

COVID-19 AFFILIATE PLANNING – ELECTION MEETINGS

20th March 2020

The evolving Coronavirus pandemic poses a unique challenge for co-operatives for whom member participation, democratic control and the election process are fundamental.

For most co-operatives the rules will prescribe a quite detailed election process along the following lines:

1. Vacancies arising on rotational retirement
2. Opening of nomination process
3. Closing nominations and confirming qualifying candidates to electorate
4. Convening of election meeting (before, or as an agenda item at, the Annual General Meeting)
5. Assumption of seat, and responsibilities, by successful candidate

Your rules will, almost certainly, not provide for a significant 'stalling' or 'pausing' of this process.

These are however exceptional circumstances we find ourselves in. When mass meetings are being discouraged and social distancing is a public health priority there are obvious risks in convening election meetings (and the canvassing that typically precedes them). As a corporate entity you and your committee/boards have a duty to safeguard the interests of the entity itself, its members and - in these times quite evidently - the public good.

Likely attendance numbers will vary from co-operative to co-operative. And it is for each board/committee to weigh up the risks as they assess them to be.

That said it is ICOS recommendation that election meetings and related physical canvassing be halted as a matter of urgency.

It is our view that where a co-operative follows the recent advice to postpone the holding of its Annual General Meeting until such time as the pandemic eases or lifts, it will be feasible to:

- a) **Commence** the nominations process later and with ample time in advance of the AGM, **where as of today the process has not yet started**;

or

- b) **Re-convene** (what effectively amounts to a 'paused') process later and with ample time in advance of the AGM, **where as of now you have either (i) opened nominations, (ii) closed them or (iii) issued notice** for an intended election meeting in the coming days/weeks.

If you fall into category (b) above it will be necessary to communicate with candidates and members alike and ICOS is already in the process of assisting co-operatives on the mechanics of doing just that.

Irrespective of your particular election circumstances, or board /committee resolutions on same, at this time please do not hesitate to contact ICOS if we can be of any assistance.