

7.2 Governance matters

In response to enclosed request received from Danish Dental Association, Finnish Dental Association, Icelandic Dental Association, Norwegian Dental Association and Swedish Dental Association, proposing the changes to rules and regulations concerning the possibility of digital voting, the Council offers the following evaluation:

Council's responsibility for organization of the General Assembly: According to the FDI Constitution, the Council determines the time, place, management, and general arrangements of General Assembly meetings. The proposed change would remove the Council's responsibility to determine the format of the General Assembly (GA) meeting (including the voting method), whether hybrid, online only, or in person. Council is the body responsible for the initiation, conduct, delegation, monitoring and coordination of all business of FDI along with the FDI's financial stability. This means that, in order to discharge these responsibilities, Council must also be able to maintain the right to take into account all factors that may affect the ability of the General Assembly to discharge its own duties and responsibilities democratically and effectively. The facilitation of participation in General Assembly business meetings was necessarily considered in detail during 2020 and 2021 and the Council has continued to monitor the potential impact of improved virtual communications and environmental significance since then. The following points have led the Council to conclude that, on balance, FDI's interests are best served by the General Assembly meetings being held in person for the foreseeable future.

Accessibility, financial and environmental considerations: The Council does appreciate that, at first pass, the concept of reducing the financial expense and environmental impact of global travel involved in discharging the General Assembly's duties is attractive. It also understands that it may be perceived that virtual attendance at GA business meetings would increase accessibility. The Council also fully accepts that these issues should be regularly reviewed and welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the discussions.

Technical challenges and reliability: Hybrid meetings heavily depend on technology. Not all members may have access to the necessary technology or ideal environment for virtual participation which may create disparities and disadvantages. Technical difficulties such as poor internet connections of the participant, or poor connection in the congress venue at the destination, have a great risk for successful flow of the meeting and effective communication and participation.

Lack of engagement and participation: In-person GA meetings provide full engagement and interaction among participants. The ability to have side conversations contribute to more productive meeting experience, which cannot be replicated in a hybrid setting. Virtual attendance might lead to lower in-person participation, which affects the overall discussion, atmosphere and engagement of the event. Without full engagement in participation, delegates will have limited opportunity to make fully informed decision. This is a risk for FDI democratic way of conduct of the GA meetings.

Democracy and inclusivity: Mandatory hybrid meetings will lead to reduced democratic collaboration. Ensuring that both in-person and virtual participants have equal opportunities to contribute and to follow discussions is challenging for the meeting organizers, translators and moderators. There is a risk that many members would be able (if they choose) to vote and influence decision making in FDI without the benefit of hearing and taking part in all opportunities for pre-voting debate and discussions.

Building Relationships and Networking: In-person GA meetings and WDC provide many opportunities for formal and informal interactions, networking, and relationship-building that are hard to replicate virtually. These interactions can lead to stronger collaboration and a sense of community within the Federation.

Long meetings and different time zones: Organizing a hybrid General Assembly meeting would be challenging due to time zone differences. From the online World Dental Parliament experience in 2021, managing time differences was one of the biggest challenges. For that meeting, careful consideration was given to the schedule of business meetings so that online attendance was more manageable for virtual participants in different time zones. This resulted in an extension of the business meeting schedule to last over two weeks to accommodate shorter sessions. Even with that arrangement, there was no time frame to suit all members across the world. This was clearly an extraordinary circumstance due to the risks posed by the global pandemic. Extending the schedule to shorten the meetings and allow for interactive participation of those GA delegates attending virtually would significantly increase venue costs and expenses of delegates attending in person and we would not be able to implement a whole agenda in a timely manner.

Dramatic costs and consequences to the host National Dental Association and FDI: Financially, hybrid events are not cost-effective. While they can reduce travel and accommodation expenses for virtual participants, the costs of setting up and maintaining a hybrid infrastructure are significant, as we would need to sustain two full teams. Beyond the drastic increase in costs for organizing hybrid meetings, most of the burden will be placed on the host country, although some financial burden will also fall on FDI. Delegates who are not present at the General Assembly (GA) meetings would not attend the WDC. This reduces the number of registered delegates, lowers attendance at the congress, and diminishes participation in the scientific program and other educational activities, posing a risk to the overall success of the FDI WDC. We believe that this could jeopardize the sustainability of our franchise model due to the high costs involved. The failure of the current model would lead to increased expenses and human resources required for FDI to organize WDC/WDP, posing a great risk of a deficit in FDI finances and consequently leading to a decrease in FDI reserves.

To end, we are in the process of lowering the membership fees; however, if the last scenario occurs, we would, without a doubt, have to increase membership fees.

PROs	CONs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially increased participation / Convenience • More sustainable (less travel) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removing responsibilities from the Council • Lack of full engagement and participation • Technology challenges for members • Technology challenges for FDI organizers • Lack of direct networking • Long meetings for different time zones • Drastic increase of costs for hybrid meetings • Financial impact to the organizing host member • Reduced attendance at WDC – impact on host country • Risk of losing franchise model due to high costs • Drastic increase in expenses and human resources • Risk of deficit in FDI finances leading to decrease in reserves

The Council recommends no change to the current rules and regulations.

FDI Regular Members are welcome to send comments by August 25, 2024. Please email your correspondence to: divosevic@fdiworlddental.org

FDI Governance matters will be discussed at Open Forum 1 on Monday, September 9, 2024.