ASOIF GOVERNANCE TASK FORCE

SUGGESTED COMPONENTS OF ELECTORAL RULES AND PROCESSES FOR INTERNATIONAL FEDERATIONS – 2025 EDITION

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A About this document

The main part of this document comprises a list of suggested components to consider including in electoral rules and processes for International Federations (IFs), plus some additional guidance on election panels and the overall timeline. The focus is on the election of officials rather than the adoption of proposals and resolutions.

B Background and rationale for the analysis

The ASOIF GTF published guidance on electoral rules and processes in 2017. It was believed to be time for an update in the context of ever-increasing pressure on IF elections, as well as various important developments in recent years, including widespread adoption of electronic voting and the evolving functions of electoral panels.

C Compiling the suggested components

The suggested components have been compiled following analysis of various sets of IF rules which were judged to be some of the best in the “Democracy” section of the ASOIF Governance Taskforce (GTF) questionnaire 2023-24. In places, there are suggestions which are based on observation of IF elections but not necessarily covered directly in any of the reviewed IF rules.

D How to use this document

The section below sets out a list of suggested components to consider including in IF rules. It is clearly advantageous to review relevant rules well in advance of scheduled elections. The components are provided in outline form only. In some cases, the terminology will vary slightly from that used within a particular IF but the general sense should be clear.

Many of the components would need to be included in the statutes or constitution of the organisation. Other parts could probably be implemented with board approval.

It is up to individual IFs to determine whether and to what extent each separate component is relevant to them. For example, there may be legal requirements in the country in which they are based which impact on the appropriateness of specific measures.

The document is intended as a tool and does not constitute legal advice.

Suggested components of electoral rules and processes for IFs

1 Roles to be elected by general assembly (or equivalent)

1.1 President.

1.2 1 or more vice presidents; possibly a deputy president or equivalent title.

1.3 1 or more ordinary board members.

1.4 Some board members may be elected by continental confederations.

1.5 Chairs and members of selected committees may be elected, including audit, ethics and judicial committees.

Additional note:
An observation is that electing a large number of people at the general assembly inevitably increases complexity and risks. It may be preferable to elect only board members with most or all committee roles filled through a different appointment process.

2 General assembly frequency

2.1 The general assembly should take place annually or, at a minimum, every two years.

2.2 The IF should hold an additional extraordinary general assembly at the request of the board, or at the written request of at least one-fifth (1/5) of the members acting together.

3 Timing (see also the sample timeline in 33 below)

3.1 Elections generally take place every four years at the general assembly. Elections may be staggered so that not all board members or other officials are elected at the same time.

3.2 Elections will usually take place in a specific year (e.g. after Olympic Games, at World Championships).

Additional note:
A number of IFs made amendments to statutes to adjust the electoral cycle following the postponement of the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Rules allowing for flexibility should be drafted carefully to avoid the potential for exploitation.

3.3 It is preferable for the electoral general assembly not to take place in the home country of one of the leading candidates. However, it is recognised that hosting allocation may take place several years in advance and be linked to other factors, such as the venue for a major event.

4 Notification about general assembly

4.1 The IF administration will notify members at least 120 days ahead of general assembly.

4.2 The notification will include the time and location of the general assembly, logistical details, information about any IF support for members to participate, how to propose items for the agenda, and a call for candidates. Another option is to separate the call for candidates from the general assembly notice, to allow for a longer time period for the full electoral procedures.

Additional guidance:
Any support that is provided to help NFs participate in person (whether funding or the IF/host organiser making bookings directly) should be based on clear, transparent criteria and justifiable, considering the circumstances of the IF.

5 Call for candidates

5.1 The general assembly notification will include a call for members to nominate candidates for election or appointment, including the relevant deadlines, eligibility criteria and information about the rules which apply.

6 Election panel (see also more details in 32 below)

6.1 The board may decide to establish an election panel to assume certain duties related to elections. The election panel members will be proposed by the board or nominations committee and appointed by the general assembly or board well ahead of the elections. The majority of the election panel should be independent.

6.2 The role of the panel which oversees elections may include:

6.2.1 Supervising the administrative process relating to the election of officials;

6.2.2 Monitoring compliance with the relevant regulations;

6.2.3 Ensuring the correct application of the regulations;

6.2.4 Reviewing and proposing changes to the regulations;

6.2.5 Issuing instructions or observations (for example, communicating with all candidates regarding election rules);

6.2.6 Issuing a warning to a candidate (which may or may not be made public)

6.2.7 Referring complaints to the relevant body (which could result in a candidate being ruled ineligible); and

6.2.8 Admitting candidates, which may be after a vetting procedure.

7 Nominations process

7.1 Each full member in good standing is entitled to nominate a candidate for each position or category of position.

7.2 A candidate should require only one nomination.

7.3 It should be clarified whether or not a candidate must be nominated by a member federation with which they are directly associated.

Additional note:
In the context of increasing movement between countries, it is probably not reasonable to require that an individual is a citizen of the country in which the national federation that makes the nomination is based. However, there may be some requirement for a meaningful link between the individual and the national federation that nominates them. It may be necessary to consider this issue some time in advance of elections when there are specific restrictions/quotas relating to representation of countries and continents within IF bodies.

7.4 The board may have the right to nominate individuals for positions on committees other than the board, based on the skills and experience required.

7.5 Nominations should be submitted to the administration by a specific deadline, at least 90 calendar days ahead of the general assembly.

7.6 Nominations should include the biography of the candidate and explain how they meet the requirements for the post for which they are a candidate, plus the experience, skills and qualities they would bring to the position if elected.

7.7 Nominations should include a declaration of interests.

8 Eligibility

8.1 Conditions which may render an individual ineligible to be a candidate include:

8.1.1 Having served a period of ineligibility for breach of IF regulations, such as the code of ethics, safeguarding policy, anti-doping rules, competition manipulation rules or others;

8.1.2 Having been removed from IF office in accordance with IF rules;

8.1.3 Failing to pass an eligibility check (see 12 below);

8.1.4 Being an undischarged bankrupt;

8.1.5 A conviction for of an offence punishable by a term of imprisonment of two or more years (whether or not a term of imprisonment is imposed); the fact that an individual has obtained a pardon or has finished serving a sentence may be taken into account in determining eligibility;

8.1.6 A bar from being a company director;

8.1.7 Being subject to an order that the individual lacks competence to manage their own affairs;

8.1.8 Having been deprived of civil rights by proper application of the law;

8.1.9 Having been prohibited from holding such position, or any similar position, under any other circumstances as provided by law; or

8.1.10 Being under 18 years old.

8.2 There may be proportionate eligibility requirements to ensure that candidates have been involved in the sport. Any such rules should not unreasonably restrict the pool of potential candidates.

9 Gender balance and wider diversity

9.1 A rule should be in place to encourage gender balance on the board and in other committees, ideally with progressive targets to work towards equality. IFs may also identify broader diversity and inclusion objectives in the composition of their board and other committees.

Additional note:
Guidance on working towards gender equality is available elsewhere, including from the EOC EU Office Pool of Actions.

9.2 Athletes' committees should have an equal or virtually equal gender balance.

10 Term limits

10.1 The recommended limit is three terms of four years for all elected officials.

10.2 There may be a rule to prevent any elected official who has served three terms in the same or multiple roles from serving another term without a break of at least two years. Alternatively, there may be a limit on the total number of terms or years which an individual can serve in multiple roles.

10.3 The terms may be counted from the general assembly at which term limits are initially adopted.

10.4 It is recommended that there should be no exemption clauses.

10.5 A specific rule is needed to deal with the case of an official taking up their position part-way through the term due to a vacancy. It may be decided that filling a vacancy for any period of less than three years does not count as a full term.

11 Age limit

11.1 There may be an age limit which applies on the date of election.

12 Eligibility check (see also 32 below)

12.1 One option is for a vetting panel, ideally with an independent majority, to determine whether or not each nominated candidate is eligible for election according to agreed rules. The committee should report its decisions to the IF administration or the election panel, if one exists (see 6 above).

13 Change of official mid-term

13.1 If a president is unable to complete the term of office or the term has been terminated, the deputy president/vice president will become acting president for the remainder of the term.

13.2 In case of any retirement or vacancy amongst the remaining members of the board, a successor will be elected for the remainder of the original term at the next general assembly, subject to notice being given about such election and call for nominations at least 90 calendar days before the general assembly. The board may decide not to call for an election to fill a vacancy if such an elected board member cannot serve for at least 18 months of the original term.

14 Clarification of who is a candidate

14.1 A candidate is identified as such when the nomination is submitted.

14.2 An individual may be regarded as a candidate and subject to relevant rules if they state their intention in public to be a candidate or campaign in such a way that gives the appearance of being a candidate, even if they have not been nominated.

15 Publishing list of candidates

15.1 The list of candidates for election should be published once any eligibility check has been completed, at least well ahead of the general assembly (see the sample timeline in 33 below).

15.2 The list of candidates with the nominating member/IF body and respective biographies should be included in the general assembly agenda.

16 Rules for candidates

16.1 Campaign rules for candidates should be established and published (see 31 below).

16.2 The campaign rules apply to a candidate for election, as do the code of ethics and constitution or equivalent, if the individual is not otherwise already bound and covered prior to that time.

At the general assembly:

17 Appointment of scrutineers

17.1 At the beginning of the first session, scrutineers may be proposed by the board and elected by the general assembly. An adequate number should be appointed to count the votes/verify electronic voting numbers and to assist in the distribution and counting of ballots or voting machines. If scrutineers are required to check an electronic voting system in advance, they may need to be appointed by board first, then formally ratified by the general assembly.

18 Roll call

18.1 General assembly procedures usually include a roll call of members participating in the meeting that are eligible to vote in elections. Some clarity in the rules is helpful about eligibility to vote as precise numbers of participants may fluctuate during a general assembly, ether in-person or online, after the roll call is taken.

19 Presentations by candidates

19.1 Each candidate for president and vice president should be provided with an equal opportunity to make a presentation to the members at the general assembly. The presentation should focus on the credentials of the candidate and the vision and objectives for their term if elected. The presentation should last no more than an agreed duration (e.g. 10 minutes) and may include video presentations and multi-media.

19.2 Candidates for other positions should have an opportunity to be presented to the voting constituents at an appropriate forum for the elections, the guidelines for which may be determined by the board.

20 Secret or open ballots

20.1 Usual practice within IFs has been for secret ballots for election of officials. This process may protect voting members from external pressure.

20.2 Open voting is an alternative, sometimes used in the allocation of events, which makes voting members accountable to their constituencies but may also have other consequences.

20.3 Decisions other than elections are often decided by open vote, such as by a show of hands or coloured voting cards. If the president or at least one quarter (1/4) of the members present or represented request it, there should be a secret ballot.

20.4 It is preferable to hold a vote even when there is only one candidate as holding the vote provides an opportunity for members to abstain (or potentially indicate in another way) if they wish to register that they do not support the candidate.

21 Electronic or paper voting

21.1 Elections should either be conducted with ballot papers or by using electronic voting devices that have been certified for this purpose.

21.2 If there are a large number of candidates to be elected, an electronic system is likely to be more practical. An electronic system is also essential for conducting hybrid in-person and online or online only elections.

21.3 There may be provision to revert to a paper-based system in the case of a technical failure. Some form of back-up online system is advisable. If all online systems fail while conducting an online or hybrid election, the election may need to be postponed. Postponement may also be necessary in the event of circumstances beyond the control of the IF and meeting organisers.

21.4 There have been examples of IFs conducting elections by e-mail over a defined period of time with oversight by a credible third party, rather than at a meeting (whether online, hybrid or in-person).

22 Number of ballot papers

22.1 In the case of a paper ballot, the number of ballot papers distributed and returned will be counted. If more ballot papers are returned than were distributed the vote is invalid and a new vote will be held.

23 Voting process

23.1 The order in which positions will be elected should be specified.

23.2 Full members in good standing are eligible to vote.

23.3 Provision for voting by proxy is not recommended.

23.4 It is suggested that ballot papers should list the names of candidates in alphabetical order or in random order.

23.5 There may be a weighted voting system to take account of the different levels of involvement of member federations in the sport.

23.6 Board members generally should not have a vote and not be eligible to vote on behalf of national member federations.

23.7 Members are generally eligible to vote for a candidate for each position. They may be entitled or required to vote for several candidates for specific categories of position, such as ordinary board members.

23.8 Option 1 – simple majority, elimination of candidate with fewest votes:

23.8.1 A simple majority (50% plus one) of the valid votes cast is necessary for a candidate to be elected. If no candidate receives a simple majority in the first round, the candidate with the least number of votes is eliminated.

23.8.2 If two or more candidates are tied for the lowest number of votes, a further vote will be held to determine who is eliminated.

23.8.3 Consecutive ballots will be organised until the election is decided.

23.9 Option 2 – simple majority, run-off between top two candidates:

23.9.1 If there is a candidate in the first round with over 50% of the votes they will be declared elected.

23.9.2 If no candidate receives more than 50% of the votes then a run-off vote will be held between the top two candidates. In the event there is a tied vote between the candidates in the second position, the run-off vote will be between the first candidate and those tied for second place.

23.9.3 In the run-off election, the candidate receiving more than 50% of the votes will be declared the winner. If no candidate receives more than 50% of the vote, subsequent run-off elections will be held eliminating the person with the least number of votes until a candidate receiving more than 50% of the vote is declared elected.

23.10 Any unsuccessful candidate for any position may, if also so nominated, be included in a subsequent election for any other position.

23.11 If a number of candidates are to be elected to positions, such as ordinary board members, the candidates will be ranked by the number of votes polled and the appropriate number of candidates will be declared elected. A run-off vote may be required.

23.12 If two candidates are tied following a run-off vote, there may be provision for a second run-off vote. Another option is to determine the successful candidate based on voting numbers in previous rounds, where applicable. A further consideration may be to prioritise a new candidate over an incumbent (or the reverse). If all else fails, the toss of a coin may be needed.

23.13 If, at the time of an election, there are fewer candidates than there are vacancies, the president may invite all members at the general assembly to submit further nominations by an agreed process. This clearly limits any opportunity for vetting.

23.14 For elections, no succeeding vote should take place until the result of the previous vote is known and announced.

24 Valid votes

24.1 The following should not be counted as valid votes: abstentions; blank votes; votes for more or fewer candidates than the number required; votes declared void by the scrutineers whose decision will be final, e.g. unintelligible votes.

25 Chair announces result

25.1 The chair or someone appointed by the chair will announce the result of the election; it is recommended that they should state the number of valid votes cast for each candidate.

25.2 The number of votes polled for each candidate should be published promptly.

26 Ballot papers or electronic votes kept sealed then destroyed

26.1 The signed scrutineers' result sheets will be preserved.

26.2 The ballot papers or electronic results should be retained securely for a designated period of time such as 100 calendar days after the election and then destroyed.

27 Protests

27.1 If the result of the election is challenged, any protest should be made in writing and presented to the chair or election panel before the closing of the respective meeting of the general assembly. A protest should include the reason for the challenge and evidence for the claim. The protest will be handled in accordance with IF rules.

27.2 Protests should be referred to an independent body for investigation, such as a disciplinary or ethics committee, if deemed necessary by the election panel.

27.3 An expedited procedure is likely to be needed to determine the course of action. The most likely options are a re-count or re-vote (either immediately or at a later date). An immediate decision does not preclude further investigations afterwards.

27.4 A wide range of result scenarios (e.g. a tie, a failure in the electronic voting system) should be considered in election rules to reduce changes of a challenge (see 23 Voting process above).

27.5 The procedure for handling protests just before or just after the election may be different to the handling of allegations about breaches of rules at an earlier stage.

28 Handling violations of rules at an earlier stage

28.1 Any interested party should bring any breach of these guidelines to the attention of the IF administration or the election panel, if one exists. The administration or election panel should immediately inform in writing the appropriate body to conduct an inquiry in accordance with the code of ethics or disciplinary rules. (See also 6 above and 32 below).

29 Taking office

29.1 Elected individuals generally take office immediately following the general assembly. Alternatively, there may be a later start date. In any case, there should be a proper handover.

30 Matters not covered dealt with by election panel

30.1 Any matters not provided for in this section of the present regulations should be dealt with by the election panel.

31 Rules for candidates

31.1 Candidates should abide by the IF code of ethics and constitution or equivalents.

31.2 Candidates should refrain from carrying out any electoral campaigning prior to the start of the electoral period.

31.3 Candidates should conduct their campaigns with honesty, dignity, moderation and respect for their opponents, limiting expenditure to a proportionate level.

31.4 Candidates should not directly or indirectly, solicit, accept or offer any form of remuneration or commission, or any concealed benefit or service of any nature, connected with any IF activity or election or appointment to office.

31.5 Candidates should in no case and under no pretext give presents or offer donations or gifts or grant advantages or benefits of whatever nature to or at the request of any party who will vote in, or who may otherwise influence, an election.

31.6 Candidates should not enter into any promise or undertaking to personally act (whether as a candidate or following election), for the direct or indirect benefit of an IF body, a member federation or individuals within the IF.

31.7 Candidates should not accept paid travel, expenses, air tickets or accommodation from other candidates, their representatives, members or other associated organisations to attend meetings and activities directly related to a candidate’s elections.

31.8 Candidates should not enter into any form of undertaking with any individual or organisation that is likely to affect the candidate’s freedom of decision or action if elected.

31.9 Candidates for election have the right to promote their candidacies subject to the provisions set out in the rules.

31.10 Except with the permission of the election committee, no debate or public meeting of any kind should be organised to promote a candidature.

31.11 Candidates may make declarations or give interviews provided, in doing so, that they comply with the rules.

31.12 Candidates should not make payments, directly or indirectly, to journalists or other persons affiliated to the media in order to promote their candidacies.

31.13 Candidates should not produce (or cause third parties to produce) any spoken word, written text or representation of any nature likely to harm the image or reputation of another candidate.

31.14 Candidates should not engage in any act, collaboration or collusion by or between candidates with the intent to defraud or manipulate the result of the vote.

31.15 Candidates should not request support or service from the IF or from external advisors who are working with the IF in connection with their candidacies.

31.16 IF resources should not be used to fund travel and campaign activities by candidates who currently occupy elected or appointed positions.

31.17 Candidates who hold official positions within the IF, IF bodies or member federations are permitted to remain in office during the election campaign.

31.18 The IF administration should maintain neutrality at all times. The members of the administration should limit their relations with the candidates strictly to the content of their role as staff.

31.19 There may be a specific rule on the campaign budget, for example setting a limit on expenditure, and/or requiring the candidate to divulge the campaign budget and sources of financing on request. The duration of the campaign period should be defined.

32 Election panels, nominations committees and vetting panels

Various combinations of committees and panels exist among IFs with slightly overlapping functions:

32.1 Nominations committee

Functions:

- Reviewing structure, size and composition of the Board
- Succession planning
- Leading process for appointments including identifying and nominating candidates
- Reviewing and recommending skills needed for board/committees
- Admitting candidates, following an eligibility check and/or vetting

Typical composition:

- President/chair
- At least 3 appointed members with an independent majority
- Secretary may be an IF staff member

Appointed by: Board or General Assembly

32.2 Election oversight panel

For functions see 6.2 above.

Typical composition:

- Chair
- At least 2 appointed members with an independent majority
- Secretary may be an IF staff member
- An IF ethics committee could fulfil the role of election panel

Appointment by: Nominations committee recommend candidates, appointed by board or general assembly

32.3 Vetting panel

Functions:

- To determine whether an applicant or existing official is eligible
- To adopt a standard vetting form and declaration form
- To liaise with risk/compliance/integrity

Typical composition:

- Chair
- 2 independent members

Appointed by: Nominations committee recommend candidates, appointed by board or general assembly

33 Sample timeline for elective general assembly

Time	Action
-2 to 1 years	Candidates for election panel (or equivalent) submit candidatures
-2 to 1 years	Application deadline
-2 to 1 years	Vetting panel (or equivalent) conducts integrity checks on election panel candidates
-2 to 1 years	Nominations committee (or equivalent) make recommendations to board
Post general assembly	Election panel begins new term
-2 to 1 years	Election panel revises procedural rules including candidate requirements, rules, nominations rules etc. within parameters defined in statutes
-2 to 1 years	Board approves manual and candidate requirements
-12 months	Board approves election timelines
-6 months	General assembly date and venue announced
-4 months	Call for candidates/nominations
-4 to 3 months	Completion and submission of candidatures
-3 months	Vetting panel (or equivalent) conducts integrity checks on candidates
-3 months	Election panel confirms candidates; the timetable needs to allow for potential appeals
-2 to 1 month	List of candidates published (after vetting) including biographies and nominating members Candidates can begin to campaign
-2 to 1 month	Training provided for delegates if voting takes place online
-30 days	Election panel prepares to recommend scrutineers
-30 days	Congress agenda and papers distributed to members
-2 weeks	Preparations for candidates to present at general assembly
- 1 week	Training for members on online voting system