

Review of best practices for improving governance

1. The present review of best practices in respect of the management of governing body meetings is distilled from the practices of 28 organizations within the United Nations system, together with one international and one intergovernmental organization. These practices have been compiled from the results of a survey conducted by the WHO Secretariat in August 2023.

2. **Subcommittees:** numerous organizations have established committees dedicated to financial oversight. Some organizations have implementation and compliance committees, which are dedicated to ensuring adherence to conventions or standards. Some organizations establish technical or specialized committees aligned with their mandates.

- One United Nations specialized agency has advisory subsidiary bodies like the Technical Coordination Committee and the Policy Advisory Committee, which provide recommendations to higher-level bodies.
- Another United Nations specialized agency has established an Audit Committee and an Evaluation Committee, sanctioned by the Executive Board. These committees meet formally at least four times a year, with their meetings scheduled before Executive Board meetings to ensure the timely processing and submission of committee reports.
- To maximize meeting efficiency, the executive body of one United Nations specialized agency fully utilizes its subsidiary bodies. Most agenda items must first be considered by the relevant subsidiary body, which then presents a concise report (usually 1–2 pages) to the Council, summarizing its discussions and the recommended decision text for adoption by the executive body. This approach minimizes debate time in the executive body since consensus has often been reached during preliminary discussions in the subsidiary bodies.

3. **Development of agendas:** organizations determine agenda items through various methods, including standing items outlined in rules of procedure, mandates from previous governing body meetings and proposals from Member States or secretariats.

- Some organizations maintain preset agendas but allow flexibility to add new items, focusing on alignment with long-term goals and crisis management.
- In one United Nations specialized agency, Member States' proposals to add items to the agenda require agreement from other members of the executive body through a "silence procedure", whereby the proposal is circulated by email and, if there are no objections, the item is added to the agenda. Novel items are grouped sequentially with related or relevant existing agenda items.
- Another organization uses the standing agenda item "Other matters" to raise additional issues of interest.
- One United Nations specialized agency imposes a cap on the number of items considered each week during governing body meetings.

4. **Debate and discussion of agendas:** to facilitate effective discussions, organizations often use structured documents, guiding questions and time limits. Detailed background documents and draft resolutions or decisions play a pivotal role in guiding discussions. Initial discussions and consensus-building are delegated to subsidiary bodies or specialized committees to streamline agenda management.

- In one organization, executive body documents contain decisions prepared by the Secretariat in the form of short bullet action points, which can be modified during debates.
- In another United Nations specialized agency, all conclusions, decisions and resolutions of the governing bodies are discussed by Member States in informal consultations/Main Committee before being adopted by consensus.

5. **Management of the session:** the role of the chair or presiding officer is crucial for maintaining the conduct of governing body meetings. Some organizations categorize agenda items and group several together for discussion.

6. **Role of the chair:**

- In one United Nations specialized agency, the presiding officer “may call a speaker to order if [her/his] remarks are not relevant to the subject under discussion”. Member States are reminded in writing prior to the meeting and upon registering for the list of speakers that interventions should be strictly item-related, with no scope for “general statements”.
- Another organization relies on the firmness of the Chair or President to set the tone for discussions on each item.

7. **Categorizing agendas:**

- One organization categorizes agenda items into “A” and “B” points, whereby “A” points are items likely to be adopted by the executive body without debate, and “B” points are items for discussion or decision.
- Another organization categorizes agenda items into three categories (“for approval”, “for consideration” and “for information”) to prioritize discussion at meetings of the executive body.
- One United Nations specialized agency, when dealing with reporting requirements for items meant solely for information and not requiring a decision by the governing body, uploads them to the executive body website for “noting” by Member States.

8. **Report by the head or principal of the organization:** the majority of organizations manage the report of the head or principal of the organization to the governing bodies through an overarching report. Out of the 28 organizations surveyed, 10 submit one overarching report, five submit consolidated reports on several agenda items and five submit individual reports on each agenda item.

9. **Document management:** word limits for documents vary based on document type or category, with some organizations emphasizing clarity, conciseness and succinctness, while others set word or page-based limits that are strictly enforced.

- In one organization, a budget envelope is included in the approved workplan and budget. It sets a limit for translating documentation within the approved budget. Information documents are not edited and are issued in English only.

10. **Managing late submissions:** organizations employ various strategies when dealing with authors who miss internal deadlines for document submission, including reminder systems and continuous monitoring to ensure adherence to deadlines.

- One organization requires authors to justify tardiness to the head of the organization.
- Another organization adds footnotes or specific markers to indicate late submissions.

- Several organizations may choose to postpone agenda items or discussions until the following session if documentation does not meet specified deadlines. One organization has established “lead time” periods for document reviews, with non-compliance leading to the postponement of agenda items until the next session.

11. **Participation in governing body meetings:** most organizations conduct on-boarding/induction sessions for new governing body members, offering a mix of online and in-person briefings and workshops.

- One organization conducts a comprehensive one-day session for the members of the executive body involving key personnel from the Secretariat to provide an in-depth understanding of its operations and objectives.

ANNEX

LIST OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Category	Name
United Nations entities	United Nations Secretariat
	IAEA
	IOM
	UNAIDS
	UNCTAD
	UNEP
	UNFPA
	UNHCR
	UNICEF
	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
	UNODC
WFP	
United Nations specialized agencies	FAO
	ICAO
	IFAD
	ILO
	IMF
	ITU
	UNIDO
	WIPO
	World Bank Group
WMO	
United Nations treaty secretariats	Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions
	Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
	Secretariat of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

International organization	OECD
Intergovernmental organization	European Space Agency

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