

2017 Proposed Amendment to SPEP Bylaws: Pros and Cons

Pending further input from our members, the SPEP Executive Committee (EC) supports, in principle, the idea of conducting electronic voting for the election of future EC Members-at-Large. We do **not** support electronic voting for proposals, amendments to the bylaws, elections to standing committees, or elections for the position of Executive Co-Director. The purpose of this document is to explain our reasoning in view of the various pros and cons as we see them.

Positive Implications of Electronic Voting for EC Members-at-Large

Using the same website of the Philosophy Documentation Center (PDC) that members currently use to pay annual dues and register in advance for the annual meeting, all SPEP members in good standing could participate in the election, regardless of whether or not they are able to attend the annual business meeting. This would be more democratic than our current practice. It has the potential to increase the number of SPEP members participating in the election of Members-at-Large to the EC. And it would offset any perceived advantage or disadvantage that a particular candidate might have given the institutional location of the annual meeting.

Logistical Factors

- *Timeline*

As is the case at present, the announcement of candidates for the position of Member-at-Large would take place with the online/mail publication of the program for the upcoming meeting. Candidates' biographies would be published in the program, and would also be available on the PDC SPEP website, as well as the SPEP website.

Voting for nominees would begin approximately three weeks prior to the date of the business meeting. It would continue until a time (to be specified with PDC) on the afternoon of the Thursday preceding the annual Friday business meeting. Voting would take place through the PDC website, with a unique voter key sent to each member of SPEP who has paid their annual dues for the current membership year. At present, because of the time lag, only those who pay their membership dues by Wednesday midnight EST, before the conference, would be able to vote. If this amendment passes, the EC will work with PDC to arrange for both the longest membership window and the latest time for the vote to close in any given year. The results of the elections would be announced during the annual business meeting

- *Why must the election take place **prior** to the business meeting?*

It is important for the newly elected Members-at-Large to be present at the EC organizational meeting on the Sunday morning following the annual meeting. The EC meets together only twice per year – at the annual meeting and in April to put together the annual program. A great deal of organizational work gets done at that Sunday morning meeting, in addition to the orientation to EC work that new members receive. It would be highly problematic if newly elected members to the EC were not present at the Sunday meeting.

Budget

According to the PDC, the cost of an annual online election for the position of Member-at-Large would be approximately \$250 per ballot per year. (This cost is approximate because there may be small additional costs for mailing ballot access to members without e-mail addresses.)

Negative Implications

If we were to move to electronic voting for Members-at-Large to the EC, it would no longer be possible for members to nominate additional candidates from the floor during the business meeting, since the election would already have taken place prior to the beginning of the meeting. While nominations from the floor have historically been rare, the power to nominate candidates from the floor represents a democratic check on SPEP elections. The question for the membership to consider is whether the potential for greater participation in the electronic vote is a sufficient increase in the democratization of the election process to outweigh what would be lost by the elimination of nominations from the floor.

A second potential negative implication would be the effect that the move to electronic voting might have in decreasing participation at the business meeting. It is hard to gauge this effect in advance.

We do not support electronic voting for proposals and amendments to the bylaws for the following reasons:

At last year's business meeting in Salt Lake City, several members emphasized the importance of robust discussion and democratic deliberation of the rationale for proposals and proposed changes to SPEP bylaws. We share this concern. The annual business meeting provides a crucial forum for democratic deliberation, a forum that would be difficult to replicate online. At the business meeting everyone in attendance has the opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns about proposals and amendments. Members take these interventions into account before deciding how they will vote. Participation in this deliberative process would not be feasible with online voting. While online spaces can certainly augment discussion, they provide a different kind of forum that does not replace the in-person discussion at the business meeting. They also require time and intensive moderating resources that go well beyond the current duties of SPEP officers. For all these reasons, we think that proposals and amendments should continue to be voted on at the annual business meeting.