

## An Advisor's Guide to Elections

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Elections in the youth group context have a storied history, with decades of culture and precedence. As youth workers, we often see our job during this time as a shoulder to cry on, or a vote collector. But we too play an important role in building the *skills for engaged citizenship* – a combination of critical thinking, values based analysis, and strategic planning. We have the power to take a process that could be a meaningless popularity contest and instead infuse it with important lessons about taking responsibility for one's community. Focusing on the process of the election, rather than the product, allows us to have a more meaningful experience and simultaneously improve the teens ability to actually select candidates to vote for that are ready to lead the region or have the capacity to grow into their leadership position. Below are suggestions for using the election process as a learning tool.

**It's About the Goals:** Before you begin, start by defining what exactly you are aiming to accomplish. While the classic approach may be to evaluate each candidate for the entire caucus time, there is another way. Instead, you can reframe caucus time to be about the Temple Youth Group (TYG) shaping a vision for the region. What is working in NFTY Chicago? What needs to change? Giving real time to this discussion allows your TYG to have a true framework by which to evaluate candidates. Done well, this segment makes the process of selecting who to vote for much less about petty gossip and who you 'like' more, and instead gives it an honest rationale that the TYG can be confident in.

**What Are We Looking For:** When going down the roster of candidates, begin by discussing the position. What makes someone a good president? What skills do you think they will need? *Then*, discussing the candidates has a clear metric to evaluate it by. When thinking about candidates, offer that Regional Board is also about personal growth – are there candidates whose potential for leadership is so great that the TYG wants them to have the opportunity? It is easy for elections to become about the gossip surrounding a candidate, leading to plenty of discomfort for the advisor who must struggle to navigate these tricky conversations. By having, instead, a solid metric to evaluate candidates the teens can actually have a respectful and honest discussion. A candidate who might have been eliminated before because 'they cheated on their boyfriend, duh,' now might be eliminated because 'they need to take some time to build trust amongst the community whereas the other candidate has a critical mass of support that could help implement their vision.'

By putting the process over the product, you may run out of time or may not be able to evaluate every candidate for as much time as you would like. But you *do* help provide your TYG with the skills to make these decisions in a healthy way, and set them up for success in the elections hall when voting is underway.