

Funeral Consumers Alliance
Voting for board candidates remotely
prepared by Executive Director Josh Slocum
June 16, 2020

Does your funeral consumer organization usually vote for candidates for your board at an in-person membership meeting? Do your bylaws require this?

As is obvious to all of us, the pandemic has made these group gatherings impossible. There are two choices for funeral consumer groups in this situation. It's important to note that whichever choice you make, you *will* be operating outside your bylaws:

1. Do nothing, and hold no elections until the pandemic has fully passed. This will mean breaking your bylaws if they require elections to your board this year.
2. Hold voting by paper-based, US Mail. This will mean breaking your bylaws if they require that voting take place in-person at a general membership meeting.

Since there is no way to avoid breaking your bylaws, don't feel as if you're doing something wrong. None of us can control this situation. What's important is to find a solution that comports with the *spirit* of your bylaws and your organization's mission, even though it is impossible to comply with the letter of the law.

You may choose to ride out 2020 with the current incumbent board, waiting until we can gather in large groups again to hold your elections. But if you do choose to hold elections, we suggest holding elections by paper mail, as FCA National does. This will allow you to send the biographical information about candidates to your membership/ mailing list, along with ballots. You may find that you get more member participation, since only a small portion of your membership shows up in person at annual meetings even in normal years.

Here's what you'll need:

1. A bio/questionnaire for each candidate. This should include their basic biographical information. It should also contain a written statement from the candidate describing his or her interest in the organization, relevant experience, and vision for the group.
2. A ballot with the candidate choices. Be sure that it instructs the voter on how many board seats are open, how many candidates are vying for those seats, and how to mark the ballot to indicate their vote.
3. A return envelope pre-addressed to the tellers' committee (**not** postage-paid)

4. A tellers' committee. This committee should be composed of three people. Two of them should be people who are **not** a current board member and who are **not** running for election. The third member may be a board member, but **not** a candidate or incumbent. The tellers' committee receives the ballots by mail, counts them, certifies the results, and communicates those results to the board.

Yes, this will mean spending money on a mailing that you did not anticipate. But there's no reason not to ask the membership to help defray that cost; people are aware of the bind organizations are in because of the pandemic and they are happy to help and contribute because of that. You might include a donation reply card (the same sort of slip you use for your ordinary fundraisers), along with a note. It might read something like:

"We appreciate your participation in our elections for FCA of Anycity as we do our best to keep the organization and mission on track in an unusual time. This mailing for our elections was an unplanned expense—will you help us defray the costs with a gift? Our members and the public need our guidance on funeral planning as much or more during this pandemic, and your gifts are what make that happen!"

Below you will find a sample questionnaire completed by one of FCA National's recently elected board members. Of course, you can and should adapt or rewrite the questionnaire to fit your local organization's needs. This is a suggestion for inspiration, not something we are offering as the "perfect" pre-packaged solution.

Then, you'll find a sample ballot.

Questions or concerns? Write to **josh@funerals.org** and we'll be happy to help. Good luck!

EXAMPLE CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE TO MAIL TO VOTERS

Dianna Repp, FCA Board Candidate Questionnaire 2020

Name: Dianna Repp, Ph.D.

Affiliate name and location: Funeral Consumers Alliance of Arizona, headquartered in Tucson, AZ.

Pertinent professional/personal background skills and experiences that would benefit FCA on a committee or on the Board of Trustees:

My professional interest in end-of-life issues began in 1995, with a college-level course on death and dying in cross-cultural perspective, followed by volunteering at a local hospice. I continue to actively research and teach about end-of-life issues, focusing on the *longue durée*. This includes collaborative research (1996-present) on ancient and contemporary near death experiences in multiple cultures; socio-political and ethical issues in the care of the dead; ecologically sustainable burials in varying environments; and teaching death and dying courses at the college level (2006-present). As part of my professional research, I attend local, national and international conferences and workshops related to end-of-life issues and the death positive movement. I also present at conferences and workshops such as “Before I Die Arizona” (2019; CEU certification).

My experience also includes chairing regional conferences (Arizona Undergraduate Student Research Symposium: founder and chair, 10 years); leading a college study abroad; and acting as state representative for my college to the Arizona Articulation Task Force (and as chair: 2019). In my professional role as faculty in anthropology at Pima Community College (an official Hispanic Serving Institution, with over 22,000 students), I teach several classes, and am responsible for collecting, collating, and analyzing data for cultural anthropology classes at my institution, and co-facilitating data-driven analyses and decision-making.

What have you done with your local affiliate and have you held a leadership position?

I became a member of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Southern Arizona (now: Funeral Consumers Alliance of Arizona) in 2012. I served as Secretary of the Board of Directors, and as President (2012-2016).

Describe specific skills that you will bring to FCA and how they might be useful.

I offer my skills in creating educational materials and presentations (collaboratively or individually); organizing, facilitating, and/or presenting at events and workshops; and overseeing data-based research and analysis.

Please describe any experience you have working with legislative and funeral regulatory matters.

I do not have experience working with legislative and funeral regulatory matters. However, I have taught about funeral regulatory matters in college-level classes relating to end-of-life issues.

What experiences do you have in marketing, fundraising, and working with major donors?

I do not have experience in these matters.

Do you have experience in finance? Have you been a treasurer of an organization?

I do not have experience in either of these areas. However, I have created and overseen the budget for the Symposium I chair each year.

Do you have experience with writing and computers? Have you been secretary of an organization?

I teach intensive writing courses at the college level, a delicate balance between being an editor and yet allowing for each person's authentic voice. I have authored a doctoral dissertation, journal articles, and created educational materials including the online format for an undergraduate course, Death and Dying in Cross-Cultural Perspective (Arizona State University), and a 16-week lecture course, Death and Dying Across Cultures (Pima College). In addition to Word, Power Point, Excel, Google docs, etc., I routinely use college-level learning management systems (D2L, Blackboard).

I served as secretary of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Southern Arizona.

What are the two most important things that FCA does for consumers?

As a consumer at the local level, I have been most impacted by the funeral home price comparison survey. This is an important service to the community and an excellent outreach tool. At the federal level, I am grateful for the national FCA's continued advocacy on behalf of all consumers of funeral and end-of-life related matters.

What is the role of the national FCA in how it relates to the local affiliates? What else can FCA do for affiliates?

The national FCA plays a vital role in advocating for all consumers at the federal level, and communicating current information about these efforts to the local affiliates. Please continue to keep the local affiliates up to date on important issues.

Describe specific areas the FCA needs to focus on or improve.

I have been impressed with the efforts to include local affiliates in national surveys, and to support local FCAs on regional issues. Please continue this important work.

The national FCA has been making a concerted effort to reach and serve diverse populations in the United States. I would be honored to support and expand these efforts.

Describe your vision for the future of the Funeral Consumers Alliance.

My vision for the FCA is both a challenge and an opportunity: to stay true to our mission of protecting a consumer's right to choose a meaningful, dignified, affordable funeral, while also expanding outreach in related areas. As a trusted organization, we can provide end-of-life education that addresses and engages community members, reaching beyond the price of a funeral. In the future, the FCA can encourage affiliates to sponsor or co-sponsor one-day events that bring in the local community, and discuss multiple aspects of end-of-life issues, as well as ways to live more fully in the present. As part of this outreach, I hope the FCA expands its role in serving marginalized and underrepresented populations, on their terms, and in ways that are meaningful to them.

Describe a specific problem area that an affiliate may have and how you would assist them as a member of the FCA board of trustees.

In the past, I have heard that affiliates had issues with fund-raising strategies. I know that the national FCA has been instrumental in working with local affiliates and assisting them in fund-raising. In addition, I would like to offer to work with local groups to create one-day events to raise awareness of end-of-life issues.

What other relevant information would you like to share with the committee?

The national Funeral Consumers Alliance is the premier organization advocating for the rights of funeral consumers. It is an honor to be nominated for the Board of Trustees. This is important work. Funeral rights encompass a vast area, and touch on deep and enduring aspects of our lives. I am humbled by the realization of all I do not know. I come willing to learn from the national organization, with a heart open to serve and support consumers and the work of the Funeral Consumers Alliance.

SAMPLE BALLOT

NOTE!—We suggest printing the ballots on colored paper to help ensure that the ballots received are legitimate, and not extra copies produced by someone else. While election fraud is unlikely in our sphere, this is simply good practice.

Funeral Consumers Alliance of Anycity Board of Trustees Elections, 2020

BALLOT

*Please choose NO MORE THAN XX candidates
Mark 'X' next to the candidate's name*

Susan Baker _____

Jane Doe _____

Sarah Collins _____

David Miller _____

Jon Smith _____

Mail ballots to:

ADDRESS AND NAME OF TELLER'S COMMITTEE GOES HERE