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| Title: ITU logo | INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION**TELECOMMUNICATION STANDARDIZATION SECTOR**STUDY PERIOD 2022-2024 | TSAG-TD104 |
| TSAG |
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| **Question(s):** | N/A | Geneva, 12-16 December 2022 |
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| **Source:** | ITU-T Study Group 15 |
| **Title:** | LS/i on Guidelines on e-meetings [from ITU-T SG15] |
| **LIAISON STATEMENT** |
| **For action to:** | TSAG |
| **For information to:** | - |
| **Approval:** | ITU-T SG15 meeting (30 September 2022) |
| **Deadline:** | 15 March 2023 |
| **Contact:** | Glenn ParsonsEricsson Canada Inc. | Tel: +1-514-379-9037E-mail: glenn.parsons@ericsson.com |

A new liaison statement has been received from SG15.

This liaison statement follows and the original file can be downloaded from the ITU ftp server at <http://handle.itu.int/11.1002/ls/sp17-sg15-oLS-00033.docx>.

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|  | INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION**TELECOMMUNICATIONSTANDARDIZATION SECTOR**STUDY PERIOD 2022-2024 | **SG15-LS33** |
| **STUDY GROUP 2** |
| **Original: English** |
| **Question(s):** | All/15 | Geneva, 19-30 September 2022 |
| **LS** |
| **Source:** | ITU-T Study Group 15 |
| **Title:** | LS on Guidelines on e-meetings |
| **LIAISON STATEMENT** |
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Introduction

SG15 has several guidelines that supplement the working methods of Rec A.1. These have been in place for multiple study periods and are typically agreed by the study group at the beginning of each study period. Several of these apply to electronic meetings:

* Remote Participation - Annex 1
* Planning between physical and virtual - Annex 2
* Virtual Meeting Procedures - Annex 3

These are attached for the consideration of TSAG

**AHG-GME**

The TSAG ad hoc group on the governance and management e-meetings (AHG-GME) has been meeting to continue its efforts to propose rules (i.e., more than guidelines) on the conduct of e-meetings for Rec. A.1.  The meeting documents are here:

[/ifa/t/2022/tsag/exchange/AHG-GME/ (itu.int)](https://www.itu.int/ifa/t/2022/tsag/exchange/AHG-GME/)

Some aspects of the SG15 virtual meeting guideline have been included with the proposal to add an Annex to Rec. A.1 (DOC17).   None of the justification and rational in the SG15 guideline has been retained and not all points have been included. Of note in the current draft are the strict virtual meeting rules of scheduling meetings only between 12:0015:00 Geneva time, (instead of suggested core hours), 10-minute breaks every hour, mandating (instead of suggesting) no weekend meetings, and requiring the chair be physically present at a physical meeting.

It is understood that for the next AHG-GME meeting the chair will restructure the document so that the proposed rules are organized by meeting type. It may also be useful to allow differences based on the nature of the work and working methods of the Study Groups.

**Plenipotentiary Conference**

Study Group 15 is aware that the Plenipotentiary Conference (PP-22) has received contributions on the topic of governance and management e-meetings, for example in the context of PP Resolution 167.

**Proposal**

SG15 requests that TSAG does not impose a change to the current working methods of SG15 for the following reasons:

1. It would be premature to do so while discussions are continuing on the general topic of appropriate e-meeting procedures in the AHG-GME, at PP-22, in TSAG itself, in the Council and most likely WTSA-24.
2. Establishing guidelines for application by all ITU-T study groups does not capture the essential differences in the working methods and deliverables of the SGs themselves. In Study Groups 2 and 3, for example, the approval process for Recommendations involves Member States consultation through TAP, given that the nature of the work has policy or regulatory implications, whereas SG15 uses AAP for the vast majority of its technical Recommendations. It would be premature to try to impose new procedures in Rec. ITU-T A.1 without the benefit of clear direction for the participation of Member State and Sector Member representatives concerning decision-making in e-meetings (e.g., from PP-22 or Council).
3. It is understood that the working methods of all groups in ITU-T including study groups should be based on the principles of efficiency and pragmatism. For SG15, the current working methods have stood the test of time. For example, SG15 has been able to continue to develop and approve technical documents during the ongoing pandemic. Therefore, the working methods of SG15 should remain unchanged until it can be clearly demonstrated that a change is both useful and necessary.

Annex 1
Remote Participation

**Background**

A-series Supplement 4, *Supplement on guidelines for remote participation*, indicates that:

Meetings of ITU-T groups may be conducted in the following formats:

• physical meetings (face-to-face);

• physical meetings with remote observation (i.e., webcast);

• physical meetings with (active) remote participation;

• e-meetings, also called virtual meetings.

The same format may not apply to all sessions of a given meeting.

WTSA Resolution 32 (Hammamet, 2016) instructs the TSB director to:

• take action, in order to provide appropriate electronic participation or observation facilities (e.g. webcast, audioconference, webconference/document sharing, videoconference, etc.) in ITU‑T meetings, workshops and training courses for delegates unable to attend events in person, and coordinate with BDT to assist in the provision of such facilities;

This guideline applies to the case where remote participation in a face-to-face meeting has been requested. The ability to support remote participation should be considered when selecting the location for a face-to-face meeting. The local time zone may also be a consideration. This is particularly important if external factors (e.g., travel restrictions due to a pandemic) may make it difficult for some delegates to attend. A separate guideline describes the process for changing a face-to-face meeting to a virtual meeting.

**Guidelines**

The meeting hours will be based on the normal working hours of the local time zone of the physical meeting location.

It is recommended that delegates presenting proposals to the work of SG15 participate in person whenever possible. SG15 normally considers multiple, competing technical proposals in an area of study. The process of developing consensus around the technical details, often involves merging the best aspects of multiple input proposals. This process usually occurs in ad hoc groups, e.g. drafting sessions, coffee break discussions, and informal evening discussions. While a remote participant can join the formal part of the meeting, remote participants cannot join the informal ad hoc discussions, which can create a situation where there is nobody to explain or advocate for any technical proposal that was presented by a remotely connected member who has no delegate physically attending the meeting.

Where necessary, and where facilities allow (e.g., for meetings in Geneva), observation or remote participation can be used to facilitate the participation of experts who are not able to travel. The participant has to complete necessary meeting registration (if applicable) process for remote participation.

Some particular guidelines for chairmen and Rapporteurs concerning meetings with remote participation or observation:

* Remote participation or observation for a physical, face-to-face meeting is provided on a “best effort” basis. If the audio quality of a remote participant’s connection is not sufficient to allow them to be understood by those in the room, the chairman should interrupt the speaker, and refrain from giving them the floor again until the audio problem is resolved. The meeting should not stop or be interrupted because of a remote observer or active participant’s ability to connect or to hear.
* The agenda as established by the chairman, based on the contributions received, applies to all delegates, local and remote. There is no obligation to rearrange the meeting agenda based on when various local participants will be present or remote participants are able to dial in.
* The chairman retains the same abilities according to the general rules as with delegates in the room. The chairman may interrupt any delegate, local or remote, for example, in cases where the delegate exceeds the amount of time allotted for presentation, or strays from the topic under discussion.
* If time requires limitations on the debate (for example, if the chairman must limit the number of times, or the total amount of time a member can speak on a given topic). Such limitation should apply to the total number of interventions allowed across all local and remote delegates representing the same member.
* Remote participants have no role in decision-making. Decisions are generally described in Resolutions and A-series Recommendations as being made by “Member States and Sector Members Present in the meeting”, which has been legally understood to be only those members with a delegate physically present. As a practical matter, if a remote participant has a valid point with which other members in the room agree, the group will surely do the right thing, but formally this is due to the views of members in the room, and never directly due to the views of a remote participant.

Concerning delegates participating in the meeting:

* Physical attendance at face-to-face meetings will always be the most effective form of participation for members presenting proposals, creating the best opportunity for the member’s proposals to be adopted by enabling participation in ad hoc groups, drafting sessions, coffee break discussions, and informal evening discussions.
* A member who has some delegates attending physically, while others are participating remotely, may find it more effective to use a spokesperson in the room rather than attempting to advocate remotely. A presenter in the room can get a better sense of whether what they are presenting is being understood, and is also able to participate in the related ad hoc groups, drafting sessions, coffee breaks, and informal evening discussions.
* Each delegate must register for the meeting and be identified when taking the floor regardless of whether they are participating locally or remotely.

SG15 routinely provides webcasting of plenary sessions allowing for remote observation of the plenary. The normal default format for other sessions is a physical meeting (face-to-face). In the case where the management team considers that external factors (e.g., travel restrictions due to a pandemic) make it difficult for some delegates to attend remote observation or active participation will be provided, on a “best effort” basis, for those delegates, if the facilities are available.

A.suppl4 provides additional guidance for conducting physical meetings with active remote participation. A.suppl4 also provides additional guidance regarding conducting of virtual meetings (or e-meetings), which are described in a different guideline.

Annex 2
Re-planning between physical and virtual meeting formats

**Background**

Traditionally, physical and virtual meetings have been used for different purposes, with decision making or development of merged or compromise proposals normally only occurring at physical meetings. Each type of meeting has its own set of procedures for approval with its own set of deadlines:

* Decision-making SG or WP plenary meetings are confirmed by collective letter at least 2 months prior to the start of the meeting, or if occurring on a date other than one previously planned or scheduled, the collective letter is issued at least 3 months prior to advertise a new date.
* Interim face-to-face Rapporteur group meetings are confirmed at least 2 months prior to the meeting after confirmation of all meeting logistics and an adequate number of expected attendees and contributions. A convening letter is available on the SG web site providing the logistical information normally required for attendees to request visas.
* Interim Rapporteur group E-meetings are confirmed at least 2 weeks in advance, with less attention normally given to expected contribution levels as it is easier to cancel an e-meeting if expected contributions do not materialize. The logistics for the e-meeting are advertised on the Study Group web site.

Normally, once a meeting has been advertised and confirmed, it is not expected to be changed.

There have been certain circumstances where it has been necessary to cancel, re-schedule, or change the format of a planned face-to-face event to a virtual one due to a force majeure type event (natural disasters such as earthquake, acts of war, or a pandemic).

In the case of a force-majeure event of unknown duration (e.g., a pandemic), it is also foreseen that it may be desirable to change the format of a meeting originally planned as virtual to a physical format once normalcy is restored.

This guideline provides the procedures to be followed when making these kinds of changes to meeting plans.

**Guidelines**

Different guidelines are provided depending on the type of meeting being re-planned or re-scheduled. In all cases, announcement of any change should be made as soon as possible, recognizing of course that force majeure events are often sudden and unexpected.

**Meeting originally planned as a face-to-face SG or WP plenary meeting**

It may occur that an event prevents the holding of a face-to-face meeting in the location or on the dates originally envisioned, and this event occurs after the collective letter has been issued announcing the meeting, and likely after some delegates have planned their travel. Obviously, any decision for a change should not be taken lightly. There are five courses of action that may be considered, depending on the nature of the situation:

* Defer the meeting to a future date;
* Change the meeting to a different geographic location;
* Defer the meeting and change to a different geographic location
* Change the meeting from a physical to a virtual format;
* Cancel the meeting altogether.

In the case of deferring a meeting to a future date, a corrigendum should be issued to the original collective letter indicating that the original meeting has been cancelled. A new collective letter should be issued for the new, replacement meeting. The starting date of the replacement meeting should be at least three months from the date that the new collective letter is issued, as with any previously unplanned plenary meeting.

In the case of changing a meeting to a different geographic location while maintaining the original dates for the meeting, this change may be announced through a corrigendum to the collective letter. The corrigendum should be issued three months in advance of the start of the meeting.

In the case of deferring a meeting to a future date and changing the geographic location, a corrigendum should be issued to the original collective letter indicating that the original meeting has been cancelled. A new collective letter should be issued for the new, replacement meeting. The starting date of the replacement meeting should be at least three months from the date that the new collective letter is issued, as with any previously unplanned plenary meeting.

In the case of converting from a physical meeting to a virtual one, if the replacement virtual meeting occurs on the same dates as the originally planned physical meeting, this may be advertised with a corrigendum to the collective letter. If the planned virtual meeting is to be for different dates than the original physical meeting, the originally planned meeting should be cancelled with a corrigendum to the collective letter, and a new collective letter should be issued for the replacement virtual meeting occurring on different dates. Since this is an announcement for a decision-making meeting, the starting date of the replacement meeting should be at least two months from the date that the new collective letter is issued, as with any previously unplanned plenary meeting.

In the case of meeting cancellation, this is announced with a corrigendum to the collective letter.

**Meeting originally planned as a face-to-face Rapporteur Group meeting**

A planned face-to-face Rapporteur group meeting may be in one of two states: planned or confirmed. If an event prevents that such a meeting can be held on the planned dates or in the planned venue, the same five options can be considered:

* Defer the meeting to a future date;
* Change the meeting to a different geographic location;
* Defer the meeting and change to a different geographic location
* Change the meeting from a physical to a virtual format;
* Cancel the meeting altogether.

In the case of deferring the meeting to a future date, if the meeting has not already been confirmed and hence the planned date is at least two months in the future, the planned dates for the meeting can be moved further into the future on the study group web site and a notification made to the question email reflector.

In the case of deferring a confirmed meeting to a future date (where the original dates may have been inside of two months of the current date), the date to which the meeting is being changed should be at least two months from the current date. Notification of the change is made to the question email reflector. In addition, a specific notification will be made to any individual who has already registered or confirmed their attendance at the meeting. The meeting is updated on the study group web site, going back to the “planned” (rather than confirmed) state. The meeting can be changed back to “confirmed” for the new dates once the Rapporteur has confirmed sufficient attendance for the new dates and once the logistics around the new dates are solid, at least two months prior to the new dates.

In the case of changing a meeting to a different geographic location, if the meeting has not already been confirmed and hence the planned date is at least two months in the future, the updated location for the meeting can be indicated on the study group web site and a notification made to the question email reflector.

In the case of changing a confirmed meeting to a different geographic location (where the original dates are inside of two months of the current date), the date of the meeting should also be moved to at least two months from the current date, with notifications as described above for the case of only changing the date of a confirmed meeting.

In the case of converting from a physical meeting to a virtual meeting, as long as the dates of the original physical meeting are maintained, this change can be made even at short notice. If the dates of the replacement virtual meeting are to be different than those of the original face-to-face meeting, the 2-week deadline for the planning of e-meetings will apply. Notification of the change is made to the question email reflector. In addition, a specific notification will be made to any individual who has already registered or confirmed their attendance at the physical meeting. The meeting is updated on the study group web site.

In the case of cancelling a planned or confirmed physical Rapporteur group meeting, this announcement should be made to the question email reflector, any registered or confirmed attendees should be notified directly, and this cancellation should be indicated on the study group web site.

**Meetings originally planned as virtual**

There may be cases where meetings may be originally planned as virtual due to a force majeure event of unknown duration, even though the preference would have been to schedule such a meeting as a physical meeting if that had been possible. If the force majeure event subsides, the following procedures can be followed to re-plan a virtual meeting as a physical meeting.

**Meeting originally planned as a virtual SG or WP plenary meeting**

In the case of a virtual plenary meeting that has already been announced by way of a collective letter, the dates for the meeting are at least three months in the future, and the original dates are maintained, the change to a physical meeting can be announced with a corrigendum to the collective letter.

If the original dates of the virtual meeting are less than three months from the current date, the meeting should be postponed to a date that is at least three months away when re-planning from a virtual meeting to a physical one. If the date of a meeting is changed, a corrigendum should be issued to the original collective letter cancelling the meeting for the original dates. A new collective letter for the physical meeting should be issued three months before the start of the meeting announcing the new dates and location.

**Meeting originally planned as a virtual Rapporteur Group meeting**

In the case of a Rapporteur group meeting originally planned as virtual where there is a desire to re-plan as face-to-face: Whether the original dates are maintained or not, the dates for the physical meeting should be at least three months from the current date when the meeting is announced as being face-to-face. At the time of announcement, the dates and the geographic location (city, airport(s)) should be known, and the meeting can be indicated in the “planned” state. Changing the meeting from “planned” to “confirmed” must occur at least two months before the physical meeting dates based on availability of final logistics for the meeting, and the Rapporteur confirming sufficient expected attendance and contributions for the physical meeting in the planned location. The meeting is updated on the study group web site.

Annex 3
Virtual Meeting Procedures

# Guidelines

**Confirmation of virtual meetings:** Virtual meetings should normally be confirmed at least two weeks prior to the meeting. Unlike face-to-face meetings, participants are not all physically present in the same time zone, and this should be taken into account when selecting meeting times. While it may never be possible to find a time that is convenient or comfortable for all participants, particularly when there may be a series of virtual meetings on the same topic, consideration should be given to “sharing the pain”, for example choosing times for successive meetings to be convenient for North American, European, or Asian participants. Participation in a virtual meeting.

**Use of video:** While the MyMeetings tool can support video, participants are requested to not use the share video option and to turn off their cameras to avoid creating bandwidth problems for delegates with slow connections.

**Requesting the floor:** Participants wishing to request the floor should use the “raise hand” button in the tool, and wait to be given the floor by the chairman or Rapporteur before speaking. If, after being granted the floor, a participant experiences a problem with the quality of the audio the chairman or Rapporteur may request that participant to make the intervention using the public chat window. Any other comments entered in a chat window are not considered as a part of the discussion. Participants should use the “lower hand” button after speaking.

## Working Hours

In order to maintain the quality of SG15 work, it is important that all delegates are able to pay careful attention throughout the meeting. Therefore, when selecting the working hours, the geographic location of the participants should be considered. The participants in the work of SG15 are typically spread from as far West as the West Coast of North America, and as far East as Japan. For example, if the selected working hours are 13:00-17:00 Geneva time this becomes 0400-0800 for the West Coast of North America and 2000-midnight for Japan.

In a virtual meeting it is not possible to work outside of the normal meeting hours without being unfair to some delegates, e.g., requiring them to meet before 4am or after midnight.

For virtual interim meetings of Rapporteur groups, the core working hours may be optimized by considering the time zones of the expected participants. Even in this case working outside of the agreed core working hours may be difficult.

During a plenary meeting, certain management team meetings and working party report preparation sessions will be held outside of these core working hours.

## No Weekend Work

Normally, in a Geneva plenary meeting, it is possible to spend one, or even both days of the weekend for drafting and other breakout activities. This becomes practical when for many delegates, it is not possible to travel back home for the middle weekend of a SG15 meeting.

However, in a virtual format, it is expected that all delegates are at home on the weekend, where they are likely to have family responsibilities (e.g., children not in school), and therefore the SG15 management team has judged that we should not require delegates to be available over the weekend.

## All normal meeting rules apply

While a virtual meeting may feel less formal than a face-to-face meeting, all relevant meeting rules apply.

Any virtual meeting which is considering written proposals for developing draft Recommendation text should follow the same procedures as for Rapporteur group meetings or correspondence activities: specifically, all input documents/proposals should be placed in a dedicated folder in the IFA or rapporteur group meeting Sharepoint, and TSB should be asked to write-lock the folder after documentation of the virtual meeting is complete. The provisions of A.1 concerning contributions to plenary meetings (e.g., free of restrictions) also apply to contributions to virtual meetings. The same IPR inquiry should be made at a virtual meeting considering written proposals for draft Recommendation text as would be made at a face-to-face meeting.

The guidelines for the chairman and participants in virtual meetings specified in A.suppl4 should be applied as appropriate.

The contribution deadline for a plenary meeting 12 working days before the meeting and late contributions are not accepted. For an interim meeting of a Question the contribution deadline is set by the Rapporteur and normally late contributions are not accepted.

The use of the question email reflectors and the IFA should be limited to the ways in which we use these tools during a face-to-face meeting: Specifically, for reporting on tasks that the Rapporteur has asked to be carried out.

As an example, in a face-to-face meeting, the Rapporteur may charter a breakout group on a particular topic. The assigned breakout convener may send an email to the reflector announcing the location and time when the group will meet and to announce, on the email reflector, the availability of a breakout report that has been uploaded to the IFA.

However, since work outside of the identified working hours in a virtual meeting is not possible, an analogous situation might be that the Rapporteur might ask the editor to capture some provisional agreements reached in, for example, a meeting on Tuesday during the normal meeting hours, into a Working Document for discussing on Wednesday, that editor may upload and announce the availability of that document on the question email reflector. If there are editorial issues with the document, a participant can reply privately to the editor.

Debate about the substance of a document must always occur during the actual live meeting not on the email reflector. Discussion on the email reflector may exclude participants in some time zones. For example, a participant on the West coast of North America, when waking up to join the meeting at 0400, finds that there is a long email thread of detailed technical discussion among delegates from Asia and Europe that must be read and absorbed before they can participate in the discussion.

And most importantly, as in any meeting, participants should not make new proposals (perhaps inspired by the previous day’s discussion) via the email reflector or IFA. Such inputs will be considered as late contributions, that may have bypassed required national processes, and will not be considered by the meeting.

## Time Management

The working hours of virtual meeting are approximately half of the working hours of a face-to-face meeting. The time available for the discussion of contributions is further reduced since the Rapporteurs must allocate time during the meeting hours for drafting and review of texts that are being prepared for consent or agreement. These activities usually take place outside normal meeting hours in a face-to-face meeting. In a virtual meeting it is not possible to work outside of the normal meeting hours without being unfair to some delegates, e.g., requiring them to meet before 4am or after midnight.

It can be expected that in some cases the number of input contributions and the limited time available will make it difficult to allocate time for the presentation of all of the input contributions. In these cases, the Rapporteur should give priority to the discussion of the proposals in the input contributions.

Even in a virtual meeting, all of the General Rules of Conferences still apply: The Rapporteur has full authority to set the agenda, and to interrupt any speaker who strays from the topic under discussion or exceeds the amount of time they are given.

In a plenary meeting the Rapporteurs will create agendas that prioritize the work items that are planned for consent and agreement during the meeting. Work on items not planned for consent or agreement at the meeting, including the presentation of contributions on those topics, may be deferred to subsequent interim meetings. This is something that occurs even in face-to-face plenary meeting, but it is likely to occur to a much greater extent (e.g., maybe we are deferring 50% of the contributions to interim meetings instead of 10% of the contributions) in a virtual plenary meeting.

In an interim meeting the Rapporteurs will create agendas based on the priority of the work items in the work program.

For a plenary meeting there are 12 calendar days between the contribution deadline and the start of a meeting. For an interim meeting the contribution deadline can be set by the Rapporteur so that the participants have adequate time to review the contributions before the meeting (normally one week). In the interest of using the available time efficiently, it is assumed that all delegates who care about a given topic have read the contributions related to that topic. Therefore, it is not necessary to allocate meeting time to the presentation of background portions of a contribution or the alternatives considered (but not being proposed). When developing the agenda, the Rapporteur should, as in a face to face meeting, identify groups of related contributions. To facilitate an efficient discussion of the proposals in these contributions, the Rapporteur should identify the topics where these contributions make proposals on a common topic and move directly into discussion of those proposals and make of decisions without the need for separate presentations of each individual contribution. This approach is within the Rapporteur’s authority to set the agenda.

Note that it may be necessary to use the approach described above for a face-to-face meeting if a large number of contributions are received. In the past some Questions have received more than 100 contributions to a plenary meeting.

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