E-mail, Mail, and Electronic Voting at PTA Local Units and Councils

Basic Guidelines for Implementation

The decision to allow mail, email, or on-line voting should be made at the time a PTA sets its goals and objectives for the coming PTA year. This allows a unit to complete the preliminary work of amending the Standing Rules and collecting the correct membership details. A unit that has taken these steps will be prepared to act if there is poor turnout for the meeting to elect the Nominating Committee or Officers.

Amend the Standing Rules

- Refer to Washington State PTA Bylaws
- Amend the standing rules to include instructions on voting by mail and E-mail
- Sample standing rule: XYZ PTA may allow voting by e-mail, on-line voting tool and/or by mail for electing the Nominating Committee and Officers.
- Present the standing rules to the membership for approval before the membership form is updated

Membership Registration Form

- Prepare membership registration form prior to the fall 2009 membership drive
- Include spaces for collecting mailing address and E-mail address on the form and note why this information is needed for future voting
- Each member must supply a unique E-mail address.
- The member signature on the membership form provides consent for receipt of the electronic or mail in ballot
- Members who prefer not to vote by electronic or mail in ballot will be provided an opt out option on the membership form.
- WSPTA recommends proper use of public resources. Taxpayer funded email addresses, such as those ending in .gov, .ed, or .edu, should not be used for electronic voting.
**Budget**

- Prepare the budget to include line items for postage, paper, mailing labels, envelopes, printing of the mailed ballots, or the cost of on-line voting tools

**The Election Meetings**

For the Nominating Committee, we recommend holding the meeting to elect the Nominating Committee as usual. For the election of Officers, we recommend posting the slate of candidates 15 days before the meeting as usual. Allow candidates to be nominated and to declare from the floor. Allow time for a floor vote (with ballots) if the standing rules allow for a floor vote as well as an electronic/mail vote. *The subsequent election is actually a part of the meeting.* Set the parameters of the election – the final due date for votes and the due date for the Tellers Report – and state for the record in the meeting.

It should be quite clear to all members when and how results of the election will be announced.

**The Tellers Committee**

As with any election done by ballot, the President appoints a Tellers Committee to count the votes. The Tellers Committee will need to exercise extra care concerning the confidentiality of electronic votes. It is possible to mail ballots in an unmarked envelope inside of the PTA-provided envelope, thereby ensuring the identity and privacy of the voter. But for electronic voting methods, the ballot itself will include the email address of the voter.

- We recommend that the Tellers sign a non-disclosure agreement with the PTA upon agreeing to count the votes, stating that they will keep the results of the voting confidential except in the case of the report provided to the President.
- The Tellers Committee must verify that each ballot is from a member in good standing.
- The Tellers Report will be added to the minutes of the General Membership Meeting at which the election was initiated. The meeting will officially adjourn upon receipt of this report.
- The Tellers must count votes and must also count quorum.
  - Each completed ballot counts toward quorum.
  - Blank ballots may count toward quorum. A blank ballot is similar to an abstaining vote.
  - If any ballot is unreadable, or is in any way ambiguous, it may count toward quorum but not as a vote.
- At the completion of the election, all ballots shall be destroyed by the tellers committee, including the deletion of electronic member communications containing ballots.
Option A: Voting by Mail

Following is an example of a recommended procedure a PTA might follow when running an election by mail using ballots.

It is also recommended that by mail elections utilize a ballot that must be returned within a PTA provided return stamped addressed envelop that contains the member identification number on the outside of the envelope, not the ballot. Ballots that are not returned in the provided envelope are unverifiable and shall be disqualified.

All PTA members in good standing must be mailed a paper ballot, unless the member has signed a written waiver. The ballot shall include a return address and ballot deadline clearly identified. Only one ballot may be returned per envelop.

When the election includes balloting conducted at a physical polling place (meeting) and by mail:

1. The notice of election must include:
   a. Date, time and place of meeting
   b. Announcement of ALL voting methods being utilized
   c. Date that “by mail” ballots will be mailed to members in “good standing”
   d. Deadline for return of ballots
2. The same paper ballot shall be utilized at both the polling place (meeting) and by mail.
3. All ballots mailed to members in good standing shall include a brief description of the voting procedure and ballot return deadline.
4. The names of all candidates brought forth by the nominating committee and any self declared candidate(s) meeting eligibility requirements for election of office/committee shall be printed on the ballot.
5. A record of all members casting a ballot at the physical polling place (meeting) shall be established by the Tellers Committee and kept as part of the record of election.
6. The tellers committee shall tally and record the total votes cast at the physical polling place (meeting).
   a. Ballot results shall NOT be announced until all voting concludes and a final tally can be reported.
b. All ballots shall be retained until all votes have been counted and the tellers committee has presented an election report.

7. The tellers committee shall review each ballot returned by mail to:
   a. Determine that the ballot was cast by a member in good standing.
   b. The voter intent is clearly recognized/understood.
   c. Spoiled or unrecognizable ballots are disqualified (but may be counted for the purpose of determining quorum)
   d. Under votes (no candidate selected) are counted for quorum purposes
   e. Over votes (ballots with more than the valid number of candidates selected for a position) are disqualified (but may be utilized for establishment of quorum)
   f. The ballot was received by the specified voting deadline – ballots should be date stamped when received

8. Mailed ballots received after the postmark deadline shall not be counted nor used for establishment of a quorum.

9. The tellers committee shall create a record of all members casting a ballot by mail
   a. This record shall be compared to the record of all members casting a ballot at the physical polling place (voting in person at a meeting)

10. Ballots received by mail from members who are on record as having voted in person shall be disqualified and not counted for purposes of election to office or meeting quorum.

**Option B: Voting by E-mail**

Following is an example of a recommended procedure a PTA might follow when running an election by e-mail.

All PTA members in good standing who have provided a private email address to the PTA membership chair shall be sent a notice of election announcement. The announcement must identify the voting method(s) to be utilized for the election (physical polling, mail ballot, electronic ballot).

When utilized, electronic ballot notices shall be delivered to each PTA member in good standing who has consented to electronic voting. Members who have not provided a written consent shall not be sent an electronic ballot.

When the election includes balloting conducted at a physical polling place (meeting) and by electronic mail:

1. The notice of election must include:
   a. Date, time and place of meeting
   b. Announcement of ALL voting methods being utilized
   c. Date that “by mail” ballots will be mailed to members in “good standing”
   d. Deadline for return of ballots

2. A comparable ballot shall be utilized at both the polling place (meeting) and by electronic mail.

3. All ballots mailed electronically to members in good standing shall include a brief description of the voting procedure and ballot return deadline.
4. The names of all candidates brought forth by the nominating committee and any self declared candidate(s) meeting eligibility requirements for election of office/committee shall be printed on the ballot.

5. A record of all members casting a ballot at the physical polling place (meeting) shall be established by the tellers committee and kept as part of the record of election.

6. The tellers committee shall tally and record the total votes cast at the physical polling place (meeting).
   a. Ballot results shall NOT be announced until all voting concludes and a final tally can be reported.
   b. All ballots shall be retained until all votes have been counted and the tellers committee has presented an election report.
   c. Electronic mail messages containing member ballots shall not be forwarded under any circumstances. Paper copies of electronic balloting messages created by the tellers committee must be destroyed.

7. The tellers committee shall review each ballot returned by electronic mail to:
   a. Determine that the ballot was cast by a member in good standing.
   b. The ballot is returned from the member electronic mail address on record.
   c. The voter intent is clearly recognized/understood.
   d. The electronic mail message containing the ballot was received by the specified voting deadline.

8. Ballots received via electronic transmission after the announced deadline shall not be counted nor used for establishment of a quorum.

9. The tellers committee shall create a record of all members casting a ballot by electronic mail
   a. This record shall be compared to the record of all members casting a ballot at the physical polling place (voting in person if balloting was also conducted at a membership meeting)

10. Ballots received by electronic mail from members who are on record as having voted in person shall be disqualified and not counted for purposes of election to office or meeting quorum.

11. Ballots distributed via electronic mail must be return via electronic mail to the specified electronic mail address included on the announcement of election.

Option C: Using Online Voting Tools

A number of online tools exist that could be used to take an electronic vote for Nominating Committee or Officers. There are tools specifically written for voting, and those intended for surveys that will suffice.

Ideally, your Local Unit will select the tool at the time it approves changes to its Standing Rules. Costs of tools vary so your unit will want to choose a tool that best fits the needs and the budget of your PTA.

If the cost of an online tool is an obstacle, units in a Council may consider asking the Council to make the annual purchase, enabling all units in the Council to use the tool. The WSPTA does not recommend using a survey tool owned by the school district.
You can find online survey or voting tools by entering “online survey tools” in your favorite search engine. The following list is meant as a reference, and in no way implies an endorsement of any of these online tools by the Washington State PTA:

- Polldaddy  
- Survey Monkey  
  [www.surveymonkey.com](www.surveymonkey.com)
- Zoomerang  
  [www.zoomerang.com](www.zoomerang.com)
- Emailelection  
- Votenet  

Send your survey link to the email addresses of your members via the State Membership database. If your tool won’t show you the address used to send the response, you can have the survey include the email address of the voter as a question in the survey.

Be sure to set a deadline for receiving votes via your online tool.