

While in-person voting and participation in meetings is preferred, situations may arise (weather, distance) that prevent a PTA from reaching quorum and conducting essential business.

The decision to allow mail, email, or electronic voting should be made at the time a PTA sets its goals for the upcoming PTA year (July – June). This allows for completion of the preliminary work of amending the standing rules, adjusting the budget, and collecting relevant membership information.

Reference: *Washington State PTA Uniform Bylaws* [Article 5, Local PTAs and Councils; Section 4, information about absentee, mail or electronic voting].

To implement mail, email, or electronic voting a PTA or council must:

1. Amend their association's standing rules
2. Update their membership form
3. Amend the association's budget

Amend the Standing Rules

- Standing rules shall specify whether voting by mail, email, or electronic transmission is a regular practice or only to be used in certain circumstances.
- Standing rules shall include specific instructions on voting by mail and electronic transmission, or shall refer to a policy document containing specific instructions.
- Standing rules shall be approved by the PTA membership prior to soliciting voter information on the membership form.
- Refer to the sample standing rules on the WSPTA website for suggested wording.

Update the Membership Registration Form

- The membership form should collect both a physical mailing address and email address for each member, and must note that this information may be used for voting purposes.
- Each member must supply a **unique** email address.
- Washington State PTA supports appropriate use of public resources. Taxpayer-funded email address, such as those ending in .gov or .edu should not be used for voting.
- Provide members with the choice to opt out of mail, email, or electronic voting.

Amend the Budget

The budget must be amended to include any costs associated with mail, email, or electronic voting, including (but not limited to): postage, paper and printing, mailing labels, envelopes, and the cost of online voting tools.

Tellers Committee

The president shall appoint a tellers committee to count the votes. The tellers committee will need to exercise extra care concerning the confidentiality of electronic votes.

If possible, ballots should be mailed in an unmarked envelope inside a mailing envelope, thereby ensuring the voter's privacy. For electronic voting, the ballot itself will include the voter's email address.

- WSPTA recommends that tellers sign a non-disclosure agreement stating that they will keep all details of voting confidential, except for the final report provided to the president.
- The tellers committee must verify that each ballot is from a paid member.
- Tellers must count votes and must also confirm quorum.
 - Each completed ballot counts toward quorum.
 - Blank ballots may count toward quorum. A blank ballot is similar to an abstaining vote.
 - If a ballot is unreadable, or is in any way ambiguous, it may count toward quorum but not as a vote.
- The tellers report will be added to the minutes of the membership meeting at which the election was initiated. The meeting will officially adjourn upon receipt of this report.
- Once minutes of the election have been approved, all ballots shall be destroyed by the tellers committee, and all electronic member communications containing ballots shall be permanently deleted.

Electing a Nominating Committee or Officers

It is recommended that PTAs hold a meeting to elect a nominating committee or officers. If elections are held by mail, email, or electronic voting, a two-step process is required.

Step 1: A notice to self-declare candidacy must go out to all members, with a clear deadline for submission. For an officer election, this notice shall be sent after the nominating committee report is posted, and the report shall be included with this notice.

Step 2: A ballot is sent to all members that includes the nominating committee report (for officer elections) and the names of all self-declared nominees that meet eligibility requirements.

Adoption of Budget, Standing Rules, and Motions

For the approval of a budget or amendments to the budget, standing rules or amendments to standing rules, or other motions, the following must be included with the ballot:

1. The full text of a motion must be included with the ballot. This motion should come from the board of directors or the appropriate committee. Example: "The Merrywood PTA budget committee moves the adoption of the 2019-2020 budget as presented."

2. If the motion refers to a document, the full text and content of the document to be approved, with any notes or rationale, should be sent with the ballot. If the ballot is sent electronically, the document must be in a format that is easily accessed from most computers or mobile devices. (PDF is one example.)

There is no opportunity to amend a motion or a document when voting by mail, email, or electronic tools. Voting instructions must be included with the ballot, clearly stating what constitutes a valid vote and what does not. Votes that stipulate changes be made to the motion or document shall be declared invalid, although they may be used to establish quorum.

Voting by Mail

Ballots returned by mail shall utilize a return envelope, provided by the PTA, that is stamped, addressed, and which contains the member identification number on the outside of the envelope, rather than on the ballot. Ballots not returned in the provided envelope are unverifiable and shall be disqualified.

All PTA members in good standing shall be mailed a paper ballot, unless the member opted out. The ballot shall include a stamped, addressed return envelope, and the ballot deadline shall be clearly identified. Only one ballot may be returned per envelope.

When voting by mail (may also include voting at a physical polling place/meeting):

1. The notice of election must include:
 - a. Date, time, and place of meeting.
 - b. Announcement of **all** voting methods being utilized.
 - c. Date that ballots will be mailed to members in good standing.
 - d. Deadline for return of ballots.
2. The same paper ballot shall be utilized at both the polling place (meeting) and by mail.
3. All ballots mailed to members in good standing shall include a brief description of the voting procedure and the ballot return deadline.
4. **For election of nominating committee or officers (two-step process):** the first mailing includes the full nominating committee report (for officer elections) and/or provides the opportunity for self-declared nominations. This mailing shall also include eligibility requirements for election. The second mailing includes the full list of nominees, including all self-declared nominees who meet eligibility requirements, and the ballot.
5. A record of all members casting a ballot at the physical polling place (meeting) shall be established by the tellers committee and kept as part of the record of election.
6. The tellers committee shall tally and record the total votes cast at the physical polling place (meeting).
 - a. Ballot results are confidential until all voting concludes and a final tally is reported.
 - b. All ballots shall be retained until election minutes are approved.
7. The tellers committee shall review each ballot returned by mail to ascertain:
 - a. The ballot was cast by a member in good standing.

- b. Voter intent is clearly recognized and understood.
 - c. Spoiled or unreadable ballots are disqualified (but may be counted for the purpose of determining quorum).
 - d. Under votes (where no candidate is selected) are counted toward quorum.
 - e. Over votes (ballots with more than the valid number of candidates selected for a position) are disqualified (but are counted toward quorum).
 - f. The ballot was received by the voting deadline. Ballots should be date-stamped when received.
8. Ballots received after the postmark deadline shall not be counted nor used to establish quorum.
 9. The tellers committee shall create a record of all members casting a ballot by mail:
 - a. This record shall be compared to the record of all members casting a ballot at the physical polling place (voting in person at a meeting).
 10. Ballots received by mail from members who are on record as having voted in person shall be disqualified and not counted for purposes of the election or used to establish quorum.

Voting by Email

Email ballot notices shall be delivered to each PTA member in good standing who has consented to electronic voting and provided a unique email address. Members who have not provided written consent shall not be sent an email ballot.

When voting by email (may also include voting at a physical polling place/meeting):

1. The notice of election must include:
 - a. Date, time, and place of meeting.
 - b. Announcement of **all** voting methods being utilized.
 - c. Date that by email ballots will be sent to members in good standing.
 - d. Deadline for the return of ballots.
2. A comparable ballot shall be utilized at both the polling place (meeting) and by email.
3. All ballots and information emailed to members in good standing shall include a brief description of the voting procedure and ballot return deadline.
4. **For election of nominating committee or officers (two-step process):** the first mailing includes the full nominating committee report (for officer elections) and/or provides the opportunity for self-declared nominations. This mailing shall also include eligibility requirements for election. The second mailing includes the full list of nominees, including all self-declared nominees who meet eligibility requirements, and the ballot.
5. A record of all members casting a ballot at the physical polling place (meeting) shall be established by the tellers committee and kept as part of the record.
6. The tellers committee shall tally and record the total votes cast at the physical polling place (meeting).

- a. Ballot results shall not be announced until all voting concludes and a final tally can be reported.
 - b. All ballots shall be retained until all votes have been counted and the tellers committee has presented a report.
 - c. Email messages containing member ballots shall not be forwarded under any circumstances. Paper copies of electronic balloting messages created by the tellers committee must be destroyed.
7. The tellers committee shall review each ballot returned by email to ascertain:
 - a. The ballot was cast by a member in good standing.
 - b. The ballot is returned from the member email address on record (has not been forwarded).
 - c. Voter intent is clearly recognized/understood.
 - d. The email message containing the ballot was received by the specified voting deadline.
 8. Ballots received via email after the announced deadline shall not be counted nor used to establish quorum.
 9. The tellers committee shall create a record of all members casting a ballot by email:
 - a. This record shall be compared to the record of all members casting a ballot at the physical polling place (voting in person if balloting was also conducted at a membership meeting).
 10. Ballots received by email from members who are on record as having voted in person shall be disqualified and not counted for purposes of election to office or meeting quorum.
 11. Ballots distributed via email must be returned via email to the specified email address included in the original notice.

Online Voting Tools

Online voting tools may be used in the same circumstances for which mail and email voting are allowed. There are tools specifically written for voting, and many intended for surveys that are adequate for this purpose.

Ideally, your PTA will select a tool at the time it approves changes to its standing rules. Costs vary, so your PTA will want to choose a tool that best fits its needs and budget. If the cost of an online tool is an obstacle, PTAs in a council may consider asking the council to make an annual investment, so that all PTAs may use it. *WSPTA does not recommend using a survey tool owned by the school district.*

Online voting tools are managed similarly to email voting. Send your survey link to the email addresses provided by members for voting purposes. If your tool won't show you the email address used to send the response, you can have the survey include the email address of the voter as a required question in the survey.



Resources

Washington State Non-Profit Corporation law:

<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=24.03>

RCW 24.03.080: Notice of members' meetings.

RCW 24.03.085: Voting.

RCW 24.03.009: Notice by electronic transmission; Consent required, when effective.

Robert's Rules of Order: <http://www.rulesonline.com/rror-08.htm>

Washington State PTA: www.wastatepta.org