

Method of work of the governing bodies

Report by the Secretariat

1. At its 135th session, in May 2014, the Executive Board discussed the outcomes of the Sixty-seventh World Health Assembly and Board members requested that the Secretariat make recommendations for improving the work of the governing bodies at its next session.¹

2. The method of work of the governing bodies remains under discussion as part of the continuing work on WHO reform. The discussions have highlighted the need to strengthen the strategic role of the governing bodies, as well as to increase their inclusiveness, transparency and efficiency. The Executive Board and the Health Assembly have already taken steps towards reforming their methods of work, as outlined in the table below.

	Reform	Implementation initiated or planned	Reference
Management of the agenda			
1	Include in the criteria for inclusion of additional items on the agenda the categories for priority setting in the draft twelfth general programme of work: the current health situation, the needs of individual countries; internationally agreed instruments; the existence of evidence-based and cost effective interventions; and the comparative advantage of WHO	As of the Executive Board at its 132nd session	Decision WHA65(9)
2	Require that explanatory memoranda stipulated by Rule 9 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board take into account the criteria established by the Executive Board in resolution EB121.R1, and identify linkages to the general programme of work and the programme budget	As of the Executive Board at its 135th session	Decision EB134(3)
3	Require that supporting statements stipulated by Rule 10 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board on proposals of an urgent nature take into account the criteria established by the Executive Board in resolution EB121.R1, and include an explanation of the nature of the urgency, as well as potential risks of deferral or exclusion	Upon receipt of the next proposal of an urgent nature	Decision EB134(3)

¹ See the summary records of the Executive Board at its 135th session, first meeting, section 5 (document EB135/2014/REC/1).

	Reform	Implementation initiated or planned	Reference
4	Require that the explanatory memoranda and supporting statements be provided to the Officers and members of the Executive Board, and be made available on the WHO web-based platform to all Member States and Associate Members, and that the minutes of the meetings of the Officers of the Board under Rule 8 be made available on that platform to all Member States and Associate Members	As of the Executive Board at its 135th session	Decision EB134(3)
Minimizing the late submission of draft resolutions/decisions			
5	Implement deadlines for proposals for draft resolutions	As of the Executive Board at its 135th session; further implementation at the Sixty-eighth World Health Assembly	Decision EB134(3) and resolution WHA67.2
6	Require that proposals to be discussed or put to a vote at any meeting of the Board be circulated at least 24 hours in advance	As of the Executive Board at its 135th session	Decision EB134(3)
Management of the session			
7	Use a traffic light system during the sessions of the Executive Board, as well as during the plenary and main committees of the Health Assembly	As of the Executive Board at its 135th session	Decisions WHA65(9) and EBSS2(2)
8	Allow for consideration of progress reports by the Health Assembly only	As of the Executive Board at its 136th session and the Sixty-eighth World Health Assembly	WHA67.2
9	Introduce webcasting of public meetings of the governing bodies	In 2015	Decision EB134(3) and resolution WHA67.2
10	Rent a cost-effective and secure electronic voting system for the nomination and appointment of the Director-General	The system is due to be tested in January 2016	Resolution WHA67.2
11	Minimize the use of paper documents in governing body meetings	Measures taken include the issuance of summary and verbatim records in electronic format only; the provision of access to documents through Quick Response codes; introduction of agendas containing hyperlinks; availability of conference papers on the WHO website; ongoing work on the development of an application for mobile devices	Decision EB134(3)

	Reform	Implementation initiated or planned	Reference
Strengthening capacities to govern			
12	Improve capacity-building and training for Officers and members of the Executive Board	The first training was provided during the 135th session of the Executive Board; a guide to the Board was produced and distributed in all official languages in May 2013 and revised in May 2014; the Secretariat has been engaging the Chairmen of the Board and of the main committees of the Health Assembly earlier in order to brief them on the agenda and key issues	Decision EB134(3)

3. With a view to continuing to improve the methods of work of the governing bodies, the Board may also wish to consider the proposals set out below.

PROPOSALS TO IMPROVE THE METHODS OF WORK OF THE GOVERNING BODIES

Promoting manageable agendas

4. Over the past few years the issue of ensuring a manageable agenda at sessions of the Executive Board has been discussed extensively by the governing bodies, in particular by the Board, and has already been considered in past reports on the methods of work of the governing bodies.¹ The Board and the Health Assembly have already taken a number of decisions in this regard.² The challenge is to avoid overcrowding the agendas of the governing bodies so that strategic decision-making can take place while respecting the sovereign right of Member States to address issues of concern to them within the governing bodies, including by proposing agenda items. Only by finding an acceptable balance between those two demands will proposed revisions of the methods of work be sustainable and effective.

5. In the short term, efforts to promote a manageable agenda may be best advanced by robust application by the Officers of the Board of the criteria approved by the Health Assembly in decision WHA65(9) for proposed new agenda items for the Executive Board. Modest but important reductions in the number of agenda items may also be achieved through the reform of reporting requirements.

¹ See, most recently, documents EB132/5 Add.3, EB133/3 and EB134/6.

² Most recently, resolution EB121.R1 and decisions WHA65(9) and EB134(3).

Reform of reporting requirements

6. Approximately 80% of the items on the agenda of governing body meetings are the result of constitutional mandates and reporting requirements contained in previous resolutions or decisions of the Health Assembly or Executive Board. In order to reduce the pressure on governing body meeting agendas, the Secretariat recommends that, as much as possible, a more flexible approach to reporting requirements be adopted. In addition, where it is necessary that reporting requirements be contained in resolutions and decisions, the Secretariat recommends that they be limited to a maximum of three biennial reports over a period of six years.

Encourage early discussion on draft resolutions

7. The governing bodies have introduced a deadline for the introduction of draft resolutions of the first day of a regular session of the Health Assembly or the Executive Board.¹ In order to ensure sufficient time for consideration of such proposals, the Secretariat recommends that draft resolutions be shared with Member States as early as possible and that consultations on such proposals begin in advance of the relevant governing body meeting, through means that include the following:

- (a) informal circulation of draft resolutions, including by email or through the WHO web-based platform;
- (b) organization of informal consultations through face-to-face meetings and/or the use of online tools;
- (c) immediately following their formal submission, the processing of proposed draft resolutions and the posting thereof as conference papers on the WHO website as early as seven days before the opening of the session of the governing body concerned, rather than waiting until the adoption of the agenda as is the current practice.²

Establish a webpage for statements

8. Although the introduction of the traffic light system has had a significant impact in saving time during governing body sessions, on some occasions delegations have reduced the length of their statements to fit within the allotted time and requested to submit their full statements to the Secretariat. In this regard, the Secretariat proposes to establish a webpage where such statements could be posted temporarily during the relevant session of the governing body, allowing delegations to listen to any abbreviated statements during the meetings and have the opportunity to review the longer statements posted on the website. Such statements would not be included in the summary records of the meeting.

Timely distribution of documentation

9. The increase in the number of agenda items has been accompanied by a sharp increase in the number of pre-session documents, which reached a record of 73 for the 132nd session of the Board, compared with 56 for the 124th session. The number of pre-session documents dropped to 68 for the

¹ See decision EB134(3) and resolution WHA67.2.

² If the relevant item is not retained on the agenda, then the conference paper would be withdrawn from the website.

Board's 134th session, but still remains high. The high volume of documentation contributes to its late arrival. In addition, late documentation is sometimes inevitable; this is the case, for example, for reports on intergovernmental processes held close to the date of the governing body session. Nevertheless, steps can be taken to better ensure timely distribution of documents. To this end, the Secretariat will apply document word limits more rigorously, and will provide clearer and more specific direction on the action required and guidance needed by the governing body.

Management of the session

10. The number of side events held during the Health Assembly has steadily increased, reaching a record of 47 side events during the Sixty-seventh World Health Assembly in May 2014, which lasted six days (there were also 65 side events during the Sixty-sixth World Health Assembly, which lasted 10 days). For delegations, this increase has intensified the challenge of participating both in the main committees and other official meetings, as well as in side events of importance to their respective governments. For the Secretariat, it has strained efforts to effectively allocate finite resources, such as meeting rooms, interpretation services, and technical and logistical support, as these resources are used both for the official meetings of the Health Assembly and side events. This has had an impact on the Secretariat's capacity to respond to requests by Member States to provide technical and logistical support to one or more drafting groups with little advance notice, while at the same time supporting side events, many of which Member States have devoted time and resources to organizing.

11. Furthermore, the Secretariat has observed that the increase in the number of side events has been accompanied by a growing trend towards events organized by Member States in collaboration with nongovernmental organizations, including those not in official relations with WHO. This trend poses a particular challenge, as organizations not in official relations with WHO are not among the registered participants of the Health Assembly and therefore are not allowed access to the Palais des Nations, Geneva, to attend side events.

12. Proposals aimed at addressing the issues described above include:

- (a) to hold a one-day session in advance of the Health Assembly for side events and open it to a broader group of stakeholders; the side events could be organized around proposals received or particular themes, and employ various formats, such as face-to-face panel or round table discussions, either held sequentially or in parallel, and web-based forums
- (b) to pass on the actual costs of organizing side events, (such as those for the room and technical and logistical support) to the organizers
- (c) to introduce a limit on the number of side events, such as three per region and/or no more than two per day.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

13. The Board is invited to note the report and provide further guidance, particularly in relation to the following: (a) managing the number of agenda items for the Executive Board; (b) reforming reporting requirements; (c) encouraging early discussion on draft resolutions; (d) establishing a website for statements; and (e) managing Health Assembly side events.

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