

**GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING A MOTION TO  
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (GA) ANNUAL MEETINGS**

**1. Who can submit motions?**

- A. Congregations, District Associations or Affiliated Societies on condition that they are supported by a majority of their governing bodies and evidenced by a signed copy of the appropriate minute.
- B. At least twelve individual Full Members of the Assembly (ministers, lay pastors, lay leaders on the appropriate roll; Honorary Members; Honorary GA Officers and members of the Executive Committee).
- C. The Executive Committee on its own authority.

**2. What is the procedure for submitting a motion?**

Motions should be submitted to the Executive Committee, via the Chief Officer:

- A. in writing.
- B. with the names of the formal proposer and seconder (Note: The people speaking to the motion do not have to have the right to vote, but must have the right to speak or be granted the right to speak by the Chair).
- C. at least fifty-six days before the first day of the Meetings for ordinary motions.  
  
***[In 2024 the deadline for regular motions is 5pm on 08 February 2024]***
- D. for Motions requiring constitutional change, alterations or additions may be proposed by the Executive Committee on giving three months' notice, or by not less than four Congregations, Societies or District Associations on the Roll of the Assembly on giving six months' notice.
- E. motions must be accompanied by a background paper. This is essential if congregations are to have fully informed discussion on the motions.
- F. Motions on matters of United Kingdom law or public policy should, where appropriate, take account of the separate legal provision of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

### 3. What types of motions are there?

There are three main types of motion:

A. **Motions** (often for clarity referred to as 'ordinary' or 'regular' motions).

B. **Emergency motions**: these are about issues of public concern which have arisen since the announced closure date for the acceptance of (ordinary) motions.

**Emergency Motions** must be submitted:

- A. at the earliest opportunity
- B. in writing
- C. with the names of a proposer and a seconder

They must be submitted to the Chief Officer either before the Meetings or at the earliest possible moment during the Meetings.

The Steering Committee will be asked to vet the motion, including whether it meets the criteria to be an emergency motion, and assist in refining wording and grammar as necessary.

The Chair will seek permission from the Meeting, without prior discussion, to admit an emergency motion to the agenda. A two-thirds majority of those present and voting is required.

### C. **Administrative Motions**

**Administrative motions** are intended to facilitate the business of the General Assembly, including, but not limited to: acceptance of the Annual Report and Accounts; appointment of Officers and Auditors; the grant of honorary membership; thanks and greetings; and minor changes to the Constitution or Standing Orders. Such motions are not taken into account in the limits on the number of ordinary and emergency motions.

#### Honorary Membership:

The criteria for Honorary Membership are set by the GA Executive Committee. At the present time, the criteria are:

- 1) Nominees should be persons who have rendered long and consistent service nationally and who have thereby made a significant contribution towards the furtherance of the objectives of the General Assembly; and

- 2) Nominating bodies should include the nominee's own District Association as well as 8 other District Associations, thereby ensuring national support.

**4. I've decided to submit a motion. What should I do?**

- A. Read the latest version of Standing Orders for the Conduct of the Annual Meeting.
- B. Check to see who can submit motions (see Section 1).
- C. Check the procedure (see Section 2).
- D. Contact the Steering Committee and/or the Chief Officer to seek advice about the subject of the motion and the wording. They are also likely to know if someone else is preparing a motion on the same topic. Contact information on the current members of the Steering Group is available from the Meetings Organiser, Andrew Mason ([AMason@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:AMason@unitarian.org.uk)).
- E. Give plenty of time to do the research to prepare the background paper.
- F. Ensure motions contribute to the work and purposes of the Unitarian community.
- G. Consult as widely as possible within and without the Unitarian community to arrive at a consensus, especially with contentious or complex motions.
- H. Work with another member group of the GA to formulate and to propose the motion.

**5. How do I write a motion?**

- A. Keep the motion as simple and short as possible. Only include one topic in each motion.
- B. A numbered form is better where: a) more than one matter must be included; or b) one part of the motion depends on the acceptance of another part. This will help delegates understand the effect of any proposed amendments to the motion.
- C. Put the more general parts of the motion first and more specific parts later.
- D. If the motion is internal to the GA, the EC or GA Officers, mandatory language may be used e.g. direct or instruct. Ultimately, however, the EC are the trustees of the charity and must act in what they perceive to be the best interests of the charity.
- E. If the motion is aimed at member congregations, representative associations and affiliated societies, or to any organisation outside the Assembly e.g. H M

Government, it should use non-mandatory language e.g. recommend, request, urge, ask, encourage, call upon, thank, congratulate, deplore.

- F. Check the grammar. Make sure the motion does not contradict itself. Use short, simple sentences. Use inclusive language. Make the motion sufficiently informative but do not overdo it. Use the background paper to fill out the detail. Make it co-operative in tone rather than confrontational.
- G. Ask someone outside the drafting group to read the motion without telling them anything about it first. The Steering Committee can be used for this. Do they understand what the motion is about? Does it say to them what it says to you? If they do not understand your motion, then it is likely that others will not understand it.

## **6. How do I write a Background Paper?**

A Background Paper should:

- A. Contain additional information about why the motion is being put.
- B. Indicate the likely implications (financial or otherwise) of the motion.
- C. Contain facts rather than opinions.
- D. Not include supporting signatures.
- E. Consist of fewer than 500 words (c. one side of A4). References to other supporting information, such as webpages or publications, may be used.

## **7. What happens after my motion has been submitted?**

- A. The motion will be checked to ensure that it fulfils the Assembly rules.
- B. The Steering Committee will check it for clarity and accuracy.
- C. The proposers may be asked to make adjustments accordingly before the Meetings for major items, or at the motions workshop for minor ones.
- D. If another motion on the same topic is submitted the Steering Committee will ask the two proposers to form a composite motion.
- E. If this proves impossible one motion will be withdrawn.

## **8. What happens at the Meetings?**

The Annual Meetings detailed agenda will indicate when motions will be taken.

Proposers and seconders (P&S) should be ready, on time, to be called by the Chair.

Speakers should give their name and the capacity in which they speak.

The P&S of a motion have 6 minutes between them to speak.

It is advisable for P&S to time their speeches beforehand so as not to overrun. The timetable is invariably tight. The Assembly, by a majority of those present and voting, may allow an extension to the time in any particular case, but this would be unusual.

The proposal will be followed by debate. All other speeches have a maximum of 2 minutes.

Normally the Chair will close the debate (For exceptions see Standing Orders item 5 on Procedural Motions).

Proposers then have 2 minutes to reply following debate, at the discretion of the Chair.

It is advisable to take note of points made during debate that you will wish to respond to.

A vote will then be taken and the result announced by the Chair.

If passed, the motion then becomes a resolution to be acted upon and becomes the property of the General Assembly.

## **9. Selection of Motions**

There is a general limit of FOUR 'ordinary' motions and ONE emergency motion – exceptional circumstances may allow for one more emergency motion.

If there are more than four 'ordinary' motions a secret ballot of all voting members will be held, usually at the beginning of the Meetings, to determine which FOUR motions will go on the agenda.

If there is more than one emergency motion submitted before the Meetings a secret ballot of all voting members will be held, usually at the beginning of the Meetings, to determine which ONE emergency motion will be carried forward to the meeting. This will still need a 2/3 majority vote to go on to the agenda, as will any unopposed emergency motion.

A policy is in place to handle emergency motions submitted during the Meetings – this takes into account whether any emergency motions have already been submitted.

**10. What is the role of the Steering Committee?**

- A. The committee comprises three people who respond to questions on the procedure for the conduct of the Meetings.
- B. Before and during the Meetings they offer advice on the formulation of motions. They usually hold two workshops to help and advise proposers; one prior to the date for submission of motions (usually in January), and one a few weeks before the Meetings to clarify any wording and ambiguities or settle any disagreements.
- C. During the Meetings reference is made to them by the Chair, if necessary, with regard to questions on the procedure for the conduct of the Meetings.

Amended December 2023