FÓRSA

Branch AGM guide

2020-2021

Contents

Introduction

This guide to branch annual general meetings (AGMs) has been written on the assumption that some Covid-related restrictions on travel and assembly are likely to remain in place during in the period that AGMs are usually scheduled.

As these restrictions are likely to be in place, this guide advises on the business that should be conducted at AGMs.

Your branch may have adopted a set of rules and/or general standing orders for AGMs. If so, you should check these to see exactly what you are obliged to do regarding an AGM. In any case, you should seek advice from your Fórsa official about how to arrange and conduct your AGM.

The guide sets out the dates of the five divisional conferences, and related deadlines for submitting branch motions, amendments and nominations. Branches should keep these in mind when deciding the timing of their AGM.

The guide then gives guidance on establishing and conducting 'virtual' AGMs, with maximum opportunity for members' participation within the constraints of a digital event.

It also gives guidance on conducting elections for branch officer positions in the absence of the opportunity for a physical meeting.

You should seek advice from your Fórsa official about how to arrange and conduct your AGM.

Business that should be conducted at the AGM

These are the items of business that should be dealt with at the branch AGM:

▶ Adopt the minutes of the last AGM

▶ Receive relevant reports from branch officers and officials

▶ Adopt a financial report from the branch treasurer

▶ Elect branch officers

▶ Adopt motions (if any) for submission to divisional conference (optional)

▶ Agree nominations (if any) for divisional officer and executive positions, for submission to divisional conference (optional).

Deadlines for divisional conference motions, amendments and nominations

The Fórsa divisional conferences are currently set to take place on the following dates. (Note that, if it's necessary to have virtual conferences, these are likely to be shortened):

Education Division	Portlaoise	7-9 April 2021
Local Government Division	Cork	12-14 May 2021
Services and Enterprises Division	Cork	12-14 May 2021
Civil Service Division	Galway	26-28 May 2021
Health & Welfare Division	Galway	26-28 May 2021

Under rule, this means that that the following deadlines apply:

Education
Notice to branches to issue no later than:	Wednesday 30th December 2020
Closing date for submitting motions:	Wednesday 20th January 2021
Closing date for nominations:	Wednesday 20th January 2021
Preliminary agenda to issue:	Wednesday 10th February 2021
Amendments to motions to be submitted:	Wednesday 24th February 2021
Final agenda to issue to branches:	Wednesday 24th March 2021

Services and Enterprises/Local Government
Notice to branches to issue no later than:	Wednesday 3rd February 2021
Closing date for submitting motions:	Wednesday 24th February 2021
Closing date for nominations:	Wednesday 24th February 2021
Preliminary agenda to issue:	Wednesday 17th March 2021
Amendments to motions to be submitted:	Wednesday 31st March 2021
Final agenda to issue to branches:	Wednesday 28th April 2021

Civil Service/Health and Welfare
Notice to branches to issue no later than:	Wednesday 17th Feb 2021
Closing date for submitting motions:	Wednesday 10th March 2021
Closing date for nominations:	Wednesday 10th March 2021
Preliminary agenda to issue:	Wednesday 31st March 2021
Amendments to motions to be submitted:	Wednesday 14th April 2021
Final agenda to issue to branches:	Wednesday 12th May 2021

Registration

It is advisable to invite all branch members to register for the virtual AGM at least two weeks in advance of the meeting. This will give the branch an indication of roughly how many members to expect, and help you assess the best platform for handling the numbers attending and, if necessary, seek technical assistance from the union centrally (see below).

You can do this by creating a google form and circulating the link via email to all branch members. For information on how to create a google form, click **here**.

Registration can also be carried out by inviting members to send their details to a pre-determined email address.

The branch should seek the following information from members who register to attend the virtual AGM:

- name
- email address
- workplace
- union number.

You need to be aware of, and follow GDPR requirements when requesting and handling members' personal data. See appendix one.

It is strongly advised to use the registration process as an opportunity to remind members to update their contact details, which can be done **here**. It's very important the union has members' most up to date details to be able to reach them in the event of a ballot, either for your AGM or a national pay agreement.

Once registration is closed, the branch committee can decide what platform is most appropriate to accommodate the number of people registered. Registration should ideally close no less than a week in advance of the AGM to allow the committee make this decision and familiarise themselves with the chosen platform.

You should also email all those registered with information about how the AGM is going to be conducted. Be clear about what they need to do to access and participate in the meeting. You can ask your Fórsa official for advice.

Platform selection

There are many platforms available to host your virtual AGM, and each has their own pros and cons. All platforms can be accessed via mobile phone, tablet and desktop facilities, but for the purpose of branch AGMs, participation via computer or a large-screened device is advisable.

Here are some of the available options. If the free tiers don't meet your needs, the branch can opt to purchase an expanded package.

Lifesize

Free tier

- Host up to ten participants
- Unlimited meeting time duration
- Recording not available
- Polling not available.

From $12.50 per month

- Host up to 100 participants
- Unlimited meeting time duration
- Recording not available
- Polling not available.

Read more about expanded Lifesize packages **here**.

Microsoft Teams

Free tier

- Host up to 300 participants*
- Unlimited meeting time duration*
- Recording not available
- Polling available.

From €4.20 per month

- Same allowances as the free version
- Meeting recording available.

* For a limited time only, until further specified by Microsoft.

Read more about expanded Microsoft Teams packages **here**.

Please note that many workplaces have the premium version of Microsoft Teams with Office 365. Be sure to check, as you may already have access to all the Microsoft Teams features.

WebEx

Free tier

- Host up to 100 participants
- 50-minute maximum meeting time
- Recording not available
- Polling available.

From €12.85 per month

- Host up to 100 participants
- Unlimited meeting time duration
- Meeting recording available
- Polling available.

Read more about expanded WebEx packages **here**.

Zoom

Free tier

- Host up to 100 participants
- 40-minute maximum meeting time
- Recording available
- Polling available.

From €13.99 per month

- Host up to 100 participants
- Unlimited meeting time duration
- Meeting recording available
- Polling available.

Read more about expanded Zoom packages **here**.

Setting up your virtual AGM

Once registration has ended, you can download your data and create an invitation list. If you chose to collect information via google forms, **this article** teaches you how to retreive that data.

Depending on your chosen platform, you can learn how to schedule your AGM and issue virtual invitations in advance by following the links below:

- **Lifesize**
- **Microsoft Teams**
- **WebEx**
- **Zoom**

If your branch usually has more than 100 people at its AGM, and more than 100 people register for the 2021 virtual event, the committee can contact Fórsa's Communications Unit for assistance.

The Communications Unit will only be in a position to assist branches with this large level of interest, as it may require a webinar format rather than a standard virtual meeting platform.

Motions

In normal circumstances, motions can be taken from the floor on the night of the AGM. But in the current situation, branches are advised to require members to submit motions in advance of the meeting (with adequate time allowed for others to submit amendments) to ensure the smooth running of the AGM.

Once all motions are received, it is suggested that they be circulated to members in advance of the AGM. This communication can include a reminder to register to attend the AGM.

At the meeting, motions should be formally proposed by the person who submitted it, which means they don't speak to the motion at that point. This is to facilitate the smooth running of the virtual event. If there is no opposition to the motion from the floor, the branch chair can consider it adopted, rather than putting it to a vote.

If proposers want to speak to the motion, branches are advised to put a time limit on the speeches and limit contributions if there is no opposition to the motion.

This method is not a rule and branches are entitled to follow normal debate proceedure, as they would at a normal AGM.

Speaking to motions

Members can indicate their desire to speak by physically raising a hand on camera if there's not too large a crowd, raising a virtual hand, or emailing a pre-determined address if they cannot use the raise hand feature. The chair can make a judgement on which method to follow depending on the number of participants.

Learn how to raise a virtual hand on the different platforms by following the links below:

- **Lifesize**
- **Microsoft Teams**
- **WebEx**
- **Zoom**

Voting on motions

If there is opposition to a motion and a vote is required, this can be done in a number of ways.

Show of hands on camera

If the meeting is small enough and everyone has capacity to turn on their cameras, members can vote for and against the motion when asked by the chair to show hands on screen.

If some people have joined by phone and cannot access their camera, the chair can decide if the vote could be swayed by the remaining number of members off-camera, and invite them to email a pre-determined address by a certain time.

This practise is similar to regular AGMs, where members generally vote on motions via a show of hands (ie, a secret vote is not required).

Meeting platform poll

Most online meeting platforms have a polling facility where people in the session can vote. Follow these links to learn more about how to use this feature on different platforms:

- **Microsoft Teams**
- **WebEx**
- **Zoom**

Members who join the AGM by phone will not be able to access these polls. You could cater for this by establishing a pre-determined email address to enable them to submit a vote that way within a designated timeframe.

Elections

Branches are strongly advised to invite nominations for branch committee and other positions well in advance of the AGM, and not to accept nominations at the event. This is because you will need to prepare elections for any contested positions in advance of the meeting.

Uncontested nominees to any position should be deemed elected without a vote.

There are a number of ways you can conduct elections, while observing public health restrictions (see below). You should seek advice from your Fórsa official, and you should inform members in advance so that they know how the elections are being conducted and have a fair opportunity to vote.

This advice is for the purpose of branch elections only, and should not be followed in any other circumstance without consulting your Fórsa official.

Workplace ballots

If all your members are attending workplaces, you could arrange to have ballot facilities in place at designated times so that members can vote in-person. Be sure that all members have an opportunity to vote, even if they are not all in the same location. And you will need to ensure that social distancing and other public health measures are observed. You should seek advice from your Fórsa official about how to conduct the ballot.

Postal ballot

If you have adequate postal contact details for members, and can ensure that all members have an opportunity to vote, you can conduct any necessary ballots by post. You should seek advice from your Fórsa official about how to conduct the ballot. Depending on the size of your branch, there can be considerable printing and postage costs associated with postal ballots, which may require you to provide postage-paid return envelopes. You should check the costs before making your decision.

Email ballot

If you have adequate email contact details for members, and can ensure that all members have an opportunity to vote, you can conduct any necessary ballots by email. The best way to do this is to:

1. Designate a trusted individual as returning officer for the ballot
2. Furnish the returning officer with a full list of the email addresses of those eligible to vote
3. Inform eligible members of an email address to which they should return their ballot papers. (It is recommended that an email address is set up for the express purpose)
4. Require those who register to vote to nominate an email address from which they will be voting. Only votes from such designated email addresses would be accepted
5. The returning officer should be the only person who has access to this email account
6. There should be a strict closing date for the ballot, after which the returning officer can check votes received against the full list of email addresses (see 2 above) and then conduct the count
7. The only information that the returning officer should share is the outcome of the ballot (numbers of votes cast; spoiled votes; and votes cast for each candidate, etc)
8. Members should be advised of the outcome of the ballot by email.

You should seek advice from your Fórsa official about how to conduct the email ballot.

Online voting

There are a number of online voting services available to branches, including the free **Condorcet Internet Voting Service (CIVS)**.

Using CIVS, the branch can create a poll and issue a voting link to members. A decision can be made by the branch whether this link will be issued to all members, or only those who registered their intent to attend the AGM.

It is a secret ballot and members can only vote once. In the case of three or more people contesting the one position, CIVS also offers a proportional representation option.

Learn more about CIVS **here**.

Managing your AGM

- Your AGM can broadly follow the usual agenda. But some of the business (like the submission of motions and elections) will already have been dealt with.

- Once the meeting commences, it's good practice to advise all participants to mute their microphones when not speaking. This eliminates any feedback and background noise.

- You should inform delegates if the event is being recorded, and tell delegates they do not have permission to record the event.

- As in a normal meeting, the chair needs to keep order. At the outset of the meeting, you should ask participants not to speak unless called. There are a number of ways that participants can indicate their desire to speak:

  - Raise their hand on camera, or by using the virtual raise hand feature, so that the chair can see they want to speak (see the explanation in the 'motions' section above)

  - Most platforms have a facility to send written messages, either to the whole meeting or to an individual participant. This can also be used to indicate a desire to speak. (In a large meeting, it might help the chair if someone else keeps an eye on this on their behalf.)

- If you wish to share your screen, it's best to have the content loaded and ready to go before the meeting commences. Make sure there's nothing on your screen that you don't want others to see. Follow the links below to learn how to screenshare on various platforms:

  - **Lifesize**

  - **Microsoft Teams**

  - **WebEx**

  - **Zoom**

- Setting time limits for each agenda item helps keep the meeting moving.

- Sometimes participants will drop out during the meeting as a result of failed technology or poor connection. It's best to try continue on where possible and provide a very brief recap of what they missed if they manage to reconnect. This is why good minutes are important so people can see what they missed out on after.

- And finally, before you wrap up, do a brief recap of the meeting and ensure everyone was happy they had an opportunity to contribute.

Problems with WiFi

- Meeting participants can reduce the risk of problems with WiFi connections by ensuring that all devices in their location (including TVs) are powered off.

- WiFi connections are also often improved by situating your device near a wall or window.

- Virtual backgrounds take up a lot of bandwidth. It helps to turn them off if you're struggling with your WiFi connection.

Appendix one: Personal data protection

It's essential that you are aware of, and follow, GDPR requirements when requesting and handling members' personal data. If you fail to do so, you may fall foul of legal personal data protection requirements.

You should:

- Familiarise yourself with the union's **Branch GDPR Guide**
- Seek advice from your Fórsa official
- Use the 'BCC' button (not 'To' or 'CC') when sending group emails to members
- Tell members how you will be using their data, and for how long it will be retained. This is a legal requirement under data protection legislation
- Include a privacy notice on any forms you circulate. See the wording below.

Also:

- Ensure any personal data about branch members is kept confidential and secure. Have sufficient technological safeguards and work processes in place
- Use the Fórsarep.ie email account
- Don't leave confidential paperwork unattended
- Don't share members' contact details without their consent
- Password protect emailed documents that contain personal data
- Be careful opening unusual emails (phishing emails, virus risks)
- If you have concerns over a possible data incident or data breach, contact Fórsa's Data Protection Officer at **dpo@forsa.ie**. The union's DPO must report data breaches to the Data Protection Commission within 72 hours of being made aware of them.

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Privacy notice template (for use in communication with members)

The personal data you provide in this form will be used to process your attendance and voting at the branch AGM and any associated elections. This form will be retained for one year.

Privacy notice template (for use in communication with election candidates)

Fair data processing notice for Fórsa branch officers, branch executive committees and Fórsa representatives

The role of Fórsa's elected branch officers and members of branch executive committees is vital to the smooth and efficient running of Fórsa branches and the organisation as a whole. Thank you for carrying out these critical roles.

For you to fulfil your role as an elected Fórsa representative, branch officer or branch executive committee member, you will be in contact with members of your particular branch, as it is your role to be the first point of contact for Fórsa.

If Fórsa members in your branch need union representation, they must know who and how to contact their local Fórsa representative, branch officer or branch executive committee members.

This means that some of your personal data will be shared with members of your own branch. This generally consists of your name, work section, email address and, on occasion, your mobile phone number.

Your data may also be used by Fórsa head office to contact you directly on a range of Fórsa initiatives and work regarding your union role.

Fórsa is committed to processing personal data in accordance with the requirements of data protection legislation, namely the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Irish Data Protection Act 2018. The union aims to maintain consistently high standards in protecting and securing all of your personal information. Our privacy statement can be viewed **here**.

If you have any data protection concerns please contact Martina O'Leary, Fórsa Data Protection Officer, at dpo@forsa.ie.