



APTA ELECTIONS MANUAL 2020

Handbook – APTA Biennial Elections, 2020

ABSTRACT

This document outlines the role of AEC, elections procedure, rules, regulations, guidelines to contestants and voters, electioneering process and conclusion of elections.

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Chairperson, APTA Elections Committee 2020

Revision History

Version	Description of Changes	Author	Chairperson	Revision Date
1.0	Initial Draft by AEC team 2018	AEC Team	Chandra Sekhar Nallam	10/18/2018
1.1	BoD and Core Executive team suggestions incorporated and changes to schedule	AEC Team	Chandra Sekhar Nallam	11/2/2018
2.0	Initial Draft by AEC team 2020	AEC Team	Bhanu Chandar Naraharasetty	07/29/2020
2.1	BoD Suggestions	AEC Team	Bhanu Chandar Naraharasetty	10/21/2020

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1. Introduction

American Progressive Telugu Association (APTA) requires conducting biennial elections to Executive Committee (EC) and Board of Directors (BoD) for the term **1st of January 2021 to 31st of December 2022**. APTA Elections Committee (AEC) is responsible for conducting these elections. APTA BoD has appointed APTA Elections Committee (AEC) Chairperson. AEC Chairperson has formed the remaining AEC team. Members of this committee will be introduced in Section 3 of this document. AEC will conduct elections per APTA Bylaws V 6.0 and per 'AEC Elections Manual 2020'.

The purpose of this document is to establish policies and procedures related to entire elections process in a very comprehensive detail. This document shall be shared with current BoD. Acceptable feedback will be taken into consideration and will be incorporated into elections procedures as they deemed fit. Final version of this document will be shared with APTA general body. Once the elections process starts, this document is considered as '**final**' and policies and procedures outlined in this document are to be followed by all parties without any deviation.

2. Objectives

Election is a formal group decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold office. Voting is a foundation and sign of strong communities. Voting correlates with membership, organization's objectives, vision and future growth. It takes an active and engaged member community to ensure broad representation and leadership responsive to organization's sustained growth and community concerns.

Primary objective of current AEC team is to conduct elections to APTA offices (EC and BoD) for the term 2021-2022. AEC will conduct these elections by ensuring that:

- The entire elections process is fair and unbiased.
- The elections shall be accessible to all the eligible voters per Bylaws V 6.0.
- The integrity of the process shall be maintained throughout the elections process.
- The results of the elections truly reflect the votes cast by eligible APTA registered members and their spouses.
- All eligible Voters will receive ballots as per Bylaws 6.0.
- Voters and contestants are treated fairly and equally.
- The secrecy and confidentiality of the individual's votes be kept.
- Any financials involved in this matter are completely transparent to APTA Treasury Team and general body.
- A comprehensive and transparent communication made to general body pertaining to Elections 2020.

AEC will operate and conduct Elections 2020 within the guidelines provided by APTA Bylaws V 6.0. As much as Bylaws inform about the elections criteria and process, they also provide AEC a discretionary power to establish elections code of conduct and make decisions as appropriate within the construct of Elections 2020.

3. Elections Committee

3.1 Members

APTA Elections Committee (AEC) consists of one AEC Chairperson, appointed by APTA Board of Directors and 10 Election Coordinators appointed by AEC Chairperson.

AEC Chairperson:

Bhanu Chandar Naraharasetty (Coltsneck, NJ)

AEC Vice Chairperson:

Naresh Kotikalapudi (Philadelphia, PA)

AEC Team/Coordinators:

Satya Sunderneedi (Boston, MA)

Sushma Vaddey (Fairfax, VA)

Satya Phani Kumar Villa (Charlotte, NC)

Hema Dasari (Apex, NC)

Rama Krishna Pamidipati (St. Paul, MN)

Pavani Mekala (Houston, TX)

Prasad Degala (Dallas, TX)

Uma Shankar Kamireddy (Phoenix, AZ)

Rajesh Peddireddy (Los Angeles, CA)

3.2 Role and Responsibilities of AEC

AEC team is responsible for conducting elections per APTA Bylaws V 6.0. Elections process within the scope of AEC team includes:

- Establish elections schedule, timelines and review with current APTA BoD
- Receive membership data from Executive team (Secretary)
- Ensure the accuracy of membership data
- Publish elections 2020 notification to APTA general body
- Receive nominations for all the positions elections are being conducted for
- Review nominations for completeness, accuracy and validity
- Certify or Reject nominations and publish final list of contestants
- Select tool for voting and review with current BoD
- Monitor and control elections campaign including, provide fair and equal opportunities to all contestants in all forms of campaign
- Provide membership data to all contestants
- Take necessary actions on contestants who violated 'Elections guidelines for contestants' as described in sections 6 and 6.1

- Take necessary actions on voters who violated '*Elections guidelines for voters*' as described in sections 6 and 6.2
- Monitor and control voting process
- Conduct vote counting and review results with contestants
- Submit results to current BoD

3.3 AEC Internal Affairs

All matters related to operations of APTA Elections Committee (AEC) are considered classified information. This information will be kept confidential and will only be available to AAC upon request and external statutory authorities if needed.

Any decisions / resolutions to be taken within AEC team will be discussed amongst AEC team. Any decision / resolution requires a minimum of 6 (Six) votes within AEC team to be made final.

4. Elections Notification

4.1 Schedule

'Beginning of Elections Process' is when AEC sends a formal communication regarding upcoming elections also known as 'Elections Notification'.

'End of Elections Process' is when AEC hands over the winning candidates list to current BoD.

4.2 Key Dates:

This section establishes the baseline for dates when certain activities to be started and ended. Some of these activities have hard dependency on one or more of the preceding activities. If one of the activities are not completed per schedule, AEC may reestablish the new dates for dependent activities. However, AEC will work diligently with current BoD, EC and other relevant Committees to ensure each of these activities are completed per baseline plan.

Baseline Plan:

Membership cutoff date: 9/01/2020

Elections notification: 11/01/2020 (Midnight of 31st October 2020)

**Receive primary membership including spouse data from Executive team: 10/31/2020*

***Finalize mode of elections and the tools to be used: 11/05/2020*

***Nominations acceptance start date/ time: 11/06/2020 6:00 PM EDT/EST*

Nominations acceptance end date/ time: 11/12/2020 6:00 PM EDT/EST

Nominations withdrawal end date/ time: 11/15/2020 6:00 PM EDT/EST

Nominations closure date/ time: 11/15/2020 6:00 PM EDT/EST

Announcement of unanimously elected candidates date: 11/16/2020 6:00 PM EDT/EST

**Membership data review and updates: 11/17/2020 6:00 PM EDT/EST*

Contestant campaigns start date: 11/17/2020 6:00 PM EDT/EST

Contestant camping end date: 12/02/2020 6:00 PM EDT/EST

Data removal form submission by contestants: 12/02/2020 6:00 PM EDT/EST

Voting start date/ time: 12/4/2020 6:00 PM EDT/EST

Voting end date/ time: 12/6/2020 6:00 PM EDT/EST

Initial results walk thru with contestants: 12/6/2020 6:00 PM EDT/EST

Ballot audit by AEC end date: 12/13/2020 6:00 PM EDT/EST

Final results walk thru with contestants date: 12/13/2020 6:00 PM EDT/EST

Final results handover to current BoD date: 12/19/2020 6:00 PM EDT/EST

**Spouse data (Email) Cutoff date: 11/07/2020 6:00 PM EDT/EST*

Items with * are critical path items to close elections per schedule. Any delay in these items will push the dates.

4.3 Positions Elections to Be Conducted For

Below are the positions for which elections will be conducted.

Board Directors (10)

Executive President (1)

Executive Vice Presidents (3)

General Secretary (1)

Joint Secretaries (3)

Treasurer (1)

Joint Treasurers (3)

4.4 Code of Conduct

Once the elections process starts, elections code of conduct comes into effect.

During the elections process, current leadership and general body members must follow below directives from AEC. If the directives below do not cover some aspects or if leadership or general body gets into a situation that is not addressed below, leadership/ general body is expected to reach out to AEC for further clarification.

- No one can initiate new services.
- No one can initiate or start any national or regions level events including conferences/ conventions / trainings.
 - o Exceptions: State level meets and greets, cultural and festival events can still be organized with AEC approval.

- Any event/activity that can be put on hold/pause should be put on hold/pause during election process.
- BoD or EC or any other leadership team members cannot appoint or change any committee chairs or members for any nominated committees. Any exceptions need to be reviewed and approved by AEC.
- BoD or EC cannot take any decisions/ resolutions that directly or indirectly impact elections. All decisions/ resolutions are to be reviewed and approved by AEC before making them official.
- BoD or EC cannot add/ remove members from official APTA WhatsApp groups.
- AEC team members can cast their own vote to the candidates of their choice. However, AEC team members cannot publicly or privately endorse any contestants.
- AEC cannot involve in any activities that would influence voters in their voting decisions.

4.5 Communication

All communication regarding elections 2020 will be managed by AEC. AEC will send communication to general body using apta_reg_members@googlegroups.com distribution list.

Once the elections process starts, apta_reg_members@googlegroups.com distribution list will be moderated by AEC. Emails with objectionable content will not be released. This is in addition to any established email etiquette that APTA already observes. Some examples of objectionable content from AEC perspective are:

- Content that causes disruption to elections process
- Personal criticism of any members of any sort (both contestants and voters)
- Language, images, videos or any sort of content that is not appropriate for general body
- Promotion or publicity of any services/ events/activities that are not initiated before elections process starts

5. Nomination and withdrawal

5.1 Nomination fee

There will be a non-refundable nomination fee for contesting in the elections. Nomination fee will be per below. Nomination fee for rejected and/ or withdrawn applications will not be returned.

Board Director - \$300

Executive President - \$300

General Secretary - \$300

Treasurer - \$300

Vice President - \$200

Joint Secretary - \$200

Joint Treasurer - \$200

5.2 Nomination process

Nomination information is a public data to APTA registered members.

AEC publishes all the positions that are part of elections process per Section 4.3. Interested APTA general body members who are eligible for each of these positions per APTA Bylaws V 6.0 will be asked to send a nomination using google form. Google form will provide all the required details.

There are four forms to be submitted by contestants. Three forms during the nomination process and one form at the end of elections campaign.

Contestants are expected to provide below three forms as part of the nomination process.

- Google form with all required details. This form includes three sections. Optionally candidates can also send their picture, for AEC to use in communication.
 - o Candidate details
 - o Nomination details
 - o Campaign details
- Signed 'Data security and confidentiality Agreement'
- Proof of payment of nomination fee to APTA Treasury team

Contestants will also receive another form, 'APTA private and confidential data removal'. Contestants must sign and return this form to AEC at the end of elections campaign time. Failing to send this form before deadline established in Section 4.2 makes the contestant disqualified and will be removed from the final ballot.

AEC will publish nominations certified for each position to the general body at the end of nominations closure.

5.3 Withdrawal process

Candidates can withdraw their nominations any time before withdrawal deadline. All remaining nominations will be included in the final ballot, except nominations for those positions that are elected unanimously per Section 5.5.

Contestants must send an email from their primary email id used in the original nomination form to AEC team via APTAAEC2020@googlegroups.com mentioning that he/she would like to withdraw from the elections. Candidates once withdrew are not allowed to send another nomination for elections 2020 for the same position. Within the nomination time window, they can send another nomination for a different position other than a position that he/she previously sent nominations for.

5.4 Certify or Reject a nomination

AEC reviews all nominations for completeness, accuracy and eligibility per APTA Bylaws V 6.0. Any nominations that fail to provide all required details and not adhering to APTA Bylaws V 6.0 will be rejected. If one contestant sends multiple nominations for one or more positions at any given time, all his nominations will be rejected.

Rejected nominations will be informed to candidates via email. Candidate will have 24 hours to resubmit the rejected nomination if he/ she still desires to resubmit the nomination. Resubmission of the nominations for any eligible position can be done even after end of nominations acceptance. If a nomination is rejected for the second time, contestant is not allowed to resubmit the nomination. No new submissions will be accepted after nominations acceptance ends.

5.5 Unanimous Election

If the number of certified nominations for a given position is equal or less than the number to be elected, then the candidate(s) will be declared as 'Unanimously elected'. These candidates will be removed from the ballot. Note that unanimously elected candidates will not take charge until oath process administered by AAC.

Unanimously elected candidates will be declared on *11/16/2020 6:00 PM EDT/EST*. However, these candidates will still have to follow the procedures outlined for contestants in Section 6.1 until end of the elections process.

6. Campaign

AEC practices 'zero tolerance' against any violation by either contestants or by voters during the entire elections process. Once the elections notification is issued, AEC code of conduct comes into effect. All contestants, voters and current office bearers (EC, BoD and Extended Executive Team) are expected to follow elections code of conduct. Most of the elections code is described in this document. If an issue arises which is not covered in this document, AEC will take appropriate action on the parties involved and will provide further direction. AEC's decision in this regard is final until end of elections process.

6.1 Campaign via emails and in social media

Campaign in any form via Email / Text / Call /social media will be allowed between 9:00 AM to 9:00 PM respective local time of the honorable Members only.

Emails:

Contestants can send emails to apta_reg_members@googlegroups.com distribution list with their campaign material. Each contestant can send a maximum of 5 emails during the entire campaign process. If one campaign email is sent with multiple contestants mentioned in that email are **not allowed**, only individual contestants can send their emails.

Each contestant, along with their nomination is required to provide AEC team with their primary email id. AEC team will only release the campaign material sent from the Primary email id of each contestant.

Contestants can only send emails to apta_reg_members@googlegroups.com. Contestants are **not allowed** to reach out to members via any other groups, individually, mass communication or blind copy (BCC).

No elections related emails from ap-ta@googlegroups.com will be released during elections process. AEC team will moderate this DL.

WhatsApp:

All official APTA WhatsApp groups will be monitored by AEC during elections process.

Executive president needs to add AEC chair as an Admin to all these groups. AEC chair may add one or more AEC team members to these groups. If any of these groups are full, non-local leadership team members will need to exit from these groups.

Below groups are considered 'Primary APTA Groups' by AEC.

- 10 Regional groups
- All state level groups

All other groups are considered 'Secondary APTA Groups' by AEC.

Settings for both Primary groups and Secondary groups will be changed to 'Messages by Admin Only' during elections process.

Activities in Primary groups: Messages in these groups can only be sent by AEC team members. All group members will be requested to send their messages to one of the AEC team members who are admins of that group. AEC team member will evaluate the message from elections relevance perspective and publish only those messages that are not objectionable to AEC team. No messages related to elections campaign or criticism will be published to the group. AEC team will periodically publish campaign material for contestants. AEC team member in that group will post a message periodically to remind all group members regarding the AEC rules for WhatsApp groups.

Activities in Secondary groups: These groups can only have messages directly related to the purpose of that group. Messages in these groups can only be sent by any admin of that group. All group members will be requested to send their messages to one of the admins of that group. No elections campaign is allowed in these groups. Group admins are instructed not to release any messages related to elections. AEC team member in that group will post a message periodically to remind all group members regarding the AEC rules for WhatsApp groups.

Facebook:

Contestant can post campaign messages on their own wall and tag others. AEC team will have no responsibility over contestants' activities in this regard.

Contestants **cannot** post in official APTA FB page. APTA FB page admin will be instructed to block any such postings.

Discord:

Contestants or any APTA member **cannot** post any election related messages in official APTA Discord servers or rooms. APTA Discord admin will be instructed to block any such postings and remove the member temporarily. One of the AEC Member shall be made admin in Discord.

6.2 Contestants' rights and responsibilities

Contestants have right to reach out to APTA members seeking their votes. Contestants can reach out to members via APTA group email or phone. AEC will provide members information to the contestants (member name, phone number, referrer name and referrer phone number).

Contestants are expected to use members' data for the intended purpose of elections campaigning only. Using this data for any other purposes will be considered misuse of private and confidential data. Offenders will face disciplinary actions by AAC in addition to any possible criminal charges as per state/ federal laws related to data privacy and protection laws.

Contestants have right to report any violation by other contestants or general body members to AEC.

Contestants have right to send any questions they may have pertaining to elections process to AEC team. They can reach out to AEC team via AEC DL APTA.AEC2020@googlegroups.com. AEC team will respond to these questions timely.

Contestants can leverage social media but are expected to do responsible campaign per section 6.1.

6.3 Voters' rights and responsibilities

Voters' primary responsibility is to cast their vote. Voters are expected to act fairly and leverage their voting right to elect contestants of their choice. Voters are expected to keep their voting details confidential.

Voters are expected to cast their votes personally. Delegation of vote casting is not allowed. If found that a voter delegated his/ her vote to someone else, their vote will become ineligible in final counting, if proven.

Voters have right to report any violation by contestants or general body members to AEC.

Voters have right to send any questions they may have pertaining to elections process to AEC team. They can reach out to AEC team via AEC DL APTAEC2020@googlegroups.com. AEC team will respond to these questions timely.

In the event of death of primary registered and eligible member, the spouse of the deceased is eligible to vote. However it is mandatory to register their email for receiving the ballot within the prescribed date.

7. Ballot and Voting

APTA Elections 2020 will be conducted using electronic voting method. AEC team will review tools available in the market. Once the tool to be used is finalized, AEC team will review the tool with current BoD. After the nominations process is complete, functionality of the tool will be demonstrated to all contestants.

All balloting and voting process will be communicated to general body members via email before voting starts.

8. Vote counting and declaration of results

Vote counting will be done by AEC in a very transparent way.

Vote counting and result sharing will be done in two phases.

At the end of voting session, all contestants are invited to a confidential meeting. During this meeting, using an online sharing mechanism, contestants get to see the initial results. Note that it's not the final results.

During this meeting, AEC team will also share with contestants any potential voting violations/ discrepancies. Meeting will be adjourned at that point.

AEC team will audit these potential violations/ discrepancies in next few days to come. Once the audit process is complete with the removal of invalid votes, AEC team will call for another confidential meeting. During this meeting contestants will be presented with initial results (directly from the tool, which is read-only), confirmed discrepancies that caused the invalidation of certain votes and final results after including invalid votes to original results.

Once the final results were reviewed with contestants and all challenges were resolved, AEC will hand over the results to current BoD.

9. Conclusion of elections process

Elections process concludes when AEC hands over the final elections results to current BoD. AEC team will continue to hold this position until next AEC Chair is announced.

AEC team will close all financial transactions with current Treasury team. AEC will submit bills for any expense incurred towards elections process and paid by AEC team members.