

Conducting Local Union Officer Elections

A Guide for Election Officials



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Employment Standards Administration
Office of Labor-Management Standards
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A Message to Local Union Election Officials

Congratulations! You have been selected to serve as an election official in your union. You may have volunteered, been elected by the membership, appointed by your union's president, chosen by one of the candidates, or maybe you were "drafted" to serve in this role. In any event, during the upcoming weeks you and your fellow election officials will be entrusted with the responsibility of providing members with the opportunity to exercise the most fundamental of union rights, the right to elect their union's officers by secret ballot. Don't underestimate the importance of your role — you are an essential part of the democratic process. The persons elected to office will help shape the future of your union as they handle the union's finances, are involved in contract negotiations and grievances, and conduct other business affecting the welfare of your union's members.

Your Role

As an election official, you will be responsible for conducting your union's election of officers in accordance with federal law and your union's constitution and bylaws. In doing this, you will have several different roles — rule maker, communicator, and judge. You will need to be patient, knowledgeable, organized, firm, and, most of all, impartial. At times, your hard work may seem thankless. But remember, your job is not to please everyone but to run a fair and honest election.

Throughout the election process, election officials should be guided by three principles. First, you should be fair and impartial, treating all candidates equally and avoiding any acts of favoritism or even the appearance of favoritism. You should maintain a businesslike relationship with all candidates even if you work with or are personal friends with any of them. Second, you must follow the election provisions in your union's constitution and bylaws as well as any other union election rules as long as they are not inconsistent with federal law. Finally, you should uphold American democratic traditions by protecting the right of every member in good standing to nominate candidates, run for office, and vote by secret ballot for officers of your union.

What's in This Guide

This Guide has been prepared by the Office of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS) of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to help election officials plan and conduct local union officer elections. The Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1959, as amended (LMRDA), establishes certain rights for union members and contains provisions to insure union democracy and financial integrity. In particular, Title IV of the LMRDA sets forth basic democratic procedures which unions must follow in conducting their officer and delegate elections. OLMS has also issued regulations interpreting the LMRDA election provisions.

The Guide is designed to be an easy-to-use reference based on the law and regulations as well as the knowledge and experience of OLMS staff. It will take you step by step through the election process, help you to identify your responsibilities during each step, and provide suggestions to make your job easier. Except for the first and last chapters, each chapter is divided into three parts. "Requirements" has essential information about the standards for conducting elections, "Suggestions" provides practical tips for election officials, and "Common Pitfalls" warns of mistakes often made in union elections. Each chapter ends with the applicable provision of the LMRDA, a place to insert any related provisions of your union's constitution and bylaws, and a space for notes.