

Guidelines for Co-chairing

1. Introduction

Co-chairing of committees and groups can be an effective way to share leadership responsibilities. Sharing expertise, enabling diverse perspectives, allowing for more inexperienced members to step up and reducing time commitment can be a progressive and inclusive approach.

However since the arrangement is different to having a single chair it is important to clarify how co-chairing should work in practice.

2. Positions eligible for co-chairing

All committees and groups who have to elect a chair can also elect co-chairs instead if permitted by the Terms of Reference and if these guidelines are followed. In addition to committee chairs it also applies to Vice Presidents, although they do not hold chairing positions. It is important to note that some positions are not eligible (for example External representatives who hold a chair position in an external group on behalf of IPEM or the chair of the Board of Trustees).

3. Number of co-chairs

There can only be a maximum of two co-chairs for each elected chair position.

4. Nomination

Prospective co-chairs must have agreed their cooperation in advance and stand together as they will be considered as a single candidate for the purpose of the election process. Individuals may not nominate themselves for one half of a co-chairing arrangement in the hope that they will find a co-chairing partner before the election.

5. Committee numbers

A Co-chair can be – but does not have to be- an additional person on a committee. For example if a committee allows six members (plus a secretary and chair, a total of eight) and Co-chairs are elected then the overall number of people on the committee can rise to nine. (see 12 regarding additional expenses)

6. Election

All candidates in co-chair arrangements standing to be chair will have the same election procedure as a single candidate according to the Terms of Reference of the committee.

7. Voting

The committee Terms of Reference will outline the voting rights of chairs. In situations where a chair has a vote or a casting vote, that vote is shared by a co-chairing partnership. Co-chairs should agree between themselves in advance of a meeting how they will agree to use their vote, ie they can only have one vote between them.

8. Division of duties

It is essential that there are clear lines of communication between the co-chairs, the committee, external groups where required and the responsible National Office manager to ensure that both co-chairs speak with one voice on committee and IPEM matters.

Ideally, candidates for the position should consider and agree working arrangements prior to nomination. At the start of the term of office, as a minimum, the following points should be agreed and clearly documented:

- both co-chairs have equal status

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- allocation of duties
- decision-making and how that will be split appropriately to avoid delays in getting sign off from two people and whether both co-chairs will authorise or sign letters
- how co-chairs will communicate and update each other and plan next steps
- how information is shared with the national office and the committee or group
- arrangements for chairing meetings, for example whether they will chair alternate meetings or chair specific agenda items as per a agreed division of duties
- arrangements for attending other internal and external meetings (See 11)
- if a co-chair attends a meeting alone, how and when they will provide a report of the meeting to the other co-chair
- how to manage situations where there is a difference of opinion, avoiding public disagreement and conflicting statements. (See 13)

9. Attendance at meetings

The principle of co-chairing is to share the responsibility of committee work. It is imperative that having co-chairs does not 'double' the voice of the chair at both committee meetings or while attending other meetings on behalf of the committee. Members should remain mindful that co-chairs share a single seat and this should be used as a guideline for their joint involvement in meetings.

10. Chairing committee meetings as co-chairs

Co-chairs cannot simultaneously chair the same item of a meeting. Prior to the meeting, co-chairs may agree which items each of them shall chair, to ensure that the content of the meeting is appropriately divided. This may be done on preference, experience, or to avoid a conflict of interest. The co-chair not chairing the item may wish to contribute to the debate with their own views and answer questions if relevant, but must not enhance the opinion of the co-chair with the intention of directing a particular decision to be made.

11. Attending other committee meetings as a co-chair

When attending meetings of other committees only one co-chair should attend in the capacity as chair of their committee or in an ex-officio role. If the other co-chair is also attending the other committee meeting, for example as a regular member of the other committee, it is important that the co-chairs do not multiply the voice of the committee they chair together. As individuals, the co-chairs must represent in the capacity they have been requested to in the given setting.

12. Expenses and Costs

To manage committee costs, the meetings that the co-chairs attend together should be limited to meetings of the committee they are elected to as co-chairs. For other meetings which the chair of that committee should attend the co-chairs have to agree who will attend. They also need to agree what position they will take if they have to cast a vote.

Generally, efforts should be made to ensure that a co-chair arrangement does not incur too many additional costs.

13. Managing conflict

If the co-chairs are unable to agree on a course of action they should, in the first instance, consult the committee. It is the responsibility of the committee to resolve any conflict but the responsible National Office manager will offer advice and facilitate discussions.

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If no solution can be found then, as a last resort, the Council or Board the committee reports to can be consulted to reach an agreement.

The decision of the committee (or the Council or Board of Trustees if required) will be binding on both co-chairs.

As per IPEM's Volunteer Policy all volunteers agree to treat other members, volunteers and staff with respect, consideration, and appreciation. If any member of the committee is concerned that the situation is in breach of this policy and/or damaging to the business or the reputation of the committee, they should report these concerns to the responsible National Office manager.

14. Relationship breakdown

It is essential for the effective and efficient running of the committee that both co-chairs work together. If the working relationship between co-chairs breaks down or is perceived to have broken down, and the situation risks damaging the business or reputation of the committee, then these concerns should be reported to the national office.

At this stage the options to move forward include:

- both co-chairs offer to resign, and elections are set up for a new chair or a new set of co-chairs
- a vote of no confidence in the co-chairing partnership is called and, if successful, elections are set up for a new chair or co-chairs being elected

A final decision on the best course of action should be taken in collaboration with the committee, the secretary and the national office. In the event that committee and other meetings need to go ahead in the absence of a chair or co-chairs a committee member should temporarily step up to chair the meetings.

15. Resignation

If one co-chair resigns before the end of the term of office, both co-chairs will be considered to have demitted office and a new chair or co-chairs must be elected at the next meeting of the committee. The remaining co-chair will continue as sole chair until the election of a new chair or new co-chairs is held.

If the remaining co-chair wishes to continue in post as sole chair, they must be nominated and stand for election again as part of the new election process. If the remaining co-chair wishes to continue in post with a new partner, both potential co-chairs must be nominated and stand together for election.

16. Term of Office

The term of office for co-chairs is the same as for a single chair.

If a resignation or breakdown of relationship requires new elections mid year the national office manager will work together with committee / group and any potential new chairs to find a solution on a case-by-case basis.

We will need to take into account the following:

- the remaining length of the committee year
- the length of the term of office as per the Terms of Reference
- the availability of covering the role (external and within the committee)

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- the nature and work of the committee or group involved.

In case no satisfactory solution can be reached between the national office, the volunteer and committee involved the decision will be referred to the Council the committee is linked to.

17. Governance

The Board of Trustees has overall responsibility for ensuring this policy complies with IPeM's governance obligations.

The EDI and Member Networks Manager has responsibility for ensuring staff and volunteers are aware of this policy.

18. Review

4 years from the date of this policy

19. Other related policies and documents:

Chair role descriptions

Chair induction handbooks

Volunteer disciplinary procedure

Volunteering policy

Volunteer's Term of office policy

Managing Groups and Committees procedure

Managing Recruitment of Volunteers procedure