

Election Considerations

When the time comes to find new leadership, elections are often the way to go. These elections may happen just among your group or they may be open to the entire campus. Here are some things to think about as you develop your election process:

Open Positions

- Have job descriptions posted online for interested candidates to look through.
- Provide general responsibilities in an easy-to-read format.
- Tell them how many positions are available.
- Also provide details regarding eligibility so no one goes through the process, only to find they're not eligible for a particular position.

Candidate Requirements

What must a candidate submit to be considered an official candidate?

- a certain number of student signatures on a candidate petition?
- an application form?
- a transcript?
- a platform describing themselves, their purpose in pursuing a position and what they hope to do within that position?

List these requirements online and also have information available for distribution at the Student Activities and/or Student Life office.

Other Requirements

Determine if candidates must:

- Attend a "Meet the Candidates Forum" to answer questions from their peers
- Attend a meeting of the organization they hope to have a position in
- Be a certain class year or have a certain number of academic credits (think about this carefully so you're not unintentionally disqualifying transfer students)
- Have a particular GPA

Election Timeline

Determine the following:

- When candidate applications are due
- When signed petitions are due
- When candidate platforms are due
- When they must attend a meeting(s) by
- When elections will be advertised
- When elections will be held
- When election results will be announced
- When officers will officially take office

Then, create a timeline that lays this out and publicize it. You may even want to use "backwards planning" (plotting dates by going backward from election results being announced) when creating this timeline.

Online Elections

Many schools have found that putting their elections online significantly increases the numbers of students who vote. For instance, at Carnegie Mellon University (PA), when they put their student government elections online, the percentages went from 2 to 7 percent who had previously voted to 25 percent. Clemson University saw 5,000 students voting when their process went totally online, up from 3,500 when both online and paper versions were available.

What are the benefits, beyond increased voter turnout?

- saves labor because you don't have to tabulate paper ballots
- makes candidates really get out there with their message because, with more people voting, they can't rely as much on "special interests" voting them in

What are the drawbacks?

- Vulnerabilities and irregularities in the system might prevent some students from getting online to cast their vote
- systems may require students to input their social security numbers to get in

Sources: *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 24 and April 8, 2003