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NDBA ADVISORY COMMITTEE PAMPHLET NO.021

Duties of a Returning Officer.

Purpose

This Guideline assists clubs in conducting fair and open elections for Boards of Directors. The Guideline should be read in conjunction with the Club’s Constitution.

Club Constitution and Regulations

Elections are to be conducted according to the Club’s Constitution and any Regulations passed by the Board.

This Document provides details on the Role of a Returning Officer and covers the following topics:

	<u>Tick Boxes</u>
1. The Role of a Returning Officer	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Who may be a Returning Officer	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Election Timetable	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Notice of Election	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Nominations	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Uncontested Elections	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Candidate Profiles	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Roll of Eligible Voters	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Order of candidates on ballot papers	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Form of ballot papers	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Advice to members and candidates	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Voting	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Postal voting	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Voting at the Annual General Meeting	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Security of the ballot	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. “How to vote” material	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Scrutiny and counting	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Informal Ballot Papers	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Persons Present at Scrutiny and Count	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Result of Election	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Retention of Materials	<input type="checkbox"/>

For information on the details on each topic, please refer to pages 2 - 8 of this pamphlet, before ticking each box, to ensure the requirements have been satisfied.

This document should be completed in conjunction with the Chief Executive Officer/Secretary of each club.

1 The Role of a Returning Officer

The Role of a Returning Officer is to conduct, in its entirety, the election for the Board of Directors. Broadly speaking, this Role includes:

- Preparing the notice inviting nominations;
 - Ensuring the notice is published;
 - Receiving nominations;
 - Acceptance of nominations and declaring formal acceptance when nominations close;
 - Conducting the draw for positions on the ballot paper;
- Drafting and printing ballot papers:
- Distributing ballot papers to eligible members;
 - Counting ballot papers; and
 - Providing the result to the club.

2 Who May be a Returning Officer

A Returning Officer should not be a Candidate for any position being contested in an election. A Returning Officer cannot be seen to have any affiliation with or show support to any Candidate or Group of Candidates. The integrity of an election relies on the ability and complete impartiality. They may or may not be a member of the Club.

3 Election Timetable

For club elections:

- There should be a period of at least “Two Weeks” but generally not more than “Four Weeks” between the date nominations are invited and the close of nominations;
- The close of roll of members entitled to vote should be no later than the time set for the close of nominations;
- There should be a period of at least “Two Weeks” between the close of nominations and the commencement of the voting period.
- The days and times for voting should be convenient to members and should ensure that as far as practicable, members are given adequate opportunity to vote; and
- Where Ballot Papers are posted to members, there should be a period of about “Three Weeks” between posting to members and return of ballot papers.

4 Notice of Election by Returning Officer

Subject to the requirements of the Club’s Constitution, an “Election Notice can” be:

- Prominently displayed on the Club noticeboards;
- Posted to all members;
- Advertised in a newspaper.

The notice should:

- State that an election is to be held and identify and provide contact details for the Returning Officer;
- Set the time and date for the close of the roll of eligible members;
- Invite nominations, listing the positions to be contested;
- Clearly set out any requirements or qualifications required under the Constitution to be eligible to contest any position;
- Advise where nomination forms may be obtained;

- Specify the place where nominations are to be lodged;
- Fix the time and date for the close of nominations; and
- Advise the day(s) and time(s) for voting; or if a postal ballot, when ballot papers will be posted and where they are to be returned; or if voting is at the Annual General Meeting, the time, date and location of the meeting.

5 Nominations

General

A nomination form should require completion of the following information:

- The full name, residential address, contact details (home or business phone/fax/e-mail/mobile phone number) and membership number of the candidate;
- The position or positions for which the candidate is standing;
- The candidate's written consent to the nomination;
- The full names, residential address, membership number and signatures of the required number of eligible nominators; and
- The place and time by which to lodge nominations.

If the Returning Officer is of the opinion that there is an anomaly in a nomination, such that it may require the Returning Officer to reject the nomination, the Returning Officer should, as soon as practicable after receiving the nomination, contact the candidate and advise that the anomaly should be rectified before the time for close of nominations.

Unless there are extenuating circumstances completely beyond the control of a candidate, the Returning Officer should not accept a nomination after the time and date fixed for the close of nominations.

Withdrawal of a Nomination

A candidate who has been nominated in an election should be permitted to withdraw that nomination, but only in writing addressed to the Returning Officer, provided it is received before the close of nominations.

Certification of a Nomination

For the purpose of enabling the Returning Officer to form an opinion as to the eligibility of a candidate and the candidate's nominators/proposers. The Returning Officer should require the Chief Executive Officer of the Club to furnish him/her with such information regarding the candidate and nominators/proposers as the Returning Officer may specify. The Chief Executive Officer of the Club should provide the required information, in writing, as soon as practicable after the request is made and certainly before nominations close.

6 Uncontested Elections

If, when nominations close, the number of persons who have been duly nominated as candidates for a particular position does not exceed the number to be elected to a position, each of those persons is elected. Any positions remaining unfilled should be Contested Elections

If, by the close of nominations, the number of persons who have been nominated as candidates for a position or positions exceeds the number of persons to be elected, then a ballot must be held for the position(s).

7 Candidate Profiles

The following applies if candidates are permitted to provide information (profiles) about themselves, which would be made available to members:

- Profiles should be submitted to the Returning Officer, in an approved format, at any time before the close of nominations;
- The Returning Officer should compile and present the profiles in a manner agreed with the club prior to the commencement of the election;
- If it is considered that any information provided by a candidate is not appropriate; is false or misleading; or exceeds a stipulated word limit, the Returning Officer may, take action to omit or rectify the information, or reduce the length of the information, as the case requires;
- Where voting is conducted at the club, the profiles should be displayed throughout the voting period, and for a postal ballot, posted with the ballot paper.
- Alternatively, they could be included in the Club's journal or annual report;
- The Profiles should be displayed in the same order as the candidates on the ballot paper.
- Where photographs are included, all photographs should be the same size and ideally, current Directors should not be shown wearing Director's apparel.

8 Roll of Eligible Voters

As soon as practicable after the close of nominations, the Returning Officer should receive a roll of eligible voting members certified to that effect by the CEO.

The roll should show, in alphabetical order and consecutively numbered, the full surname, given names, residential address and membership number of each member entitled to vote. If the election is to be conducted by post, corresponding address details supplied as labels or on disc (or other means as agreed between the club and the Returning Officer). The Returning Officer should be supplied with a copy at the same time.

Candidates are entitled to a copy of the roll in order to pursue their candidature.

9 Orders of Candidates on Ballot Papers

A Returning Officer should not conduct a draw for positions on the ballot paper without at least one independent witness present. Ideally, candidates or their representatives should be present. The time and place for the conduct of the draw should have been adequately advertised.

Where a Club's Constitution contains any particular requirements as to the manner or order candidates are to appear on the ballot paper, the Returning Officer must comply with those requirements.

Otherwise, the Returning Officer, as soon as possible after the close of nominations, should conduct a ballot to determine the order of candidates on the ballot paper. Where there are separate positions, a separate draw is conducted for each position.

Such a ballot could be conducted in the following manner, which is consistent with Parliamentary elections:

- On identical slips of paper show each candidate's name as it will appear on the ballot paper;
- Enclose the slips in separate, identical containers, seal each container and deposit all the containers in a ballot box and fasten the ballot box;
- Rotate the ballot box and allow any other person present to do the same;
- Unfasten the ballot box and take out a container;
- Announce and record the name of the candidate whose name is on the slip taken from the first container. Repeat the process until all containers have been withdrawn and all names recorded; and
- Sign the record and ask someone else to sign as all candidates should be formally advised of the result of the draw.

10 Form of Ballot Papers

Separate ballot papers can be prepared for each position, or several positions can be included on a single ballot paper. The Returning Officer should make this decision in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer. Where there are multiple positions on one ballot paper (e.g. President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Committee) each position should be shown separately and in order of seniority.

The Returning Officer is responsible for printing the ballot-papers. This could be done "in house" or by a commercial printer, however, security is paramount. A certificate should be issued and signed by the Returning Officer, acknowledging the exact number of ballot papers printed. They should be securely stored at all times.

The ballot papers are:

- To show the position(s) being contested;
- To show the names of the candidates contesting each position (in the order prescribed by the ballot or some other way if so prescribed by the Club's Constitution);
- May distinguish names from each other where a similarity in the names of two or more candidates is likely to cause confusion;
- To provide clear and concise direction as to the manner in which vote is to be recorded, having regard to the system of voting required by the Constitution; and
- Where the ballot is conducted by post, provide instructions on how the ballot paper is to be returned to the Returning Officer and the date for the close of the ballot.

11 Advice to members and candidates

The Returning Officer should ensure that a list of the candidates and the office for which they have nominated, along with other information such as the days and hours of voting, availability of postal voting, name and contact phone number of the Returning Officer are displayed on the club's noticeboards. This information may also appear in the club's journal.

The Returning Officer should write to all candidates following the close of nominations providing them with a copy of the ballot paper draw, the arrangements for voting, the method of voting, information regarding the appointment of scrutineers, the day and time of counting the votes and any other information as the Returning Officer determines.

12 Voting

Voting options are as follows –

Attendance voting at the club.

Voting takes place at the Club during the days and times as advertised. A member wishing to vote should produce his/her membership card and have his/her name marked off the roll.

The Returning Officer/ Polling Official should initial the ballot paper before handing it to the member who, having voted, should place the completed ballot-paper in a locked ballot box.

If a member makes a mistake when voting; a replacement ballot paper can be given in exchange for the spoilt one.

At some clubs voting may take place at more than one location. As members may attend both premises, there arises the opportunity for a person to vote at both locations. While procedural checks would identify any instance of this after the ballot had closed, it would be too late to guarantee the integrity and correctness of the result.

Some possible alternatives are:

- Amend the hours of voting so that voting is not concurrent at two locations. This would allow a single roll to be used. Sufficient time would have to be allowed to open voting at the second location, using the same roll;
- Require members to place their ballot papers in an envelope, and complete a declaration on the envelope before placing it in the ballot box. It would then be possible to isolate and reject any envelopes should someone have voted more than once.

This situation should of course, be addressed and resolved prior to the start of the election process and candidates advised of procedures.

13 Postal Voting

The Returning Officer should, as soon as practical after the printing of the ballot papers, send by post to each member requesting a postal vote due to their absence during the voting period:

- A ballot paper (or papers) initialed by the Returning Officer, containing the directions for voting and for return of the ballot paper;
- An envelope addressed to the Returning Officer with spaces on the back for the member to print their name and address, and a space for the member's signature. If considered necessary, the member's membership number may also be required. (An inner "ballot paper only" envelope may also be provided if considered necessary);
- If applicable, candidate profiles.

The envelope containing the completed ballot paper is to be received by the Returning Officer prior to the close of the ballot. It can be posted or delivered.

On receipt of an envelope, the Returning Officer must, if satisfied that a person of that name is included on the roll for the election, accept the ballot paper in the envelope without opening the envelope and make a mark on the roll to indicate that the person has voted.

If the Returning Officer is not satisfied that a person of that name is included on the roll, or if

the person's name and signature does not appear on the envelope, it should be rejected and the envelope not opened.

Envelopes received by the Returning Officer after the date for the close of the ballot should be rejected and remain unopened.

Combination of attendance voting and postal voting.

The same procedures outlined above for attendance voting are to be followed. However, where a member is unable to attend the Club during the hours of voting he/she may apply in writing to the Returning Officer for a postal ballot paper.

The Returning Officer should mark the roll to identify that a postal vote has been issued to the member. The same procedures for postal voting as outlined above are followed.

14 Voting at the Annual General Meeting

Some members (and employees) may be entitled to attend the Annual General Meeting and vote on general matters, but are not entitled to vote in the election of the Board of Directors.

The Chief Executive Officer/Secretary/Secretary Manager when preparing a list of members entitled to attend the Annual General Meeting, should prepare a separate roll of members entitled to vote in the election of the Board of Directors.

The Returning Officer should initial the ballot paper before handing it to the member who, having voted, should place the completed ballot-paper in the locked ballot box.

15 Security of the Ballot

The Returning Officer must at all times ensure the security of the returned postal vote envelopes and the ballot papers completed at an attendance ballot. The unused ballot papers should be securely stored by the Returning Officer, preferably in a separate ballot box.

16 "How to Vote" Material

While candidates are normally entitled to post out "how to vote" material to members in order to pursue their candidature, the distribution of "how to vote" on Club premises is subject to any restrictions specified in the Club's Constitution/ Regulations.

17 Scrutiny and Counting

At the close of the ballot (postal ballot) the Returning Officer is to open each envelope which has been determined as acceptable, extract the ballot paper (without unfolding it) and place it in a ballot box. In an attendance ballot the ballot papers should remain in the locked ballot box up to the close of the ballot. The Returning Officer will then remove the ballot papers from the ballot box, examine each ballot paper for formality and conduct the count.

The ballot is to be counted in order of seniority. Any candidate elected to a higher position will be excluded from subsequent ballots.

In the event that two or more candidates have an equal number of votes and one has to be excluded or one has to be elected, unless the Constitution/Regulations provide a means of resolution of a tie other than by "a draw from a hat" the Returning Officer will conduct a draw.

18 Informal Ballot-Papers

A ballot-paper is generally considered to be informal if it:

- Has not been completed in accordance with the directions on it; or
- Has not been initialed by the Returning Officer or the Polling Official, or contains a mark or writing which, in the Returning Officer's opinion, would enable the elector to be identified, eg. Roll number, name.

Before starting the count, the Returning Officer should be perfectly clear on the criteria for informality and should ensure that scrutineers observing the count on behalf of candidates have a clear understanding.

19 Persons Present at Scrutiny and Count

The Returning Officer, Polling Officials and Scrutineers appointed on behalf of candidates are entitled to be present during the scrutiny of envelopes, issuing of ballot papers and the counting of the ballot papers.

A Scrutineer is a person appointed by the Candidate to observe the process on his/her behalf and is therefore not entitled to assist the Returning Officer in the counting of the ballot.

A candidate may not act as a scrutineer in any of the ballots being contested.

20 Result of Election

Once the result of the election has been determined the Returning Officer should advise the Chief Executive Officer of the Club of the result in writing, including:

- In the case of a postal ballot the number of envelopes rejected and the reason for the rejection;
- The number of votes received by each candidate;
- The number of informal votes; and
- The total number of votes cast.

Once the result has been announced, place a copy of the result on the Club noticeboard.

21 Retention of Materials

All materials (roll of electors, ballot papers, etc.) are to be kept by the Returning Officer for "One Month" prior to being destroyed. This is in case there is any challenge by a Candidate concerning the result of the election.