

VNGOC board elections- feedback on using a recommended 'slate'

SURVEY RESULTS

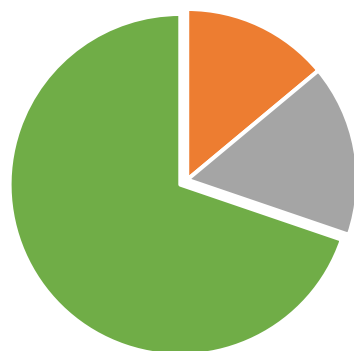
The VNGOC membership at an Extraordinary General Meeting held in December 2021 approved the Terms of References (ToR) of the nominations committee and decided to review the ToR including the usefulness of the 'slate' after several board elections. (<https://vngoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/VNGOC-Nominations-Committee-Terms-of-Reference-Proposed.pdf>)

In the current ToR the nominations committee is tasked with assessing the existing composition of the Board to achieve as much 'balance' as possible, to seek nominations that could fill any identified gaps and to propose a 'slate' of recommended candidates to the membership. At the board elections in March 2023 and March 2024 not all recommended candidates were elected. To ensure the continued relevance of the 'slate' the VNGOC board is seeking feedback from the membership.

To ensure the continued relevance of the 'slate' the VNGOC board with the support of the nominations committee, collected feedback from the membership through an anonymous online survey.

Of the 418 member organisations 50 people responded, 43 of which indicated that they voted in the VNGOC board elections in March 2024. An overwhelming majority of respondents (70%) indicated that they voted for the 'slate' of candidates the nominations committee recommended.

Did you vote for the 'slate' of candidates the nominations committee recommended?



■ No ■ Prefer not to say ■ Yes

Respondents were then asked why they decided to vote for or against the slate:

Why did you decide to vote for the candidates recommended by the nomination committee?"

- **Trust in the Committee:** Many respondents trusted the nomination committee's judgment and the slate they recommended.

- **Balanced Representation:** Respondents appreciated the slate for its balanced approach, ensuring representation across thematic, regional, gender, and age diversity. They felt this balance would enhance the board's effectiveness and inclusiveness.
- **Safeguarding VNGOC's Mission:** Some respondents believed that supporting the slate aligned with VNGOC's mission and objectives, ensuring a well-rounded board that could represent diverse perspectives.
- **Consensus Building:** The slate was seen as a way to foster consensus and avoid ideological polarization. Respondents valued the committee's efforts to create a bipartisan slate agreed upon by consensus.
- **Disappointment with Fragmentation:** Some respondents expressed disappointment that not all VNGOC members supported the slate as a whole in recent years, leading to an imbalanced board. They felt this division compromised the board's diversity and representative nature.
- **Historical Perspective:** A few respondents highlighted their long-term involvement and noted that the slate approach was developed to manage ideological tensions within VNGOC, aiming to keep the board representative of various views and prevent one-sidedness.

Why did you decide not to vote for the candidates recommended by the nomination committee?

- **Preference for Individual Choice:** Some respondents felt that voting based on their own judgment of candidates, rather than following the recommended slate, was more democratic and aligned with their values.
- **Lack of Familiarity with Candidates:** A few respondents mentioned that they didn't know all the candidates well enough to support the slate fully.
- **Alignment with Organizational Goals:** Some respondents indicated that not all recommended candidates aligned with the mission or specific goals of their own organization.
- **Concerns about Balance:** While agreeing in principle with the idea of a balanced board, some respondents felt that recent board compositions had not achieved a true balance, reflecting a perceived misalignment with the broader membership's preferences.

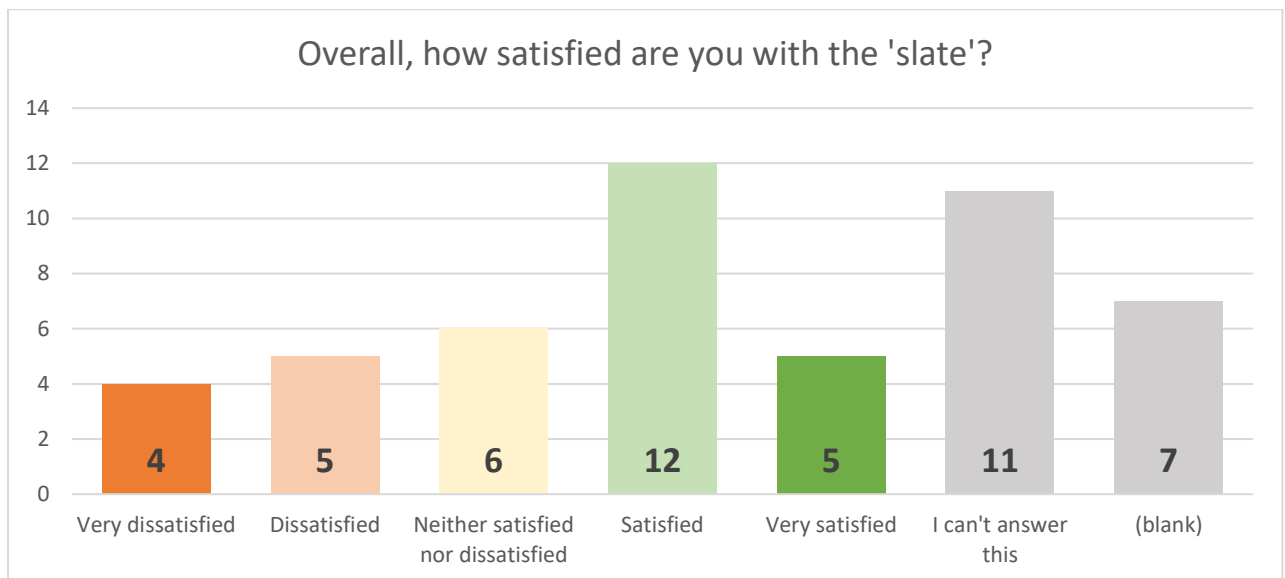
Feedback on the slate, the presentation, and suggestions to improve the process:

1. **Support for the Slate Concept:** Many respondents believe that the concept of a slate is valuable as it aims to promote balanced representation across policy views, regions, gender, and thematic areas. Some feel it serves as a good recommendation without being coercive.
2. **Concerns About Practical Application:** Despite theoretical support, several respondents feel the slate has not achieved its intended balance in recent elections. They note that some members view elections competitively, undermining the slate's goal of compromise, and suggesting that the slate process is losing effectiveness.
3. **Suggestions for Improvement:**
 - **Transparency and Clarity:** Respondents suggest providing more details on why each candidate was recommended, outlining each candidate's experience, previous roles, and intended contributions to the board.
 - **Diversity and Representation:** Some recommend conducting a diversity audit and collecting demographic data to improve representation, especially for underrepresented groups and policy areas like drug policy reform.

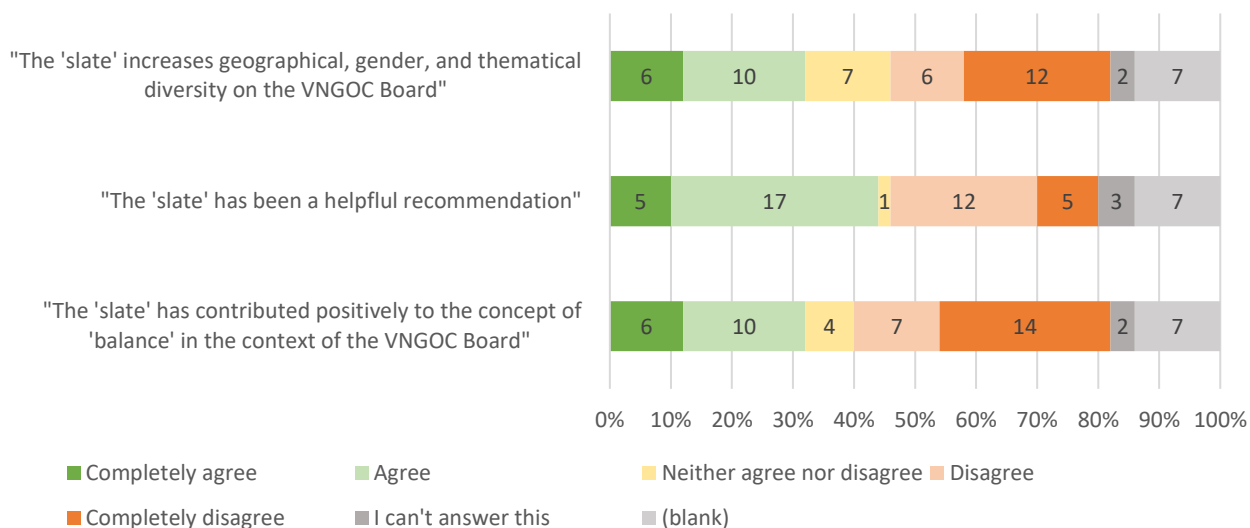
- **Candidate Information:** Suggestions include sending candidate bios earlier, providing detailed profiles, and sharing their vision to help members make informed choices.
 - **Better Communication:** Respondents propose clarifying the purpose of the slate, especially for new members, to help them understand its importance.
 - **Opportunities for Discussion:** Hosting open forums or structured discussions on the slate could foster better understanding and alignment among members.
4. **Frustration with Election Outcomes:** Many feel that the recent election results, where members did not follow the slate, indicate a lack of trust or commitment to balance. Some express concern that factional voting and “winner-takes-all” mindsets undermine the purpose of the slate.
 5. **Alternative Suggestions:** A few respondents suggested alternatives, like allowing for changes to the slate or removing the committee’s role entirely to allow more freedom in voting.

Overall, while the slate is seen as a positive tool for balanced governance, members feel that improving transparency, communication, and engagement may help restore trust and effectiveness in the nominations process.

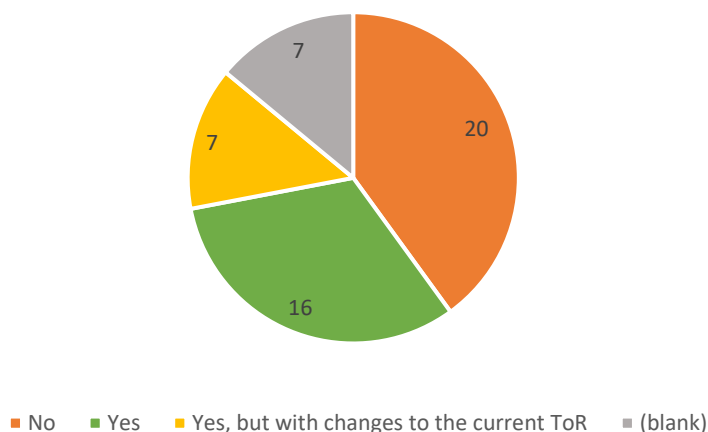
After given overall feedback on the slate and the presentations respondents were asked a series of closed questions.



How do you agree to the following statements:



Do you support the continuation of the 'slate'?



Respondents were divided on the question “Do you support the continuation of the ‘slate’?”. Those that indicated that they support the continuation of the slate but with change to the current ToR had the following suggestions:

1. Enhanced Representation:

- **Emphasis on continuum-of-care:** Respondents suggest that the ToR should better reflect a balanced approach, incorporating all aspects of drug policy, including recovery, prevention, and harm reduction.

- **Diversity Dimensions:** Expand criteria beyond gender and region to include race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, sexual orientation, and lived experience. This would better represent the diversity of those affected by drug policies.
2. **Inclusive and Transparent Process:**
 - **Broaden Candidate Eligibility:** Allow more inclusive criteria for nominations, including grassroots and community-led organizations, as well as additional nominations from the floor at the General Assembly.
 - **Clarity on Decision-Making:** Provide transparency on how candidates are selected for the slate, including documented criteria for balanced representation.
 - **Enhanced Feedback Mechanisms:** Gather member feedback regularly to adapt the process as needed, through surveys or focus groups.
 3. **Support for Underrepresented Groups:**
 - **Mentorship Programs:** Establish mentorship and training for candidates from underrepresented backgrounds to empower them in the application and campaign process.
 - **Outreach Efforts:** Actively engage diverse organizations and communities, including those that may not typically participate, by offering informational sessions and workshops.
 4. **Flexible Representation Standards:**
 - Some respondents suggest that "balance" should not necessarily mean a strict "50-50" approach. Instead, it should be flexible to represent underrepresented groups without fixed quotas, which can change over time.
 5. **Competency and Experience:**
 - **Competency over Diversity Focus:** While diversity is important, respondents feel proven competency should not be overlooked and should be a priority in the selection process.
 - **Lived Experience:** Emphasize candidates with lived experience of drug use and those affected by drug policies, as their insights can enhance board discussions.
 6. **Accessibility and Flexibility:**
 - **Meeting Accessibility:** Use virtual platforms to allow broader participation across geographical and socio-economic backgrounds.
 - **Regular ToR Review:** Implement a regular review cycle (every 2-3 years) to keep the ToR relevant to evolving member needs and policy landscapes.
 7. **Concerns Over Complexity:** Some respondents feel that the current recommendations for the ToR may be too complex for a simple survey process, suggesting the need for simplification.