

# **Facilitation Guide**

## **The Spiritual Nature of Bahá'í Elections**

An Assembly Development Module Workshop



“Let us recall His explicit and often-repeated assurance that every Assembly elected in that rarified atmosphere of selflessness and detachment is, in truth, appointed of God, that its verdict is truly inspired, that one and all should submit to its decision unreservedly and with cheerfulness.”

**Shoghi Effendi**, in *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 65

“The evolution of local and national Bahá'í Assemblies at this time calls for a new state of mind on the part of their members as well as on the part of those who elect them, for the Bahá'í community is engaged in an immense historical process that is entering a critical stage. Bahá'u'lláh has given to the world institutions to operate in an Order designed to canalize the forces of a new civilization.”

**The Universal House of Justice**, *Ridván Message to the Bahá'ís of the World*, 1996



# The Spiritual Nature of Bahá'í Elections

## OVERVIEW FOR FACILITATORS

### Purpose:

- ★ to increase electors' appreciation of the sanctity of Bahá'í elections

This module is targeted to individuals, rather than to Assemblies. Its objective is to increase electors' appreciation of the sanctity of Bahá'í elections. It covers how electors should prepare themselves throughout the year to perform their sacred duty; qualities to consider and ignore in deciding who to vote for; and the atmosphere that should characterize any Bahá'í election.

A two-hour module on a related topic complements the material in this module. Cultivating Distinction: Bahá'í Electoral Practices explores what is required or forbidden in Bahá'í elections, the spiritual principles underlying these practices, and specific ways in which Bahá'í electoral practices differ from secular elections.

### What you will find inside your Facilitation Guide:

- ★ **Frontispiece with key quotations.** A one-page sheet containing quotations from Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice which provide the foundation of the module. (p. 2)
- ★ **Overview for Facilitators.** The page you are reading now. (p. 3)
- ★ **The Assembly Development Process.** A one-page description of the process of Assembly development, the role of these modules within that process, and how to request an Assembly Development representative to facilitate the modules. (p. 4)
- ★ **Guidance for Facilitators.** A four-page collection of suggestions for preparation before the session, tips for facilitating during the session, ideas for closing the session, and guidance on what to do with the workshop report form and evaluation forms after the session. (pp. 5-8)
- ★ **Highlights of this module.** A two-page listing of the module objectives, an agenda outline with times of each segment of the module, and a listing of materials needed. (pp. 9-10)
- ★ **Facilitator's instructions for segments of this module.** A two-page sheet to introduce the module, followed by instructions for each segment of the module. (pp. 11-29)
- ★ **Description of the Office of Assembly Development.** A two-page overview of the vision and mission of this office and the services it can provide. (unnumbered pages near the end of the Facilitation Guide)
- ★ **Facilitator Report Form.** A two-page evaluation form for the facilitator to complete and return to the Office of Assembly Development within two weeks after presentation of a module. (unnumbered pages at the end of the Facilitation Guide)
- ★ **Assembly Evaluation Form.** An evaluation form for the facilitator to send to Assemblies two months after participating in a workshop for them to turn in. (unnumbered pages at the end of this Guide)

**Note:** You will also want to obtain a copy of the Participant Handouts.

# The Assembly Development Process

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*“...enabling Assemblies to rise to a ‘new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities....”*”

The National Spiritual Assembly focuses its Assembly Development initiatives towards facilitating the development of “a new state of mind” on the part of Assembly members and the community, thereby enabling Assemblies to rise to the “new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities” envisioned by the Universal House of Justice.

The development process is designed to be furthered by presentation of a variety of module workshops, each module covering a distinct topic or function. Use of these workshops will help Assemblies to understand more clearly the spiritual nature of their institution, to improve their performance, and to attain an ever advancing level of maturity as the primary institutions of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. When used with the general community, the workshops will heighten appreciation for the station and responsibilities of local Assemblies and deepen the desire to support and assist these institutions in their growth process.

The National Spiritual Assembly highly recommends that each workshop be studied with a Bahá’í facilitator who resides outside the particular Bahá’í community, although these materials may be used by Assemblies on their own. A list of Bahá’ís who serve as facilitators, called Assembly Development Representatives, is available from the Office of Assembly Development of the Bahá’í National Center at (847) 733-3490 or by e-mail to [OAD@usbnc.org](mailto:OAD@usbnc.org).

Assemblies may choose to study these workshops as an institution, may invite other Assemblies in their area to study together, or may invite their community to join them in exploring the modules. Workshops may also be used at Bahá’í schools or Institutes. If they are used with both Assembly members and other community members, Assemblies are encouraged to set aside follow-up time at one of their future meetings to consider the impact and implications of what was learned on their collective functioning.

Workshops in this program range from two to five hours in length with the majority averaging about four hours. They are, however, adaptable to different timing needs. Workshops are divided into separate segments which can be selectively deleted if timing needs require this. Optional supplemental materials are also included for use if more time is available.

# Guidance for Facilitators

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## Before the Session

### Personal preparation

- ★ Take time to prepare yourself spiritually and materially to facilitate this workshop. Meditate on your role in facilitating the friends' thoughtful study and consultation.
- ★ Read through the workshop and its handouts in advance of the session and ponder the themes in them.
- ★ Pray for assistance. Feel confident that the Blessed Beauty will guide and confirm you as you endeavor to serve the Faith.

### Preparation of the course and its materials

- ★ Become familiar with the workshop and its options and extensions. Feel free to duplicate the handouts on colored paper and interleaf them in the Facilitation Guide if this would make facilitation easier for you.
- ★ The amount of time suggested for each segment of the workshop is a minimum only. If the number of participants in a workshop is large and many small groups will be reporting back, you will need to allow more time than the minimum to complete some segments.
- ★ If some of the participants are not proficient in English, consider ways to meet their needs. For instance, those who understand spoken English but do not read it easily could be paired with those who can read quotations aloud. These adjustments may affect the amount of time necessary to complete an activity or exercise.
- ★ Material which appears in italics is provided to supplement and extend the session if more time is available. Determine in advance how many expansions to the module, if any, are appropriate. Some factors to consider are available time, general level of experience and deepening of the participants, and local interest in a particular topic.
- ★ Have materials (such as a few extra handouts, art supplies, extra pens and pencils, small gift item) ready for each participant. It is wise to have slightly more of everything than you anticipate needing in case a larger than expected group of friends attend.
- ★ If the workshop segments you will be using require cards for games or exercises, prepare these beforehand. If workshop

## Guidance for Facilitators, continued

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segments have demonstrations, practice these once or twice beforehand.

- ★ Select devotional readings, prayers, and music you will want to use and make sure you have the equipment to play any music you might have.

### Preparation of the meeting room

- ★ If possible, ask to see the meeting room in advance. Arrive early to set up. Adapt the room set-up to meet your needs, if possible.
- ★ Create an inviting atmosphere of beauty, dignity, and warmth to welcome participants. Possibilities include photographs of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, holy places or great teachers, heroines and heroes; framed quotations, decorating the walls with objects of beauty, tablecloths, arrangements of fresh or dried flowers, lighting, candles, music from diverse cultural backgrounds, bowls of potpourri or drops of rose oil, seating arrangements, and refreshments.

### Creating and maintaining a spiritual environment

- ★ Warmly greet the participants. Be sure that the spirit of the Faith permeates the room. While conveying the content of the workshop is important, it is equally important that the style of interaction does not feel harsh, nervous, or rushed. Be a bringer of light to the hearts of the group.

### During the Session

### Facilitating discussion

- ★ These workshops ask facilitators to raise several questions to the group for possible consultation. If one question fails to elicit much response, move on to another one.
- ★ Express appreciation for each participant’s contribution.
- ★ Be mindful of who has spoken and try to give everyone an opportunity to offer a first comment before giving time for individuals to offer second or third comments. Depending on the size of your group, you may want to go around the room, inviting each person to comment briefly in turn.
- ★ As groups are consulting on quotations and focus questions, go from group to group and listen in, without interrupting the

## Guidance for Facilitators, continued

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consultative process. You may want to note comments or questions that arise and bring them up when the groups reassemble.

### Using time

- ★ When small groups are asked to consult or work on an art project in a certain amount of time, give each group a “5-minute warning” when their time is nearly finished. This could be done either by going from group to group as a reminder or by ringing a small bell.
- ★ Be flexible and sensitive to the needs and understanding of the participants. If a particular question or point engages the group in lengthy but topic-related discussion, it may be preferable to allow participants to continue to pursue an area that intrigues them rather than to cut off discussion and move on to another point or exercise. Participants often experience exploring less material but in greater depth as more satisfying than a hurried look at many aspects of a topic.
- ★ You may choose to make the decision yourself about whether to let a group spend more time on one area and skip later exercises or activities. You may also choose to involve the group as a whole in the decision: “Since this topic is generating a lot of interest, do we want to 1) spend more time here and not explore a later topic, 2) extend the time of our session and not skip any segments, or 3) move on from this topic, go through all the following segments, and end at our original agreed-upon time?”

### Dividing participants into small groups

- ★ Put stickers on participants name cards or leave cards with stickers at their place and have them group themselves according to sticker design.
- ★ Divide into groups by the month/season in which one’s birthday falls.
- ★ In theater/auditorium seating, form groups around where participants are sitting.
- ★ Create funny groupings and ask people to choose the group that best describes them (Example: people who love apples are

## Guidance for Facilitators, continued

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group A; if your favorite color is blue, join group B; if Casablanca is your favorite movie, join group C;.)

- If you have Assembly members from several communities attending a session, you may wish to have them work together as an Assembly or work in groups composed of different Assemblies, depending on the exercise.
- If you have a combination of Assembly and community members attending, you may wish to mix the groups together for some exercises and separate Assembly members from community members for other exercises.

### Closing the Session

- ★ Provide verbal instructions on how to turn the evaluation forms in.
- ★ You may want to give a gift to each participant of a card with a beautifully lettered quotation that pertains to the workshop.
- ★ Encourage Assemblies that went through this workshop in a group larger than their own membership to have a follow-up period at an up-coming meeting to consult on what was learned and how it can be applied to their own functioning.
- ★ Suggest choosing a date and picking a topic for the next Assembly development workshop.

**Please note:** Have the participant evaluation forms turned in to you and return them with your evaluation form. Be sure to use the machine readable forms. Give participants their Bahá'í Locality Code and explain how to fill in the forms.

### After the Session

- ★ Complete the workshop report form and mail it with the participant evaluations to:

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the  
United States, Office of Assembly Development  
1233 Central St., Evanston, IL 60201  
OAD@USBNC.ORG  
fax. (847) 733-3486, phone (847) 733-3490

- ★ Send a follow up letter to the Assembly(ies) to thank them for participation and include a copy of their evaluation form to fill out two months after the workshop.

**Thank you for serving the Cause by facilitating this Assembly development workshop!**



# Highlights of The Spiritual Nature of Bahá'í Elections

## Objectives:

Participants will:

- ★ Explore aspects of “a new state of mind”
- ★ Identify ways to prepare themselves throughout the year to perform their sacred duty
- ★ Recognize qualities to consider and ignore in deciding who to vote for
- ★ Consider how a rarefied atmosphere can be created for a Bahá'í election

*Extension sessions for use if more time is available:*

**Agenda outline:** (total time: 2 hours)

- ★ **Introduction** (10 minutes), pp. 11-12  
An opportunity to familiarize participants with the objectives of this module and present an agenda outline of topics and activities.
- ★ **The call to “a new state of mind”** (20 minutes), pp. 13-14  
A guided discussion to help participants grasp some of the implications of moving toward “a new state of mind” as electors.
- ★ **Preparation for voting** (45 minutes), pp. 16-18  
Individual study, group discussion, and a song about how to prepare for voting and what factors should and should not influence the elector.
- ★ **The atmosphere of Bahá'í elections** (35 minutes), pp. 19-21  
Activities to foster creative thinking about how a reverent, joyful atmosphere can be created and maintained.
- ★ **Closing** (10 minutes), pp. 24-26  
Inspirational quotations to stimulate a desire in participants to display their new state of mind as electors and to provide assurance of divine confirmation of all their efforts. An alternative closing activity is provided on pages 27-29 for use when a community has recently participated in the other "Cultivating Distinction" election module.
- ★ ***The Administrative Order: Pattern for future society*** (30 minutes), p. 15  
*Study of passages which place the electoral process in its larger context and heighten appreciation of the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's Administrative Order.*
- ★ ***Reflecting on a new state of mind as electors*** (20 minutes), pp. 22-23  
*Group discussion on refinements that can be made individually and collectively to ensure Bahá'í elections reflect the high standards of the Writings, followed by individual action planning.*

## Highlights, continued

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Times given on the previous page are minimums. Module material that appears in italics is provided to supplement and extend the session if more time is available. If less time is available, you can skip whatever section seems to be less relevant to the needs of the group. You may also choose to direct participants to focus only on quotations in their handouts that are bolded, as these are the most vital. Focusing on bolded quotations may also aid participants who are slower readers.

### Materials needed

- ★ Whiteboard, blackboard or flip chart and markers
- ★ A variety of highlighters
- ★ Crayons, colored pencils, or markers for making posters
- ★ One paper yellow star per person, one large sheet of pale blue poster board, and glue or tape
- ★ Soft background music for an artwork activity and for action planning time
- ★ *Optional: A performer or group song leader or tape of the song “I have found Bahá’u’lláh in the early days of my life.” The song is available on “Special Times,” by Susan Engle, and on “It’s Up to Me,” the cassette tape produced for the 1999 summer Special Edition of Brilliant Star. Both cassettes are available from the Bahá’í Distribution Service.*
- ★ *Optional: A beautiful card or calligraphy rendition of a passage on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to give as a gift to each participant if you will be using the alternative closing.*

**Note:** You will need to inform the sponsoring Assembly that Participant Handouts for each participant should be ordered directly from the Bahá’í Distribution Service prior to the workshop.

## Introduction (10 minutes)

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### Purpose:

- ★ To familiarize participants with the objectives of this module
- ★ To present an agenda outline of topics and activities
- ★ To refer participants to additional materials on the electoral process

### Activities:

#### 1. Brief devotions

- ★ Open with brief devotions that you have selected or ask for a volunteer. Consider including some form of music – live, taped, or group singing – to enhance the spiritual atmosphere.

#### 2. Introduction (2 minutes)

- ★ The Bahá'í electoral process is a unified system of specific practices and procedures which are based on spiritual principles and which occur within a reverent, devotional atmosphere. This process differs profoundly – in practices, in underlying assumptions, in sacred context – from elections in the larger society. Bahá'í elections are, therefore, yet another arena in which the Bahá'í community can demonstrate new models of life.
- ★ As the Universal House of Justice pointed out in its 1992 Ridván message, even the Bahá'í community itself is “experiencing the rigorous effects” of the quickening wind of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation “as it ventilates the modes of thought of us all, renewing, clarifying, and amplifying our perspectives. . . .”
- ★ The objective of this module is to continue the process of developing a “new state of mind” on the part of electors by increasing appreciation of the sacred nature of Bahá'í elections. A two-hour module, Cultivating Distinction: Bahá'í Electoral Practices, complements the material in this module by exploring what is required or forbidden in Bahá'í elections, the spiritual principles underlying these practices, and specific ways in which Bahá'í electoral practices differ from secular elections.
- ★ Companion materials which contain detailed information about election procedures for each different form of Bahá'í election are available. The manual Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities includes instructions for the election of Local Spiritual Assemblies. Specific instructions for carrying out Unit Convention Elections are included in guidelines prepared by the National Unit Conventions Office and distributed to the Unit Convention host Assemblies each year.

## **Introduction**, continued

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### **3. Overview of objectives** (1 minute)

- ★ Read aloud the objectives of this module and have them posted. See page 9 of the Facilitation Guide for a list of objectives. Make adjustments for any sections that are removed for timing considerations or any optional extension session that is added.

### **4. Review agenda** (3 minutes)

- ★ Go through the agenda for the session, writing an outline of topics to be covered on a whiteboard or previously prepared flip chart. See pages 9-10 for an agenda. Make adjustments for any sections that are removed for timing considerations or optional extension sessions that are added. You may also need to make timing adjustments depending on the audience composition, such as number of participants and varying levels of deepening.

## The Call to “a New State of Mind” (20 minutes)

### Purpose:

- ★ To grasp some of the implications of moving toward “a new state of mind” as electors

### Note to the facilitator

- ★ This segment of the module is also in the other “Cultivating Distinction” election module (“The Bahá’í Electoral Process”). If you are doing both modules with the same participants within a short period of time, you will want to introduce this segment as a review the second time you go through it. You will be able to spend less time on the review than the first time these materials were covered.

### Activities:

#### 1. Discussion of quotation (5 minutes)

- ★ Have a participant read aloud the first quotation on the handout “The Call to a New State of Mind: The Bahá’í Electoral Process as an Expression of Rectitude of Conduct” (see Participant Handouts, pp. 3-4).
- ★ Invite participants to share thoughts and feelings about “a new state of mind” and the process of moving toward it.
- ★ Offer the thought that one implication is the need for all of us to listen to “old” quotations with “new” ears in order to find new insights in familiar quotations.
- ★ Another implication is that this new state of mind is not a one-time paradigm shift – a condition of once we “get it,” we will necessarily “have it” forever – as much as a continuing process of reorienting our minds from the way we currently do things to the descriptions of the functioning of the Administrative Order found in the Writings and the Ridván messages.

#### 2. Read passages, underline, and share (15 minutes)

- ★ Mention that Shoghi Effendi often referred to the natural capacity of American Bahá’ís as administrators and called us the “Cradle of the Administrative Order,” but part of what we have inherited from our culture is a corrupted political process, including attitudes about elections and the actual mechanics of elections.
- ★ In The Advent of Divine Justice Shoghi Effendi singles out three qualities that must be deliberately cultivated in the American Bahá’í community to remedy inherited attitudes and tendencies. This guidance has profound implications for the Bahá’í elector.

## The Call to “a New State of Mind,” continued

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- ★ Ask participants to silently read the remainder of the quotations on their handout and underline or highlight what they feel are key words or phrases that have particular implications for the topic of this module.
- ★ Point out that definitions of words that might be unfamiliar are included in the handout.
- ★ Invite participants to share what they have underlined.
- ★ Invite volunteers to express, in their own words, the meaning of “rectitude of conduct.”

### 3. Summary comments

- ★ Elections are an administrative activity, but this activity takes place in a context. We have been performing the activity – holding elections – for years, but now we have the opportunity and challenge of qualitatively upgrading and refining the way we perform the activity. We are called to increasingly spiritualize the context and atmosphere in which we hold elections. This step forward in our maturation as electors will contribute substantially to fostering the proper functioning of the bodies we elect.
- ★ Rather than continuing the practices and attitudes we are familiar with from our American culture, we are called to “a new state of mind,” new ways of thinking and feeling that find expression in new patterns of behavior. Our movement in this direction is part of our transformation into a new creation, “the people of God,” who are described by Bahá’u’lláh in this manner: “Their outward conduct is but a reflection of their inward life, and their inward life a mirror of their outward conduct.” (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 271.)

## *Optional Extension Session 1: The Administrative Order: Pattern for Future Society (30 minutes)*

### **Purpose:**

- ★ To place the electoral process in its larger context
- ★ To heighten appreciation of the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's Administrative Order

### **Note to the facilitator**

- ★ This optional extension is also in the other “Cultivating Distinction” election module “Bahá'í Electoral Practices.” If you are doing both modules, use this extension only once, if at all.

### **Setting up the activities**

- ★ Comment that the Bahá'í electoral process is part of the structure created by God through His Manifestation, and only when viewed within the framework of this structure can the significance of the electoral process be fully appreciated. This structure is the Bahá'í Administrative Order, described by Shoghi Effendi as ‘this supreme, this infallible Organ for the accomplishment of a Divine Purpose’ (*World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 89).

### **Activities:**

#### **1. Study of quotations by pairs (20 minutes)**

- ★ Ask participants to choose a partner with whom to work. Refer participants to the handout “The Administrative Order: Pattern for Future Society” (Participant Handouts, pp. 5-6). Ask half of the groups to look for answers to the first focus question and half of the groups to look for answers to the second question.
- ★ Instruct pairs to silently read through the quotations, looking particularly for answers to their question, then jointly compile these passages into a full answer.

#### **2. Pairs report back (10 minutes)**

- ★ Invite volunteers from the first group of pairs to give answers to their question. Invite volunteers from the second group to give answers to their question.

#### **3. Summary comment**

- ★ Bahá'u'lláh has not only provided a vision of a spiritually and materially unified world, He has given detailed blueprints for building this new world order. The Bahá'í Administrative Order is divine in origin and a new creation. It is also a gift of a generous God, Who would not leave a troubled humanity tantalized by the vision of unity but without the means to establish and maintain it. This “pattern for future society” offers realistic, credible hope that “the unification of the world, and . . . the reign of righteousness and justice upon the earth” will be accomplished.

## Preparation for Voting (45 minutes)

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### **Purpose:**

- ★ To gain awareness that preparation begins well in advance of an election
- ★ To become acquainted with factors that should and should not influence electors

### **Setting up the activities**

- ★ Comment that the administrative procedure of a Bahá'í election is the practical expression of a deeply sacred reality – appointment by God. Bahá'í Assemblies come into existence not just through tallying ballots but through the will of God. Those elected are called not just by the community of their fellow believers but by God Himself. Participation in this process is a devotional practice, another opportunity to live and act in the presence of the sacred. It is a task to be approached with reverence, joy, and obedience.
- ★ Ask participants: When does preparation for voting and the process of choosing for whom to vote begin? Acknowledge all responses without commenting on which may or may not reflect a complete answer.

### **Activities:**

#### **1. Individual study of the Writings (10 minutes)**

- ★ Ask participants to read silently the handout “Preparation for Voting,” (Participant Handouts, p. 7-8) and underline or highlight passages that answer the focus questions.

#### **2. Sharing answers with the group (10 minutes)**

- ★ Focusing on one question at a time, invite volunteers to share what they underlined.

*Optional extension: Invite comments on what it means to “fully and whole-heartedly participate in the affairs of the local” community. Invite comments on what opportunities exist for us to learn “more about one another through direct personal experience.”*

- ★ Comment, in summation, that our preparation for voting begins far in advance of the election as we fulfill our “continuing duty” of “learning more about one another through direct personal experience rather than through the reports and opinions of our friends.” The act of voting is the culmination of a year’s worth of careful thought and consideration.



## Preparation for Voting, continued

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### 3. Individual study of the Writings (10 minutes)

- ★ Comment that Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice give detailed guidance about what should and should not influence our decisions as electors.
- ★ Ask participants to read silently the handout “Making Choices,” (Participant Handouts, pp. 9-10), looking for passages that answer the focus questions. It may be helpful to use two different colors of highlighters to identify these passages.
- ★ After identifying passages, participants should turn to the handout “Choosing How to Vote,” (Participant Handouts, p. 11) and write the passages they have selected under one of 2 columns:

“Should influence my decision”    “Should not influence my decision”

### 4. Group discussion of factors (15 minutes)

- ★ Ask volunteers to share factors they identified as “Should influence my decision.”
- ★ Ask volunteers to share factors they identified as “Should not influence my decision.”
- ★ Point out that some of these factors that should not influence our decision are qualities in ourselves and some are qualities in others. Ask participants to place a small mark on their handout next to factors that are qualities in ourselves (passion, prejudice, and partiality). Invite volunteers to share what they marked.
- ★ Mention that passion can be a leaning either in favor of or opposed to something, but in neither case is it the result of reason or objectivity.
- ★ Share the thought that these factors are areas where an elector’s purity of motive comes into play.
- ★ Ask participants to place a different mark on their handout next to factors that we should disregard in others (personalities, gender, social standing, race, nationality, temperament, independent means, ability to attend meetings). Invite volunteers to share what they marked. *Optional: Ask for examples of “material consideration.”*
- ★ Mention that Shoghi Effendi says we must consider “only those who can best combine the necessary qualities.”

## Preparation for Voting, continued

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Comment that this phrase “best combine” is used in two of Shoghi Effendi’s letters, one in his own handwriting, with emphasis added by him (August 11, 1933). Clearly, it is not enough for an individual to excel in one or more of these qualities. The individuals we select must “best combine” what Shoghi Effendi has described as “necessary qualities” and “essential qualifications” because each quality enhances, supports, and rounds out the others. One quality – devotion, ability, experience – cannot be considered instead of another; all must be part of the mix.

- ★ Point out several practical implications of these passages: As Bahá’ís we don’t:
  - vote for people because they are our friends
  - vote for people because they want very much to be elected
  - vote for those who are readily available but not as highly qualified
  - vote for someone with a great skill but lacking any other qualification
  - fail to vote for those who are qualified but who have a different personality than us
  - fail to vote for those who are qualified but who disagree with us
- ★ Ask participants for other implications which may come to mind.

*Optional extension:*

- ★ *Ask: Is it important to know who is currently serving on a body (Local Spiritual Assembly, Regional Bahá’í Council, National Spiritual Assembly) before choosing for whom to vote? Why or why not? What difficulties might be raised by publicizing the membership of these bodies prior to an election? What spiritual principles might be involved?*

**Optional extension: Group singing (5 minutes)**

- ★ *Refer participants to “The Electoral Choices Song” (Participant Handouts, p. 12).*

*Explain that this simple song, sung to the tune of “Twinkle, twinkle little star,” lists five qualities. These come from the quotation in which Shoghi Effendi urges electors to consider*

## Preparation for Voting, continued

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*only those who best combine these qualities. It also refers to a quotation on behalf of Shoghi Effendi about elections providing “a safe method . . . whereby the quality of membership in Bahá’í Assemblies can be continually raised and improved.”*

- ★ *Ask a volunteer with a good singing voice to sing through the song once. Encourage the group to then sing through the song a few times until everyone knows it.*
- ★ *Comment that music aids memorization and that all participants now have an easy way to bring to mind these necessary qualities as they consider their choices as electors.*

### **5. Summary comments**

- ★ Acknowledge that detaching from our own biases and preferences and evaluating the character and abilities of others is very difficult work. Fortunately, we are not asked to do this alone. Prayer and reliance on the guidance of God is not only helpful, it is a mandatory part of the electoral process.

# The Atmosphere of a Bahá'í Election

(35 minutes)

## Purpose:

- ★ To become familiar with elements that contribute to a rarefied atmosphere
- ★ To foster creative thinking on how a reverent, joyful atmosphere can be created and maintained

## Prepare materials in advance

- ★ Prepare, for each participant, a yellow star cut out of construction paper.
- ★ Prepare also a sheet of pale blue poster board large enough to hold all the stars. Write on the poster board the quotation “. . . every Assembly elected in that rarified atmosphere of selflessness and detachment is, in truth, appointed of God. . . .”

## Setting up the activities

- ★ Comment that on the election day we are asked to gather together, with the proper spiritual attitudes, having done our “homework” of getting to know the friends in our area, and having reflected on the qualities that are desirable for the office we are electing. We then enter an atmosphere which can enhance or distract from this individual, personal preparation.
- ★ Refer back to the quotation previously read about elections taking place in “that rarefied atmosphere.” Give the dictionary definition of “rarefied” as “extremely high or elevated, lofty; exalted.”

## Activities:

### 1. Envisioning a spiritual atmosphere (5 minutes)

- ★ Comment that we are fortunate to have a detailed account of how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arranged for celebration of Bahá'í festivals at the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, creating a profoundly spiritual, reverent, and joyous atmosphere. Refer participants to “Creating a Spiritual Atmosphere: The Example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá” (Participant Handouts, p. 13).
- ★ Encourage participants to close their eyes and imagine themselves in the story as you slowly read aloud this account from the memoirs of Dr. Yunis Khán.
- ★ After you have finished reading, ask participants to mentally identify one or two elements of the experience that contributed to its spiritual atmosphere.

### 2. Individual study of the Writings (5 minutes)

- ★ Give each participant a yellow star. Ask participants to read silently the handout “The Atmosphere of a Bahá'í Election” (Participant Handouts, p. 14) and select one or two

# The Atmosphere of a Bahá'í Election, continued

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qualities or actions that they find particularly meaningful from among those that make up “that rarefied atmosphere” of a Bahá'í election. They should then write their qualities or actions on their star.

- ★ As participants read the quotations, put in place the sheet of pale blue poster board.

### 3. Placing stars in the sky (5 minutes)

- ★ Explain that the poster board represents the “rarefied atmosphere.” Ask each participant to come up and tape or glue on his or her star, reading the quality or action written on it.
- ★ Since several participants may select the same item and some items may not be represented, mention any from the following list that are missing: silence, prayer, disinterestedness, detachment, turn to God, purity of motive, freedom of spirit, sanctity of heart, whole-hearted participation, unity, amity, seek God's guidance, supplicate God's aid and bounty, devotion, meditation, reflection, fellowship, love, selflessness.
- ★ Suggest that the Assembly may want to display this poster at elections as a reminder of elements that contribute to an appropriate electoral atmosphere. (Note: if multiple Assemblies are present, suggest that each may want to make a similar poster for use at their elections.)

### 4. Group discussion (20 minutes)

- ★ Pose the following three questions to the group as a whole:
  - Reflecting back on the story of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the quotations just read, and your personal experiences, how can the following be used to create a reverent, joyful atmosphere?
    - ⇒ physical arrangements & decoration of the room
    - ⇒ devotional readings
    - ⇒ music and the arts
    - ⇒ a time for socializing

Share, as examples, that one unit convention decorated the room with autumn flowers and cornucopia. Each chair had a letter folded up on it, with an acorn hot glued to the letter. The letter was a message from Shoghi Effendi (in Japan Will Turn Ablaze, p.65):

# The Atmosphere of a Bahá'í Election, continued

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Dear and valued co-worker:

Do not feel discouraged if the work you are doing for His Cause does not bear rich and immediate fruit. The seeds you are so patiently and devotedly sowing will assuredly germinate, and future generations will reap an abundant harvest. The Master is watching over and blessing your historic services. Rest assured, Your true brother, Shoghi

Another unit convention arranged for live classical piano and flute music to be performed during the voting to create a serene atmosphere and to help those who had finished voting remain patiently in their seats until all electors had completed their sacred task.

- What are some of the practical, behavioral implications of a rarefied atmosphere? [Examples: We should have a buffer of time to leave the world behind us and enter into what Shoghi Effendi describes as “the mood of prayer” and detachment. We should not feel rushed or hurried in our voting. We should respect the right of other electors to vote at their own pace, staying quietly in our place until the last elector has voted his or her ballot.]
- How might experiencing a rarefied atmosphere during elections affect development of a new state of mind?

### *Optional extension questions:*

- ★ *What is the difference between “disinterestedness” and apathy? [possible answer: We care very much about the process of the election but are detached from its outcome.]*
- ★ *How can tellers maintain a rarefied atmosphere as they sort through large numbers of ballots?*

### **Note to the facilitator**

- ★ If time does not allow for use of the following optional extension session at the workshop, encourage participants to reflect on this material as a “take home” assignment. Ask individuals to ponder the questions on the handout “Reflecting on a New State of Mind as Electors” (Participant Handouts, p. 15) and to fill out the “Personal Action Plan” (Participant Handouts, p. 16), recording changes they would like to make to demonstrate their “new state of mind” as participants in the Bahá'í electoral process. Suggest that Assemblies and communities might consult on the reflection questions at a future Assembly meeting or Feast.

## *Optional Extension Session 2: Reflecting on a New State of Mind as Electors* (20 minutes)

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### **Purpose:**

- ★ To reflect on how closely the atmosphere of our elections approaches the standard in the Writings
- ★ To plan ways in which we can demonstrate a new state of mind as electors

### **Note to the facilitator**

- ★ If time does not allow for use of this optional extension session at the workshop, encourage participants to reflect on this material as a “take home” assignment. (See note on previous page).

### **Setting up the activities**

- ★ Comment that as electors we exemplify rectitude of conduct both by our outer behavior – adhering to or shunning electoral practices according to the guidance of the Faith – and by our inner attitudes of spiritual preparation and prayerful detachment as we exercise our sacred right and duty.

### **Activities:**

#### **1. Group discussion** (15 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants to think back over all that has been covered in the workshop.
- ★ Ask participants to read through the questions on the handout “Reflecting on a New State of Mind as Electors” (Participant Handouts Pg. 15). Invite volunteers to share their answers and examples to each question.
  - In what ways might our current electoral practices of personal preparation and creating an atmosphere seem to fall short of displaying in full measure “a new state of mind” on the part of those who elect Bahá’í institutions? [Examples: the same delegate/Assembly is elected year after year, lack of a spiritual atmosphere during voting, low participation of eligible electors in process]
  - What improvements and refinements can we make as a community?
  - In what ways can individuals contribute to maintaining and preserving the purity and spiritual character of Bahá’í elections?

#### **2. Summary comments:**

- ★ One aspect of demonstrating a new state of mind is seeing participation in elections as both a right and a spiritual obligation. This is a holy task, a sacred act of service we are privileged to take part in.

## *Reflecting on a New State of Mind as Electors, continued*

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- ★ As electors, we must prepare ourselves, spiritually and materially, to participate “whole-heartedly,” not casually, in this process. We can work on our “continuing duty” of familiarizing ourselves with “the character and abilities of those who are active in the community,” on becoming “intelligent, well-informed and responsible” electors, on purifying our motives, and on strengthening our willingness to be guided by God in our choices.

### **3. Individual reflection and action planning (5 minutes)**

- ★ Ask participants to turn to the handout “Personal Action Plan” (Participant Handouts, p. 16), reflect on what they have learned during the workshop, and record changes they would like to make to demonstrate their “new state of mind” as participants in the Bahá’í electoral process. Let them know that they will not need to share their reflections.
- ★ Play soft music while participants reflect and write.



## Closing (10 minutes)

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### **Purpose:**

- ★ To provide assurance of divine confirmation for all our efforts

### **Note to the facilitator**

- ★ If this is the first time this community has participated in one of the two “Cultivating Distinction” modules on elections, please use the following closing activities. If this community has recently participated in one of these election modules and you would like to offer a different closing activity, please see the alternative closing on Facilitation Guide pages 27-28.

### **Prepare in advance**

- ★ Reproduce on attractive paper a copy of “An Appeal from Shoghi Effendi” (on the page after this closing) for each participant. Fold each copy and seal or place in an envelope.

### **Activities:**

#### **1. Sharing new understandings (3-5 minutes)**

- ★ Invite participants to share one new understanding or realization about the Bahá’í electoral process that they will take away with them from this workshop.

#### **2. Receiving an appeal from Shoghi Effendi (3 minutes)**

- ★ In a dignified, reverent manner, present each participant with a sealed copy of Shoghi Effendi’s appeal.
- ★ Comment that on February 23, 1924, very early in his ministry, Shoghi Effendi addressed these poignant words to “the beloved of the Lord and the handmaids of the Merciful throughout America.” His appeal was later included in the compilation Bahá’í Administration (p. 65).
- ★ Ask a participant with a good reading voice to read the letter aloud. Ask each participant to listen to these words as if they were personally receiving this letter.
- ★ Allow silence after the letter has been read for participants to ponder the Guardian’s appeal before closing the session.

#### **3. Closing devotions (1 minute)**

- ★ Read aloud the following prayer of Bahá’u’lláh:  
“Praised be Thou, O my God! I beseech Thee by them who have circled round the throne of Thy will, and soared in the atmosphere of Thy good-pleasure, and turned with all their affections towards the Horizon of Thy Revelation and the Day-

## Closing, continued

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Spring of Thine inspiration, and the Dawning-Place of Thy names, to aid Thy servants to observe what Thou hast commanded them in Thy days – commandments through which the sacredness of Thy Cause will be demonstrated unto Thy servants and the affairs of Thy creatures and of Thy realm will be set aright.” Bahá’u’lláh, in Prayers and Meditations, p. 35.

### ***Optional:***

- ★ *Close with the song “I Have Found Bahá’u’lláh in the Early Days of My Life.” This could be in the form of an individual singer, as group singing, or by listening to any taped version of the song.*

An appeal from Shoghi Effendi to  
"the beloved of the Lord and the handmaids of the  
Merciful throughout America"

Again I earnestly appeal to every one of you, and renew my only request with all the ardor of my conviction, to make, before and during the coming Convention, yet another effort, this time more spontaneous and selfless than before, and endeavor to approach your task – the election of your delegates, as well as your national and local representatives – with that purity of spirit that can alone obtain our Beloved's most cherished desire. Let us recall His explicit and often-repeated assurances that every Assembly elected in that rarefied atmosphere of selflessness and detachment is, in truth, appointed of God, that its verdict is truly inspired, that one and all should submit to its decision unreservedly and with cheerfulness.

Let us first strive to fulfill these conditions, difficult yet essential, in our lives, so that, contented and assured, we may make of this new year of activity a year of abundant blessings, of unprecedented achievements.

May this dearest wish be fulfilled!

Shoghi

Haifa, Palestine,  
February 23, 1924

## Alternative Closing (10 minutes)

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### **Purpose:**

- ★ To provide assurance of divine confirmation for all our efforts

### **Note to the facilitator**

- ★ This alternative closing activity is provided in case this community has recently participated in one of the “Cultivating Distinction” election modules and you would like to offer a different closing activity than that on Facilitation Guide pages 24-25. If this community has not participated in one of these modules before, please use the original closing which features “An Appeal from Shoghi Effendi.”

### **Activities:**

#### **1. Sharing new understandings (3-5 minutes)**

- ★ Invite participants to share one new understanding or realization about the Bahá’í electoral process that they will take away with them from this workshop.

#### **2. Memorization of the Writings (3-5 minutes)**

- ★ Write the following verse (from Participant Handouts, p. 7, second quote) on a whiteboard or blackboard:

“Bahá’í community life . . . makes it a duty for every loyal and faithful believer to become an intelligent, well-informed and responsible elector, and also gives him the opportunity of raising himself to such a station.”

- ★ Have participants recite in unison. Remove 2-3 key words after each recitation. Symbols may be placed above the words to aid in memorization.

#### **Optional:**

- ★ *Give each participant a beautiful card or calligraphy version of this quotation. An example suitable for photocopying onto attractive paper is attached.*

#### **3. Closing devotions (1 minute)**

- ★ Read aloud the following prayer of Bahá’u’lláh:  
“Praised be Thou, O my God! I beseech Thee by them who have circled round the throne of Thy will, and soared in the atmosphere of Thy good-pleasure, and turned with all their affections towards the Horizon of Thy Revelation and the Day-Spring of Thine inspiration, and the Dawning-Place of Thy names, to aid Thy servants to observe what Thou hast commanded them in Thy days – commandments through

## Alternative Closing, continued

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which the sacredness of Thy Cause will be demonstrated unto Thy servants and the affairs of Thy creatures and of Thy realm will be set aright.” Bahá’u’lláh, in Prayers and Meditations, p. 35

### ***Optional:***

- ★ *Close with the song “I Have Found Bahá’u’lláh in the Early Days of My Life.” This could be in the form of an individual singer, as group singing, or by listening to any taped version of the song.*

“Bahá’í community life . . . makes it a duty for every loyal and faithful believer to become an intelligent, well-informed and responsible elector, and also gives him the opportunity of raising himself to such a station.”

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi