

# Meetings

Meetings are a key tool for managing your Graduate Group ('Group'). It keeps everyone on the same page and ensures your Group stays on track in achieving your goals and aims. This guide outlines the general tasks that Groups can do to run a successful meeting, whether that be General Meeting or Committee Meetings. Each type of meeting will have similar but different tasks and not every step is appropriate for your group. If there are additional steps your Group does, make sure to note them in any handover documents!

## Preparing for your meeting.

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Your committee should agree and confirm the following before your meeting:

- How many days' notice is required to hold your meeting?
- What is the number of people required to attend for the meeting to take place (your 'quorum')?
- Who needs to attend?
- Any other rules or requirements in your constitution or handover.

You might also want to consider if your meeting should be part of a bigger event such as a Group social, or a workshop relevant to your Group.

From there, there are several tasks to undertake to organise a meeting, so it's worth going through and assigning different people to help organise the meeting.

Who will chair the meeting, take minutes, and record attendance?

Who will:

- Book your venue and any catering.
- Prepare your documentation including the proposed agenda and set a deadline for any additional motions or topics to be submitted.
- Take the minute and how will you take minutes. Check out MGA AGM Agenda & Minutes Template for inspiration.
- Take attendance, you may use MGA Attendance Template or make your own.
- Send out an official notice of the meeting to all relevant Group/Committee members and stakeholders. The notice should include:
  - date, time, and location of the meeting;
  - the agenda;
  - any relevant information attendees may require based on your plans or requirements for the meeting.

## Running your meeting.

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Arrive early and ensure you have enough time in your venue booking to prep the room before the meeting starts. Think about where people will sit (do you need to put out chairs), set up catering if you have it and put out any documentation to share. If you are using technology, set it up first in case there's any issues.

As part of the meeting, you will need to have a record of:

- **The agenda:** Ensure attendees can see the agenda so that know what is being covered in the meeting. You could, for example, project it on a screen or distribute them digitally for members to follow on their phones, tablets and laptops. At the MGA, we encourage Groups to be environmentally conscious and print only if absolutely necessary.
- **Attendance:** Have attendees fill in the attendance form. You could also use this as a chance to sign them up as members.
- **Minutes:** Decide if you want to detail everything said, or just note decisions, votes and action points. This is your record of the event and it should provide a good overview of the meeting for people to refer back to. At a minimum, your minutes should include:
  - time, date and location of the meeting;
  - the agenda; and
  - any resolutions passed at the meeting.
- **Reports:** Depending on your Group, you may choose to have Committee members submit/give reports and you can distribute these to be read. Again, you could project, digitally distribute, or print if absolutely necessary.

## After your meeting.

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Ensure all documentation for the meeting is complete, including (as required) attendance lists, minutes and reports. Save these in a place that the Group will have access to and can find in the future – we would advise somewhere cloud-based, such as a Google Drive, Drop Box or MS Teams.

Distribute the minutes and let your members know about any important decisions, votes and updates.

## Commonly-used terms

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There's a lot of jargon thrown around when it comes to meetings, so here is a quick guide to some of the lingo you will hear.

Annual General Meeting (AGM)	An annual meeting for all members to review the previous year and to vote in the following year's Committee.
Committee Meeting	A meeting for your Committee to govern your Group. You may also have an Executive Committee Meeting just for Executives.
Constitution	A document that outlines the governance of your Group.
General Meeting	A meeting for all members to discuss updates and plans. You may choose to hold these throughout the year if needed. However, not all Groups will have these.
Motion	A motion is simply an idea on which other members can vote. This may be a proposal, recommendation or idea. After a motion has been proposed, the Chair should open up an opportunity for the Group to discuss it and then take a vote. To pass a motion is also known as carried or carried out.
Quorum	The number of people that must be present for the meeting to take place. This figure is usually defined in your Constitution (if you have one).
Seconded	You may choose to require that a motion is seconded. This means that when someone suggests a motion, another person 'seconds' the motion, indicating that they also agree that the motion should be discussed and voted on. Importantly, they do not have to agree with the motion to second it. The act of seconding can be particularly useful for larger or more formal committees who want to ensure that time is not wasted discussing motions that only one person finds pertinent. Smaller or less formal committees often choose to not require a second.
Special General Meeting (SGM)	A meeting for all members to vote on urgent major issues (such as constitutional change or electing a vacant Committee position) that cannot wait for the next AGM. These meetings are unplanned and take place as required.

# Annual General Meetings

This guide outlines the general tasks for your Group to complete before, during, and after an AGM. This guide is designed to help you conduct a best-practice AGM. You may find that not every step is appropriate to your Group and there may be tasks not noted that are relevant to your Group that you also wish to undertake.

You might find the AGM Minutes & Agenda Template, Graduate Group Handover Template, and Position Handover Template useful. These can be found in Grad Group Resources under Sample Documents.

## Preparing for your AGM.

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Your committee should confirm (via your constitution or handover if you have them) and agree to the following ahead of your meeting:

- How many days' notice is required to hold your AGM?
- What is your quorum if you have one?
- What rules are in place for your elections (see Elections Guidance)?
- What majority is required for motions and constitutional changes?
- Are committee roles still fit for purpose and up-to-date? If not, the AGM may be a good place to vote on the changes and give members a chance to prepare to run for those positions.

You may want to consider if your AGM should be part of a bigger event. You could hold it before a Group Social, or after a workshop on a topic relevant to your Group. You could even include entertainment, awards or a demonstration as part of the event. Your AGM is an important part of your Group's calendar, so enjoy it!

There are several tasks to undertake to organise the AGM, so it's worth going through and assigning different people to help organise the meeting. Aside from the regular meeting suggestions, don't forget:

- If you have a bank account, check your bank's requirements regarding transfer of signatories to the group's bank account — you may need to arrange paperwork to bring to the meeting to transfer the signatories.
- Prepare any reports that will be delivered at the AGM.
- Include any relevant information required as part of your AGM including:
  - information on any proposed constitutional changes, including the exact wording to be changed/added and specifying clauses to be changed or removed, and any motions to be voted on;

- information on any elections (see Elections guidance);
- Information on voting participation;
- any relevant information attendees may require based on your plans or requirements for the AGM; and
- If you are interested in recruiting more members, you may undertake more publicity such as posters around campus or working with Faculty members to promote the event.

## Running your AGM.

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Arrive early and ensure you have enough time in your venue booking to prep the room before the meeting starts. Think about where people will sit (do you need to put out chairs), set up catering if you have it and put out any documentation to share. If you are using technology, set it up first in case there's any issues.

### **Who does what?**

The current President generally chairs the meetings. If the President is absent, it should be chaired by another nominated executive, such as the Vice President. If this isn't possible, the Group can nominate someone else. The current Secretary generally takes minutes and organises attendance being collected. If your Group is large or your Secretary is unavailable, the Group can nominate someone else.

### **What to document**

- The agenda: Ensure attendees can see the agenda so that know what is being covered in the meeting. You could, for example, project it on a screen, print out copies, or distribute them digitally for members to follow on their phones, tablets and laptops. At the MGA, we encourage Groups to be environmentally conscious and print only if absolutely necessary.
- Attendance: Have attendees fill in the attendance form. You could also use this as a chance to sign them up as members.
- Minutes: Decide if you want to detail everything said, or just note decisions, votes and action points. This is your record of the event and it should provide a good overview of the meeting for people to refer back to. At a minimum, your minutes should include:
  - The time, date and location of the meeting;
  - the agenda; and
  - any resolutions passed at the meeting.
- Reports: Depending on your Group, you may choose to have Committee members submit/give reports and you can distribute these to be read. Again, you could project, digitally distribute, or print if absolutely necessary.

## **Reports**

Who should give reports is really up to your Group. Check your Constitution to see if this is outlined if you have one. As standard, the President and Finance Officer will present a report, but you may decide that other roles should do so too. Reports can be aural, written or presented.

The President/Chair's Report is a chance to review the year, including major activity, achievements and challenges of the year. Think about any highlights, points of note, and gratitude to individuals and organisations, you'd like to include. You can also include any advice and hopes for the future.

The Finance Officer's Report details full financial records of the past year. What this includes will depend on the size and activity of your Group but could include general details about finances, any surplus/deficit, budget and actual spend, any large expenditures or income, funding, costs and details of various projects, financial standing, a breakdown of all budget lines with income and expenditure, a balance sheet, or projections. You may also detail financial plans for the future.

## **Elections**

Democracy and the committee election are key parts of the AGM. See our Elections section for more information on how to run your election.

## **After the AGM**

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Enjoy yourself! It's good to include some kind of celebration after the AGM, to say goodbye to the old year and welcome in the new committee. However, there are still some administrative tasks to be undertaken.

### **Documentation**

Ensure all documentation for the AGM is complete, including attendance lists, minutes, reports and the names and details of any new Executive members. Save these in a place that the Group can find in the future (such as cloud-based services such as Google Drive, Drop Box or MS Teams).

### **Tell people about it**

Send out an update welcoming the new Committee and thanking the outgoing Committee. You may also choose to distribute the minutes.

### **Tell MGA about it**

Submit your AGM Minutes to MGA. Make sure to include the details of your new Committee and any other relevant documentation.

# Elections

Elections are a key part of governing your Group and it is important that they are run fairly, democratically and transparently. In preparation for your elections, you will need to consider the following:

- What requirements are outlined in your Constitution regarding Elections?
- Do any roles need adding, changing or removing?
- What are your returning officer requirements?
- Who can run?
- What nomination process will you follow?
- How will you advertise the elections and get people to run?
- How will voting be managed?
- Have you prepared for handover?

## Rules and requirements

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Check your Group's constitution and see what rules and requirements have been put in place internally for running your election. If, after reviewing this document, you see that there are areas not outlined in your Constitution, ensure that you agree them at a Committee Meeting ahead of the AGM.

When planning your Election, consider accessibility. This might include putting in reasonable adjustments to allow someone to stand for a role or to vote, or putting structures in place to support and encourage people with protected characteristics or who are less likely to run in standing for a role or voting.

Ensure all rules and requirements are communicated widely ahead of the Election.

## Review your roles

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Book in time with your committee to review your constitution and committee roles and assess if they are fit for purpose and up-to-date. There's no point in having clauses and roles in place that don't reflect your Group's requirements or operating procedures. You should open this review to all of your committee and you may choose to include or consult with your members.

You may choose to vote on these changes at the AGM or at a Special General Meeting or Committee Meeting prior to the AGM, so for example, members can prepare themselves to run for election at the AGM.

The rules for constitutional changes should be outlined in your constitution.

### **Roles outside of the constitution**

As a Group grows and changes, you may find you require some new duties to be undertaken and decide to create a position to cater to this. However, it's important to note that not all positions need to be added to your constitution and, as such, don't need to be voted on at your AGM.

A good way to separate these is to consider the responsibility of the position and if the position will hold any governance for the Group. For example, the Events Officer will likely make decisions and have a reasonable say in the events plan for the year and how events are run, so they hold a role of large responsibility and governance. An Events Assistant, who helps at events and supports the Officer in administration, holds far less responsibility and has no power in relation to governance. In this case, it's worth discussing with your Group the best way to accept someone into a non-elected position.

## **Returning Officer**

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Every election must have a Returning Officer to ensure the rules are followed and the election is fair. The Returning Officer should be unbiased and publicly impartial and, as such, cannot be running for any role, however, they are able to vote. The Committee should nominate and agree on a Returning Officer before the election. You might select an outgoing Committee member or a trusted member of the Group.

If you are unable to select a suitable Returning Officer (e.g., all your members are running for roles) you can request that the MGA provides a Returning Officer. Please make sure you notify the MGA at least two weeks prior to your AGM.

The Returning Officer must be selected ahead of the AGM. They should work with the Committee to review the rules and regulations and agree any additional rules in advance that should be adhered to throughout the election process. They should work with the Committee to decide if penalties will be given if rules are broken or there is cheating. Penalties could be removing votes or exclusion from the election.

At the election, the Returning Officer runs the election. They should explain the process to everyone present and be on hand ensure the rules are followed and that the election is a fair and democratic process. If there are timed speeches or questions, the Returning Officer would normally be the one to time them. In the event of uncertainty or rule breaking, the Returning Officer's decision is final.



## Who can run?

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Your Constitution or procedures may outline any stipulations regarding who can run for your committee roles. Many Groups are happy to have all roles open to all members, however there may be occasions to have additional eligibility criteria. For example, if you have roles for diversity, inclusion and representation, you may stipulate that candidates are members of that group.

Some larger or more established Groups also choose to put restrictions on Executive roles. Such as a member must have been active in the Group for at least a year before they can run for President. You may wish to include a provision that members who have not been active that long may run if they have the backing of a current committee member.

## Nominations

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Firstly, decide if nominations require a 'second' (where another member must second the nomination for someone to run). This may be appropriate for larger and more formal Groups but is not usually necessary.

Secondly, decide if nominations must be self-nominated or if others can nominate someone to run. Allowing others to nominate can be a good encouragement to push someone to stand for a role, but it's important to ensure that no one is being forced to stand for a position against their will.

There are several approaches for handling nominations.

### **Nominations open ahead of time (a nomination period)**

For this, you may request Expression of Interests to be sent to the Returning Officer from interested members via whatever means you feel is appropriate (e.g. email, online form, text message, phone calls, in person, and/or a printed nomination form). A nomination period would normally have an 'Opening' time and a 'Deadline' and the Returning Officer would check that nominations were received within the agreed period.

A nomination period can be beneficial if you have a larger group and are running a more formal election, as it gives the Returning Officer time to collate the information and prepare for the election. It also allows you to track how popular a role is and potentially try and attract people to run for roles that no one is putting

themselves forward for. However, it may seem a little less accessible and may mean fewer people are able to run.

### **Nominations open at the AGM**

You may choose to allow people to turn up and nominate themselves at the AGM. For example, the Returning Officer can announce each role and ask anyone who would like to run for it to put up their hand or stand at the front of the room.

Having nominations open at the AGM can be beneficial as it allows more opportunity for people to run, can be more accessible and fairer, and may encourage people who are a bit nervous to get involved and give it a shot. It also means that if you have a role that no one is standing for, someone may choose to run for it on the day. However, this can be harder to coordinate on the day and can mean the AGM runs less smoothly.

### **Nominations open ahead of time and at the AGM**

You may choose to combine both options – holding an optional nomination period but also allowing anyone to run on the day.

## **Get people to run**

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It's important to advertise the elections widely through your communication channels, to allow anyone eligible a fair opportunity to run. You could also choose to hold Information Sessions so people can find out more about the roles and what being on the Committee would entail.

If you think someone would make a good President or Finance Officer – tell them! If you're connected to a Faculty, you could also ask your supervisors and lecturers to suggest people to run. Giving someone a little encouragement might just give them the boost to run.

Your Group may also allow nominations (where a member can nominate someone to run) or run a 'recommend-a-friend' scheme (where a member can submit the name of someone who is then informed that someone thinks they would be good for a role and asked if they would like to self-nominate).

Importantly, there may be people you want to run, but you should never discourage someone from running.

## Voting

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Check if your constitution outlines how voting should be undertaken. If not (or if you choose to change it), there are quite a few options. Most Groups choose to undertake either a 'Simple Vote' (suitable if there is only a few candidates) or a 'Single Transferable Vote' (where preferences are considered).

### **Simple Vote (First Past the Post)**

In a Simple Vote, voters each have one vote and the candidate with the most votes wins. As it is very straightforward, it can be good for smaller groups or when you only have one or two candidates. However, it doesn't allow voters to express their preferences beyond one candidate and can mean that a candidate can win without a clear majority (e.g., if A receives 5 votes, B receives 4 votes, C receives 4 votes and D receives 3 votes, then A wins with just 31% of the vote).

You can undertake this style of vote via:

- Show of Hands
  - This style of voting is not completely anonymous.
  - Candidates step out of the room when voting takes place or turn around when voting commences to allow them to still participate in the voting.
- Secret Ballot
  - This form of voting is much more confidential and anonymous.
  - Voters write the name of their preferred candidate on a ballot slip. You may also choose to undertake a Secret Ballot using an online tool. It is useful to have the candidates' names written somewhere highly visible so voters can ensure they are voting for the correct person.

In both styles, the person with the highest number of votes is elected. If there is more than one vacancy for the same position (eg. two Events Officers), these can either be voted on separately or the runner-up of the election can be given the second position. Make sure you make this clear when the vote is being undertaken.

The Returning Officer counts the votes for each person and records them. Whether you disclose the number of votes or if you just announce the winner is optional. If there is a tie, you may re-run the vote with the tied candidates only and/or use a coin toss to decide the winner.

### **Single Transferable Vote (STV)**

Single Transferable Vote takes into consideration voter's preferences of multiple candidates. This system is more complicated and can take longer than a Simple Vote but it allows individuals to express their preference a lot clearer. It is

particularly useful for larger committees or roles with three or more candidates running.

To undertake STV, voters should number the preferences of their candidates. If the ballot is prepared in advance, they can do this by putting numbers next to the candidate's name by order of preference. If the ballot is not prepared in advance, they can write the candidates' names in order of preference. If they do not list all the candidates, voters may only one candidate if they wish. It is useful to have the candidates' names written somewhere highly visible so voters can ensure they are voting for the correct person.

To tally these votes, the Returning Officer should count up all the First Preference votes. If one candidate has over 50% of the vote, they are the winner. If no candidate has over 50% of the vote, then the person with the least number of votes is eliminated and all their votes are redistributed according to the preferences on their ballot papers.

This process continues until someone receives over 50% of the vote or, when only two people are left, the person who receives the highest number of votes. If there is a tie in the Final Stage, then the winner is the candidate who had the higher percentage of votes in the previous round. If the two candidates have been tied throughout every round, the Returning Officer may choose to hold a run off Simple Vote for the two remaining candidates or use a coin toss to decide the winner.

If there is more than one vacancy for the same position (eg. two Events Officers), these can either be voted on separately or the runner-up of the election can be given the second position. Make sure you make this clear when the vote is being undertaken.

The Returning Officer counts the votes for each person and records them. Whether you disclose the number of votes or if you just announce the winner is optional. If there is a tie, you may re-run the vote with the tied candidates only and/or use a coin toss to decide the winner.

### **Re-open Nominations (RON)**

You may choose to include 'Re-open Nominations' (RON) as an option for voting. This allows voters the option to choose no candidates and ask for the position to be re-run. Allowing RON allows for a more democratic approach to elections, particularly if there is only one or two people running, as it allows voters to indicate that they do not feel anyone running is suitable for the position and aren't pressured into voting for someone they don't want to, just because there is no other choice.

In the case of Simple Voting, if you are using the Show of Hands method of voting, the Returning Officer should state 'RON' as one of the options during the vote (usually as the last option, making it clear it isn't a candidate called Ron). If you are using Secret Ballots, RON should be one of the options in the list that voters can note down or put a tick next to.

In the case of STV, voters may choose RON at any stage. For example, they may choose to vote for one candidate, then vote RON as their second preference; following this, they could still have other preferences or have no more preferences.

Wherever you have candidates' names written (e.g. on a prepared ballot sheet, on a PowerPoint, or on a white/blackboard), you should include RON as one of the options (usually last). Make sure you explain RON to all voters before the first vote.

## Who can vote?

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Check your constitution but in general the people who can vote are:

- Full members
- The Returning Officer
- Committee
- The candidates themselves

Associate members are normally not eligible to vote.

## Proxy / Absentee voting

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You may choose to allow Proxy / Absentee voting (unless there is a stipulation against such voting in your Constitution or Procedures), particularly if your election takes place outside of term time or if your members are regularly separated across a variety of locations (e.g., students on placement).

While these votes are included in the calculated total votes (e.g., for a majority win or the number of votes required for a motion to pass), it is important to note that the member is not counted as in attendance so they do not count towards quorum.

### **Directly to Returning Officer**

If you are announcing standing candidates before the Election and are not allowing 'walk in' nominations, you may allow Proxy/Absentee votes to go directly to the Returning Officer. In this case, you would request that all votes are received by preferred means (e.g., email or phone) by a certain time before the Election starts.

It may be prudent to request details such as the voter's name, university address, student ID, reason why they are unable to attend and confirmation that they are a member of the Group. Some groups also put stipulations on what is considered a legitimate reason for non-attendance and, as such, only accept Proxy / Absentee votes under some circumstances.

You will need to ensure that voters are only able to vote once and that the Returning Officer is able to verify that the person voting is indeed a member.

### **Via a Proxy Voter/Holder**

You may choose to allow Proxy Voters/Holder to vote on behalf of an absent member. It's important to ensure that the Proxy Vote is legitimate – for example, using a Signed Proxy Form detailing the member's full name, student number, email address and a statement that clearly identifies that they wish to nominate their fellow member to vote on their behalf.

If standing candidates (or motions) are announced before the Election, voters may instruct their Proxy Voters/Holder how they wish to vote. If not, they may leave it up to the discretion of their Proxy.

### **Online**

An alternative option is to allow absentee voters be present via phone or video call. You would need to ensure they can submit votes directly to the Returning Officer in a confidential manner – e.g., via text, messenger, email or form. If you use an online form, you will need to ensure that voters are only able to vote once and that the Returning Officer is able to verify that the person voting is indeed a member.

## **Online elections**

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Hosting an in-person AGM and Election might not always be practical or democratic for some Groups. Online elections offer an alternative option, particularly for groups where membership is spread across campuses or are regularly on placement. Most of the guidance above is also relevant for online elections, so please read that carefully. If this is an avenue you would like to explore and wish to discuss the options further, please just get in touch.

For an online AGM, you may use video chat or an online message-based service.

When organising an online election, it's important to consider your timeline early. How long is your nomination period, how long is voting open for and when are

results going to be announced. As always, check your constitution for any guidance or provision for online elections including the use of online election services.

### **Nominations**

Consider how you wish to receive nominations and what candidates must do to nominate (see above). If you are using an online tool, candidates may be able to submit their nomination directly to it. If you are coordinated it 'in house', you may, for example, request nominations via email or Google Form.

### **Access to candidates**

If you are not holding a traditional AGM and there will be no opportunity for voters to have access to all candidates ahead of the vote, consider how you will ensure voters can learn about each candidate. An online service may allow for videos, manifestos and FAQs. If you are coordinating your elections 'in house', you may choose to set up, for example, a Facebook Event, blog or Instagram account, where you include the manifestos, a short statement and/or a video of each candidate.

### **Voting**

Decide early how you will undertake online voting. Consider how long the voting period should be and how people can vote. For example, will you use a form, an app or an online service? How will you ensure that every eligible member can vote but stop people that can't vote from voting? Similarly, how will you ensure members don't vote more than once?

If you are using a form, you may request identifying details, such as name, student number and email address, but that means votes aren't anonymous, so the Returning Officer should ensure the votes are kept confidential.

Consider how you will ensure candidates do not unduly influence someone's vote (e.g., candidates cannot watch while a voter votes and cannot vote on their behalf).

## **Handover**

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Following the election of your new committee, it's really important to have a proper handover to ensure the incoming group are trained well and have all the information they need to do their role. You might choose to hold a handover meeting or a series of handover sessions or have individuals organise their own handovers. Just ensure that handover is accessible and thorough and important details (including passwords and logins!) are transferred. You can also use our Handover Templates to help with the process.