

General Meetings 101

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Definitions

If a term is in bold, there is a definition in this section or that it is defined within the document.

Executive	One of four core leadership roles in a club. The President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Secretary	General Meeting	Defined on page 1
		Quorum	Defined on page 5
		Minutes	Defined on page 14
Agenda	The written plan for a meeting, typically distributed beforehand	Acknowledgement of Country	Defined on page 4
Committee	Club leadership roles other than the Executive	Voting Rights	Defined on page 9
		Returning Officer	Defined on page 11
Alumni	A former student of La Trobe. Someone who has studied at and/or graduated from the University	Observers	Defined on page 5
		Apologies	Defined on page 6
La Trobe College Student	A student at La Trobe College Australia, which is a different organisation to La Trobe University	Motion	Defined on page 14
		Abstaining	Defined on page 9
La Trobe University Student	An individual enrolled at La Trobe University for the current semester	Proxy Vote	Defined on page 9
		Secret Ballot	Defined on page 9
Executive Handbook	A reference book with key information for club Executives, updated annually	Nominator	Defined on page 9
		Nominee	Defined on page 9
		Chairing	Defined on page 11
LTU Clubs Linktree	The fountain of all LTU Clubs knowledge! If you need something, this is where to look	Conflict of Interest	Defined on page 11
		Actions	Defined on page 14

<https://linktr.ee/LTUClubs/>

What is a General Meeting

The Basics:

A **General Meeting** is a meeting open to all members of an organisation.

General Meetings are open to all members for attendance and act as a chance for members to express their thoughts on the direction of the club.

In the Clubs context, General Meetings are used to host elections, affirm important documents, affiliate with the university, and discuss major events or decisions.

AGMs, SGMs, and IGMs – What is the Difference?

IGM: *Inaugural General Meeting*

- The first annual General Meeting a club hosts

AGM: *Annual General Meeting*

- An election must happen for all Executive roles
- The constitution is affirmed
- The club affiliates with the university
- Must occur annually

SGM: *Special General Meeting*

- An election is called for any roles where the Executive is stepping down or an acting Executive is in place
- Any changes need to be made to the constitution outside of an AGM
- A motion or major decision needs to be addressed
- Can be called for by members at any time

Scheduling:

Scheduling a General Meeting can be difficult!

Running a poll, surveying members, and asking about availability is a great place to start if your club doesn't have regular meet-ups or is running an IGM. These options give the members a chance to choose a time that works for them, which increases the odds of meeting **quorum** and having nominees for the **Executive**.

For clubs with regular meet-up times and locations, choosing a day and time that lines up with that is best practice to engage active members.

Do

- Poll or survey for member availability
- Use regular meeting times for established and repeating club activities
- Have an activity or food alongside the meeting
- Advertise in advance, in line with the constitution

Don't

- Schedule the meeting on a major holiday or during a significant religious ceremony
- Schedule the meeting at a significantly different time to regular club activities without reason and/or checking member availability
- Keep the meeting a secret or not advertise it

Distributing Documents and Presentations:

When running a General Meeting there are several documents that attendees need to be able to see, and a lot of information that gets shared. There are a few different methods for sharing information and which ones you choose depend on your venue and club needs.

Presentations:

Presentations are great for helping those at the front of the room know what to say or do next. They help to keep everyone on task and reinforce the **agenda**.

They are a useful tool to use for displaying reports, highlighting changes to documents, outlining future plans, and explaining roles before an election. This is also a good way to digitally display any documents being discussed

Presentations are limited by the need for a screen, so make sure that is taken into account when booking a room for the meeting. If the meeting is online, then an appropriate meeting platform is needed to display the presentation.

Printed Documents:

Printing out copies of documents and reports that are being discussed, the agenda, and role descriptions for elected positions, is an easy way to make sure attendees are informed and that the information is accessible.

Even when using a presentation, having printed copies of important documents like the constitution, prior meeting minutes, and any reports, makes sure that members are able to review them before the discussion.

Digital Distribution:

Before a General Meeting it is best practice to send out an agenda and any documents that will be discussed. This should ideally be done at the same time as the announcement or advertisement of the meeting.

The agenda, constitution, previous meeting's **minutes**, and role descriptions for elected positions should all be sent out to members prior to the meeting.

Acknowledgement of Country

An **Acknowledgement of Country** is a simple and powerful way to show respect for the Traditional Owners of the land. It recognises their deep and continuing connection to Country and helps build awareness and understanding. Starting meetings or events with an Acknowledgement of Country is an important step in creating a more respectful and inclusive environment.

La Trobe University has campuses and undertakes teaching, learning and research activities in the traditional lands of the following people:

- Wurundjeri (Bundoora)
- Wurundjeri /Boon Wurrung (or Bunurong) (City)
- Dja Dja Wurrung (Bendigo)
- Latji Latji / Barkindji (Mildura)
- Dhudhuroa / WayWurru (Wodonga)
- Yorta Yorta / Bangerang (Shepparton)

The University acknowledges Aboriginal people's ongoing connection to the land upon which its campuses are located and values the contributions Indigenous Australians make to its activities.

For specific clubs you may want to include an acknowledgement of certain cultural practices. Here are some examples!

- *A journalism club may want to acknowledge the cultural importance and traditions around storytelling and truth.*
- *A cooking club may want to acknowledge connection to country, native flora and fauna, culinary traditions. They may also acknowledge the overharvesting or hunting of native flora and fauna in colonial practices and the ongoing impacts that has on culture and culinary traditions.*

You can also show personal appreciation for connection to country by sharing an experience you have had recently that connected you to the traditional lands you are on.

Example Script:

"We, [Club Name] acknowledge that we are meeting today on the unceded land of the [Mob/Language Group] people. We pay our respects to elders past, present, and emerging, and we extend that respect to all First Nations people in attendance today. This always was and always will be Aboriginal Land."

Attendance, Observers, Apologies, Quorum

Attendance:

An attendance list should have every member with **voting rights** in attendance listed.

An attendance list is important to confirm enough members are present (quorum) and that the club is keeping accurate records. It also ensures that only eligible members vote or run.

Minimum Requirements:

- Full name
- Student number
- Preferred contact email
- Membership type

Having the contacts of those in attendance helps with follow-up communication after the meeting. This is good for following up on elections in case of a complaint, especially for the **Returning Officer**.

Observers:

Observers are those present at a General Meeting who do not have voting rights or who are not club members. They may talk during the meeting when discussion is prompted and can contribute, but they cannot run for Executive or **General Committee** roles, and they cannot vote.

The only exception to the above is if an **Alumni** is elected for a relevant position or if a La Trobe College Student is elected for the General Committee. This can be a great opportunity to connect with your broader membership.

Observers are tracked separately from attendance as they do not count towards quorum. Observers must be tracked due to their contributions to discussion and to avoid the potential for corruption.

Attendance, Observers, Apologies, Quorum (Continued)

Apologies:

Apologies are the people who are who have asked for their non-attendance to be documented. This is particularly important for individuals who may be running for an Executive or General Committee role but are not in attendance at the meeting.

Apologies also track the non-attendance of those who have registered but did not attend.

Tracking apologies helps if you need to show why you have rescheduled a General Meeting or to show us that you need help with encouraging attendance.

Quorum:

Quorum is the number of attendees needed to run a meeting. Quorum ensures that there is a representative portion of the club's membership present so that elections can be run fairly and democratically.

What happens if you don't meet quorum?

If quorum is not achieved at the end of 30 minutes after the advertise meeting time, the meeting shall adjourn for one week. All members must be notified with a minimum of 5 days' notice of the rescheduled meeting details. If at such a meeting quorum is still not achieved, the members present shall be competent to discharge the business of the meeting and may vote as if quorum were met.

The Clubs Program sets the quorum for General Meetings based on club size.

Go to the **Executive Handbook** for more information on how many people are needed!

Minimum Requirements of Tracking Attendance, Observers, and Apologies:

Attendance:

- Full Name
- Student Number
- Membership Type
- Preferred Contact Email

Observers:

- Full Name
- Student Number (If relevant)
- Membership Type
- Preferred Contact Email

Apologies:

- Full Name

If running for the Executive or General Committee:

- Student Number (If relevant)
- Membership Type
- Preferred Contact Email

If running for General Committee a written speech or statement must be provided to the Returning Officer prior to the election.

The Constitution

Changing the constitution:

If changing the Club Constitution, all changes must be affirmed by the Club's Team.

Submit any changes for review in a Governance and Updates Form through **the LTU Clubs Linktree** and book a meeting to discuss any changes being made where possible.

Scripts for affirming the constitution:

Motion to affirm a new constitution:

"I raise the motion to affirm the new constitution of [Club Name] for the upcoming Club's Calander year of [Clubs Calander Year]"

Motion to re-affirm an existing constitution:

"I raise the motion to reaffirm the constitution of [Club Name] for the upcoming Club's Calander year of [Clubs Calander Year]"

Motion to affirm changes to an existing constitution:

"I raise the motion to affirm the changes made to the constitution of [Club Name] in sections [Sections Changed] as described."

Follow by affirming the constitution as though it is a new constitution.

Reports

President's Report:

The President's Report is used to summarise the past year of club activities and achievements, as well as strategies.

The report should include:

- Major events and activities
- Major achievements
- Strategies and plans implemented in the past year

Treasurer's Report:

The Treasurer's Report is used for financial transparency and reporting. It also shows members where their fees are going and what the club is spending its money on.

The report should include:

- Financial tracking and breakdowns
 - Budgeted vs. actual costs
 - Spending per budget category
 - Spending per event type
- Ticket sales revenue
- Grant results and acquitals
- Major achievements, improvements, or losses

Secretary's Report:

The Secretary's Report is used to summarise membership, communications, advertising, attendance and meetings.

The report should include:

- Membership numbers and growth
- Average event attendance
- Social media and newsletter statistics (where applicable)

Other Reports:

Other positions may want to do reports on their achievements and the statistics they have been tracking.

Examples:

- Events Coordinator: Event data and information
- Social Media Officer: Moderation, post frequency, engagement, tracking link interactions, post performance
- Sponsorships Coordinator: Brand connections, income, projects

Elections

Voting Conditions and Eligibility:

Voting is anonymous. The only exception is in instances where the Returning Officer may need to know how each individual has voted, such as to manage a complaint or investigate a high level of **abstaining**.

The only club members with voting rights at a General Meeting of a La Trobe affiliated club are currently enrolled La Trobe University students. **Proxy votes** are not permitted.

Voting should always be a free and fair process for all participants involved.

Election Methodology:

Voting may be done in person and/or electronically, but it will always be done via **secret ballot**.

The method(s) will be confirmed by the Returning Officer at least three days prior to the election taking place

The candidates for a role are **nominated** to run and they can be self-nominated. A **nominee** is the person being suggested for a role. A nominator is the person who suggests someone for a role. Sometimes we see clubs provide someone who seconds a nomination, this is not needed.

At any point a voter may choose to abstain. If there are a lot of people abstaining, or if someone is abstaining from an otherwise unanimous decision, it can be helpful for the Returning Officer to follow up with the relevant parties. This is to check for grievances, confusion, and make sure that the vote was representative and fair.

What is a 'Proxy Vote'?

A proxy vote is a vote placed on the behalf of someone who is not in attendance at a meeting.

What are 'Voting Rights'?

Voting rights are the rights and freedoms **La Trobe University students** are entitled to during club elections. This includes the right to free, fair, democratic elections and the ability to vote in them.

What is a 'Secret Ballot'?

A secret ballot is a voting system where the identity of the voter remains anonymous.

This is typically done through providing paper to write a vote on, called a ballot, where there is no way to easily identify the voter.

What is 'abstaining' or 'to abstain'?

Abstaining is a neutral option. It shows that you are present and can vote but have chosen not to express an opinion.

Single Preference Voting:

Voting may take place via a single preference secret ballot. Single preference voting is the process of voting for one person who is your preferred candidate.

For this method, eligible members could:

- Write the name of their preferred candidate or that they abstain on a slip of paper to be read and counted by the Returning Officer.
- Select one of the two candidates or that they abstain on a digital poll or form, to be supervised by the Returning Officer.
- For single-person nominations, eligible members would vote yes, no, or to abstain. This can be done on paper or digitally as described above.

Preferential Voting:

For positions with three or more candidates, voting may take place via secret ballot, using a preferential voting system. A preferential voting system is a type of ranked choice voting that allows voters to rank their votes for candidates.

How it works:

- Members rank each candidate in order of preference (1 for highest)
- Votes are counted and the candidate with the least amount of first preference (1) votes is eliminated
- The eliminated candidate's votes are redistributed, with their votes being allocated to the next preference ranked on each ballot
- Votes are counted again and the candidate with the least amount of votes is eliminated
- The eliminated candidate's votes are redistributed, with their votes being allocated to the next preference ranked on each ballot
- This continues until there are only two candidates. At this stage, the candidate with the most votes is elected.

For this method, eligible members could:

- Write the name of their preferred candidates, ranked, or that they abstain on a slip of paper to be read and counted by the Returning Officer.
- Rank candidates or acknowledge that they abstain on a digital poll or form, to be supervised by the Returning Officer.

Returning Officer

A Returning Officer is the person appointed to **chair** the election.

The role includes:

- Chairing the election
- Collecting and handling physical ballots or voting slips
- Counting votes
- Handling complaints
- Observing the process of the election
- Helping plan elections (when necessary)

The Returning Officer must not:

- be running for any role in the election
- be a current Executive
- have any notable influence on or be part of a campaign regarding the election
- express bias or influence regarding the nominees or election results

*The Returning Officer should not have any **conflict of interest** with the nominated candidates (predicted or actual). Any conflict of interest must be declared.*

If the Returning Officer does declare a conflict of interest, it is required that a motion is passed to:

- Nominate a new Returning Officer from those in attendance
Or
- Allow the current Returning Officer to continue despite the conflict of interest

The Returning Officer's contact details get put on the meeting minutes. They should be contacted after a General Meeting if a member has a concern or complaint about how the election has been run.

What is 'chairing' or 'to chair'?

To be the chairperson is to oversee a meeting or other group setting.

Chairing an election means being the person who runs the process of an election.

If you are chairing an election then you are the one asking who is nominated, who is doing the nominating, and then counting and collecting votes.

It also includes fielding suggestions, complaints, and directing discussion.

What is a 'conflict of interest'?

A conflict of interest is when an individual's personal interests – family, friendships, financial, or social factors – could compromise an individual's judgment, decisions, or actions.

For a Returning Officer, this may mean that a close friend or roommate is on the current Executive or running in the election – or that they themselves are a current member of the Executive.

Scripts & Examples for the Returning Officer

Motions responding to a declared conflict of interest:

- *"I raise the motion to nominate a new Returning Officer from those present, due to a declared conflict of interest"*
- *"I raise the motion to proceed with [Name] as Returning Officer. This is done with the acknowledgement of a declared conflict of interest, which will be recorded in the minutes."*

Explaining roles:

- President: *"The President acts as club figurehead. They provide leadership for and oversee the running of the Club and ensure that the Club meets its purpose."*
- Vice President: *"The Vice-President plays an important role in supporting the President and engaging with members to ensure the Club is benefiting them."*
- Secretary: *"The Secretary has responsibility for oversight of club operations and communications. Primarily organisation of meetings, membership management, and record keeping."*
- Treasurer: *"The Treasurer is responsible for overseeing the Club's financial health, including record-keeping, budgeting, reporting, and ensuring financial compliance."*

Collecting nominations:

- *"Are there any nominees for the role of [Role Title]"*
- *Collect names of nominees as they are nominated, the secretary should collect their details for the meeting and the details of the person who nominated them.*

Scripts and Examples for the Returning Officer, Continued

Introducing nominees for speeches:

1. *"Each nominee will get [Amount of time] to pitch their suitability for the role of [Executive Role]."*
2. *"I now ask that all nominees exit the room for the duration of the speeches."*
3. *"Introducing [Name], nominated for the position of [Executive Role]."*
4. *At this point either step aside or gesture for the nominee to begin.*
5. *At the conclusion of their time: "Thank you [Name], you may now exit the room"*
6. *Repeat lines 3-5 until all nominees have spoken*
7. *"I now ask that all nominees return to the room for the election. With speeches concluded we will now commence the vote."*

Elections and Declaring the Results

1. *Chose the most appropriate of the following options:*
 - *In the case of single-preference voting: "You will be given a slip of paper. Please write the name of the nominee you prefer for the role of [Executive Role] on this paper."*
 - *If the case of multiple-preference voting: "You will be given a slip of paper. Please write the names of each nominee in a numbered list, expressing the order of your preference for the role of [Executive Role]."*
2. *"There is to be no talking during this process. Do not show who you are voting for, do not try to see who others are voting for. Once you have written down your vote, [please bring your ballot to me / place your ballot in the designated box / wait for your ballot to be collected]."*
3. *At this point, collect and count the ballots.*
4. *"The role of [Executive Role] for [Term Year] will be performed by [Name of Winning Nominee]."*
5. *"This concludes the vote for the position of [Executive Role]."*

Minutes, Motions, & Actions

Minutes:

Minutes are the notes taken during a meeting. For a General Meeting, the minutes act as a legal document to affirm the existence of and the elections within a club.

There is a template for General Meeting minutes on the LTU Clubs Linktree. It is mandatory that La Trobe affiliated clubs use this template to ensure necessary information is provided.

Why affirm the previous meeting's minutes?

Affirming the previous meeting's minutes confirms that they are an accurate record of what occurred. It validates the archived documentation of the club's governance.

Motions:

Motions are the major decisions made at a meeting. These are voted on by attending members who have voting rights.

Mandatory motions at a General Meeting include affiliating with the university, affirming the constitution, affirming previous meeting minutes, and approving a Returning Officer.

Common motions include proposing major club events, proposing a code of conduct, or defining club values, among other examples.

Examples:

- *"I raise the motion that [Club Name] draft a code of conduct to be affirmed at the next General Meeting"*
- *"I raise the motion that [Club Name] create a working group to manage [Major Event] during the upcoming Clubs Calendar year"*
- *"I raise the motion that [Club Name] host regular events to do [Club Activity] at least [Minimum Regular Occurrence per Semester]"*

Actions:

Actions are the things that need to be done after a decision has been made. They can also be completed tasks, assigned in previous meetings. They may come from motions or from general discussion.

Actions should be specific, assigned to a specific person, and have a due date for when they need to be completed. This makes them an amazing tool to get things done.

Examples:

- *"Action: [Name] to create and distribute a survey to members on club values. This is to be ready for review by [Date]."*
- *"Action: [Name] to contact [Other Club] by [Date] to discuss potential collaboration."*