

ELECTION PROCESS GUIDELINES

CHAPTER AND CONSTITUENT GROUP ELECTIONS

All chartered groups should submit a call for new officers/committee members and host an election every other year at minimum. Many groups conduct this process on an annual basis. Alumni group elections should coincide with the university's fiscal year, with terms beginning July 1 and concluding June 30. Below are election processes that have been successful for established groups. All of these options are acceptable. Your group should choose the one that works best for them.

IN-PERSON ELECTION

With this option, nominations are accepted in person at a meeting open to all alumni in the area with interest. Leadership position descriptions are forwarded in advance of the nominations meeting, along with an outline of the general procedure for nominations/voting. Alumni who would like to be considered for a leadership position are instructed to carefully read the position requirements.

Alumni may nominate themselves by attending the nominations meeting, at which time they will be invited to share brief remarks about their qualifications and experience, interest in the position, etc. Voting can then take place at the same meeting once all nominees have had the opportunity to speak, or elections can take place at a meeting held at a later time.

COMBINATION

A final option is to accept nominations electronically, but require all alumni seeking a position to attend an in-person elections meeting. Some groups like this option because it allows for the efficiency of a virtual nominations process, but still requires interested alumni to show they are willing to take the extra step of attending an event in-person in order to be elected.

HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS FOR THE ELECTION PROCESS

- Use a secret ballot for elections. Voice votes can discourage new or shy volunteers.
- Schedule time in chapter meeting agendas for elections discussion. Elections should not be an afterthought.
- Encourage volunteers to try new things. Positions should not be maintained by the same person just because nobody else wants to do it.
- Nominate an elections chair to coordinate and manage the process.

ELECTRONIC BALLOT ELECTION

Many groups find that they are able to garner greater participation if they host the elections process online. Leadership position descriptions are emailed to all alumni, along with an outline of the general procedure for nominations/voting. Nominations are collected via email. The requirements for nomination are at the alumni group's discretion.

For instance, alumni may be required to fill out a form answering various questions, or to just email a simple statement explaining their qualifications. The nominations are then compiled by the alumni chapter and can be emailed out to all alumni to review, along with a link to vote. Free online survey websites like Survey Monkey make it easy to set up a ballot online and collect votes electronically. Your alumni liaison can assist you in researching the appropriate tool to use.

ELECTIONS TIMELINE

To help in planning, work backward from the election date to develop an elections timeline that fits your group's needs. This timeline should be tailored to each group.

JANUARY

- Send an email to provide an overview of the election procedure to alumni
- Announce elections process to alumni at any events you are hosting

MARCH

- Leadership team announces nominations for officers for the next term will be accepted at an April meeting, or online through a date in April.
- Leadership position information is emailed to all alumni for review.

APRIL

- For in-person elections: The nominations meeting is held. Voting may take place following the nominations meeting, or may be planned for a future meeting.
- For electronic elections: Nominations submitted online are due. Nomination materials are compiled and emailed out to alumni with a link to vote and a deadline to do so.

MAY

- For in-person elections: Voting takes place at a special all-alumni meeting.
- For electronic elections: Online voting closes

JUNE

- Another solicitation for volunteers should be made for any open positions.
- Organizational positions formally announced and reported to alumni liaison.
- New leadership team attends Alumni Leaders Institute

JULY

- Hold first planning meeting
- Make sure to meet bylaw obligations

SUCCESSION PLANNING

So you have elected a new board/steering committee. Now what?

Here are some tips to ensure a smooth transition of officers:

- **Before elections are held:** It is important to make sure that current officers understand that they have an obligation to assist in the transition of leadership positions. Ask them to begin assembling important documents that would be helpful to a new leader. Notes, receipts, emails/electronic files, photos, etc. are all important pieces of information that can be passed along.
- **After elections, host a retreat/transition meeting where outgoing and incoming officers can meet:** Schedule this meeting shortly after elections so that outgoing officers' ideas are fresh and incoming officers are given the best opportunity to start their new role on the right foot.
- **Create clear roles and duties – volunteer job descriptions:** See the Developing and Maintaining a Strong Group section and Addendum M.
- **Keep event registration and evaluation records:** Do this to ensure all key activities and information for your chapter are archived properly for the reference of future board members.
- **Allowing others to lead makes you a better leader – establish term limits:** If you love the job, you may want to stay in your leadership role as long as possible. However this can cause burnout, idea stagnation, and does not expand the leadership network. Term limits provide a context achievement and future growth and you could come back later with new energy and ideas. Instead learn to enjoy helping out at special events and as a participant.
- **Address inactive volunteer leaders - as soon as possible:** Life happens and sometimes volunteer leaders cannot fulfill their duties, roles or responsibilities. This is okay and does not make volunteer a “bad person.” However, honor the need for active and committed leaders and have this conversation as soon as possible. Find a graceful way out - consider a leave of absence or acknowledge that the timing was not right. Encourage participation in activities since sometimes former leaders are embarrassed to attend future events.
- **Search for your successor right away – and not someone just like you:** Begin planning and identifying new potential leaders as soon as you become a leader. Attend events and “work” a room to identify future leaders. The best volunteer boards are diverse in all aspects, so begin observing who is active and coming to your events. Could they be a leader of a committee or special event?
- **Don't try to do every job yourself:** Sometimes it's easier to do things yourself than to recruit helpers to whom you can delegate. This can be a self-fulfilling prophecy; “no one else can do it like me,” and so no one will. This also sends the message that a leader has to do all the work alone and then no one will want to volunteer.

- **Seek advice and consider a structured “order of succession”:** For medium and large volunteer groups, structuring succession (e.g. a vice president who always succeeds the president) can stabilize succession further into the future. Use staff to help evaluate your unique organization, current needs and potential leaders.
- **Recognize outgoing leaders and be a mentor to newcomers:** Remember to thank and recognize outgoing leaders for their service. Former leaders can now enjoy the fruits of their leadership as a participant. Save energy to be a mentor to your successor and provide information, advice and perhaps, most importantly, encouragement.

Make an effort! Transition plans are only as good as the level of effort dedicated to training and knowledge-sharing with new officers. To avoid reinventing the wheel each year, a positive transition process is essential. The most critical element in transition planning and development is the understanding that what you are doing is not a downplaying of your personal achievements as a chapter leader. This is a sign to volunteers and alumni base that WVU and its affiliates provide a single, consistent message of unity and strength. The first and last person we touch at every event can ultimately determine the future of WVU.