Charity meetings during the Coronavirus outbreak

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Charity trustee meetings and AGMs are usually held on a face-to-face basis, however, during the coronavirus period charities will need to consider public health, while maintaining good governance at the same time.

Contents

* [If you need to postpone a Trustees' meeting or an AGM](https://www.nicva.org/article/charity-meetings-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak#if-you-need-to-postpone-a-trustees-meeting-or-an-agm)
* [Holding a virtual meeting to safeguard health](https://www.nicva.org/article/charity-meetings-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak#holding-a-virtual-meeting-to-safeguard-health-)
* [To postpone or hold an AGM digitally](https://www.nicva.org/article/charity-meetings-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak#to-postpone-or-hold-an-agm-digitally)
* [Holding meetings remotely/digitally](https://www.nicva.org/article/charity-meetings-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak#holding-meetings-remotely-digitally)

When organising a trustee meeting or AGM, charities must normally follow the relevant clauses in their governing document.  However, given the severity of the public health situation the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland has issued [guidance](https://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/news/covid-19-coronavirus-information/) to allow charities to postpone or hold meetings digitally during the coronavirus outbreak.

If you need to postpone a Trustees' meeting or an AGM

The Commission will not take any regulatory action against any charity if meetings are postponed as a result of the current circumstances. The Commission recommends that a note is kept documenting that the meeting has been postponed due to current health advice as a result of the coronavirus outbreak and, that plans to hold the AGM will be implemented as soon as reasonably possible after government advice changes.

Trustees may be concerned about missing their annual reporting deadline as their annual accounts and reports need to be ratified at their AGM before they are filed on the charity register.  The Charity Commission has stated that no charity will be penalised for missing its annual reporting deadline and will not be marked 'In default' on the charity register.

Holding a virtual meeting to safeguard health

The Commission accepts that a quorate meeting of the trustees or members may be held by digital means even if the charity’s governing document prohibits this or is silent on it.

The Commission expects charity trustees to record this decision noting that it has been done to demonstrate good governance of the charity and in keeping with the government’s advice (on the management of the coronavirus outbreak).

To postpone or hold an AGM digitally

If you are planning an AGM and have a large number of members, then perhaps it may be prudent to postpone rather than hold it digitally. For example, do all of your members have access to digital technology and/or broadband? Do you have permission from your members to communicate with them electronically to send the notice of the meeting?

Charitable companies could consider proxy voting but if you don’t have permission to communicate electronically from your members then you would need to consider how you would physically get the notice out to members and manage the return of proxy forms, especially if offices are closed and staff or volunteers are working from home.

Holding meetings remotely/digitally

There are various digital platforms that you could use to hold your meetings, it all depends on how many people will be invited to attend.

There are various free options such as Skype, Zoom and Google Hangouts, however the free options usually have a limit on the number of participants.   For example, Google Hangouts is 10 people, Skype 50 whereas Zoom is 100 however Zoom has a 40 min limit on group meetings. Paid for services allow larger participant numbers and longer meetings.

Perhaps you may want to consider a paid for service in the short-term. The providers listed above also offer a more enhanced service for a small monthly fee.

If your organisation already uses Office365 then you may have free access to Microsoft Teams to hold your meeting via Teams Live Event, you just need to check your licence.

For more information on digital meeting/video conferencing provdiders please see the following article from TechRadar which compares the best free and paid for options:

[www.techradar.com/best/best-video-conferencing-software#best-free-video-conferencing-software-at-a-glance](https://www.techradar.com/best/best-video-conferencing-software#best-free-video-conferencing-software-at-a-glance)

If you're interested in using Zoom, here is a useful start up guide

<https://itld.psu.edu/training/participating-zoom-meeting-quick-start-guide>

For practical advice on hosting and participating in a meeting online

<https://info.copronet.wales/video-calls-with-zoom/>

[ICSA Good practice for virtual board and committee meetings](https://www.icsa.org.uk/assets/files/pdfs/guidance/good-practice-for-virtual-board-and-committee-meetings-web1-002%281%29.pdf?utm_source=Bates%20Wells%20Braithwaite&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=11459263_Briefing%2007.04.20&dm_i=1Y95,6TM0V,EQ22CB,RBSAS,1)

**For more detailed information, please see the Charity Commission's guidance on the coronavirus**

[www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/news/covid-19-coronavirus-information/](https://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/news/covid-19-coronavirus-information/)

**For more information on operating during the coronavirus period please see NICVA's  dedicated coronavirus webpage**

[www.nicva.org/article/nicvas-advice-on-managing-the-impact-of-coronavirus](https://www.nicva.org/article/nicvas-advice-on-managing-the-impact-of-coronavirus)

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