

BMA co-chairing guidance

May 2022



Introduction

Co-chairing committees, subcommittees, and other groups can be an effective way of sharing a heavy workload and using the strengths and expertise of two people. The arrangement is obviously different to having a single chair. It is therefore important that it is clear to everyone involved how co-chairing should work in practice.

Positions eligible for co-chairing

The bye-laws of the association state that committees/boards, in advance of or at the first meeting, shall elect its chair(s) and deputy chairs(s) from amongst its voting membership (unless otherwise stated in the articles and bye-laws and/or the committee has standing orders that have received approval from the organisation committee to elect prior to the start of the new session). Each of the Chair and Deputy Chair roles may be shared by up to two members as co-chairs or co-deputy chairs.¹ Under this guidance conferences may also elect co-chairs unless prohibited by conference standing orders.

The references to co-chairs below also apply to deputy chairs and chair of conference.

Number of co-chairs

There can be a maximum of two co-chairs for each elected officer position.

Nomination

Prospective co-chairs must stand together and will be considered as a single candidate for the purpose of the election process. Individuals may not nominate themselves for one half of a co-chairing arrangement in the hope that they will find a co-chairing partner before the election. A candidate standing as a co-chair with another member may not also nominate themselves for Chair or another co-chairing arrangement in the same election.

The candidates shall be nominated by themselves, provided that self-nomination is not precluded by that committee or board's standing orders.²

The names and BMA membership numbers of both co-chair nominees should be submitted on the same nomination on the online nominations and elections system. Further information on this process will be available in the election guide.

Election

All candidates in co-chair arrangements standing to be chair, will share the same time period for hustings as a single candidate and will co-produce a single candidate statement within the word count for a single candidate as outlined in committee standing orders.

¹ Bye-law 94.

² Bye-law 95.

Replacement or additional representatives on committees

Some committee standing orders enable the body who elect a representative to the committee to send a replacement representative(s) to be a member of the committee during any period where the original representative(s) is/are elected as Chair or Co-chairs. For example, a region can appoint a replacement representative to the committee if the chair is a regional representative.

If the chair is elected to the committee by the representative body at the ARM, the replacement representative will be the person who polled the next highest number of votes at election.

There will be a replacement representative for each co-chair ie a co-chairing partnership will have two replacement representatives on the committee for their respective seats. Their replacement representatives have one vote each.

For committees where there is no replacement representative arrangement for committee chairs outlined in standing orders, co-chairs will retain their individual voting rights of the seat that they are directly elected to.

Voting

Committee standing orders will outline the voting rights of chairs. In situations where a chair has a vote in their own right, or has a casting vote, that vote is shared by a co-chairing partnership.

Co-chairs should agree between themselves in advance of a meeting how they will agree to use their vote and inform the secretariat in advance which co-chair will be responsible for casting the vote. This is particularly important when electronic voting systems are being used.

Division of duties

It is essential that there are clear lines of communication between the co-chairs and the secretariat to ensure that both co-chairs speak with one voice on committee and association matters.

Ideally, candidates for the position should consider working arrangements when agreeing to stand together prior to nomination. At the start of the term of office, both co-chairs must agree working arrangements including allocation of duties.

As a minimum, the following points should be agreed and clearly documented:

- both co-chairs have equal status
- decision-making and how that will be split appropriately to avoid delays in getting sign off from two people and whether both co-chairs will authorise or sign letters
- how co-chairs will communicate and update each other and plan next steps
- how information is shared with the secretariat
- arrangements for chairing meetings for example whether they will chair alternate meetings or chair specific agenda items as per agreed division of duties

- arrangements for attending other internal and external meetings (see paragraph below on attendance at meetings)
- if a co-chair attends a meeting alone, how and when they will provide a report of the meeting to the other co-chair
- how to manage situations where there is a difference of opinion, avoiding public disagreement and conflicting statements – it is a good idea to agree a resolution process with the committee officers and secretariat to manage differences (see paragraph below on managing conflict)

The role profile of the [committee chair](#) and [chairing a meeting](#) documents contain further guidance on the wider roles of the committee chair and co-chairs.

Attendance at meetings

The principle of co-chairing is to share the responsibility of committee work. It is imperative that having co-chairs does not ‘double’ the voice of the chair at both committee meetings or while attending other meetings on behalf of the committee. Members should remain mindful that co-chairs share a single seat and this should be used as a guideline for their joint involvement in meetings.

Chairing committee meetings as co-chairs

Co-chairs cannot simultaneously chair the same item of a meeting. Prior to the meeting, co-chairs may agree which items each of them shall chair, to ensure that the content of the meeting is appropriately divided. This may be done on preference, experience, for example if one co-chair is responsible for the workstream the item relates to, or to avoid a conflict of interest.

The co-chair not chairing the item may wish to contribute to the debate with their own views and answer questions if relevant, but must not enhance the opinion of the officers with the intention of directing a particular decision to be made. If a co-chair is not chairing the item due to a conflict of interest, they should consider not participating in the debate.

In committees with backfill arrangements, where a co-chair is not chairing an item, they can only participate in the same capacity as an observer and may not vote. For guidance on the role of an observer, please see part one of the BMA standardised standing orders.

Attending other committee meetings as a co-chair

When attending other committee meetings, only one co-chair should attend in the capacity as chair of their committee. If the other co-chair is also attending the other committee meeting, for example as a member of the other committee or has been invited to provide expertise, it is important that the co-chairs do not multiply the voice of the committee they chair together. As individuals, the co-chairs must represent in the capacity they have been requested to in the given setting.

Costs

To manage committee costs, the meetings that the co-chairs attend together should be limited to meetings of the committee they are elected to as co-chairs, executive committees and meetings where one or more of the co-chairs are also entitled to attend in their own

right or through separate office. As mentioned above they will have one vote between them as co-chairs.

Attendance at BMA internal meetings, as reps on other BMA committee meetings, external conferences and business meetings should be divided between the co-chairs according to their responsibilities. The Bye-laws state that standing committee or board chairs have an ex-officio seat on every subcommittee of the committee.³ Under a co-chair arrangement, only one co-chair should attend a subcommittee meeting (with the exception of executive committees as above).

There may be limited occasions when there are benefits in having both co-chairs present such as meetings with ministers and other senior figures specifically about the committee's priorities. In all cases, pre-approval must be obtained from the committee's secretariat in line with the honoraria policy.

Outside of these core functions and exceptional arrangements, only one honoraria should be provided for a given meeting in a co-chair arrangement.

Where the chair of a committee has an ex-officio seat on a committee and one of the co-chairs already has a seat on that committee through a separate representative route, both may attend the committee meetings. If the co-chair that has a dual representative role attends, they should make clear in what capacity they are speaking in debates. Generally, efforts should be made to ensure that a co-chair arrangement does not incur additional costs. It should not be more expensive than a standard chair arrangement.

Where an individual is a member of a committee through a co-chair arrangement, such as regional committee chairs attending a UK branch of practice, they should agree between themselves how they will manage attendance at the BoP committee meetings. Only one should attend each meeting and attendance cannot be shared on the day (eg. one person attending the morning and one person attending in the afternoon). When individuals in a co-chair arrangement consider standing for a membership of a subcommittee, executive or other position (elected or not), they would need to stand as a joint candidate as they hold a single seat. Similarly, only one should attend each meeting and attendance cannot be shared on the day. Both co-chair partners cannot hold separate seats or positions, unless they are elected separately to different voting seats.

Managing conflict

If the co-chairs are unable to agree on a course of action having followed the agreed resolution process, they should, in the first instance seek the advice of the deputy or deputies. If this fails to resolve the situation, they should consult the committee's executive, and if that does not resolve the issue, they should consult the committee. The decision of the committee will be binding on both co-chairs. It is the responsibility of the officers and ultimately the committee, not the secretariat, to resolve any conflict but the secretariat will offer advice and facilitate discussions.

If any member of the committee is concerned that the situation is damaging to the business or reputation of the committee, they should report these concerns to the secretariat, who

³ Bye-law 105.

will consider and advise the member as appropriate. If the member is still concerned, they will be invited to raise the issue at the next committee meeting.

Relationship breakdown

It is essential for the effective and efficient running of the committee that both co-chairs work together. If the working relationship between co-chairs breaks down or is perceived to have broken down, and the situation risks damaging the business or reputation of the committee, these concerns should be reported to the secretariat, who will consider and advise, involving chief officers as appropriate.

There are a few potential scenarios which can follow a breakdown in relationships, including:

- both co-chairs resign, and elections are set up for a new chair or co-chairs
- one co-chair resigns, leaving the remaining co-chair in post until the election of a new chair or co-chairs
- a vote of no confidence in the co-chairing partnership is called and, if successful, elections are set up for a new chair or co-chairs being elected

A final decision on the best course of action should be taken in collaboration with the committee secretariat and other elected officers. This may require discussion with chief officers or directors.

In the event that committee and other meetings need to go ahead in the absence of a chair or co-chairs, consideration should be given as to who is best placed to chair. For example, a member of the executive team could take the chair, or a chief officer. For exec and other meetings if there is a need for neutrality, for example the deputy chair/member of the executive team or a chief officer should chair.

Resignation

If one co-chair resigns before the end of the term of office, both co-chairs will be considered to have demitted office and a new chair or co-chairs must be elected at the next ordinary meeting of the committee. An extraordinary meeting of the committee to elect a new chair or co-chairs may be called, following approval from the treasurer through the committee funding request scrutiny panel, at the discretion of the remaining officers or an election held electronically in between meetings if there is a risk that waiting for the next ordinary meeting would prevent the committee from operating effectively.

The remaining co-chair will continue as sole chair until the election of a new chair or new co-chairs is held.

If the remaining co-chair wishes to continue in post as sole chair, they must be nominated and stand for election again as part of the new election process. If the remaining co-chair wishes to continue in post with a new partner, both potential co-chairs must be nominated and stand together for election.