

PNB Elections Committee Report on 2009 Pacifica Elections

January 21, 2010

This is a compilation of suggestions from members of the Pacifica Elections Committee.

The Election Committee of the Pacifica National Board asked that the PNB and Pacifica management put as high priorities, in the fall of 2008 and again in early 2009, the following:

- (1) staff and member list clean up, and
- (2) contracting out as much of the 2009 Pacifica elections as possible to an election vendor whose future business depended on handling non-profit elections impartially and professionally, and who had adequate resources to draw on to handle the work load.

The PNB approved these recommendations and a Request for Proposals from possible election vendors. Vendor proposals were solicited and reviewed by the Elections Committee early last year, finalists were interviewed by the committee via conference calls, and recommendations on which vendor to hire were made to the ED and PNB. However, other critical issues took up most of the attention of the PNB and management last year, hiring of the National Election Supervisor was delayed (until May 6, 2009), no election vendor was used to help the NES, and we had many of the same problems with our elections as in the past. We hope that the recommendations in this report will receive serious attention this year, in order to avoid still another repeat of past problems with our elections.

We strongly recommend that the Pacifica Executive Director meet with the 2009 National Election Supervisor and interested members of the Elections Committee very soon (by conference call) to discuss this report and the reports of the NES and Local Election Supervisors, as work must begin very soon to prepare for the 2010 Pacifica elections.

Staff and Membership Lists:

Correcting problems with staff and membership lists should be the top priority as we prepare for the 2010 Pacifica elections. A schedule with milestones and measurable results by specific dates should be developed quickly and implemented in time for the list correction and updates to be completed before the candidate nomination period starts this year. Incentives should be provided for station managers to ensure that this does not continue to receive such a low priority. Committee members are encouraged to submit suggestions on how best to do this so that we can forward them to the PNB and our Executive Director.

List clean up continues to be the biggest problem and causes troubles at all Pacifica stations, even though the problems have been worse at some stations. Inaccurate and incomplete member and staff database information causes a variety of problems (not just with elections) that can significantly interfere with our operations, as well as creating excessive expenses. However, this continues to be receive inadequate attention from management at each station. The errors and omissions in staff and member lists:

- * make it difficult to contact all staff members when needed for other reasons (safety, policy changes, specific program queries or changes)
- * make it impossible to send fund drive premiums/gifts to all donors, and wastes funds on premiums sent to incorrect addresses
- * interfere with mailings to members (for solicitation of donations, membership renewal, tax information, etc.) thus interfering with fundraising
- * cause some members, when they do get ballots, to get the incorrect ones (staff vs. listener)
- * cause us to waste printing and postage for all mailings (not just election mailings) when sent to incorrect addresses, and even more when election mailings have to be repeated after getting corrected information
- * frustrate and alienate members who do not get ballots, even if they are able to get replacement ones easily (which was often not the case), thereby reducing future donations and increasing mistrust of management
- * provide rationale for lawsuits, costing Pacifica even more personnel time and money even if Pacifica prevails in court
- * make it difficult to obtain good Local and National Election Supervisors, as any who are familiar with these problems will know they are getting themselves into a lot of difficult work (separate from actually conducting the

elections) and which must be done in a short time, while having to deal with many unhappy people who will direct many of their frustrations towards them

Despite these problems, we keep repeating many of the same mistakes at each Pacifica election, and leave correction of long-term problems up to the Local and National Election Supervisors -- work that they should not have to do and for which they do not have adequate authority to really take care of.

For each election, we have:

- * many members (both staff and listeners) who do not get ballots, often after repeated requests for replacements (or difficulties learning how to get replacements), and many with no (or incorrect) feedback after requesting replacements
- * staff members who get listener ballots
- * members who get more than one ballot (with their name and/or address listed differently but with both being delivered)

Maintenance of accurate, complete, and up-to-date staff and member lists is a critical need for all non-profit organizations, and should be handled by competent individuals with adequate time and support as an on-going task, not something that is put off until our elections. Pacifica and individual station management, at all stations, need to make maintenance of member and staff lists a much higher priority. The decreased long-term costs and increased member donations should more than pay for any increase in short term costs.

Names of staff members (both paid and volunteer) should be posted prominently at each station well in advance of the nomination deadline, and all staff should be encouraged to check it for completeness and accuracy. Better procedures need to be developed for all stations for challenging and correcting the staff list.

For cleaning up the staff lists, consider using the MEMSYS member database for staff contact information as well as for information on volunteers who earned membership via volunteer hours, with an additional field to donate staff members, so that two or three separate databases with duplicate information do not need to be kept up to date and in sync. Require that all program producers keep management up to date with necessary information for those people who regularly help produce their shows, whether paid or volunteer.

Do a better job ensuring that all staff names and addresses are correct and complete, BEFORE the election period starts.

Membership lists need to be constantly updated, as many people change postal addresses, e-mail addresses, and phone numbers each year, and data from each fund drive should be used to update the lists. Making it easier for members to supply and update their own contact information online, with incentives to do so during fund drives, may help some to both increase accuracy of the information and decrease staff time required for updates.

We must ensure that competent personnel maintain each station's membership and staff lists, and that this be done on a continuing basis, not just at the time of Pacifica elections. At every Pacifica station, there continue to be problems with at least part of this, especially regarding staff lists.

Cleaning up the lists needs to be done on a continuing basis, and initiated immediately so that problems can be corrected before this year's Pacifica elections.

General Recommendations for Pacifica Elections:

To reduce costs, facilitate corrections, and reduce non-voting caused by misplaced/discarded mail: Provide for election materials, including complete candidate statements, election instructions, and replacement ballot requests, to be easily but securely available online, as well as by postal mail. Do not send the complete election packet to everyone, but do send at least a postcard (accompanied by on-air announcements to look for it) to all members and which tells them how to either get election information online or by mail, at their choice. Paper ballots should be sent to all members, however, with the supplemental information (candidate statements, STV explanations, etc.),

available either online or by requesting a complete printed packet via mail, depending on the member's preferences. Unresolved issue: A number of committee members felt that the actual voting should be on paper ballots in order to make the vote counting more verifiable, although some felt that electronic voting might be an acceptable choice if adequate security measures could be provided. There may be a tradeoff between ability to reach quorum and cost savings (printing and postage for the complete election packet sent to all members vs. just those who request them), so this issue needs to be explored more thoroughly in order to determine how to reduce costs without decreasing voting participation. (Note: Getting election information, including candidate statements via web pages does not require that we have members' e-mail addresses, although if we do, then it would be easier to send reminders about voting, with links to the appropriate web sites.)

Contract out as much of the election work as possible to a company whose future business depends on doing elections for non-profits in a way that is professional, fair, and efficient. In accordance with a ruling by Pacifica's legal counsel last year, the NES may be an employee of the election vendor as long as the Pacifica ED may choose the NES and vendor (and may do it as a team).

Hire the National Election Supervisor (NES) and election vendor (if used) sooner in the year (in March at the latest), to allow adequate preparation time and to allow for adequate search time for Local Election Supervisors.

Provide incentives for members to supply (and keep current) their e-mail addresses to the station, for use with election mailings as well as other functions.

Better coordinate timing of on-air fund drives with the elections, so that candidate carts and other election information can get adequate air play and they are not competing with fund drives for air time.

Ensure that adequate explanations (on the air and with the ballot instructions) are provided of Single-Transferrable Voting and the importance of not just choosing ones first choice candidate.

Candidates should be encouraged to keep their campaigns positive and focused on issues rather than individuals, and on what they want to do and on their commitments, rather than attacking other candidates. On-air announcements (during forums as well as recorded election promos) should help listeners to be interested in the elections and feel glad to have the opportunity of voting.

Provide incentives for members to return ballots, but which do not encourage one group of listeners more than another, perhaps by letting the member choose from a variety of different but low-cost gifts when they return their ballot.

Determine the number and total amount of donations sent in with ballots, for each station, for the 2009 elections and develop a better solicitation for donations with the ballots, to help offset the cost of elections.

Develop procedures, and have LES's meet regularly with station management, to ensure that all candidate carts are played in proper rotation, that both candidates and on-air staff are familiar with and follow the fair campaign provisions, and that appropriate and graduated sanctions are available and utilized for infractions.

At stations where it was difficult to reach quorum: Better promotion on-air of the elections to increase listener interest and ensure that quorum is reached.

The Pacifica ED should make sure that management at each station provides proper support for the elections.

Ensure that up-to-date and complete election information, including dates and how to obtain replacement ballots, is maintained on each station's web site and/or that each station's web site link to a national one where current information can be made easy to find. (Almost every station had troubles with this again in 2009).

Handle all fair election complaints and replacement ballot requests quickly, provide feedback to those making the complaints and requests, ensure corrective measures are taken as needed, and provide adequate competent personnel to help with this as needed. This was a problem at all stations.

At least some of the key election materials and instructions need to be translated into Spanish.

As it is Pacifica policy that listeners can request ballots based on economic hardship, a standardized form should be developed and adopted for use network-wide. Moreover, Pacifica's waiver must be translated into Spanish, as the contradictions apparent in the applicants' answers have necessitated personal interviews conducted by Spanish-speaking LSB member to verify eligibility.

If bar codes are not printed onto the ballots, it must be emphasized to volunteers who open or scan the ballots that they are never to remove stick-on bar codes.

Do more effective recruiting for volunteers and observers to help the LES at each station, especially for ballot processing. Ensure that they are properly trained before they are allowed to touch any ballots. This was quite variable between stations, with volunteers doing much of the work at KPFA, for example, and almost none at WPFW.

Publicize any changes in ballot processing locations and times, both on the air and on the station's web sites, so that both candidates and other interested members and volunteers can find the right locations each day.

Post the complete round-by-round STV results from Choice Plus Pro or other software used for ballot counting, along with the scanned ballot images, on a Pacifica web site or an individual station's web site immediately after the ballots are processed/counted. This still has not been done for the 2009 elections, as of Jan. 21, 2010.

Recommendations re Technical Issues with Elections and Ballots:

Ensure that ballots are designed and printed in such a way as to facilitate accurate scanning and image processing of members' voting choices. Test and verify ballot scanning/processing software with the ballots for each station well before they are printed and mailed, in time for ballot and/or software changes as needed to facilitate accurate recognition of voters' choices.

This was especially a problem at stations with long ballots, and for ballots which were not aligned exactly right when fed into the scanner, due to lack of alignment marks.

Design the ballot in such a way that members will not be tempted to tear the ballot in half (if the number of candidates fits on only a half page) and keep the part with their validation bar code, thus invalidating their ballot. This was a problem at KPFT, which had a relatively short ballot.

Ensure that the proper bar code information (rather than, for example, the MEMSYS member number which does not uniquely identify members at the same address, or blank info for those who earned membership via volunteer hours), and any other information needed to verify ballots, is printed on the ballots.

For ballot envelopes (including those for replacement ballots), ensure that the outer envelopes (not just the return envelopes) have the appropriate individual station's ballot return address, not the Pacifica national office address, in order to avoid additional ballot security problems when many undeliverable ballot envelopes with active ballot bar codes are returned to the national office.

Ensure that return envelopes for staff and member ballots can easily be distinguished from each other, in order to determine if quorum has been reached.

Compiled by Bill Crosier, Chair, PNB Elections Committee
with help from the committee members