



POST - POLIO NETWORK (NSW) INC.

Supporting polio survivors and their families since 1989

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Discussion Paper on Committee Membership: Length of a Single Term in Office Maximum Time in Office Postal Nominations and Postal Voting

During the review of the Network's Constitution undertaken in 2003, the Constitution Sub-Committee discussed at length whether a maximum time in office for Committee Members should be defined in the Constitution but, after weighing up the arguments for and against, decided not to recommend such a change at that time. It was recognised that the Network has an ever-decreasing pool of members who are able to serve on the Committee.

The Management Committee feels that the entire membership should be involved in discussing this issue. To begin this process, members need to consider whether the current one-year term served by Committee Members best suits our needs. In addition, the Committee recognises that the majority of the Network's members are not able to attend Network meetings, predominantly because of their location and/or level of disability. In order to engage more members in the Committee election process, we are canvassing support for an election system which comprises postal nominations of Committee Members, and postal voting for Committee positions and for resolutions at General Meetings of the Network.

Should the Committee members' term be increased from its present one year? Should there be a limit on the number of term renewals? If changes were made, how do you think this would affect the performance of the Committee and thereby the Network? Would performance be improved, stay much the same, or deteriorate? Should the Network change its present election system?

To assist you in answering these questions, this Discussion Paper gives you an insight into the pros and cons of the issues under review. You are invited to consider the arguments on both sides and give some thought to the direction the Network should take.

The Committee invites you to participate in the open discussion on these matters at the Special General Meeting on 15 June. If you are unable to attend the Meeting, we especially want you, the silent majority, to make your views known by completing and returning the enclosed Questionnaire prior to the Meeting. As well as responding to the specific questions posed, any additional comments you care to make will contribute to the discussion on the day. The outcomes of the discussion will be reported in the subsequent *Network News*, together with the Committee's recommendations on the way forward.

On behalf of the Management Committee, I urge you to read this Discussion Paper and give careful consideration to its contents. To have your voice heard please attend the Special General Meeting on Wednesday 15 June 2005, or return the enclosed Questionnaire prior to the Meeting.

Gillian Thomas
President
18 May 2005

Committee Members' Term of Office

Should the Network increase its current one year term for Committee members ?

At the moment, the Network's Constitution limits each Committee member's term to one year as all members stand down at each Annual General Meeting. The Management Committee members are therefore accountable to the Network membership on an annual basis. However, many organisations have longer terms of office, such as two or three years. In considering whether or not to introduce a maximum time in office and/or postal voting, it is necessary to first consider whether the Network's current one year term best suits our needs, particularly if postal voting with its resultant costs is adopted. It is important to note that if members decide to increase the elected term, an Annual General Meeting will still be held every year for the presentation of financial and other reports.

Points FOR increasing Committee members' term of office:

- The number of elections are reduced thus reducing Network costs and volunteer effort.
- The experience and confidence of Committee members grows with time and one year may be insufficient to become truly effective.
- It is more likely that Committee members can see their projects through to completion if the term is longer.
- Long-term strategic planning is encouraged.

Points AGAINST increasing Committee members' term of office:

- Committee members are more accountable – if the membership is unhappy with a Committee member's performance they will be unable to make a change through the election process in less than two or more years (the length of a term).
- In practice, Committee members are elected for several successive terms so this gives plenty of time for building experience, confidence and effectiveness. In addition, this also allows plenty of time for finalising projects and strategic planning.
- Committee members are more likely to serve for a short term of office.

Maximum Time in Office for Committee Members

Should there be a limit to the number of consecutive terms of office for:
President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer and/or Committee Members ?

Under the Network's Constitution, Committee members are elected for a term of one year and all members stand down at each Annual General Meeting. The Constitution does not limit the ability of any member to re-stand for election and as such there is theoretically no maximum time in office. This is in common with the other Australasian Polio Networks and many other organisations.

The practice of allowing Committee members of organisations to renew their term through re-election is normal. Some organisations limit the number of renewals, while others don't. In those organisations with a limit, this is usually applied across the board to all Committee members. However, the limitation could be applied to the President, Vice-President, Secretary and/or Treasurer. Alternatively, the limitation could be applied to the non-Executive Committee members.

For organisations that do have limitations, the designated member(s) must stand down after serving a pre-defined number of consecutive terms of office. Having reached their maximum time in office, they are not then eligible for re-election to the Committee until at least one term has passed.

Points FOR limiting the maximum time in office:

- Gaining the expertise and skills of a wider group of members.
- Avoiding stagnation or "getting in a rut" by bringing in new blood and new ideas.

- Members not being prepared to challenge for a position when an incumbent has held it for some time.
- It avoids the expectation that someone must stay in a position until someone else comes forward.
- It reduces the expectation that people should stay on the Committee for many years.
- Members may feel that that one style is the only “right” one and that, if they could not continue that style, they should not stand for the office.
- Where an incumbent has assumed additional tasks into the role others may feel that this would be required of them even when this is not the case.
- Fewer members are exposed to the information that is required in executive roles and on the Management Committee.
- Too much corporate memory can be held in too few heads – having a maximum time in office potentially increases the turnover of personnel on the Committee and spreads the organisational knowledge wider.
- When someone has been in a position for a considerable time to suggest a change may be taken as offensive to the individual.
- If only one or a small number has had experience in a role the ability to maintain the organisation is reduced if that person/s cannot continue.
- Someone may feel that they may be expected to continue for a long time as a predecessor may have done.
- The Network membership may be more accepting of the fact that people all need to help out and not leave all the work to the same few.
- Members who may prove unsuitable are guaranteed not to be there indefinitely.

Points AGAINST limiting the maximum time in office:

- For 16 years the Network has prospered and we should be careful changing our successful formula. Change should not be introduced for change’s sake.
- “Gaining the expertise and skills of a wider group of members”, “avoiding stagnation or ‘getting in a rut’” and “bringing in new blood and new ideas” are already happening to a maximum extent because any member who wishes to serve is already able to do so and is welcomed. In our organisation setting a maximum period in office will not improve matters because there is a shortage of members who want to, and are able to, serve on the Committee and its Executive.
- There is already difficulty filling Committee positions when members retire. If a maximum period in office is implemented, additional members will be required to stand down and it is unlikely that all Committee positions will be able to be filled.
- If a Committee member is required to stand down due to the maximum term being reached and no-one else nominates, then a Committee vacancy is created. Depending on the vacant position and the number of vacancies, the Committee will be less able to function.
- The Network’s membership, by its very nature, is ageing and less physically able so fewer people are able or willing to take on the effort and pressure of office.
- Members who aren’t prepared to challenge for a position may not have the motivation and initiative required to be an effective Committee member.
- A less-able member may be forced to take on a Committee role simply because it is time for a change in personnel.
- Having a maximum term is indiscriminate because it not only removes unsuitable Committee members but also removes those doing a good job. The Committee loses out solely because a time limit has expired.
- A talented and experienced member may be replaced by a member with less talent and invariably less experience.
- There is a loss of corporate memory on the Committee when experienced members leave.

- A considerable amount of time can be wasted training new members if there is a high turnover, whereas if there is a core team that works well together much time and energy can be saved, and experienced and confident people lead and manage the Network.
- Changes in personnel can also mean changes in modus operandi, which may be positive or negative. For example, there can be changes in direction of the Network which results in little being achieved over time, and in addition the flow of projects underway is disrupted.
- Natural attrition exists whereby people already move off the Committee of their own accord and new people fill the vacant spots and bring in fresh ideas – the Committee does not stagnate.
- There are other ways to increase Committee turnover, if this is desirable, than by introducing a maximum time in office. For example, each year one or two members could be required to step down. This could be achieved voluntarily or by Committee ballot.

Postal Nominations and Postal Voting

Should the Network introduce postal nominations and postal voting for Committee positions and for resolutions at General Meetings ?

By its charter the State Electoral Office is unable to conduct postal ballots for an organisation such as ours. For an experienced person to conduct a full postal ballot on behalf of the Network it would cost \$2,000 per election. The Network could itself call for postal nominations and conduct a postal ballot, however there would still be substantial costs (both financial and human) involved. If the term of office of Committee members is increased, annual costs to the Network would be reduced accordingly. For example, for a two-year term costs are halved, and for a three-year term costs are one third.

Points FOR:

- The Network's membership is widely spread geographically and many have physical limitations which mean they cannot attend meetings. Postal nominations and/or postal ballots give them the opportunity to participate in the election of the people tasked with running the Network.
- The Network currently sends out Proxy Forms to all members for voting on Constitutional amendments. Expanding this process to enable members to vote on other resolutions at General Meetings makes the Network more inclusive.
- Sending postal ballots and Proxy Forms out to only those people who register to receive them could reduce costs associated with implementing these changes.

Points AGAINST:

- Insufficient postal nominations may be received to form a viable Committee.
- No new Committee nominations could be taken from the floor or, if these are permitted, those who have voted by post are not able to vote on the new nominations.
- Discussion on resolutions at a meeting may lead to amendments on which the person who has submitted a Proxy Form for a postal vote cannot vote.
- The discussion may also raise new ideas which the person has not considered when casting the vote and may have wished to change the vote accordingly.
- Printing and postal expenses, plus additional expenses if pre-paid envelopes are provided – membership fees need to cover these expenses so may need to rise.
- There will be new demands on the Network's Executive in managing the process.
- If people haven't participated in Network activities prior to nomination, or if they aren't able to attend an Annual General Meeting to nominate for the Committee, they may not be able to attend or fulfill their responsibilities on the Committee if elected.
- A lot of time, effort and cost to introduce the system for a limited benefit - when Proxy Forms have been send out in the past members have not made use of them with only 10% returned.