AFM Musicians Union Local 99

General Election

Fall 2025

The Musicians Union Local 99 is a union of professional musicians in the northern half of Oregon and Southwest Washington. Its mission is to elevate and better the economic status, social position, and general welfare of its members through collective bargaining with employers, and advocacy to government and the public. The union's leadership is democratically elected by its members.

The Fall 2025 General Election

The Fall 2025 General Election included two races for three total seats on the Union's Executive Board:

1. The first race was to elect one person to the position of *Executive Officer−Oregon Symphony*, a position that represents a particular subset of the union. There were a total of four candidates on the ballot for this position.
2. The second race was to elect two At-Large Executive Officers. There were a total of five candidates on the ballot for these positions.

All members of the union in good standing (approximately 460 people) were eligible to vote in both races. Paper ballots were sent by mail on November 14th and tallied a few weeks later on December 8th. In total, 135 ballots were cast between both elections.

These elections were run using two variations of the STAR voting method, short for "Score Then Automatic Runoff". Single-winner STAR was used for the *Oregon Symphony* race, which elected just one officer, while Bloc STAR was used for the multi-winner race, which elected two officers.

Election Tallying Process

On election day, ballots were removed and separated from their secrecy envelopes, then tabulated manually by four volunteers in the following order:

First, a *ballot reader* read the scores received by each candidate out loud.

Second, an *observer* looked over the shoulder of the *ballot reader* to ensure that what was being read out loud was correct.

Third, a *manual recorder* wrote down the scores received by each candidate by hand.

And finally, a *digital recorder* entered these values into a spreadsheet, which was projected onto a large screen in the room for all to see.

This process offered a simple, low tech, and user-friendly option for the union to tabulate ballots, while maintaining security and preventing errors using multiple points of redundancy.

Auditing

In the tally for the second *At-Large Executive Officer* position, the two finalists were tied in the automatic runoff, with the same number of runoff votes. In the event of a runoff tie, the winner is the candidate who has the higher total score. Since the total score for each candidate differed by only one point, the tallying board decided to go back and re-verify that the scores had been recorded correctly, as an extra measure of due diligence.

The vote tally board reviewed all ballots and verified them against the manual and digital tally sheets. Then, the scores from the manual tally sheet were totaled to verify that it matched the total produced by the spreadsheet. No errors or discrepancies were found, and the initial results were confirmed to be 100% accurate.

Election Analysis

The race for the *At-Large Executive Officer* positions was especially competitive this year. The race saw three incumbents running for re-election with only two empty seats. Despite this, only one of these incumbent candidates campaigned, put out a candidate bio, and sent an email to voters. Unsurprisingly, this led to a number of voters only voting for that single candidate, Bruce Fife, who handily won re-election. The other two incumbents were those finalists for the second *At-Large* position who nearly tied for highest score.

In the race for *Oregon Symphony Officer*, a number of voters left the race blank, likely because they did not feel comfortable weighing in on the matter if they weren't Oregon Symphony members.

While the election itself appeared to run perfectly, turnout was lower than the last two Local 99 elections, at 30%. However, this percentage is considered high for unions as a whole. Unfortunately, Local 99 does not have any data from before the switch to STAR voting, so it’s not clear if members are more or less inclined to vote when using STAR as opposed to more familiar voting methods.

In conclusion

This was the fourth time the Musicians Union Local 99 has used STAR Voting for internal elections, with the first being in February 2023, the second in December 2023, and the third in December 2024. Local 99 amended its bylaws to switch to STAR voting in June of 2020, moving away from first-past-the-post voting (also known as plurality voting).

At the time in 2020, there had not been a contested election in two decades. The bylaws amendment was proposed by a member of the union who was a STAR Voting advocate (and activist), who was able to convince his fellow union members to adopt STAR proactively *before* it was needed. After the switch, it took another three years before there was a contested election.

Local 99 will continue to use STAR voting for future elections, as it's required by the union's bylaws.

For more information on this election, please reach out to info@equal.vote