

General Assembly of the DSA Libertarian Socialist Caucus

Provisional Procedure and Guidelines



AT THE 2017 DSA CONVENTION, the Libertarian Socialist Caucus (LSC) will coordinate collective action as a caucus among Convention delegates and observers with this provisional decision-making structure. **This process is intended to carry us through the Convention, not govern the caucus indefinitely.** Both this decision-making process for the Convention and the decision-making process for the formally structured LSC going forward into the future will be open questions for discussion at our General Assembly.

The General Assembly will take place on **Friday, August 2 from 9:00 AM to 11:00 AM**. It will be held at the **Montgomery Ward Lounge**, a room on the second floor of the **Student Center East (750 S Halsted St.)** of the University of Illinois at Chicago. The room is on the far north end of the second floor of the student center, past the Amazon Pick-Up Center, and is clearly labeled.

Initial Key Questions and Mobile Voting

I. WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

Any registered member of LSC who is physically present at the Convention, both delegates and observers, can vote on caucus decisions pertaining to the Convention and participate as a member of the General Assembly. **Members of LSC must be dues-paying members of DSA, and only LSC members will be able to vote in the Assembly.** A station will be set up where organizers will verify membership upon entry to the Assembly area. **All DSAers admitted to the LSC listserv will be able to vote in the Assembly.** If you are not on our listserv but are a dues-paying member of the DSA, you

can participate in the voting, but please plan to bring your **DSA Membership Card or a copy of your email receipt for paying dues** to verify your membership.

II. HOW WILL WE COMMUNICATE?

We will be meeting in person at a single General Assembly to make most of the major decisions. For **snap decisions** that come up during floor debates, we will be communicating and voting via two digital platforms: **GroupMe for chat and Loomio for voting.** GroupMe is a group messaging app which can be used on a computer, a smartphone, or any cell phone with text messaging capabilities. Loomio is a group decision-making software that was designed in the Occupy Wall Street movement and now has a smartphone app as well. To use each of these platforms, we will collect LSC members' phone numbers and email addresses at the General Assembly. If members do not have smartphones, we will identify working individual solutions for receiving their input on caucus proposals and decisions. Both apps can be deleted after the Convention.

III. WHAT DO WE VOTE ON?

We will remain in contact and ongoing discussion over the course of the Convention. As tactical and political questions arise, participating LSC members may suggest measures to vote on via the GroupMe chat. **To be put to a vote over Loomio, proposals must be supported by a delegate.** Amendments to a proposal (such as adding additional voting options) also require a delegate's support.

IV. HOW DO PROPOSALS PASS ON MOBILE VOTES?

The delegate sponsor of a proposal will select a time limit for voting on that particular proposal, depending on the urgency of the matter in question. This voting window may not be shorter than twenty minutes. A vote is only valid if **at least half** ($\frac{1}{2}$) of participating LSC members have voted within that window. Mobile votes have the same voting threshold as in-person votes. That is, a proposal passes as a **consensus position** of LSC with a **75% ($\frac{3}{4}$) majority**. This threshold and its meaning will be explained in the sections that follow. If the Assembly arrives at consensus, we ask LSC members who are delegates to vote in line with the consensus.

Procedure for the General Assembly

ON FRIDAY MORNING at 9:00 AM, LSC will gather in person at the Montgomery Ward Lounge for a General Assembly. We will have a participatory and collaborative discussion as an entire caucus, hopefully coming to conclusions about our mission and structure and the strategic course we hope to chart in the near future.

I. FACILITATION

The General Assembly will be guided by a facilitator, whose task is to explain the conduct of the assembly, keep the discussion on schedule as we move through the agenda, and gently intervene in cases of interruption and excessive time use by speakers.

II. INTRODUCTION TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

We will begin by taking down participants' names, phone numbers, email addresses, delegate or observer status, and DSA local on an attendance sheet. We will also use this opportunity to verify membership of those not already on our listserv. A member of the Organizing Committee will give a brief overview of LSC and introduce us to the Assembly. **A volunteer will be called on to take minutes, with special emphasis on vote counts.** The facilitator will then proceed by beginning personal introductions—names, pronouns, DSA local, and an icebreaker question. Following introductions, the facilitator will explain the three community principles for the conduct of the Assembly.

1. **Assumption of positive intent.** We may have ideological or strategic disagreements with one another, but by entering this space we agree to assume that those around us are similarly committed to freedom, solidarity, and democracy. Anger is an important element of agitative, justice-oriented politics, but it should be shared with the other members of our community rather than directed at them.
2. **Step up, step back.** We want this to be as participatory as possible, but people participate in different ways, by both speaking and listen. If you've been speaking a lot, try to scale back your speaking time and spend more time listening; if you've been mostly listening, try to insert yourself in the discussion more so we can hear your thoughts. This also means not speaking over each other. Interrupting one another not only derails meetings; it creates an unequal discussion environment where only those who

feel comfortable speaking over others have a chance to be heard. This is maintained by respecting the speaking order tracked by the facilitator.

3. **Respect the time constraints of the Assembly because it is our shared time as a community.** We need to move very quickly through the agenda to get everything done, so be mindful of the time you are using.

The facilitator will then briefly explain the procedure of the Assembly (described below).

III. VOTING ON MOTIONS AND PROPOSALS

In the Assembly, voting on motions and proposals is done by holding up a brightly colored card we will be distributing to those with voting rights to signify their vote. In votes where the **voting threshold** has not clearly been reached, a hand count will be conducted. All voting thresholds are a proportion of the total number of eligible voters in the Assembly. Thus, for each type of motion/proposal passage will be calculated ahead of time using the attendance sheet. **All thresholds are minimums for passage that must be exceeded.** We will round up in calculating each threshold. The number of votes necessary to exceed each threshold will be written on a board in front of the whole Assembly so everyone understands the exact number of votes necessary at any given moment (for example, if there are 23 voters in the Assembly, the $\frac{3}{4}$ threshold is $17.25 \rightarrow 18$ votes, and " $\frac{3}{4}=18$ " will be written on the board).

The thresholds for each kind of vote are as follows:

1. Amendments to the agenda require **majority support, i.e. more than one half ($\frac{1}{2}$)**.
2. Procedural motions (closing the agenda, extending discussion time for agenda items, adjourning the Assembly) require **two-thirds ($\frac{2}{3}$) support**.
3. Passing proposals as LSC consensus positions requires a **supermajority, i.e. three quarters ($\frac{3}{4}$) support**.
4. Passing proposals as LSC consensus positions without discussion requires **near-unanimity, i.e. nine-tenths ($\frac{9}{10}$) support**.

We will explain what each of these kinds of votes means, and when they are taken, in Section VI.

Voters may choose to abstain rather than vote aye (yes) or nay (no).

In a vote where there are abstentions, the vote-counting procedure changes. The facilitator must first check to see if the vote is valid.

A vote is only valid if at least **two thirds ($\frac{2}{3}$)** of the votes are **non-abstention votes** (aye or nay); if the ayes and nays together do not pass this threshold, the vote must be retaken with fewer abstentions.

If the vote is valid, the thresholds depend on the kind of vote. If the vote is a consensus ($\frac{3}{4}$) vote, then it requires the **original threshold of three quarters ($\frac{3}{4}$) support of the total Assembly** to pass despite abstentions. If the vote is a procedural ($\frac{2}{3}$) vote, then the **new threshold is $\frac{2}{3}$ of the ayes and nays added together** (not including abstentions) to pass.

For instance, suppose there are 23 voters in the Assembly but on some vote 6 abstain, meaning 17 remain as ayes or nays. If the number of ayes and nays added together were under 15 ($\frac{2}{3}$), the vote would have needed to be retaken with fewer abstentions. But because 17 is greater than 15, the vote is valid. If the vote is a **consensus** vote, the consensus threshold ($\frac{3}{4}$) remains what it was before, 17 (i.e. $\frac{3}{4}$ of 23) in order for the vote to pass. If the vote is a **procedural** vote, the procedural threshold ($\frac{2}{3}$) lowers from 15 (i.e. $\frac{2}{3}$ of 23) to 12 (i.e. $\frac{2}{3}$ of 17) in order for the vote to pass.

In the interests of time and clarity, the facilitator should **encourage Assembly voters to be decisive and not abstain unless they absolutely feel the need to**.

IV. FINALIZING THE AGENDA

The Assembly will get underway by establishing the agenda. A draft agenda will be sent out several days in advance, with additions or amendments requested from the LSC email list. At the Assembly, the facilitator will read off the agenda items (which must include time allotments) and put out a final call for amendments. Anyone can put forth a motion to amend the agenda. Amendments to the agenda require support of **one half ($\frac{1}{2}$)** of Assembly participants. The agenda is finalized and cannot be reopened when a motion to close the agenda is passed (requiring **two thirds ($\frac{2}{3}$)** support).

At this time, we will move into small group discussion on the mission of LSC.

V. SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION: MISSION OF LSC

In this portion of the Assembly, we will break down into randomly assigned small groups of five to seven people, each with a facilitator with a list of prepared discussion questions. These are intended to spur rather than constrain the conversation, generally within the broad framework of elaborating on what we would like to see LSC accomplish within DSA and the role we hope it can play in our communities and the broader socialist movement. After fifteen minutes of discussion, we will come back together as a group for report-backs on the thoughts and subjects that arose in our small groups.

VI. MOVING THROUGH THE AGENDA

Now the **voting on agenda items** begins. As we move through each item on the agenda, we will have an open discussion, with speaking order maintained by the facilitator. At the beginning of discussion on an agenda item, the facilitator will describe the subject of the vote in neutral terms in under a minute. After this is finished, any Assembly voter may present a **motion to pass** that agenda item as an LSC **consensus** position **without further discussion**. This motion requires **90% (9/10)** support to pass.

If the no-further-discussion motion is not presented or does not pass, the agenda item is discussed until its allotted time elapses or until there are no further comments. If an item does not pass automatically but has had only speakers on one side of an issue, the facilitator may request comment from a participant of the opposing position. When the time allotted for an agenda item expires, the facilitator will remind the Assembly and ask for concluding thoughts and a vote on the

agenda item. At this stage any Assembly participant may present a **motion to extend discussion time** by five minutes. A motion to extend discussion requires **two thirds (2/3)** support to pass. Additional five minute extensions require additional successful motions. If the motion fails, the Assembly will vote and move on to the next agenda item.

For agenda items requiring a vote by the Assembly participants to be passed as **LSC consensus positions**, they must have **three quarters (3/4)** support following discussion. If the Assembly arrives at a consensus about any given position, delegates who are part of the LSC are expected to uphold and fight for that LSC consensus position on the general Convention floor. If the LSC has no consensus on some optic, then they should vote according to their individual conscience or other obligations (representing the consensus position of their local, for instance).

For the Future and Structure of LSC portion of the agenda, we will once again break down into (different) small groups of 5-7 with a set of core questions before returning to discuss as a large group. This portion is more open-ended, but with the goal of reaching consensus positions on some basic matters related to the structure and organization of LSC (requiring **3/4 support**).

When the agenda is completed, the facilitator will ask for a motion to adjourn the Assembly. Passage requires **two thirds (2/3)** support. Failure to pass extends open discussion by ten minutes. We hope to continue those discussions after adjourning in smaller groups as we break, so as to not take an unreasonable amount of the LSC membership's time for the Assembly.

Final Considerations

I. FURTHER MEETINGS OF THE LSC DURING THE CONVENTION

The General Assembly will be the main meeting of the Libertarian Socialist Caucus during the Convention. If it becomes necessary to make snap decisions after the adjournment of the Assembly, we will follow the procedure for discussion over GroupMe and voting over Loomio which is described in the first section of these guidelines.

The LSC has also secured classrooms during certain time slots on Friday and Saturday. At present there is no specific event scheduled for these rooms. However, if the Assembly decides upon further events they'd like the LSC to host during the Convention, they are available for use.

Finally, there will be a party on Friday evening near the Convention site. All are invited, regardless of their membership status.



II. VOTING THRESHOLD CHEAT-SHEET

1. Amendments to the agenda require **majority support, i.e. more than one half ($\frac{1}{2}$)**.
2. Procedural motions (closing the agenda, extending discussion time for agenda items, adjourning the Assembly) require **two thirds ($\frac{2}{3}$) support**.
3. Passing proposals as LSC consensus positions requires a **supermajority, i.e. three quarters ($\frac{3}{4}$) support**.
4. Passing proposals as LSC consensus positions without discussion requires near-unanimity, i.e. nine-tenths ($\frac{9}{10}$) support.
5. If there are any abstentions, counting procedure changes.
 - a. For vote to be valid, at least two thirds ($\frac{2}{3}$) must be non-abstention votes (aye or nay). If invalid, vote must be retaken with fewer abstentions.
 - b. If vote is valid, the threshold depends on the kind of vote being taken.
 - a. If a consensus ($\frac{3}{4}$) vote, then it requires the original threshold of three quarters ($\frac{3}{4}$) support of the total Assembly to pass despite abstentions.
 - b. If a procedural ($\frac{2}{3}$) vote, then the new threshold is $\frac{2}{3}$ of the ayes and nays added together (not including abstentions) to pass.