

# call to order

## *Elections*

—*J. Michael Blaska, Parliamentarian & Chief of Staff,  
Wisconsin Counties Association*



Organizations should specify the method of elections in their rules or bylaws. Elections can be conducted by a voice vote, roll call and ballot. Voice vote is often used in large membership organizations especially when an election is uncontested. Roll calls are more common in large organizations when a member represents a delegation of votes, like a political party convention election where the states are called upon to announce their votes. The most common method in smaller membership organizations is the ballot. If a method is not prescribed then a motion is in order.

When an organization has an election on its agenda, it is generally taken up early in the meeting. The first order of business is to determine who is going to chair the meeting during the election process. Let us assume the positions of chair, vice-chair and 2nd vice chair are scheduled for election. If the incumbent chair is up for election he or she should step aside and allow the vice-chair to run that portion of the meeting. Any member who is considering running for the office of chair should not be allowed to chair the meeting for that portion of the election.

What if all of the past officers are considering running for chair? Who should chair the meeting? In one county the previous chair was defeated for his election to the board and returned to the board to conduct the election of the chair. The newly elected chair then took over the remainder of the election process. If there are no returning officers or they are all interested in the position, then the body needs to

nominate another member who has no interest in the office. You need not be a member of the body to conduct the election, the county clerk or anyone the body trusts can be chosen.

Once a temporary chair has been chosen to conduct the election, the chair should appoint tellers, who need not be members of the body, to distribute, collect, count the ballots and report the vote. Tellers should be chosen for their accuracy and dependability, should have the confidence of the membership and should not have a direct personal involvement in the result of the vote.

If only one member has been nominated for an office, the chair can simply declare the nominee is elected. If there are more than two candidates for the position there is a possibility that no one achieves a majority. The balloting is repeated, as often as necessary, until such time as a single candidate reaches a majority.

It is improper to limit the voting to the two leading candidates. Often the two leading candidates will represent two different factions. A division within the organization may be worsened by limiting the election to the top two candidates. On the other hand, it may be possible to unite the organization with a compromise candidate.

It is also improper to remove the lowest vote getter. Individuals are never removed from the ballot unless they volunteer; however, they are under no obligation to do so. The candidate in the lowest place may be a “dark horse” on whom all factions may agree upon.