

**SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICAL
ASSOCIATION TRADE UNION**



GROUND RULES FOR MEETINGS

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1. YEAR PLANNER MEETING DATES

Meeting dates for all committees shall be pre-set on an annual calendar, distributed at the beginning of each year. These dates cannot be changed randomly. Where real emergencies or unforeseen circumstances exist, the Chairperson of the meeting and the responsible secretariat staff members at Head Office must be contacted immediately. Do not wait until the last minute to offer an apology. Refer to **Annexure A**. When suggesting alternative dates first look at the annual calendar to see whether other meetings are not already arranged on that date. Consider alternatives such as teleconferences or virtual platforms when forced to postpone.

2. R.S.V.P.

When asked via phone, email, or electronic calendar to attend a meeting, be sure to **reply** immediately. Meetings are structured – airline tickets, accommodation, and meals are secured on the basis of expected attendance. Last-minute airline ticket bookings and/or cancellations, whether it be airline tickets, accommodation, or car rental, attract additional costs and penalty fees.

3. ATTENDANCE AND QUORUM

Do not cancel at the last minute once you have RSVP'ed unless it is a real emergency. Meetings cannot continue successfully without a *quorum*. See **Annexure A** in this regard.

4. AGENDA

The agenda and accompanying documentation must be circulated to all participants at least a week in **advance EXCEPT where the constitution dictates otherwise**. Those who want to add items to the agenda must add such items as soon as possible after receipt of the agenda. It is preferably not to wait until the date of the meeting to add items or address concerns under the agenda item "adoption of the agenda", although this is allowed for emergencies. The golden rule is that the more that can be done prior to the meeting, the more quality time can be allocated to valuable discussion at the meeting, provided that everyone has at least read through their documentation and are prepared for the meeting. Agendas must indicate start and ending times and time slots in-between where necessary.

5. CUT-OFF DATES FOR COMMENTS ON DOCUMENTS

If in terms of the action lists (described below) action items are allocated to specific persons, those persons must adhere to the timelines indicated on the action list. If a written report is due "at" the next meeting, this entails that the report should be ready 7 days before the next meeting to be distributed with the agenda.

6. ARRIVE EARLY

If this is not possible, at least arrive promptly at the scheduled time at the latest - but never late. Do not assume that the beginning of a meeting will be delayed until all those planning to attend are present. If you arrive late, you risk missing valuable information and lose the chance to provide your input. Also, you should not expect others to fill you in during or after the meeting; everyone is busy, and those who were conscientious enough to arrive on time should not have to recap the meeting for you.

People hate to be kept waiting and many see it as a sign of contempt and disrespect. Being punctual says a lot about you. It reveals your integrity, shows your humility and discipline, but most importantly, shows your respect for others and their time.

7. START MEETINGS AND PRESENTATION SLOTS ON TIME

The Chairperson of any meeting must start the meeting on time.

If someone only needs to attend a particular segment of the meeting, he/she must be informed of his/her exact time slot by the meeting organiser. Such person must be accommodated by the Chair at the pre-arranged time slot, even if the agenda is running late, so that the person does not have to wait outside the meeting for an inordinately long time period that leaves him/her with the impression that the organisation has weak time management and is disrespectful towards invited speakers and their time.

8. RUN AND END MEETINGS ON TIME

Stick to the agenda. Each agenda item should have a time limit. If you are going over the set time for a certain item, make one of the following choices:

- Put the item on the "matters standing over" list for the agenda of the next meeting.
- If an agenda item is multi-faceted, break it down into one or two key aspects for discussion and table the remaining items on the "matters standing over" list for the agenda of the next meeting.
- The meeting can decide that the item is urgent and needs to be dealt with immediately, and agree that the other items on the agenda will have to be postponed to the next meeting.
- Organise a teleconference/ virtual meeting prior to the next meeting if required to discuss postponed items.
- Arrive at decisions on postponed matters via a Round Robin process prior to the next meeting.

Chairs are allowed to have and implement discussion ground rules. For example allow someone to "hold the floor" for a maximum of say 2 minutes, and enforce it with a timer/appointed timekeeper for the meeting. Or determine that one speaker may only be allowed the floor twice on a certain topic. Set these rules out clearly at the beginning of the discussion. This will prevent time wasting and talking the topic to death.

9. COME PREPARED

Attendees must come to the meeting with an understanding and knowledge of all meeting topics, derived from the material distributed at least a week prior to the meeting. **I.e. READ the documents distributed prior to the meeting BEFORE arriving at the meeting.** This prevents the asking of questions on information already provided and contributes to the respect of everyone's valuable time.

If you were requested to complete a report for discussion at the next meeting, supply it to the responsible staff members in time for distribution – i.e. at least **7 days before** the meeting, so that it can be circulated with the agenda. At the meeting you should be prepared to answer questions on your report from the other participants who have at that stage read your report. If you need to do a PowerPoint presentation, have the presentation ready on the computer used for meeting presentation and on a USB device as backup.

10. ABSTAIN FROM ELECTRONICS

When you're attending a meeting, you must be completely present. Meetings are not a mere social gathering; they're held for a reason and their outcomes affect the entire organization. That's why you need to give them all your attention and put any distractions aside. Although your mobile phone might not be a source of distraction for you, for example, it could be one for others. Your mobile phone should therefore be put on silent mode. Don't watch sports games on your iPad or laptop during a meeting. Don't do other work or do study assignments on your laptop or iPad during a meeting.

11. DO NOT INTERRUPT

Hold your comments to the speaker until the Chair asks for comments, unless the Chair has encouraged open discourse throughout the meeting. Do not interrupt. Conversation during a meeting is disruptive to other attendees and inconsiderate of the speaker. Speak in turn. When asking a question it is more appropriate to raise your hand than to blurt out your question. The Chair needs to acknowledge everyone and you will be provided an opportunity – await your turn.

Be Patient and Calm. Do not fidget, drum your fingers, tap your pen, flip through or read materials not concerning the meeting, start whispering to the person next to you, or otherwise act in a disruptive manner.

12. KEEP YOUR QUESTIONS BRIEF

When asking questions, be succinct and clear. If your question is detailed, break it into parts or several questions. But be sure to ask only one question at a time; others may have questions as well.

13. PAY ATTENTION

Listen to the issues the speaker addresses, the questions from the attendees, and the answers provided. You do not want to waste meeting time asking a question that has already been asked.

Problem: People don't take meetings seriously – they arrive late, leave early, spend most of their time doodling. **Solution:** Consider meetings as WORK – a shared convictions among participants that meetings are real work and not “downtime”.

14. STAY ON TOPIC

Every topic on the agenda must be discussed individually and result in one of the following:

- (1) The topic has been noted and finalised, it does not need further attention and is removed from the agenda. (This must be minuted.)
- (2) The topic is broken into sections because it is too involved, certain sections are “parked” (see 7 above) and will stand over for a Round Robin exercise, teleconference or the next meeting. The “parked” section must appear on the next agenda under “matters standing over” and/or on the action list distributed shortly after the meeting (see below).
- (3) The remainder of the topic where it is broken into sections, or the entire topic if it is not broken into sections, must after discussion lead to a resolution. The resolution describes the action to follow. The Chair should summarise the resolution for the benefit of the minute taker at the end of the discussion of each topic.
- (4) Allocate a responsible person for any topic that needs action in terms of a resolution. Indicate this on the action list (see below) and include a deadline – i.e. when the action must be finalised.

15. ATTEND THE ENTIRE MEETING

Leave only when the meeting is adjourned. Leaving before the end of the meeting - unless absolutely necessary and unless you have prior permission - is disruptive to other attendees and inconsiderate. It also affects quorum – see Annexure A in this regard.

16. RESPOND TO ACTION ITEMS

After the meeting, be sure to complete any tasks assigned to you as expeditiously as possible; file your meeting notes or the minutes for later review or to prepare for future meetings. Do not leave your notes on the table – it indicates that they were not important to you and staff members cleaning up after you are prone to read them.

17. ACTION LIST

Staff members responsible for the meeting must distribute an action list with timelines within three days after the date of the meeting. Action list items must be addressed as set out in 16 above.

18. MINUTES

Secretariat staff members responsible for meeting minutes must distribute same within seven days from the date of the meeting, unless a number of meetings for which the staff members are responsible occur in the same week – in which case a maximum of two weeks will be allowed, keeping in mind that action lists would have been distributed within three days after the meeting.

NB: Minutes are sent out for comments and corrections and must be returned to the staff members with such comments and corrections as soon as possible, to avoid a waste of time at the next meeting. Comments on minutes should NOT be held over until the date of the next meeting to be discussed at that meeting – this practice is an unnecessary waste of time.

19. UNINTERESTED MEMBERS

Once attempts have been made to elicit response from a non-attending/uninterested member, the Chairperson will have to recommend to his/her Committee to resolve that such a member, showing a lack of interest in Committee matters, indicated by an intermittent or constant lack of attendance and general unresponsiveness, must be requested to resign from the Committee and be replaced by the next candidate on an election list, alternatively a co-opted member (the latter to serve on the committee until the next elective meeting as specified in the constitution. A majority decision by the Committee will decide the matter.

Annexure A

Quorate meetings - operational

Introduction and Background

The South African Medical Association trade union functions through its secretary general at the head office, being an implementing arm of the various decisions of the structures of the union. During the latter 3 months of each year a year planner will be developed, ensuring that each committee/ structure has meetings according to its own Terms of Reference guided by the constitution and, where possible, meetings do not overlap. This is done to ensure that full secretariat support can be provided and to ensure that individuals who are part of more than one structure/committee have no risk of having more than one meeting in a particular time slot. The year planner must be officially approved by the national executive committee.

The Secretariat staff members provide support by ensuring that notices of the meetings are sent out timeously, that agendas and minutes are distributed as soon as they become

available as well as making all the necessary meeting arrangements (travel and accommodation) for members.

Practical Realities

The members of SAMATU committees/Structures are professionals – they are practicing employed doctors, whether it be in the public space or in private. In some instances, they are attached to academic institutions. As a result of the day-to-day activities of doctors, it is not always possible to be certain a full year in advance whether meetings can be attended or not. When the secretariat arranges meetings and sends notifications between 2 weeks and a month in advance, the secretariat verifies that the meeting is quorate (50% of the members of the meeting). If a meeting is not quorate, alternative dates are agreed upon by the members of the meeting. Even though all due care and diligence is placed to ensure that all members of committees/structures are aware of the meeting date, time, and location, it does still happen that a meeting that was thought to be quorate turns out not to be. This is completely understandable – bona fide professional and personal emergencies do occur. Should a meeting exist without being quorate, the following are the effects on the meeting:

1. Minutes of previous meetings cannot be approved.
2. No resolutions can be passed.
3. Since there will be less than 50% of members present, these meetings will then consist of, at most, a chairperson and 1 member. Unofficial members (being individuals that are part of the secretariat) will also be present. In essence, the meeting will be a dialogue and carry no weight.
4. The secretariat cannot be given a legitimate instruction to carry on with projects as there was no quorum to agree on project definition.
5. Cost:
 1. Travel and accommodation cost for a meeting that turns out to be non-quorate can be seen as fruitless expenditure. When a meeting is called on another date, these costs need to be incurred again;
 2. Honoraria are paid to members that attended a meeting that has no legal standing, can take no decisions or resolutions;
 3. Lunch/platters have been paid for, taking into account the number of individuals that will be present
 4. Members of the committee might have arranged locums for their practices for the duration of the meeting at personal cost
 5. Members of the secretariat that attended the meeting after hours and over weekends get overtime. This overtime, although identified as time-off (meaning it has no direct cash expense) still has a financial effect – should a

staff member resign then the organization is liable to pay out the leave that was not taken.

6. Members that did attend the meeting through personal and/or financial sacrifice are left frustrated by the course of events. Similarly, staff of the secretariat that made the preparations to prepare and attend the meetings also made sacrifices (in the event of evening or weekend meetings)
7. Even if a member joins halfway through the meeting, thereby making the meeting quorate, it provides challenges to the chairperson of the meeting. It impacts on the following:
 1. The agenda flow is affected:
 - a. minutes of the previous meeting can only be approved once the meeting is quorate
 - b. Areas of discussion must be moved to the latter part of the meeting in the hope that the meeting becomes quorate and resolutions and decisions can be passed
 - c. Only items for noting can be discussed
 2. It is a natural consequence that the chairperson will allow more discussion in areas (and even allow discussions in the items that are for noting only) in the hope that the meeting becomes quorate. This has the effect that the meeting duration is longer than is required (directly impacting on cost as per point 5.5 above.

Proposal

This proposal aims to ensure that all meetings that are scheduled are quorate. Furthermore, expenses incurred thus will be justified and productivity of meetings are ensured. It is proposed that:

1. When meetings are arranged and verified by the secretariat the number of attendees are required to be quorum +1 member. E.g. if a meeting has 6 members, at least 5 need to confirm that they will attend (the quorum being three). This will allow for one person to develop a professional or personal emergency without affecting the meeting.
2. Meetings that are not quorate at the start of the meeting should be allowed to continue for a maximum of 50% of the allotted time slot. It remains the chairperson's prerogative to abort the meeting immediately if there is no indication that any additional members will join. If the meeting is not quorate at 50% of the designated

time, the meeting must be aborted. This will ensure that costs as per point 5 below is limited.

3. Honoraria payments

In the event that a meeting (which was quorate + 1 member when arranged) is not quorate at any point during the meeting, the members responsible for it not being quorate will not receive a honorarium.

4. The member(s) that did not attend the meeting (although having indicated that they will attend) must send a written apology to the meeting members and the Secretariat within 7 days of the scheduled meeting time. If this does not occur, 50% of the honoraria of the next meeting of that committee member will be withheld from that member(s). This is in order to compensate for the physical costs incurred to arrange the meeting and the other members' wasted time.

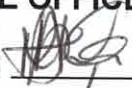
5. Secretariat

In terms of the Labour Relations Act and Basic Conditions of Employment Act, there is no remedy for any employer organization to withhold overtime leave when an arranged meeting is not quorate. SAMATU will only be able to limit the cost as per point 2 above.

Resolution

It is resolved that:

1. The secretariat will confirm the meeting date and time as being duly constituted only when a quorum + 1 member has indicated their attendance
2. Meetings that are not quorate should not extend beyond 50% of the allotted time
3. A member causing the meeting to not be quorate without prior apology will not receive an honorarium for a meeting that was not quorate at any point during the meeting and will forfeit 50% of his/her honoraria for the next meeting.
4. Members that did not attend the meeting after having indicated attendance will send a written apology to the committee members and the secretariat.
5. Members that did not send a written apology for non-attendance as per point 4 will also forfeit 50% of the next committee meeting honoraria.
6. Additional punitive costs like travel and accommodation refunds may be sought by the organization from the responsible (absent) members of a meeting. This is in the case of arrangements already made and a member is absent without a reasonable apology.

CONTROLLED BY: COMPLIANCE OFFICER SIGNATURE:  DATE: <u>2024/02/27</u>	APPROVED BY: GENERAL SECRETARY SIGNATURE:  DATE: <u>27-02-2024</u>
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DOCUMENT CONTROL SHEET			
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