



Four Election Principles

By Ann Guiberson, PRP

The November 2025 elections are now in our rear view mirrors, but the results remain with us for a long time. Each time we go through an election cycle, questions arise not only from parliamentarians but also from the public. While *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* (RONR) is not the governing authority for our state or national elections, it provides valuable guidance on election principles. Since most of us participate in some form of election almost every year—even if only by casting a vote and learning the outcome—it is essential that everyone can trust the results.

This article reviews four key election principles found in RONR that, when followed properly, help to inspire confidence in the electoral process. These principles are particularly relevant to organizations that have adopted RONR as their parliamentary authority.

Principle 1: Completing an Election

When an election is scheduled for a meeting, it must be completed during that meeting. RONR (12th ed.) 46:44. Typically, bylaws will state the specific timing for elections. However, if the election cannot be held as planned, the assembly can decide to do the following:

- **Adjourned Meeting:** If the election is not completed, an adjourned meeting should be set to finish the process.
- **Next Regular Meeting:** If no adjourned meeting is arranged, the election automatically carries over to the next regular meeting, provided it falls within the quarterly time interval.

In any case, the election should be completed as soon as possible within the current term. Until a successor is elected, the incumbent remains in office; failure to elect does not remove the current officeholder. If a vacancy occurs, it can be filled, but once the election takes place, the newly elected individual assumes the position, replacing anyone who filled the vacancy temporarily.

Importantly, not holding an election does not deprive members of their right to choose their officers.



Principle 2: Announcing the Complete Result of an Election

Members have the right to hear the full story and know the details about the outcome of an election. That means the President must see to it that the tellers provide a complete report of the results. The election report must include the total number of votes cast, the number needed to win, the names of each candidate, and the number of votes each received.

Without this comprehensive information, members would find it difficult to determine whether the results should be challenged. Considering that they do not have very much time to issue a challenge, hearing a complete report is a critical step that should not be subject to shortcut or a mistaken belief that the losing candidate's feelings need to be protected. RONR (12th ed.) 45:37 and 45:40

Principle 3: Finalizing an Election

An election is considered final immediately under the following circumstances:

- The elected candidate is present and does not decline the position.
- If the candidate is absent but has previously consented to candidacy.

If candidate did not consent in advance, the election becomes final once the candidate is notified and does not decline. So have a phone handy and make the call at the meeting so you know if you have a final election or not. If a candidate declines, a new vote should be held immediately, or at the next meeting without further notice.

Once a candidate has accepted or has not declined, the election is final and it is too late to reconsider the vote. RONR (12th ed.) 46:46

Principle 4: Contesting the Announced Result of an Election

Even though members can only challenge within a brief period of time, they do have the following options available if they think something in the election went wrong:

- Order a recount: In certain circumstances, the assembly may order a recount for ballot votes, roll calls, or counted votes. Written records must be retained and are subject to recount as well.



- Point of Order: A point of order must be raised immediately following the announcement of the result, as outlined in RONR 45:9. It is too late to challenge once another member has been recognized and started to speak, give a report, or after the chair states a subsequent motion.

The President should take steps to preserve tally sheets and written records and place them in the secretary's or sergeant-at-arms' custody if the recount or revote has to be taken at an adjourned meeting or at a later time in the current meeting. RONR (12th ed.) 46:48-49

It is important to election integrity that elections are completed promptly, most often at the same session in which it begins. The complete election results must be announced in order for members to have all the information necessary to protect their right to challenge an election. Elections need to have finality. There is a point in time when it is over and members need to know when that point is reached. Challenges to announced results must be made immediately; otherwise, it is too late. Finality in elections is essential to maintaining confidence in elections.