WSFS

From Worldcon Runners' Guide

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Ballots

The printing of a combination site selection and Hugo ballot is a mistake. They must be kept separate, and preferably put out in separate mailings. When this has been tried, there has been a major problem with people writing combined checks, and the money must go into two very, very different accounts.

The best format for a site selection ballot is to have the qualifying (i.e., membership number) information on the top of one side of the page, and the voting boxes on the bottom side of the reverse page. This enables balloting staff to validate ballots without knowing who is being voted for.

Site Selection

Every effort should be made to encourage people to vote pre-con. It still won't work, but try anyway.

The mechanics of this process usually involves a neutral person with lots of leisure time handling the votes before the con, but at-con there are tremendous time pressures. Any steps to get the maximum of administrative details out of the way pre-con should be done.

Deal in advance with the issue of the mechanics of ownership and transfer of the funds for the winning bid. A special savings account should be set up in a bank near the con location. The account should be interest bearing, and (if possible) in the name of the xxth World Science Fiction Convention (the one to be chosen.) This can be a problem in varying locations, as banking laws vary from state to state, and most certainly from country to country. The problem here is that some banks want a taxpayer ID number

so they can issue a 1099 form to the company or person that the account is in the name of; this is a problem when the entity to receive the money has not yet been chosen.

Photocopies *must* be made of all checks that are being deposited. Problems and disputes will arise.

If a database is used to track voting, the format of the database should be made available to the bidders before the convention. The software should be turned over as well (minus the data) before the selecting convention. When the winner is chosen, disks with the relevant information should be turned over.

Use the **Illinois Rule**: five minutes before the polls close each night, send out runners to the surrounding area shouting,"The polls will close in five minutes!" Then at closing time, have people shout "The polls are closed!" and put a staff member at the end of the line, and when that staff member gets to the head of the line, the voting for the day is over and you are assured that no one has snuck in after the polls close. This holds to the principle that you don't have to **finish** voting by the time the polls close, but you **must** have gotten in line to vote.

The voting area should always have a minimum of one representative from the hosting con committee, and one representative from each bid. They should be encouraged to watch each other, and to consult with each other (in a friendly manner).

The people running site selection from the host committee, if they have never done it before, should make **every** effort to seek out the people who have run it for the past few years and find out the specific mechanics of what works and what doesn't.

If the site selection department manager takes things seriously and in a level-headed manner, it will have a similar effect upon the bid committee reps, even if their past behavior has been less than that. As long as the bid committees feel they are being treated fairly and evenly, they will go along with a lot.

Darrell Martin's Qualification Law: **do not wait until ballot-counting time to validate ballots**. From the first day that the bid committees open the site selection table, ballot qualification should begin as time permits. Qualification consists of determining that the person who is claiming membership is in fact a member and has not already voted. Be sure everyone is clear on rules such as whether Hokas are allowed to vote.

Be sure to qualify potential voters **as people pay, before they get their ballot**. (Only exception might be if there an uncontested bid and the line to vote starts getting long.)

For on-site voting, separate the ballot from the membership information **before** the person begins voting. The voter gets the actual ballot after they have been qualified and paid the poll tax.

Once you have qualified a ballot, there are pros and cons as to whether the ballot should be immediately separated from the membership information. If you separate immediately, do it in a way that does not allow the people who are qualifying the ballots to see who is being voted for. The rep from the host committee should be the **only** person who is allowed to see who has been voted for before the actual tallying begins. You do not want the bid committees to be able to get a feel for how the on site voting is going—this can cause all sorts of problems with the rumor mill and cause ugly scenes. The other problem is that in the case of a challenged ballot, if the committees feel that votes from certain areas will go a certain way, they will challenge them more often. You also want to avoid people walking out of the ballot qualification area saying, "ya know, all those St. Louis people have voted for Boston instead of

New York." With the membership information up, you can't see the ballot. If you pass it down the table with the qualifying information face up, anyone can separate it (preferably using a paper cutter) and as long as no one is watching the ballot go into the box, no one can fuss.

We recommend that this qualification be done either in batches during the day or each evening after the site selection table has closed. This would include qualifying the pre-con ballots. Do *not* under *any* circumstances wait until the final night to begin qualification. One hidden advantage to this is that the site selection administrator will learn by observation which people from the bids he wants to participate in the final tally and which he doesn't; the bid committees have final say over who their reps are, but they should generally be open to suggestions from the site selection administrator if phrased properly.

At night, the ballots should be locked in a hotel safe deposit box.

Whatever system is used to qualify ballots, you need access to lists of members. Having only one computer at the site selection location tends to not work well, as there are usually two or three lines of voters. A sure-fire method is a printout (with updates from new con members) and physically check off members as they vote.

A problem occurs when a fan buys a membership, votes, and then transfers that membership to another fan. Does the second fan get to vote? There is no way for a transferee to know whether the earlier person has voted the membership. No matter what the mechanics are, the site selection people have to be able to tell whether a given membership has been voted or not. We *strongly* recommend that if a membership is transferred, that the membership number *not* change! If voting rights are not to be transferred, then the information about prior holders of a membership number must be kept in the con's registration system!

Make sure that the convention registrar absolutely positively knows that a complete, final registration list will have to be provided as of when balloting closes.

Before ballot counting begins, everyone involved in the count should discuss what makes a good ballot, what makes a bad ballot, and how disputes will be handled. Avoid having to make a rule with a problem sitting in front of you (because the parties will be biased by which bids gain or lose by the decision.) Should a problem that hasn't been covered arise (and it is guaranteed that it will) a sample method is for the site selection administrator to state what the correct **generic rule for problems of this type** should be, and if **both** bids disagree, the site selection administrator should go with their consensus; otherwise the site selection administrator's rule stands and is applied to all similar situations for the remainder of the ballot count.

Also, updated registration lists are needed by Site Selection daily during the convention.

Hugo Balloting

A person or persons who knows the SF field and the resources available (either on staff or in a consulting role) is crucial.

At Chicon V, nearly half of the initial names/works nominated received only one vote.

Do *not* challenge any nominee unless on the face of the nominating count they would qualify to be on the final ballot. If you start challenging nominees (and investigating and such) you will create a massive

amount of work, most of which is worthless. Look at who is eligible to make the final ballot after all votes are in, and **then** figure out who needs to be validated. Exception: if the ballot itself has irregularities, i.e., a person who nominates a work clearly ineligible and adds a note saying "yeah, yeah, I know it doesn't count"

Make *very, very* clear that you cannot nominate "No Award." This is the single biggest misconception that people have about the nominating process. "No Award" is always on the final ballot no matter what.

The second largest misconception voters have is not understanding that **nominating** ballots make NO distinction as to which place you list a work in (first, second, third.) These are simply tallied, not weighted by the order they are in.

Familiarize yourself both with the written WSFS Constitution and with the actual practices that have been used in recent years in interpreting the Constitution during the nomination and balloting process. Talk to recent administrators.

Make sure that your ballot counters understand both the theory and practice of stepwise elimination balloting. Pay particular attention as to how the stepwise elimination process in final balloting has been reported in the past, so that it can be distributed in a clear manner. If nothing else, get a couple of back issues of **Locus** or **SF Chronicle**.

Keep your numbers straight. Make sure they add up. If you round percentages, make sure your press release explicitly says so.

The internal consistency of your published numbers is the only way fandom will know that you are a careful worker. They have no other way of checking up on you.

If an outside consultant is used to help qualify the nominees (i.e., you are asking someone to assist in determining whether a work or person is in the correct category and that the citation information on publication is correct), include at least three red herring nominees (including at least one nominee who placed very, very low on the nominating list) on the lists with no indication as to which one(s) are red herrings, i.e., include eight nominees in each category. Do *not* under any circumstances turn a final list of nominees over to anyone outside the Hugo Balloting committee until the **final** ballot is ready, and a formal press release is prepared.

If publishers are being contacted by the Hugo committee to get addresses and publication citation information, give them a list at least twice as large as that of the actual nominees (for that publisher), and make sure you stress to them that **none** of these names is yet in nomination. Do not provide publishers with names of nominees who have been published by other publishers.

When you inform the nominees that they are nominated, do *not* under any circumstances believe promises that they will keep the information confidential. In 1991, at least two nominees went online with computer bulletin boards to proclaim the news within 24 hours of having been contacted by the concom and being sworn to secrecy. Keeping this in mind, *absolutely do not* tell a nominee who the fellow nominees are in that category until you are ready to release a final, public list.

You are required to find out if a person will accept nomination. Contact should be by phone if possible, and followed up by a confirming letter.

After the final nominee list is made public, a list of names and addresses of nominees needs to be provided to the people running the actual awards ceremony.

It has become traditional to present small pewter rockets in the shape of the Hugo rocket to nominees at-con. This practice, while not mandatory, is highly popular. Cost is usually $2-4 per rocket pin.

Traditionally, the actual appearance of the Hugo award is kept secret until the awards ceremony. Only the Hugo administrators and the convention's Board of Directors should get an advance look.

When having plaques engraved, some red herring plaques should be done. This is because information about where the plaques are being made might leak, and one can never tell when a fan might actually **work** at a plaque engraver (or be a friend of someone who does and who happens to casually mention, "say, do you know anything about those Hugo things...?".) One way is to have a plaque made for each possible winner.

Test the method of affixing the plaque to the actual trophy at least a month before the convention, preferably 2-3 months before. Let it sit around (especially if the plate must be bent or shaped in any way in order to fit smoothly), and see what it does. Your committee will learn much about the current state of the art of adhesive technology.

Winners will do *strange things* with the Hugo trophies in the exuberance of celebration. Hugos have also been accidentally dropped. There can also be more than one winner in a category (tie.) Extras should be made. Be prepared to repair at least one on site.

When designing the Hugo award, please keep in mind the difficulties that may be faced by winners in transporting them home (e.g. fitting them into suitcases.) If possible, cons should offer the courtesy of packing and shipping the Hugo (via **Federal Express**—do NOT use U.S. Mail!!!) so the winner does not have to juggle the darn thing onto a plane and get funny looks from airport security and all that.

The perfect person to count the ballots may regard being on stage during the ceremony as being a great honor or as a source of mortal terror. Ask.

When in doubt, remember that the Constitution has set up the Hugo nominations committee as a complete power unto itself. Don't abuse it, but remember that you do have the power if ambiguities arise.

Hugo Awards Ceremony

Hugo awards should be carried to the ceremony with the plaques masked so that staff doing setup cannot accidentally see them.

Bring at least 200 copies of a press release, containing the actual winners and statistics, to be handed out to the press after the ceremony is complete. Do not release numbers to any news media before the ceremony is over.

Business Meeting

As noted, it is vital that the person chairing the business meeting have a minimum of other responsibilities.

If this is the first time the business meeting chair has run a business meeting (or the first time in many years), a dry run or practice run could be done. If possible, at a convention that already has a business meeting (Westercon, DeepSouthCon, etc.), **with the permission of the group** and **after all normal business has been transacted**, the business meeting chair could practice supervising debate on a "silly"/artificial motion—if the proposed motion is silly enough, some truly fascinating parliamentary maneuvers could be tried!

It would be useful to hand out to all business meeting participants a one-sheet summary of Robert's Rules of Order, particularly concerning the hierarchy of the various types of motions. There are several of these available.

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