

Practical Advice for your School Rep. Body in Term 2

**UPDATED
20 April 2020**

NT COGSO will continue to work closely with the Department of Education to best support our School Rep. Bodies, families, staff and school communities.

The Government's response to limit the spread of the Coronavirus requires us all to employ social distancing and isolation measures. For families and school communities this means we need to be prepared for students to continue their learning in Term 2, whether that be at school or at home.

We will continue to follow the advice of the Territory and Australian Government.

NT COGSO advises School Rep. Bodies to refer to the Australian Government and NT Health for current information on COVID-19*

<https://coronavirus.nt.gov.au>

HELP AND SUPPORT

Where do we go for help?

Our team are adhering to current advice and have relocated to our home offices, however, we are continuing to assist school communities with all governance enquiries.

Office hours

Office hours remain **Monday to Friday 8:30am - 4:30pm.**

Phone

Contact us on **8999 3255** or **8999 3257**. If we are on another call, please leave a message and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

Email:

General: enquiries@ntcogso.org.au

Alice Gawler: alice.gawler@ntcogso.org.au

Marianne White: training.officer@ntcogso.org.au

NT COGSO have developed a series of Frequently Asked Questions and provided what information we can at present to support School Rep. Bodies to navigate this uncertainty.

If you have a question or wish to provide us with your feedback please do not hesitate to get in touch.



YOUR VOICE FOR NT PUBLIC EDUCATION

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL REP. BODY

Under the changing circumstances in schools, what is our role?

School Rep. Body decisions may be required to enable the Principal to manage, respond and make arrangements for your school's changing needs and operational requirements.

School Rep. Bodies can support their Principal by;

- Identifying current and future needs and reallocating funds accordingly in the school budget
- Delegate appropriate financial authority to the Principal
- Coordinate amendments, suspension or cancellation of existing Community Use Agreements
- Determine what communications with the school community is required to support their transition to changing conditions

MEETINGS

Are School Rep. Bodies still required to meet at least 8 times a year or twice per term? What about Term 2 meetings?

8 meetings per year is a Legislative requirement. However, under the circumstances we will be seeking advice from the Department of Education. Given the potential changes to school operations, decisions may need to be made to support the Principal during this time.

In the interim, School Rep. Bodies are encouraged to determine next steps according to your local context and specific needs regarding cancellation or re-scheduling of meetings. Whatever the decision, ensure the usual decision-making processes and requirements are met.

The Department of Education advised:

We will continue to monitor this situation and provide further advice if it appears that schools may face a situation where 8 meetings cannot be achieved.

If social distancing requirements are in place for a significant period of time both in the NT and the biosecurity areas then further advice will be provided by the Department of Education on how we deal with these issues.

What do we do if we have not held our AGM?

School Rep. Bodies who sought an extension and are unable to hold an AGM should contact the Department of Education Community Engagement and Local Decision Making team for advice.

Please email: cls.doe@nt.gov.au

Many of our members have left our school community due to unemployment and/or travel restrictions. What are our options now?

Determine if you continue to meet the requirements to function as a School Rep. Body.

- If members have resigned do you still have a minimum of 5 members, 50% parent membership and a parent member as Chair?
- If you are able to meet quorum consider how you can best maintain meetings
- Consider how you can best make decisions

The Department of Education advised:

In the interim, meetings should still be held and noted that a quorum was not reached. We will need to monitor the situation at individual sites if we believe a site may not be viable as a School Rep. Body into the future.

How can we hold our School Rep. Body meetings?

Consider holding your meetings via phone or video conferencing. Consider what technology families may have access to for virtual meetings. Members will need to organise ahead of time to ensure all members can access and setup the necessary equipment/requirements to attend remotely.

Meeting options: Skype, Zoom and Teleconference.

Do these meetings count as one of the 8 meetings per year?

Yes, provided you meet quorum requirements, motions are made and accepted by elected members with voting rights and the minutes and motions are recorded appropriately. We recognise virtual meetings may not be possible for rural and remote schools.

The Department of Education advised:

Most schools have the ability to utilise telephone conferencing and in this case, this would avoid the need to hold virtual online meetings where devices or bandwidth may be barriers.

How do we maintain meeting procedure and decision making?

Consider how your Standing Orders can be applied or adapted to a virtual meeting.

- What the purpose of the meeting is
- The objectives which need to be achieved
- A timed agenda
- Clear roles and responsibilities

- Agreed ways of working (or ground rules) such as “State your name before contributing” and “Mute when not speaking if you are in a noisy environment”
- Agree how actions are recorded, followed up and communicated

Find out who may or may not be able to participate in meetings. Know your quorum number. Will you be able to maintain quorum?

We intend to go ahead with our next scheduled meeting. How do we proceed?

If you continue to meet, NT COGSO encourages School Rep. Bodies to prioritise decisions that will support the Principal to best coordinate the changing operational requirements under these conditions. Consider deferring your non-urgent priorities to a later time. Set a date and record it appropriately.

OUT OF SESSION DECISION MAKING

How do we make Out of Session Decisions?

Know your quorum number. Will you be able to achieve quorum? Ensure you have an established process for Out of Session Decision Making.

<https://www.ntcogso.org.au/school-representative-bodies/resources/out-session-decision-making>

RECORD KEEPING

Where do we store our meeting minutes?

School Central is where all School Rep. Body information should be stored, including all records of Skype, Zoom and Teleconference meetings.

<https://www.ntcogso.org.au/school-representative-bodies/resources/record-keeping>

BUDGET

How can we support budget decisions and maintain financial oversight?

Identify your current financial position. Understand how possible changes to school operations may impact on your financial position and take measures to ensure you are prepared.

Ensure that you have had oversight of the current job analysis and that the 2020 school budget has been presented and approved. Ensure that financial reports continue to be presented monthly.

How will the financial reports be distributed and discussed?

If you have a finance committee:

Consider your meeting options. Adopt your usual terms of reference for your committee meeting.

Ensure you have current email contacts for distribution of all reports to members.

As Treasurer how can I best communicate with the Business Manager?

Maintain communication by email and phone. Talk with your Business Manager to arrange a suitable time to discuss school finances.

What are our financial delegations?

You would have an agreed amount determined by the School Rep. Body for the Principal and Business Manager to move within the budget.

Consider if this is sufficient under the current circumstances and review if necessary.

Will we need to consider re-allocating job budgets?

This may be something to consider in the future where you have underspent in certain jobs. Consider the advice from your Principal and Business Manager. Maintain financial governance practices.

What other questions may require budget consideration?

Student resourcing: How can we support students to ensure they have what is required to support their continued education?

Student access to devices: What can the School Rep. Body do to support student access to online learning devices and resources?

Stationery: Do students require additional stationery items to support learning from home?

Parent Payments: Camps/Excursions/Voluntary Contributions/Sport – are refunds required for any activities?

Back to school vouchers: Remind families the voucher expires at the end of Term 2.

COMMUNITY USE AGREEMENTS

Are we required to cease use of community hire agreements?

Due to social distancing it is likely that community groups would have ceased operating in your school.

Do community use agreements expire?

Review any agreements in place to determine which groups may be impacted.

What are the obligations of the School Rep. Body where funds have been paid to the School?

Review any agreements where pre-payment or annual payments have been made for the hire of facilities to determine any potential financial impact or obligations.

Are we required to refund community groups who have paid for and can no longer use facilities?

Assess on a case by case basis to determine the best course of action in regards to groups that may request or require a refund of hire fees paid.

INSURANCE**What do we need to know about insurance?**

Your school's self-insurance premium may be due, so ensure that your school insurance is current.

Your Business Manager will be able to provide you with the current self-insurance information for your school.

School security is paramount. Consider what you have in place for school security, such as Caretakers. How may this be supported, continued or adapted under the current circumstances?

CANTEEN**What do we do with our Canteen stock?**

It is likely that your canteen operations have been impacted or ceased entirely.

Consider stock on hand and how you may best store or distribute stock. Could stock be donated to families in need?

EMPLOYEES**What advice can you give for supporting our School Rep. Body employees?**

NT COGSO is unable to provide industrial relations advice. Contact your industrial relations provider to ensure you have all the relevant advice required prior to making any changes to School Rep. Body employee arrangements.

The Territory Labor Government is providing job certainty to casual staff employed by School Rep. Bodies. Read more here <https://www.ntcogso.org.au/practical-help/changes-school-operations-covid-19/practical-advice>.

The Department of Education advised:

All schools are requested to continue to employ all School Rep. Body staff.

NT COGSO seeks employment and industrial relations advice from Complete Workplace Solutions. <https://cwrelations.com.au/>

COMMUNICATION**How can we support and maintain connection with staff, families and students during this time?**

Continue communicating with families. Use your usual methods and consider if you are reaching everyone, especially those who may be more vulnerable during this uncertain time.

Useful communication methods:

- Facebook
- School Applications
- Website
- Facebook live
- Email
- Phone calls

WELLBEING**How can we support our vulnerable families?**

Communicating support organisations available to families and children may be crucial for those who need to reach out for further help or support.

Kids Help Line: 1800 551 800

Headspace: 1800 659 388 or [headspace.org.au/eheadspace](https://www.headspace.org.au/eheadspace)

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Beyond Blue: COVID-19 Mental Health Support Service

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

Red Cross: Talking to Children about COVID-19

<https://www.redcross.org.au/stories/covid-19/talking-to-kids-about-covid-19>

Smiling Mind: Thrive Inside Program

<https://www.smilingmind.com.au/covid19-support-page>