Run Your Own School Election

Introduction

This school election document and attached templates allow you to run your own election. It contains information on:

❑ The election process;

❑ The voting system;

❑ Election day; and

❑ Counting the votes.

The following instructions apply whether you want to elect one candidate from one ballot paper (a single-member election, for example a school or house captain) or if you want to elect a group of representatives from one ballot paper (a multi-member election, for example SRC representatives from year levels). In some cases you may be running both types of elections at the same time.

A number of Word documents and Excel spreadsheets have been created to assist in the conduct of single-member elections and multi-member elections. The spreadsheets contain a number of ballot papers, sorting cards and scrutiny sheets, and are set up to enable you to enter candidate names once and then utilise the ballot paper, sorting cards and the scrutiny sheet. Instructions for using the Word documents and spreadsheets are included in this document.

If time and resources are available, Elections ACT staff may be able to assist in any part of the election process. You may also like to take advantage of a program available at the ACT Legislative Assembly on representation, leadership and running meetings – contact the ACT Legislative Assembly Education Office on 6205 3016.

The election process

The essential steps in the election process are:

❑ Appoint a returning officer;

❑ Set up election rules, including a voting system;

❑ Set dates and times for opening and closing nominations, the campaign period and the voting period;

❑ Notify students and teachers of the election process and dates;

❑ Accept nominations;

❑ Prepare ballot papers, electoral rolls, other material and equipment;

❑ Organise the polling place;

❑ Appoint and train polling officials;

❑ Polling;

❑ Count votes; and

❑ Declare the result.

Returning officer

A teacher or other suitable staff member should be appointed to manage or oversee the election. This person is responsible for all of the steps above and liaising with Elections ACT (if necessary).

The voting system

To maximise the educational value of the election, choose a voting system the students will use as adults, such as the preferential system used to elect a single member of the federal House of Representatives or the Hare-Clark electoral system used to elect multiple members of the ACT Legislative Assembly.

The voting system – electing one candidate

In the House of Representatives preferential system an elector must mark the ballot paper by placing the number 1 in the square opposite the name of the most preferred candidate and then the numbers 2, 3, 4 and so on in the squares opposite the names of remaining candidates so as to indicate a preference for all of them. You could use a variation on this system called optional preferential, where the voter is not required to vote for all candidates, but must place at least a number 1 on their ballot paper. This results in fewer votes being classed as informal.

After voting has finished, the first preferences for each candidate are counted. The candidate who has received the largest number of first preferences votes, if that number constitutes an absolute majority (50% + 1) of votes, is elected. If no candidate has received an absolute majority of first preference votes, the candidate who has received the fewest first preference votes is excluded, and each of his/her ballot papers is counted to the candidate next in order of the voter's preference. The process of excluding candidates continues until one candidate has received an absolute majority of votes.

If optional preferential voting is used, the absolute majority of votes is re-calculated after each exclusion of a candidate, disregarding any "exhausted" votes that do not show a preference for a continuing candidate.

Preferential voting is a fair system because the person elected is preferred by more than half the electors. The elected person must receive 50% + 1 votes.

The voting system – electing more than one candidate

To elect a number of representatives from one ballot paper (for example four Year 7 representatives on the SRC) the Hare-Clark electoral system determines a quota that a candidate must receive to be elected.

Numbers are placed in the squares alongside each candidate's name on the ballot paper. An elector must mark the ballot paper by placing the number 1 in the square opposite the name of the most preferred candidate and then write the numbers 2, 3, 4 and so on in the squares opposite the names of remaining candidates so as to indicate a preference for some or all of them.

This is called optional preferential voting in a proportional representation system. This is a fair method of election because each person is elected with the same proportion of votes (or quota). See page 7 for an explanation of how to count the ballot papers.

Eligibility to vote – roll of voters

You will need clear rules in place to determine who is eligible to vote in each election – for example, elections may be for year levels, individual classes, houses and the like.

Separate rolls for each individual election should be compiled according to these rules and are used in the polling place to ensure that only eligible voters vote and that no-one votes more than once.

Nominations

It is essential to set up an efficient nomination process. You must have a set time and date for the close of nominations and no exceptions are to be allowed. Nominations generally can be withdrawn up to the time of the close of nominations. Your school should have clear guidelines on eligibility to nominate, including defined reasons for rejecting nominations. You should allow enough time to resolve any conflict that may arise before nominations close.

Use the template **nomination form** to change to suit your needs.

Candidates may wish to form parties or campaign committees, or hand out candidate profiles and how-to-vote material. You should ensure that rules are in place to handle this, including that:

❑   Party names must be approved;

❑   No advertising material can be placed in or at the entrance to a polling place; and

❑   Candidates and their supporters cannot use defamatory material, spread misleading information or disrupt other candidates' campaigns.

Ballot papers

You will need to choose a method to determine the order in which names are to appear on the ballot papers. The fairest method is to draw names by lot.

If you wish to ensure the election of equal numbers of boys and girls, it is easier if you have separate elections and therefore separate ballot papers for male and female candidates.

Print ballot papers

You may use the supplied templates to print your ballot papers, in either Excel or Word format.

You will need to print or copy enough ballot papers for the expected number of voters, plus some spares. Different coloured paper for each election helps. It is important to keep control of the ballot papers and masters before the election to prevent extra copies being made and used fraudulently.

In an ACT Legislative Assembly election the names within the columns on the ballot paper are rotated so that all candidates have an opportunity to be at the top of the column. This is known as Robson rotation, named after a Tasmanian Member of Parliament, Neil Robson whose Private Member's Bill was passed in 1979 to refine the Hare-Clark election system.

Print ballot papers using the elections spreadsheet template

Before printing your ballot papers, firstly decide if you wish to use Robson rotation, then select the appropriate spreadsheet.

In the selected spreadsheet, firstly select the 'setup info' tab, add your school logo (if desired), enter the school name, candidate names (in order) and election details.

If you are using Robson rotation, choose the ballot paper corresponding with your number of candidates. Note that Robson rotated template ballot papers have been created for up to 12 candidates, if you have more than 12 candidates for an election, contact Elections ACT.

If you are not using Robson rotation, ballot papers may be printed either 2 or 3 to an A4 page. Select either 'ballot paper 3' (3 to a page) or 'ballot paper 2' (2 to a page). Before printing, delete the extra rows that do not contain candidate names.

Print ballot papers using the Word templates

You may prefer to use the **ballot paper templates** set up in Word. A series of ballot papers are provided to give you the opportunity to use them for a few or many candidates. You can insert your school logo.

Election day

It is recommended that you give an opportunity for each candidate to speak to the voters (for example at a school assembly or Year meeting) and that the voting takes place as soon as possible after that.

You will need to designate a polling place and polling times (closing time is particularly important as counting can take place as soon as voting has finished). A polling place is an area used by voters to cast their vote.

A polling place needs:

❑ A roll of voters' names to identify those who can vote and ensure that no-one votes more than once;

❑ Ballot papers;

❑ Polling officials to mark off the roll, maintain order and establish a flow of voting;

❑ Tables/chairs for the polling officials;

❑ Pens to mark the roll, pencils to mark the ballot papers;

❑ Voting screens to ensure privacy while filling in the ballot paper; and

❑ Ballot boxes (with security seals) with a polling official to ensure the security of each box.

Polling officials must not be candidates or members of campaign teams.

Counting the votes

Counting the votes is carried out by polling officials and may be watched by scrutineers on behalf of the candidates. A teacher's guidance here is crucial.

To conduct the scrutiny you need:

❑ Secure space to count the votes, including sufficient tables/chairs;

❑ Sorting cards, scrutiny sheet, pens/pencils, calculator/computer;

❑ Polling officials to count the votes;

❑ Scrutineers (who are appointed by the candidates as their representatives) to see that the count is fair but do not participate in the count; and

❑ A person who understands the counting procedure to calculate the quota and distribute the ballot papers until the required number of candidates is elected.

Polling officials must not be candidates or members of campaign teams. Scrutineers are appointed by candidates but must not be candidates themselves. Scrutineers are not allowed to touch ballot papers.

Students and teachers must agree to abide by the result of an election.

Print sort cards

You may find sorting cards for each candidate useful when sorting out the ballot papers ready for counting the votes. If you are using the elections spreadsheet template, after entering relevant details into 'setup info' (see *Print ballot papers using the elections spreadsheet template* on page 3), then select the 'sort cards' tabs and delete the extra rows that do not contain candidate names, then save the spreadsheet before printing.

Scrutiny sheet

If you intend using the elections spreadsheet template to print the scrutiny sheet, enter relevant details into 'setup info' (see *Print ballot papers using the elections spreadsheet template* on page 3).

You may use the 'scrutiny sheet with calcs', which will perform all of the calculations for you, or print the 'scrutiny sheet manual' and enter the results of each count and calculate totals manually. The 'scrutiny sheet sample' is provided to assist you.

Formality of the ballot paper

A ballot paper is informal if it:

❑ Has no number 1;

❑ Has more than one number 1;

❑ Contains ticks or crosses only; or

❑ Contains any words written on it that would identify the voter.

Put all informal votes to one side to be counted in the total number of voters but not in the total number of formal ballot papers to be used in calculations to elect representatives.

Counting the ballot papers to elect one person

The process of counting votes to elect one person is as follows:

1. Sort all ballot papers to first preferences and informal and count the total for each candidate.

2. Calculate the absolute majority, by adding the total of all formal votes, divide by two, add one and disregard any remainder as shown in this formula:

$$\frac{Number\ of\ formal\ votes}{2} + 1$$

3. If any candidate has received an absolute majority, that candidate is elected.

4. If no candidate has received an absolute majority, the candidate who has received the fewest first preference votes is excluded. Each of his/her ballot papers is then counted to the candidate next in order of the voter's preference (number 2 on the distributing ballot papers unless that candidate has already been excluded, then go to number 3, and so on).

5. If the same number is marked in two or more squares, or if a number is missing from the series of consecutive numbers, preferences should be counted up to the last unrepeated consecutive number and any further preferences are to be ignored. Ballot papers that do not show any preferences for continuing candidates are placed in a pile headed "exhausted".

6. Re-calculate the absolute majority each time a candidate is excluded by subtracting any "exhausted" votes from the total number of formal votes as shown in the formula:

$$\frac{Number\ of\ (formal\ votes - exhausted\ votes)}{2} + 1$$

7. The process of excluding candidates continues until one candidate has received an absolute majority.

8. Where at any time it becomes necessary to exclude a candidate, and two or more candidates standing lowest on the poll have the same number of votes, exclude that candidate who had fewer votes at the last count at which they were unequal. If there are no counts at which those candidates had unequal votes, then the returning officer should determine by lot the candidate to be excluded.

A sample scrutiny sheet, with instructions, is provided in the attached spreadsheets.

Counting the ballot papers to elect more than one person

The process of counting votes to elect more than one person is as follows:

1. Sort all ballot papers to first preferences and informal and count the total for each candidate.

2. The total number of formal ballot papers is divided by one more than the number of candidates required to be elected, and the result increased by one, disregarding any remainder. This is the quota required for election. The formula is as follows:

$$\frac{Number\ of\ formal\ votes}{Number\ of\ vacancies\ +1}\ +1$$

3. Any candidate who reaches the quota or above on the first count of preferences is elected. If the number of votes for the successful candidate does not exceed the quota, the ballot papers are set aside as being finally dealt with.

4. If the number of votes obtained by a candidate exceeds the quota (known as a surplus), take at random the number of ballot papers equal to the surplus and transfer those ballot papers to the next available candidate in order of preference. (Note that this is a simplified process – ACT Legislative Assembly elections use a more complicated process for distributing surpluses.)

5. Where, on the counting of first preferences or on any transfer, more than one candidate has a surplus, the largest surplus is dealt with first. Where a surplus arises only after a transfer of votes, any surpluses that arose before the transfer should be dealt with first. Where two or more candidates with a surplus have the same number of votes, deal first with the surplus of the candidate who had the most votes at the last count at which they were unequal. If there are no counts at which those candidates had unequal votes, then the returning officer should determine by lot which candidate's surplus is to be dealt with first.

6. Where the number of votes obtained by a candidate is raised up to or above the quota by any transfer of votes, the candidate is elected. No vote of any other candidate is to be transferred to an elected candidate at a later count.

7. If, after all surpluses have been transferred, candidates still need to be elected, the candidate with the fewest votes (including transfers) is then excluded, with all of that candidate's ballot papers transferred to the next available candidate in order of preference.

8. Where any surplus arises it should be dealt with before any other candidate is excluded.

9. The same process of transferring surplus votes of elected candidates and excluding the candidate with the fewest votes and transferring them to other candidates should be repeated until all the candidates required are elected.

10. Where at any time it becomes necessary to exclude a candidate, and two or more candidates standing lowest on the poll have the same number of votes, exclude that candidate who had fewer votes at the last count at which they were unequal. If there are no counts at which those candidates had unequal votes, then the returning officer should determine by lot the candidate to be excluded.

11. In determining which candidate is next in the order of the voter's preference, any candidates who have been declared elected or have been excluded should not be considered. Where the ballot paper fails to indicate a preference for a continuing candidate it should be set aside as exhausted.

12. If in a series of preferences a number is repeated or is missing, the preferences can be counted up until the break in sequence and then the paper is set aside as exhausted.

A sample scrutiny sheet, with instructions, is provided in the attached spreadsheet.

Casual vacancies

You should determine procedures for filling casual vacancies during the year. This can be either by:

❑ Recounting votes from the previous election (which obviously would require keeping the ballot papers in a secure place between elections);

❑ Holding a fresh election; or

❑ Appointing someone to the vacant position (you will need to determine who has the power to appoint this person).

More information/contact Elections ACT

Please contact Elections ACT if you require more information or would like assistance with any part of your election process. Contact details are on page 1.

Elections ACT is able to provide assistance with:

❑ Preparing election rules;

❑ Preparing and printing ballot papers or checking those that you have prepared;

❑ Provision of voting screens, ballot boxes or other equipment and materials;

❑ Running election day;

❑ Counting votes; or

❑ Any other assistance required.