

## **WORLDCON RUNNERS GUIDE**

### **World Science Fiction Society (“WSFS”)**

#### **Summary**

The World Science Fiction Society (“WSFS”) is the unincorporated literary society that maintains the rules under which Worldcon operates. The membership of WSFS is every attending and supporting member of the current Worldcon, plus those other membership classes to which the current Worldcon extends membership rights. WSFS is responsible for the administration of the Hugo Awards, Site Selection for future Worldcons, and the at-con Business Meeting, the three main items that a Worldcon must have to be called a Worldcon. There is no “home office” or Board of Directors of WSFS that comes in and runs these functions. Worldcons manage the official functions under the WSFS rules. Worldcons often, but not always, establish a division of the convention committee that operates the WSFS functions, although sometimes the WSFS division functions are combined with another division.

WSFS holds two separate votes with different deadlines. They are preferably put out in separate mailings (though that has not always been the case) and available online under separate web pages.

#### **Hugo Awards**

While members of the prior year’s Worldcon may nominate for the Hugo Awards, only members of a given year’s Worldcon may actually vote for the Hugo Awards. The Hugo Awards final ballot, is a ranked-choice/instant-runoff/preferential ballot, where voters number the preferences, with their first choice marked with a 1, their second with a 2, and so forth.

As the Hugo Awards have received a lot of attention in recent years, more and more people and items are being nominated. After attempts to “game the system,” two new items were designed to prevent this. First, while nominations remained limited to five items per category per eligible vote, the final ballot was expanded to six finalists. Second, a new counting system called “E Pluribus Hugo” was created to reduce, if not eliminate, bloc nominations. Additionally, computer programs have been created to assist with all vote counting.

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The people/works that appear on the final ballot are not “nominees.” They are “finalists.” (This change from “nominee” to “finalist” came about because bad actors claimed that getting even one nomination on the nominating ballot made them a “Hugo Award nominee,” which devalued the term.) You will still see the word “nominee” tossed about, but in general it should be understood to mean only “finalist,” i.e., someone/something appearing on the short list on the final ballot.

Having a person or persons who knows the SF field and the resources available (either on staff or in a consulting role) is crucial, especially when validating works that might be expressed differently; e.g., *The Wrath of Khan* or *Wrath of Khan* or *Wrath of Khan*, *The* (not to mention spelling inconsistencies).

There is no need to challenge a nominee unless it might qualify to be on the final ballot. Look at who is eligible to make the final ballot after all votes are in, and then validate the finalists. Is this nomination eligible for the year in which it is nominated?

“No Award” can never be nominated. It is always on the final ballot, no matter what.

One misconception that nominators might have is that nominating ballots make no distinction as to whether they are listed first, second or third on the nomination ballot. These are simply tallied, not weighted by the order they are in.

Hugo Administrators should be familiar with the WSFS Constitution and 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 to leave enough time between close of nominations and opening of voting for finalists. All finalists should be eligible before going on the ballot. If a finalist drops out, the next highest nominated work should be placed on the ballot. The validation process can take quite a while, particularly when the nominated work or person is relatively unknown. Some resources are *Locus Online*, *Locus Magazine*, and *File 770*, but there are probably others.

If an outside consultant is used to help qualify the potential finalists (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. One way to do this is to list eight nominees in each category. Do not under any circumstances turn a final list of finalists over to anyone outside the Hugo Administration Subcommittee 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 finalists (for that publisher), and make sure you stress to them that none of these names is yet qualified for the ballot. Do not provide publishers with names of nominees who have been published by other publishers.

When you inform the potential finalists that they have qualified for the final ballot, do not under any circumstances believe promises that they will keep the information confidential. In at least one case, two finalists went online with computer bulletin boards to proclaim the news within 24 hours of having been contacted by the Subcommittee and being sworn to secrecy. Keeping this in mind, absolutely do not tell a potential finalist who the other finalists are in that category until you are ready to release a final, public list.

You are required to give potential finalists an opportunity to decline being on the ballot. Contact should be by phone if possible and followed up by a confirming letter. Potential finalists are not required to accept being on the ballot but must have a reasonable opportunity to decline. If it proves impossible to contact a potential finalist or if you contact them and they do not reply, they go onto the ballot.

After the complete finalist list is made public, a list of names and addresses of finalists needs to be provided to the people running the actual awards ceremony.

Hugo Award voting ends several weeks before the actual convention in order to have time to have the winners' names engraved on plaques.

With the inception of electronic voting and sophisticated computer programs, it no longer takes hours, days, or many people to count the final votes. Just make sure there is someone on the team who is familiar with how the process work.

It has also become traditional to present small pewter rocket pins in the shape of the Hugo rocket to all finalists at the convention. This practice, while not mandatory, is highly popular. It costs around \$2-4 per rocket pin.

In the past the actual appearance of base of the Hugo Award trophy was kept secret until the awards ceremony. However, it has become popular to show off the base at Opening Ceremonies and including it with past rocket base designs on display.

When having plaques engraved, some red herring plaques should be made. 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, but with more and more finalists in a given category, this could be prohibitively expensive.

If possible, 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.

It is always useful to have extra rockets and bases made. Rockets are ordered well in advance, but if not used they can be passed on to the next Worldcon. Since bases are unique to each convention, it is harder to predict how many bases will be needed. As soon as the number of possible finalists are known, an attempt should be made to have at least three bases when there are multiple people nominated for a single work. (If there are a really large number of finalists for a given work, ask what they would like their plaque to say and how many rockets they would want. Remind them that they will have to pay if they want more than X-number of rockets.) There can also be more than one winner in a category (tie). Winners will do strange things with their Hugo Award trophies in the exuberance of celebration, including accidentally dropping them. 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 Award (via Federal Express or UPS—do NOT use U.S. Mail!) so the winner will not have to deal with getting through airport security.

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 Award Subcommittee as a complete power unto itself – or rather, authorized the Worldcon to create such a subcommittee, so that the other members of the Worldcon aren't disqualified from eligibility. In practice, all Worldcons create a Hugo Administration Subcommittee whose decisions regarding the administration of the Awards cannot be overridden by the Worldcon committee. Don't abuse this authority but remember that you do have the power if ambiguities arise.

## **Hugo Awards Ceremony**

The Hugo Awards Ceremony is typically run by the Events Division, although this might vary at different Worldcons. Some Worldcons have combined their Events and WSFS Divisions, but even then, Hugo Administration is a separate area from Hugo Ceremony.

When bringing the Hugo Awards rockets to the ceremony, cover the plaques so that others cannot accidentally see them. Remind the persons transporting the trophies onto the stage to keep the plaques turned toward them so that the winner cannot be seen by sharp-eyed audience members or by a camera close-up (this has happened).

Print at least 200 copies of a convention newsletter, containing the actual winners and statistics, to be handed out to attendees when leaving the ceremony. Make sure the convention webmaster has an embargoed copy of the winners so they will have the release ready to publish at the time the finalists are announced, especially if they are updating the website in real time while watching a feed. Since 2001 it has become more common for people to tweet etc. from the ceremony, so it is better form if the webmaster has the information in advance to make updates to the Official website in real time.

Other committee positions that have a need to know include: (1) the Tech crew managing the bottom third of the screen to give the name of the winner (we don't want typos at this point). This is different from having a winner slide that could be chosen in real time from all of the finalists; and (2) the "Voice of God" in order to be able to get pronunciation information about acceptors. They CAN be given the entire list of acceptors, but it is often better if they have one winner/acceptor from each category rather than all potential acceptors.

You may also send an embargoed copy of the press release to *File 770, Locus*, the Hugo Awards Marketing Committee (which runs TheHugoAwards.org, and selected other trusted news sources, but be careful to whom you send embargoed copies.

There may also be others who need to know.

## **Site Selection**

The purpose of Site Selection voting is to produce an unambiguous determination as to which bid will be authorized to run the Worldcon in two years' time. Again, only members of the host Worldcon may vote in this election, and every effort should be made to ensure the process is both transparent and fair to the bidders. Whether or not single-day members have voting rights is a decision that the individual Worldcon has to make. It is not regulated by the WSFS Constitution. While single-day members rarely even try to vote, and most Worldcons do not give them voting rights, it is possible for a Worldcon to decide to give them voting rights. Determine this before the convention. It is not Site Selection or even the WSFS Division manager's decision to make. It is a convention policy decision.

The rules regarding the requirements and cut-off dates for filing a Site Selection bid are defined in the WSFS Constitution. As soon as possible after the filing deadline has passed, the Site Selection Administrator should design the ballot. Site Selection ballots

are usually double-sided, with one side containing the voting instructions. The top of the second side contains the information needed for voter validation, and below that the names of the sites bidding in a given year. Before the votes are counted, the voter identification and validation information should be able to be separated from the ballot. This enables balloting staff to validate ballots while keeping the vote itself confidential. Remember that the Site Selection ballot, like the Hugo Awards final ballot, is a ranked-choice/instant-runoff/preferential ballot, where voters number the preferences, with their first choice marked with a 1, their second with a 2, and so forth. Even if you explain on the instructions page about how this works, also put a note on the ballot proper saying “Number your choices in order of preference (see instructions)” because many voters are unfamiliar with how this works. Also remember that if a voter just marks a single X with no other preferences, it counts as a 1 for that candidate with no other preferences.

Deal in advance with the issue of the mechanics of ownership and transfer of the funds for the winning bid. A special banking account should be set up in a bank near the con location if possible. The account should be (if possible) in the name of the Worldcon NN (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.

Site Selection voting starts prior to the current year’s convention and usually ends on the third day of the hosting convention. Voting requires payment of an Advance Supporting Membership Fee (often called a “Voting Fee”) in the winning bid. While cash is acceptable at the hosting convention, and payment by mail may be made by check, payment may also be made by credit card or PayPal. In this instance, an additional step is required regarding proof of payment. When electronic payments are made, a token is issued as proof of purchase and must be added to the ballot as part of the validation process. Discuss how the overhead costs for credit cards and PayPal will be handled, that is, whether the fees be borne by the administering convention or subtracted from what is paid to the winning committee.

As of 2021, electronic voting for site selection itself is not permitted. However, completing a pdf, signing and emailing it is becoming prevalent. If someone wishes to vote, but is not yet a member of the convention, they must also purchase a membership in the host convention. The host convention must follow all federal, state and local rules regarding banking. Be sure to make photocopies of all checks that are being deposited to avoid disputes.

Make arrangements with convention Registration to get a membership list as of the end of pre-registration. This is used for validating voters. Registration should update this list in a timely manner for new voters. It is sometimes difficult to get updates of the membership list during the convention, but you do need to have a system for making sure nobody votes more than once. One way that is commonly used is to determine what the

first membership number assigned to at-the-door members is, print a list of numbers starting with that number, and then cross numbers off that list as at-con voters not on the pre-con list vote.

Five minutes before the polls close each night, Site Selection should send out runners to the surrounding areas announcing, “The polls will close in five minutes!” and at closing time, have them announce “The polls are closed!”. No attendees should be added to the voting line, but anyone already there must be allowed 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. The bid committees must be treated fairly and even-handedly.

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 take place 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 to qualify potential voters as people pay and before they get their ballot. (The only exception might be if it were an uncontested bid and the line to vote was long.)

Under WSFS rules, only “natural persons” may cast a vote with a preference. That means corporations, associations, stuffed animals, and “guest of” memberships may only vote for “No Preference” which is equivalent to a blank ballot or abstentions and does not affect the result of the vote. This is the one case where the site selection administrator is allowed to look at, and if necessary, mark the ballot “No Preference.”

For on-site voting, separate the ballot from the membership information before the person makes their vote. In other words, they should fill out the top half of the ballot, have it validated and removed, and then cast their vote. Names should be checked against the list provided by Registration and should be crossed off as people vote in order to prevent multiple votes.

Do not allow the people who are qualifying the ballots to see how the vote has been cast. Only the site selection committee of the hosting convention may be permitted to see this information (if necessary) before the actual tallying begins.

The integrity of the voting process is paramount. Care should be taken to avoid anyone walking out of the ballot qualification area thinking that one group has a better chance of winning than another group.

Qualify ballots received prior to convention before opening Site Selection. If possible, gather representatives of the bids on the night before the convention to do this, or get their permission for the Administrator to do so before the convention. Make sure all those members who voted pre-convention are accounted for before opening at-convention site selection. Do not under any circumstances wait until the final night to begin qualification. The bid committees have final say over who their representatives are, but they should generally be open to suggestions from the site selection administrator if phrased properly.

Each night, the ballots should be locked in a hotel safe deposit box. Also securely store all of the money taken in site selection advance membership/voting fees. The at-con treasury team may often help by taking possession of fees received and reporting back to the Site Selection Administrator the total amounts received.

A common 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 convention's registration system!

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 bid gains or loses by the decision.) Should a problem that has not been covered arise, a sample method is for the site selection administrator to state what the correct generic rule for the given problem should be. If the 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.

Bids are allowed to designate at least two observers to participate in the site selection counting, but can have more if the Administrator allows. One way of doing this is for the Administrator to request four observers from each bid, then also providing four Site Selection staff, and arranging four groups with one person from each of the bids and the convention. Each group then counts the pre-convention votes or one of the three at-con day's votes. You are required to report the vote tallies for pre-convention and at-convention votes separately, so keep the votes for these four groups separated during the convention and count them separately.



A method that works for counting ballots is for the representative of the convention to open each ballot, make an initial determination of how it was voted, show it to the bids, and say, "I think this is a vote for X." The bids then either agree or disagree. (Usually they agree.) If there is a disagreement, then the bids and the staff member discuss it. If they are unable to determine how to count the ballot, they summon the Administrator, who makes the determination on how to handle the ballot. Historically, there has been no case where a single disputed ballot has affected the results; however, it might be necessary in an extreme case to take a ballot to the Business Meeting to have it determine how the ballot should be counted.

### **Results of the Voting**

Although the results of the election are not official until certified by the Business Meeting, *there is no requirement to keep those results secret*, despite many people thinking that there is such a rule. Discuss with the bids before you start how you want to handle dissemination of the results. It is relatively common to ask that everyone keep the results quiet for a short time, such as an hour or two, to allow the bids' representatives to let the rest of their committees know the results. Thereafter, everyone should be free to tell anyone who wants to know the unofficial results. Just because results are not official does not mean they are disputed! As an example, in horse racing, it is usually clear which horse won, but the track does not pay out on bets until the results are declared to be official. Similarly, site selection results are unofficial but often known well before the official receipt by the Business Meeting, usually the morning after the votes are counted.

### **Reporting the Results to the Convention Newsletter**

If the Worldcon has a convention newsletter, the Administrator should provide them with a copy of the results (preferably electronically, to make it easier for them). The results should include "these results are not official until formally received by the Site Selection Business Meeting [at time and place]." The Newsletter may choose to wait until the results are official before printing them. Again, as noted above, the results are not *secret*, but they are unofficial until certified.

### **Reporting the Results to the Business Meeting**

The Administrator should prepare a written report (preferably also in electronic form) to the Site Selection Business Meeting showing how the votes were tallied, including all write-in bids, None of the Above, and No Preference. The tally should also show how many votes were cast with a preference (ignoring blanks and No Preference), and how many votes were needed to win (a majority, which is the next-highest whole number that is more than half the votes with preference). If multiple rounds of tallying were required, show all rounds separately.

Assuming there is no dispute that has to be adjudicated by the Business Meeting (this is extremely rare), the meeting usually passes a motion ordering the Administrator to destroy the ballots. When that motion passes, the Site Selection election is final and cannot be contested. The Administrator should take steps to destroy the ballots expeditiously to avoid any controversy.

Provide a copy of the site selection results in their full form to all of the bids, especially the winning convention. The newly-seated Worldcon committee is required to publish a copy of the results in a report to their members.

The newly seated Worldcon receives all the membership information portions of the ballots since they are the initial Supporting members of the Worldcon.

In the cases where money was received electronically but the member did not cast a ballot, those members are still considered new Supporting members.

In the cases where there was an attempt to vote after a transfer, or attempts to vote without purchasing a membership in the administering convention, it is up to the newly seated Worldcon to accept these people as Supporting members.

It is rare that someone will dispute their credit card charge, but that information also needs to be sent to the newly seated Worldcon, and they may reject the membership. (Yes, this has happened.)

## **Business Meeting**

Only attending members of the convention may vote at the Business Meeting; however, supporting members may submit business. Each individual Worldcon determines for itself whether a day member is considered an attending member for purposes of attending the Business Meeting.

The Business Meeting requires a large commitment from its head table and attendees. It is vital that the person chairing the Business Meeting has a minimum of other responsibilities. The meeting generally lasts 3 days (sometimes 4) with each session lasting 3 hours.

If this is the first time the Business Meeting chair has run a business meeting (or the first time in many years), they should have a mentor who is familiar with the meeting. Another suggestion is to have a dry run or practice session 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!

Under current rules, agenda items for the meeting must be submitted 30 days before the first Business Meeting and printed just before the first (preliminary) session. In recent years business meeting participants have also been given a one-sheet summary of *Robert's Rules of Order*, particularly concerning the hierarchy of the various types of motions.