

INDEPENDENT FORUM OF COMMONWEALTH ORGANISATIONS (IFCO) GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

1 PREAMBLE

1.1 The Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations represents an initiative towards greater collaboration and coordination of Commonwealth Accredited Organisations (COs). IFCO has been meeting on a quarterly basis for the past three years, and met more frequently while preparing input to the 2018 CHOGM. These meetings form part of a broader spectrum of collaborative activity.

1.2 IFCO constitutes an important segment of the Commonwealth's 'Third Pillar', the civil society groups that work with those forming the other two pillars, namely Commonwealth Governments and Commonwealth Inter-Governmental Organisations (Secretariat, Foundation and Commonwealth of Learning).

2 AIMS

2.1 IFCO's main purposes are

1. To serve the Commonwealth and its peoples, and to promote Commonwealth values as expressed by the Charter.
2. To make the experience, knowledge and skills of its members more accessible to governments and Commonwealth IGOs for use in promoting Commonwealth development and wellbeing, including by means of recognising/establishing thematic clusters of COs.
3. To promote a better appreciation of the role and value of civil society contributions and voices in furthering Commonwealth objectives.
4. To provide a forum where member organisations can exchange experiences, co-ordinate views and prepare proposals and submissions for consideration by competent authorities.
5. To serve as a sounding board for ideas and proposals articulated by its partners.
6. To encourage its own members to engage in critical self-examination and analysis with a view to improving performance and maintaining the highest standards of integrity, accountability and transparency.

3 MEMBERSHIP

3.1 Membership is open to every accredited Commonwealth Organisation.

3.2 Commonwealth organisations having similar goals to those of IFCO but not formally accredited to the Commonwealth may be accepted for associate, non-voting membership of IFCO, subject in each case to uncontested affirmative decision by existing members, on the basis of criteria and procedures that IFCO may devise.

3.3 The three Commonwealth IGOs shall be offered Extraordinary Membership with the right to attend meetings but without any vote on IFCO decisions.

3.4 Each Commonwealth Organisation shall have one vote.

3.5 Members may express dissent from any decision/statement/document issued in the name of the Forum and have this dissent formally recorded. Where 25% or more of members express opposition to any proposed decision/statement/action on the part of IFCO, that will constitute a blocking vote and the course of action will not be pursued in the Forum's name.

4 MEETINGS

4.1 Collective positions and action taken by IFCO and in its name shall be authorised by Meetings of the Forum, with the proviso that the Steering Group may secure such authorisation through consultation with the membership by email between meetings.

4.2 Decisions may be made using digital communication when, in the judgement of the Steering Group, the matter is urgent. The Steering Group will maintain a register of email addresses and contact details for use in such situations. Notice of a digital poll will specify the timetable for response, which will normally be two weeks except in circumstances of greater urgency. The digital poll will provide options to approve, reject, abstain .

4.3 It is the responsibility of each member organisation to ensure that the Steering Group is informed of its current email and contact details for use in the event of a digital poll; the Steering Group will not be liable for any error resulting from the failure of a CO to provide current contact details. Any inadvertent error during a digital decision-making process will not invalidate the outcome.

4.4 The business of Forum Meetings will include endorsing the record of previous meetings and agreeing dates for the next meeting; receiving reports from the Steering Group; hearing presentations/ briefings from prominent Commonwealth figures; consideration of important CW reports and proposals and appropriate IFCO responses thereto; preparing for Family Meetings; devising of joint initiatives for the benefit of the Commonwealth; exchange of information and experience; consideration of applications for membership.

4.5 Meetings of the Forum will normally be held each quarter, but members may resolve to vary their frequency and to convene additional meetings as and when needed. Every effort will be made to dovetail Forum meetings with the Commonwealth Family Meetings convened by the Commonwealth Secretariat with a view to ensuring that IFCO can contribute meaningfully to framing Family Meeting agendas and preparing its own collective inputs.

4.6 Whenever possible facilities will be provided for those unable to attend IFCO meetings in person to join online.

4.7 Meetings will normally be chaired by the current Chair or Deputy Chair of the Steering Group.

4.8 Conduct of meetings will follow the following guidelines:

- Notice to be given not less than four weeks in advance in normal circumstances
- Agendas to be shared at least two weeks in advance to allow those not able to attend to have an opportunity to make inputs,
- Proceedings to be recorded.
- A written record (minutes) of proceedings and decisions to be prepared and circulated within four weeks of the meeting.

5 Steering Group

5.1 A Steering Group will conduct the affairs of IFCO between Forum meetings and will take executive action to give effect to Meeting decisions. The Steering Group is accountable to members through the formal meetings of the Forum. All IFCO members may volunteer to serve on the Steering Group which will have a maximum of 15 members. If more than 15 members ask to serve when the Steering Committee is initially constituted, lots will be drawn to determine membership and which members will stand down at the next AGM to make room for those wishing to join the Steering Group.

5.2 The process for the appointment of members to the Steering Group will aim to ensure representation of the true diversity of Commonwealth countries in its composition and background.

5.3 The Steering Group shall appoint a Chair, or Co-chairs, Deputy Chair and Secretary from among its number. Incumbents shall serve for a three-year term, and in the event they demit office early for any reason the IFCO shall appoint a successor to complete the three-year term. The Chair will be the *de facto* spokesperson of the Forum.

5.4 The Steering Group may establish working groups to take on individual tasks and to report back to the next meeting. The establishment of such groups shall be advertised to the whole membership and their participation invited. Working Groups shall have no independent authority to issue statements on behalf of the Forum. The Steering Group may also establish clusters of cognate groupings of COs (as identified in the IFCO mapping exercise) through the same process (advertisement to the whole membership inviting their participation, based on the understanding that they have the expertise and authority to engage with the cluster).

5.5 The Steering Group will present an annual report to members which will be published once approved by the members.

6 REVIEW

6.1 A review of this governance document and the IFCO working arrangements and effectiveness will be undertaken in two years from approval of this document.

PROCEDURE

This draft governance document was approved by a formal meeting of IFCO held on 14 June 2019 for distribution to all accredited Commonwealth Organisations (COs) and other interested stakeholders. COs are invited to indicate their response to the Steering Group by writing to nicholaswatts [at] mac.com by 30 September 2019. Non-response will be taken as evidence of agreement to the document in accordance with the Silence Procedure.

Nicholas Watts (Chair, IFCO) on behalf of the IFCO Steering Group.
July 2019