

Supporters Direct Best Practice for Elections

The issues raised in the 'Required' column must be done and despite the logistical challenges they cause, are considered vital for an election to be run smoothly and minimising the potential that the process falls into disrepute or difficulty.

Issues in the 'Recommended' column are not essential but are considered best practice and should only not be done if circumstances do not permit.

Before the Election (until the nomination forms are sent to members)

Required

- Trusts must solicit nominations each year through direct communication with each member and should only not have elections in any given year in the case of there being too few candidates than eligible positions.
- In advance of the opening nominations election, Trusts should agree the number of eligible positions. If the number to be elected will change the total number of elected Directors on the board than were normally to be present after the last AGM, such a change needs to be approved by members at a General Meeting. The only exception to this is where the numbers change according to the attempt to divide the numbers by 2 or 3 in order that trusts have a balanced number elected each year if they have a two or three-year electoral cycle. In this instance, where the number changes from say 4 to 3 or 4 to 5, this change can be agreed by the Board but should be clearly indicated to members and explained to them.
- Nomination notices should clearly indicate:
 - How many people will be elected; if the number elected differs from the year previously, or will change the total number of elected Directors than are normally sitting on the board, then the reason for the change should be publicised.
 - The procedure to be followed to successfully nominate candidates
 - Where to go for further guidance
- Trusts must convene an Election Management Group who shall operate the election. The group must not have any candidates in its membership or people clearly identified with candidates. The group should contain a neutral, external party – perhaps from another trust.
- Trusts must publicise the means by which complaints can be submitted and should enable this to be done by email to the election group Chair. Complaints should be able to be determined by the Chair of the Election Management Group as soon as is possible, whose decision is final for the purposes of the election, though decisions may be appealed afterwards under Trust complaints procedures.
- Any members of the Board who may be candidates in an election, should declare their interest and leave the room for the duration of that debate.

Recommended

- Elections publicised in advance of the formal publicity being sent out soliciting nominations via website and other communications with members such as newsletters.
- The election group Chair should be the neutral party on the group.

Nominations

Required

- Election policies must clearly indicate how many members are required to be successfully nominated. Candidates should be informed as soon as is possible if their nomination is supported by persons not eligible to nominate them, in order that they may seek nominations from eligible persons in good time.
- Statements from candidates should be required and be at least 400 words long to allow a proper debate to take place. If a Trust sets a maximum number of words, then Election policies should clearly state what will happen to statements which exceed that maximum.

- Election policies should provide for any discretion to be reserved for the election group to reject or require the amendment of statements that contain material which is clearly defamatory or is calculated to cause offence to any person or group of persons. An appropriate form of disclaimer should be included with all statements circulated to members, making clear that the views expressed in the statement are those of the candidate and not of the Trust.
- Any decisions to not accept nominations as valid to be made as soon as is possible in order that the situation may be rectified or appeals to be heard.
- Election policies to state the appeal process in the event of nominations being rejected.

Recommended

- Advise that the duplicate register of members will be available on certain times for candidates to check whether those nominating them are members or how the Trust Secretary can be contacted to establish whether proposers are valid members eligible to nominate.
- Trusts should seek indemnity from candidates for any action against the trust resulting from the trust's publication of the candidate's statement.
- Trusts should offer assistance to all candidates who require help in preparing candidates statements.
- Trusts should ask for photographs to be submitted with statements if all candidates provide photographs or agree that photographs can be used. Trust should provide assistance to candidates unable to provide photographs themselves.

Campaigning

- The main thing trusts can ensure is that candidates campaign in a respectful manner and clearly stipulate that they will take action to remove candidates from the ballot in the event of a breach of this. They should also ensure that any restrictions they place on campaigning activity don't have the effect of curtailing the campaign arena; for example, website debates can be a useful and instructive forum for voters

Required

- The Trust must have a policy that is enforceable. Any restrictions on what may and may not be done must be capable of being speedily and accurately evaluated. For example, setting limits of money that can be spent by a candidate is practically impossible to police, so should be avoided.

Recommended

- Trusts should ensure that elections are vibrant and that members have a sense of the importance of them. They shouldn't send a message of dour bureaucratic duty and irrelevance to the 'real' issues.
- Trusts should provide additional opportunities for members to communicate directly with candidates, where members can ask questions of candidates. This could be through a set-piece debate or where questions can be asked by members in writing or online and the answers can be made available to members. If Meetings are held, the date should be identified in advance and communicated to potential candidates at the same time as nomination forms are sent out.

Ballot Papers

Required

- Ballot papers to be designed so as to ensure that all received papers can be verified in the event of the integrity of the ballot being questioned. There are several methods to ensure this, and Trusts should seek advice from Supporters Direct. Ballot papers should have an explanation of how the mechanism of the ballot works stating how the secrecy and integrity will be maintained.
- Candidates' statements to be enclosed within the ballot paper mailshot.
- Ballot papers to clearly indicate how votes should be cast, how many positions are available and what will constitute a spoilt vote.

Recommended

- Trusts should have freepost or pre-paid envelopes to encourage high-turnouts.
- Trusts should use election mailshots at the same time as other communications to keep costs down.
- Trusts should have an affirmative vote to endorse candidates at the AGM, with proxies available for this.
- All elections to take place via secret ballot; boxes may be placed at the AGM to receive ballot papers in person, but participation in the election must not be based on attendance at the AGM.

Results

Required

- Elections count to be overseen by independent Chair of election group.
- No one associated with any candidate should be involved in the count of the election.
- The count should be timed to ensure that the period between the close of the voting and the announcement of the results is as short as possible.
- Results to be communicated to members at the meeting and in writing in the next communication to members..

Recommended

- Results to be widely publicised by Trust.