

How To Elect Your Route Leadership And Appoint Them To The Best Positions (122)

Electing your route leaders and appointing them to specific leadership portfolios is perhaps the most important yearly responsibility of the route members.

As an Open Africa route subscriber to the Open Africa Charter, you are committed to transparent governance. As an organisation with its own founding document (constitution for a voluntary association, memorandum of association for a nonprofit company or trust deed for a trust). As an Open Africa subscriber, you are obliged to follow specified procedures in electing and/or appointing people to leadership positions. You should follow the exact procedures described in your founding document for elections and appointments.

In this Guide, you will not find the detailed instructions on the process that should be followed. The exact steps will vary from route to route, based on what is provided for in the particular founding document.

What this Guide provides is general guidelines on what you should consider in electing your route leaders and their appointment to fill specific leadership portfolios. You will find this useful in understanding who the best people would be to trust with the leadership responsibility and how to ensure wide support of the leadership by your membership.

It is worth distributing this Guide to members as part of the annual process of asking for nomination before elections take place – and to send it every year. The Guide may also be useful for training purposes when the roles of the route leadership are covered.

Why is it important to appoint the right leaders to the best positions?

Your route leaders play a very important role in determining the success of establishing and/or expanding a successful destination route. They have to inspire the members to remain active in route activities, to act as the public representatives of the route who interact with other organisations and recruit new members, and to make plans and implement projects. Above all, they are the people entrusted with governing the route as an organisation.

It does not matter which legal formation your route chooses as the best option – a trust, a nonprofit company or a voluntary association – since all organisations need leaders to take responsibility for key elements of healthy functioning. This is as true for a newly established route as it is for a well-established route. The calibre of the leadership will largely determine the route's success.

Since the route leadership plays a key role in determining the route's success, it is worth spending some time as route members on what the issues are to consider in electing the route leaders and appointing them to portfolios.

The election of route leaders is not a measure of determining the popularity of the nominated individuals. You will make a big mistake if you only focus on how well the candidates get along with everyone, although this is a very important success factor. There are many other considerations to take into account.

The two most important considerations in putting your leadership in place are:

- Transparency with full member participation in the

election process.

- Allocating the best people to the positions that match their strengths.

What is involved in electing and appointing leadership?

The identification of route leaders will generally follow some basic steps, such as:

- Request nominations – commonly a circular is sent to all members (mostly along with notice of the AGM).
- Receive nominations – in many cases, it must be written, signed by the nominee as well as the person nominated plus a seconder, and must to be delivered to the Secretary.
- Appoint a presiding officer – at the meeting where the voting is to take place, the current Chairperson, or another person appointed by the Chairperson, or a person specified in the founding document will preside over the voting process.
- Motivate for candidates – this would take place at the meeting where the vote is to be taken.
- Vote – generally, each member (or appointed proxy) will have one vote that is exercised through a ballot (a ballot is mostly preferred above a show of hands when it comes to voting for people).
- Count – this is generally done at the meeting by the presiding officer and one or two generally trusted assistants.
- Announce the results – the names of those elected will generally be announced. If members request the detailed counts, this may also be announced, but is generally not required.

Many founding documents do not ask members to vote on the portfolios allocated to the elected leadership, but only for

the people to serve on the executive structure. At their first meeting, those elected will then appoint from among themselves the individuals to portfolios such as the Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary. However, the founding document may require that the vote takes place at the General Meeting to elect leaders portfolio by portfolio, which implies that the full process (from nomination to announcing results) will apply to each portfolio separately.

We have now covered the technical detail of the election and appointment process. It is very important that this process is managed in a transparent manner and that all members participate fully and are kept and informed.

The election of the best leaders and their appointment to the portfolios they are best suited for are very important aspects of setting the route up for success. Members should therefore be aware of what it is that they should look for in their leadership, and they should seek to ensure a good spread of competencies in their leadership team.

Here are some pointers for members to consider:

- **Experience:** There is no substitute for experience when it comes to the appointment of leaders – however, this does not imply that younger people are disqualified, since experience is not only related to time, but also to the exposure the candidates had to relevant contexts.
- **Commitment:** The level of contribution from leaders is dependent on what time and effort they can offer the route; it is not only a matter of their dedication to the route, but also the degree to which they may already be overstretched.
- **Neutrality:** Strong personalities may be controversial too, and may not be able to maintain healthy relationships with all the stakeholders and members. In this regard, it may be better to prefer candidates who are perceived to be neutral on any controversial topics

or who are not seen to be representative of any “factions” in the local community.

- **Trustworthy:** Trust is something people earn over time through their actions, which is why trustworthiness is such an important indicator of the suitability of a person to serve as a leader of route members.
- **Expertise:** A variety of expert competencies are needed to form balanced leadership – from networking, to business management, to financial systems, to marketing, to product development, etc.
- **Dreamers and doers:** The route leadership should ideally include both the visionaries who see the possibilities others are missing as well as those who get things done and who work with great efficiency.

The route leadership will be assigned specific portfolios. In allocating these portfolios, it is very important to match the strengths of an individual with the requirements of the portfolio. You would ideally want to put the best person in the right position, just like a sports coach would aim to assign the team players to the positions on the field the individual players are best suited for.

Here are some pointers that could help decide which individual should fill which portfolio:

- **Chairperson:** The role of the Chairperson is to inspire members and encourage action. A suitable person will have a strong vision of how the route can contribute to local development. It will be a person who demands respect while showing energy and drive. The Chairperson should also be fairly well organised since he or she will be running meetings, doing presentations and evaluating the effectiveness of route projects. A very important consideration is that the Chairperson will act as the “face” of the route and must therefore be proficient in public appearances.
- **Treasurer:** It is very important that the Treasurer has

an impeccable record and is trusted by members to look after the assets of the route and to manage the membership fees and other income. It is essential that the incumbent has knowledge of bookkeeping systems, but he or she does not need to be an accountant or bookkeeper.

- **Secretary:** The position of Secretary is ideal for a person who is meticulous in organising information and who understands the importance of sticking to the rules and keeping a good internal communication system going.
- **Route Development Coordinator:** The ongoing development of the route and the members' businesses is a very important element in ensuring the route's long-term sustainability. An energetic and well-organised person with a natural curiosity to explore new ways of doing things would suit this position.
- **Marketing Coordinator:** An energetic and outgoing person who easily connects with others is good for this portfolio. Passion for the region and its people is also a must.

Who is involved in electing and appointing leaders

Then election of route members should involve as many as possible if not all the active members of the route – both in the nomination process and the actual voting.

During the time that the route is being established, the **Route Establishment Working Group** will be responsible for getting the founding documents (constitution, memorandum of association or trust deed) drafted, they will organise the launch meeting where the founding members will sign the founding documents, and they will make all the arrangements for the first election to take place. It is important during this period that the Working Group involve as many as possible

prospective members in the process and that they all have the opportunity to nominate candidates for election onto the leadership team.

Subsequent elections will be guided by the provisions in the founding documents. It is common for the Secretary to be the designated person to receive nominations and manage the election process, but founding documents may have different specifications in this regard, so you will have to familiarise yourself with the provisions of your route.

How to run elections and make appointments

As an organisation constituted through your founding document (constitution, memorandum of association or trust deed), you are obliged to manage your elections and appointment of office bearers in accordance to the provisions in the founding document. Study the document carefully and then plan the process leading up to the elections (which will most likely take place at your AGM).

When your elections have been concluded and the portfolios of the leadership team have been assigned, you should inform the Open Africa Head Office of the new leadership and their portfolios.

Use of this Guide

This Guide is suitable for distribution to members in advance of the election process and specifically when nomination for election to the leadership team is sought. It may be sent to members along with the notice of your AGM and other documents relating to the election process.

It is also useful in providing content for internal route training, when the election of office bearers and the

leadership team are discussed.