Notes on planning for online Research Group AGMs and elections

In-person AGMs cannot go ahead this year. Research Groups are expected to hold an online AGM this year in place of their usual in-person AGM.

You need to notify us in advance of the format you are using for your AGM, and provide evidence to us afterwards that it took place.

Below we have outlined some important things to consider as you plan your online AGM. Please direct any questions to rhed@rgs.org.

What business do Research Groups need to carry out as part of their AGM?

- Elect new committee members (see more below under 'Committee elections')
- Report to your members on the work and activities of the group this year
    - In collating this, forming the basis of this year's annual reporting which you will provide to us in October
- Plan ahead for the coming year
- Engage members, hearing their thoughts and ideas to inform the Group's work

It is important to enable as many members of your group as possible to take part – it must not just be the current committee.

What format(s) do you want to use for your AGM?
The most obvious and straightforward option is to move your AGM to an online meeting at a specified time using an appropriate video-conferencing platform. This most closely replicates an in-person AGM, and is our recommended course of action for Research Groups.

However, there are important points to consider around this option, most notably around questions of access, especially if we are thinking about how to increase engagement and enable as many people as possible to participate.

- You still need to give at least 30 days' notice of the AGM to your members, including details of when and where it will take place, along with any vacancies on the committee.
- Timings - given caring and other commitments, not everyone will be able to participate at certain times. Depending on how international your membership is, you may also need to consider time zones.
    - We encourage you to choose a time that will work for the majority of your members, recognising that you can't accommodate everyone. You can also think about other ways for those who can't attend to participate, as well as ways you can make information available before and after the meeting (more on this below)
    - You are not limited to holding your online AGM during what would have been the week of AC2020 (1-4 September), but may find this is a useful period to choose. The deadline for annual reporting remains 31 October 2020, and this is a hard deadline.
- Access to necessary infrastructure – not everyone will have a good internet connection or access to sufficient data to enable them to take part.
    - Make sure people can join by audio as well as video
- The Society has a number of paid Zoom accounts which we can make available to you for hosting your AGM. If you would like to request use of one of these, please get in touch at rhed@rgs.org so we can make the arrangements.
    - We ask people to 'register' to attend
    - We will enable the waiting room and only admit those who have registered
    - We will restrict screen sharing
    - If you elect to use another platform, we ask that you make sure you are using the full extent of security measures on the video conferencing platform you are using

Enabling other ways to participate
- Producing an annual report, including draft financial reporting, and publishing these on your Research Group website ahead of the planned AGM
- Publishing your draft agenda ahead of time, including items for discussion
- Collating questions and points for discussion beforehand – use Twitter, your mailing list and other channels open to you to ask your members to contribute to this
- If you are holding elections, set the deadline for nominations a few days ahead of the AGM, and ask candidates to supply short statements which can be posted online ahead of the AGM
    o If you are using an online voting form, you can consider open voting prior to the AGM too.

See below for more detailed notes on holding an online election for any vacant committee roles.

If you have ideas for other ways to hold an online AGM, please get in touch at rhed@rgs.org to discuss these before going ahead. Remember that you **must** hold an online AGM this year.

Holding online elections for any vacant committee roles
When you give (at least) 30 days' notice of your AGM, you should also include information about any vacant committee roles, and how people can stand for election to these.

We recommend that you set the deadline for people being nominated for roles a few days ahead of the AGM. You can also ask candidates to supply a short statement about why they are standing for the role which you can add to your website so that members can view these ahead of the AGM or online voting opening.

In terms of managing the vote, there are a number of options here:
- Online voting form which goes live prior to/during the AGM, which is circulated to members (and includes a statement from those voting that they are a current member of the group), and which closes after a specified period.
- A simple show of hands during the virtual meeting, as you would for the in-person AGM (note this may raise concerns around confidentiality).
- You can ask attendees to privately message a nominated committee member (usually the Secretary) using the chat function to record their vote.
- You can use polling tools within your chosen online meeting platform.

Depending on the voting method chosen, you can announce the results during the AGM itself, or shortly afterwards. Don't forget to also complete the committee form for 2020-21 and send this to rhed@rgs.org

Additional resources
- Guidance from the Charity Commission and gov.org.uk on holding AGMs
- Zoom's own training resources (particularly this hour-long recorded training on managing meetings, which runs through key features)
- A Guide to Hosting Virtual Events on Zoom (google doc)
- Running a Zoom Meeting Protocol
- How to Prevent 'Zoombombing'