

The Election Process at Region Level

By Sean Cridland, *Roadrunner Region, Zone 9 Representative*

Overview

Annual or bi-annual elections are inherent to the organizational dynamic of growth and change at both the PCA National and Region level. Properly run elections are emblematic of any great organization. At their best, the election process and election results blend the enthusiastic vision of new leadership with the wizened experience of the old guard to form a solid board of officers that will move the Region forward.

Regions run into trouble when their election process is non-existent, manipulated or improperly run. For those Regions whose leadership is too prideful or selfish to know when to let go of power, the election process is truly open to question and casts a negative light on the entire board. The ramifications are many. Such a situation dampens leadership recruitment, stifles creativity, and in the end threatens the health and welfare of the Region. Regardless of motive or outcome, election procedures will ultimately determine the legitimacy (real or perceived) of a group of officers and can either reflect a true, open democratic

process or something less that casts a shadow over the credibility of everyone involved.

In the previous issue of *RegionFocus* (Volume 24, Issue 1) "Region Bylaws— Their Importance and Relevance," Zone 10 Rep Doug Pierce touched upon several areas of the election process, noting that "unless well-defined and unambiguous procedures are set forth in the bylaws and are actually followed for elections, nasty conflicts can erupt over the validity of those elections." Doug briefly described some of the kinds of details that should be addressed in a Region's bylaws to avoid problems and to create a respected election outcome. The goal of this article is to expand on those details and lay out some suggestions/recommendations on how to conduct elections in your Region.

First and Foremost: Clearly Written and Carefully Followed Bylaws

Many Regions run their elections on historical precedent or tradition when there are not governing bylaws. Region members may find

FROM THE EDITOR

In the broader context of what transpires over the course of a year in a PCA Region, elections may not have the emphasis that programs like Driver Education, autocrossing, or concours do. Many Regions do not view their elections as all that important because their board positions are so hard to fill. Some consider the process a pro forma exercise that must be checked off as a periodic requirement. However your Region perceives its elective process, conducting your election properly as outlined in your bylaws is essential if your organization is going to have any credibility with your membership. Moreover, using the election process as an enabling mechanism to recruit new leaders and retain members is very important if a Region is going to sustain growth and face the future with fresh ideas and enthusiasm. RegionFocus has had several issues devoted to nominating procedures and recruiting leaders, and this latest, comprehensive article by Sean Cridland touches upon those issues and explores in further detail the right way to go about conducting elections in your Region. It's a must read for every Region board.



themselves using the phrase, "This is how it's always been done." That kind of approach can work perfectly fine when no one questions tradition and/or the membership believes the election is fair. But if foul play is perceived, absence of strong bylaws can mean turmoil, conflict, division, broken friendships, and worse.

The reality is any successful election process is dictated by a stringent set of rules or procedures. For Regions that are incorporated, the governing rules that describe the election process are contained in the Region's bylaws. But bylaws are only good if followed.

As PCA continues to survey its Regions' bylaws, we're discovering that some Regions have regularly and/or recently revised their bylaws. We are also finding that some Regions haven't looked at their bylaws for several years, and in some cases, for decades! Sadly enough, some can't remember where they are stored and others admit to not having ANY bylaws at all. Bottom line: your Region should have a current set of bylaws that are reviewed annually and always followed for all activities. If you are currently not following your bylaws for elections, you have two options—change your procedures and follow the bylaws, or change the bylaws.

For those few Regions that are not incorporated, your election rules should be set forth in the Region's operating

document, whatever that might be called. For the purposes of this article, the word "bylaws" refers to any form of operating document. But the bottom line is your Region should be incorporated. If it is not, please consult *RegionFocus* Volume 18, Number 3, "IRS Primer," by Bob Knight; Volume 4 Number 5, "Winter House Cleaning," by Bob Gutjahr; and Volume 1, Number 2; August/September 1987, "Incorporated by Reference," by Steve Jianakoplos on how to file for incorporation. Contact the PCA General Counsel as soon as possible if you have any questions regarding this important requirement.

Bottom line: your Region should have a current set of bylaws that are reviewed annually and always followed for all activities.

Bylaws vary from Region to Region depending upon size, demographics and history. This will ultimately impact how a Region's election process is run. Let's assume that 25% of any Region is active in the club. In a small Region, that might be 50 people and some informal, less structured procedures might be

satisfactory. Some small Regions have an annual dinner and the president simply asks the members "Who wants to be president next year?" If that works for your Region, then THAT process should be described in the bylaws. In a large Region, the number of active members could exceed 500 and, in this scenario, more structure is probably necessary to establish structured guidelines in the electoral process and enable involvement by the membership at large.

A good start for putting together a viable set of election procedures within the greater Region bylaws can be found in Robert's Rules of Order. Many organizations' bylaws refer to Robert's Rules as the fallback for gaps in their bylaws, so thorough was Mr. Robert.

A final thought on bylaws: It is assumed your board will read, understand and follow your bylaws. It is important your membership is familiar with them, too. They should be readily available on your Region's website so that everyone knows how the election process is governed.



Steps in Election Process

There are several steps in an election process which should be clearly laid out in a Region's bylaws. They include:

- Establishing Duties and Responsibilities of Elected Officers
- Terms of Office and Term Limits
- Announcing the Election: Dates
- Recruitment
- Nomination by committee, petition, or from the floor
- Announcement of Candidates
- Provision for Write-in Candidates
- Running the Election
- Campaigning and Candidate Behavior
- Voter Eligibility
- Distribution of Ballots
- Casting Votes
- Collection of Ballots
- Counting of Ballots
- Announcement of Winners
- Installation of Officers
- Transition of Officers, Transfer of Documents, Communication of Responsibilities
- Future speak: Technology and the Election Process
- Provisions for Filling Vacant or Resigned Positions

Establishing Duties and Responsibilities for Elected Officers

Region bylaws should clearly delineate the specific duties, responsibilities, and limitations for each elected official.

It is incumbent upon your Region to inform the membership about the election in accordance with the bylaws: the important dates of the election should be promulgated in Region forums such as websites, newsletters, postcards, etc.

Such "job-descriptions" should be made well known both to those members who put forth nominations and by those who accept nominations and run for positions of responsibility in a Region. People are often nominated because they are popular or "seem like a good guy (gal)" without consideration for their potential to fulfill responsibilities

to a Region. Many times people don't really know what the responsibilities are. Published "job descriptions" help prevent these kinds of situations. Generic Region job descriptions are contained in the *Region Procedures Manual*, and can be tailored to the Region's desires, as it (re)writes its bylaws.

Terms of Office and Term Limits

Terms of office and term limits should be specified in the Region Bylaws. Because PCA is a volunteer organization, many Regions establish terms of one year so as not to burn out the volunteer base. Often, term limits are set at no more than two successive one-year terms. Some Regions set a definitive limit on the number of terms one member can be Region president (often two) in order to prevent dynasties and to encourage new energy and creativity to flourish in a Region.

However, there are small Regions that rely upon one or two individuals to keep the Region alive. More than one small Region has admitted to having a "president-for-life" because no one really wants to take on the responsibility. In cases such as these, the bylaws should be flexible enough to accommodate the existing situation and amendable to reflect when it changes.

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Announcing the Election: Important Dates

It is incumbent upon your Region to inform the membership about the election in accordance with the bylaws: the important dates of the election should be promulgated in Region forums such as websites, newsletters, postcards, etc. These dates include:

- Appointment of Nominating Committee
- When nominations open and close
- Announcement of nominees
- Date of Election OR Open and closing dates for casting ballots
- Announcement of election winners
- Installation date of officers

Recruitment of Nominees

Recruiting leaders for your Region should not start when your electoral process begins. Rather, it is ongoing and integral to the Region's climate and culture. One of the hallmarks of great Regions in PCA is involving members, identifying and mentoring potential leaders, and encouraging them to step forward to lead activities. For further discussion on leadership recruitment, see *RegionFocus* Volume 22, Number 2 "2008 Winter Board Meeting Focus Group: Recruiting Youthful Leaders At Region Level" by Bob Gutjahr.

Development of potential leaders in a Region can be an informal, personal process, but it can also be institutionalized in Region bylaws. In general, every PCA officer, once he or she assumes office, has the responsibility not only to do the job well, but to also begin looking

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immediately for a qualified replacement for that position. This technique reinforces the concept of term limits and ensures that the person best suited to understand his/her duties will recruit the best qualified person for his/her replacement.

Some Regions require members to serve on the board in various positions before allowing them to run for president. In some cases this could be seen to stifle creativity and new

involvement, but in larger, well established Regions it ensures that top-level management is not learning on the job. The specified task of the nominating committee and the continual responsibility of the members of the current board is to ascertain which members would be interested and qualified to serve as future board members. A Region may have members who are very well qualified, but either aren't interested in serving in Region leadership or simply haven't considered the idea. In the latter scenario, a Region's leadership should gradually introduce new members to positions of responsibility without leaning on them too hard and too soon.

Nominations

There is any number of ways to nominate candidates for office; your Region's bylaws should specify its own procedures. (See *RegionFocus* issues Volume 6 Number 5, Volume 13 Number 2, and Volume 14 Number 1, for insights and suggestions on nominating procedures.)

Some Regions form a nominating committee that will canvass the membership for potential candidates and ultimately choose a slate of officers. Your bylaws should stipulate the criteria for selection to this committee, the timeline for its work, its roles and responsibilities, and, if required, its report back to the Region's board.



Different criteria can be used by the nominating committee in selection of candidates:

a. Some nominating committees have free rein and complete transparency with the membership. In some Regions, the committee openly solicits the membership for suggestions as to who should lead the club without any conditions for candidacy.

b. Some bylaws stipulate the nominating committee select candidates based on metrics of experience and service. Some criteria might include a minimum number of years of membership, level of involvement, or experience in other offices in the club itself or on the boards of other organizations. For example, in some Regions, a candidate must have already served on a board before being considered as a candidate for President. Regardless, bylaws should provide that no member of the nominating committee can be nominated for office.

Some clubs do not use a nominating committee at all, choosing to nominate their officers via an open vote at a general membership meeting. In other cases, a Region nominating committee considers suggestions from the floor during such a meeting. Some Regions have combined these methods, offering a slate of nominated candidates based on their experience and participation, but then also allowing the membership

to nominate by petition or from the floor of an open meeting.

When the bylaws permit nominations from the floor that are immediately followed by a vote of the members in attendance, there is a real risk of

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election by ambush. The members may assume that an election is not contested and then, suddenly, a group nominates a candidate from the floor and fills the room with his/her

supporters. The solution to this scenario is to only accept nomination by petition. In that way, the members know in advance if an election is contested and whether the election will require meaningful voting.

Announcing the Candidates

If a Region nominates and elects their officers at a membership meeting, the announcement is a formality. Conversely, if a Region uses mail-in balloting or specifies a period of time from the start of the nomination process to the date of the election, then the candidates must be announced to the membership via the Region newsletter or on the Region's website (preferably both). Prior to the election, a Region should provide candidates an opportunity to submit a photo and a short bio and make a pitch in its newsletter. Although a candidate may be familiar to the veteran members, he or she could be a complete stranger to less-active or newer members of a Region. Even if a member has already served as an officer, it's a good idea for candidates to get themselves into the public eye during the election season. If nothing else, it helps the candidate meet new people in the Region and gain a feel for what members would like to see happen in the coming year. Even if there is no opposition, it's still a good idea for candidates to get out and meet people during the election season. This is important and will add

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legitimacy to any subsequent action that the current and newly elected Board may take.

Provision for Write-in Candidates

Most formal balloting processes allow for write-in candidates. It's a traditional part of the democratic process. The write-in process can be a "safety valve" for those interested candidates who have missed nomination committee deadlines or for those members who are not happy with the officially nominated candidates. In some cases it is simply a way for members to express their wishes and desires for an alternative choice.

A write-in campaign can either have a very positive or negative effect upon a Region, depending on its circumstances of origin and motivation of the candidate. For that reason, write-in campaigns should be addressed in detail in the Region bylaws to obviate surprises and to ensure every member has a chance to vote and every member has a chance to run if he/she chooses to do so.

Running the Election

Once the nominating committee has done its work and the candidates are announced, some Region bylaws call for the appointment of an election chair to monitor the electoral process, to oversee balloting,

and to announce the results. The election chair should be a board appointed representative to ensure all aspects of the election from campaigning to voting are consistent with the bylaws. This officer should be different from the chair of the nominating committee, the latter of which may have a vested interest or bias in favor of the election of the nominated slate.

Many Regions assume commonly held standards of ethical behavior will be upheld. Don't assume. Ensure your bylaws have a clearly written statement on election behavior to avoid confusion about what is and what is not permitted at election time.

Campaigning

There may or may not be time for candidates to campaign based on the length of the electoral process. If a Region's election is held at a public meeting, for example, campaigning may be minimal or even non-existent. Once the slate of candidates is announced or nominations called from the floor, the Board may move directly to conducting the election itself, either by a show of hands or by passing out ballots.

Some Regions allocate their nominated and write-in candidates, a limited time period to campaign for support from the membership. Depending upon the zeal and competitiveness of the candidates, classic advertising and campaign techniques may be employed to gain the attention and support of the voting members. In a club where one candidate slates are the norm, this does not happen often, but fairness and proper comportment should be the rule when it does.

Candidate Behavior

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During the campaigning period leading up to the balloting, candidates should be encouraged to meet and greet members of the Region to make themselves and their positions familiar. Campaigning period is a great time for candidates to reach out to as many members as possible to canvas their views on Region activities and goals. It's also a great time to meet as many of the members as possible, since a Region officer will be representing the entire membership, not just his/her own circle of friends.

PCA Regions often depend on a small group of volunteers to run a variety of events. Although friendly competition is encouraged, candidates should remember that they will be more than likely working with their opponents for years to come in one capacity or another. Feuds and personal animosities have been known to divide and damage otherwise successful Regions into small, unworkable factions. As Manny Alban always says, 'Hey, this is just a car club. We're supposed to be having fun.' PCA's original bylaws and the new PCA Code of Ethics and Conduct" in the *Region Procedures Manual (RPM)* are good guides if electioneering and campaigning become too 'spirited'.

A few no brainers: candidates should not handle any ballots other than their own (or potentially, their spouses). Candidates must decline handling other members' ballots no matter

what the circumstance. Candidates must not be involved in the ballot counting process. Ballot-tampering or perceived ballot-tampering will destroy the credibility of the election

Voter lists are key when eligibility criteria is well defined. A board member or appointed unbiased individual should delineate a validated list of those members who are eligible to vote as of a specific date.

process, place elected officers in a negative light with the greater membership and create divisiveness in a Region, burning them out before they reach maturation in the process. Candidates may have official observers appointed to oversee the counting procedure."

A well-established set of bylaws, rules, and procedures which help to eliminate capricious or unpredictable behavior on the part of candidates and the leadership. People tend to have a long memory when candidates make poor choices during the election season. The smaller the organization, the longer its memory.

Voter Eligibility

All voter eligibility qualifications should be made known in advance to Region members via both newsletter and web/e-mail announcement. Region bylaws should contain a section on who is eligible to vote. Some Regions allow only primary members to vote. Others allow and encourage affiliate and family members to vote. Some Regions may have dues separate from National and may only allow Region-dues paying members to vote. If there are provisions in a Region's bylaws which delineate precisely who can and cannot vote, they must be stated clearly in election materials.

For example, PCA originally required an active member to be an owner of a Porsche automobile. Many older Regions adopted this requirement for becoming an active Region member. Later, PCA amended this requirement to include a lessee of Porsche automobiles. However, many Regions did not similarly amend their bylaws. As a result, PCA active members who

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lease Porsches may not necessarily be Region active members.

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Distribution of Ballots

If a balloted election is held at an annual meeting, it is a relatively straightforward process to issue, collect, account for, and count ballots.

Mail-in ballots can be more complicated. To preclude voter fraud, some Regions choose to send out specially printed numbered ballots to control and authenticate each vote. This requires custom printing and an additional mailing to the membership. The process is expensive—total costs may be as much as \$2-\$3 per ballot.

Some Regions simply print their ballots in their newsletters or make them available as a printable pdf file on their websites. Bylaws should stipulate in this scenario that eligible voters write their membership number on and sign the ballot, which can then be checked against membership roles.

Casting ballots

There are several ways to cast ballots. A show of hands is easiest at a general membership meeting. If

Bylaws should specify who can be appointed to count ballots—obviously no active candidate can participate in the process. Even in situations with single nominees for each position, this procedure is essential to maintain the legitimacy to the entire election process. Cutting corners will undermine the credibility of all involved.

Regions choose to have their vote at a meeting where ballots are cast into boxes, the election chair should monitor the ballot box to prevent “stuffing.” Many Regions vote by mail-in ballot.

Instructions for marking and mailing in ballots should be clearly stated on the ballots.

Regions should be aware that artful use of write-in balloting can bring out unexpected results. Regions often have only one candidate actively running for a position; this can induce voter apathy at ballot time. In a Region of 300 members, it’s not unusual to have only ten percent voter participation. Though rare, there is historical precedent for a write-in or walk-on candidate to quietly campaign behind the scenes and collect enough votes to overturn an incumbent or single-slated nominee. Such results usually come at a complete surprise until the ballots have been counted.

One anecdote from an election chair comes to mind. The chair noted that 10 ballots had come in one envelope. This raised a red-flag, especially since the instructions for mailing a ballot clearly stated one member could only mail in his/her own ballot. Despite this fact, the Region allowed the ballots to be counted, when upon further inspection, it was found that a group friendly to one candidate had enthusiastically handed all of their ballots to their favorite candidate so he could mail them in himself. While this raised some eyebrows, there were no bylaws which forbade it. Nonetheless, the matter raised some concern with some members and especially with other



candidates, causing friction and divisiveness in the Region. Since then, that Region is working to clarify their election-related bylaws to avoid that kind of incident from happening again.

Collection of Ballots

The election chair or his neutral proxy should safeguard the collection of ballots. If ballots are collected at a meeting, then the election chair should monitor the ballot-box and ensure that no stuffing occurs and that no candidates have access to the box until counting is completed and results are announced.

If balloting is done by mail, then the election chair and his or her assistant(s) should be the only ones to collect and open ballots for counting. Again, no active candidate should have access to ballots submitted for election by members at any time during the election process.

Counting of Ballots

The bylaws, election rules, and the ballot instructions should be followed to the letter when validating and counting ballots. For mail-in ballots, membership numbers should be checked against the most current membership roster to ensure that only eligible members are voting and that no member is voting more than once. Bylaws should specify who can be

appointed to count ballots—obviously no active candidate can participate in the process. Even in situations with single nominees for each position, this procedure is essential to maintain the legitimacy to the entire election process. Cutting corners will undermine the credibility of all involved.

A Region may want to include the protocols for transition of powers and documents in their election rules and/or their Region bylaws so as to make the process more transparent for those in positions of responsibility.

Some Regions have utilized the services of the National Office to count ballots. Where there is potential for a controversial election, that is one solution. Another solution is to have the candidates appoint official observers to watch the ballots being counted.

Once counted, ballots should be properly stored for a period of time delineated by the Region bylaws if a recount or verification is required.

Announcement of Winners

When officers are elected at general membership meetings, the winners are usually announced before the conclusion of the meeting. In some cases, the newly elected officers will be introduced to the membership, sworn in and take their positions. Nonetheless, Regions should still announce the winners of their elections in their newsletter and website so that the entire membership know who their new leaders are.

For mail-in balloting, the election chair may have to report to the Secretary and/or President the results of the election. Different Regions have different procedures and traditions as to how and when they announce their newly elected officers. Some may immediately send out an e-mail announcing the winners. Some may run an article in the newsletter. Others wait to announce their new officers for formal installation at their Christmas party. In any case, the procedure/tradition should be clearly delineated in the Region's bylaws and followed faithfully so that members know what to expect as the completion of each election cycle.

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Installation of Officers

For many Regions, there is no special ceremony to install officers. Instead, there is simply a designated date when one term ends and the new one begins. For those Regions, the bylaws should clearly outline the transition period between the outgoing and incoming officer and the actual date when the new officer assumes his/her responsibilities. Region tradition may dictate that the new officers be introduced during a social gathering—often the annual Holiday party.

However, many Regions conduct semi-formal (yet lighthearted) swearing-in ceremonies (I've heard of Regions using an old Porsche service manual in lieu of a Bible). This approach, while not necessary, provides a public face to each officer and brings tangible closure to the election process. It also lends legitimacy to the newly installed officers, officially assigns the new board their responsibilities in a public forum, and represents continuity of operations and history to the entire membership.

Transition of Officers, Transfer of Documents, Communication of Responsibilities

The transition of duties between outgoing and incoming officers is a key time at the end of the year for every Region. There are always

challenges with transition. The outgoing board member would like to divest himself/herself of his/her old responsibilities as quickly as possible

Transition also includes the transfer of Region files, manuals, bank accounts, archives and National publication/documentation to the new team. Some of the Region documents may require special safe-keeping; some may simply help the new officers to understand their roles within the organization of the Region.

and exit the Region stage. The incoming officer often assumes his/her new role with only a superficial understanding of the issues and what it takes to get the job done. For these reasons and to

ensure continuity, a Region may want to include the protocols for transition of powers and documents in their election rules and/or their Region bylaws so as to make the process more transparent for those in positions of responsibility.

One example: Reports to National are key throughout the year. But the first report at the beginning of the year, "PCA Region Report Form" is arguably the most important. It informs the National Office who the new officers are, what their contact information is, and who will be responsible for running all aspects of the Region. (Your Region should publicize the phone number and/or e-mails of their officers so that they are accessible to club members, as well.)

Transition also includes the transfer of Region files, manuals, bank accounts, archives and National publication/documentation to the new team. Some of the Region documents (such as insurance waiver forms, state/commonwealth incorporation forms, etc.) may require special safe-keeping; some may simply help the new officers to understand their roles within the organization of the Region.

Reference materials to use for transition guidelines: The Region Procedures Manua (RPM) offers "job descriptions" for elected Region officers. Some may help to explain the kinds of traditions and protocols a Region follows in order



to maintain its continuity. Check out RPM for copies of the annual "PCA Region Report Form" and the "PCA Region Continuity Check List" (NOTE: these MUST be completed in order for the Region to receive any future membership rebate or other funding. These forms are also on line as PDFs at www.pca.org, under "Regions," then "Forms & Documents.") *RegionFocus* Volume 4 Number 5, "Winter House Cleaning", by Bob Gutjahr and Volume 18, Number 1, "Region Leadership Continuity", by Mike Mansolino lays out some of the transition period actions that every good Region must complete if one board is going to succeed another.

Future Speak: Technology and the Election Process

In the age of the iPhone, Droid, and Blackberry and other hand-held devices, the paperless age has found its way into the election process for many clubs and organizations. Many Regions are starting to replace their newsletters with websites and e-newsletters. "Apps" are starting to offer an almost unlimited variety of useful online tools and activities, including on-line balloting. There are already a variety of free and for-purchase balloting options clubs and organizations can use to replace paper mail-in ballots, thereby erasing a number of the kinds of problems that can arise from paper ballots or the limited availability for

attending meetings. Although there may already be PCA Regions utilizing contemporary technology for the election process, this author is not yet familiar with them and has not heard any reports regarding their advantages or disadvantages. Nevertheless, we know that it is coming and it is a safe bet to say there will be a *RegionFocus* article addressing election technology in the not-so-distant future. [Editor's note: if any Region is using this technology now, please contact me.]

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Provisions for Filling Vacant or Resigned Positions

Inevitably, situations will occur wherein elected officials won't be able to complete their terms of office. Regions should address those situations in their bylaws. For example, if the role

of president becomes vacant, the bylaws should stipulate the vice-president will assume the duties and responsibilities of the of president. But should the vice president decline the position, other means of appointing a Region president for the remainder of a term should be covered in the bylaws.

Similar provisions in Region bylaws should cover the filling of other vacant positions on a Region board, be it the vice-president, secretary, treasurer, or a member-at-large.

There are many stories of disorganized Regions finding leaders who take them to new heights and also of well established Regions falling from long periods of grace because of fractious and divisive behavior when one set of leaders take over from another.

Conclusion

Most Region elections are not perfect, but the trust and respect a Region's membership gives their leaders depends greatly upon how efficiently and transparently the electoral process is conducted. As Doug Pierce outlined in the previous *RegionFocus*, "having a strong, clear, and up-to-date set of bylaws with which to run a Region goes a long way toward preventing negative change."

Let us all remember PCA is a volunteer organization that is competing for

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the leisure time of our members. Controversy surrounding elections is a huge distraction and can divide a Region's leadership, affecting the entire climate of the club. Unhappy members don't complain, they just leave the club. Having a solid set of bylaws and election rules will go a long way in preventing this from happening and will give the Region a solid foundation for continued success.



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management ideas for PCA regions

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