Effective Branch AGMs

Introduction
As you are probably aware, organisations with a membership have a legal responsibility to hold Annual General Meetings (AGMs). There are statutory requirements for what an AGM has to include, however your AGM is also a great opportunity to share and celebrate all that you have achieved over the past year with your members and supporters.

This guide will help you by explaining how your AGM can be used to:
- tell your members about what you have achieved during the year
- raise awareness of MND locally
- increase the profile of your branch

Sample materials to help make the process easier for you are available to download direct from the Volunteer Zone or from the Volunteering Team.

Why have an AGM?
The main purpose of your AGM is to give your membership an account of your branch’s activities during the previous year. It is also the occasion at which new committee members are formally elected.

As well as these formal responsibilities, and with a little forward planning, your AGM also provides a valuable opportunity to:
- say thank you to volunteers, members and supporters
- raise awareness of MND and our work amongst a wider audience
- recruit new volunteers
- showcase what your branch has achieved during the year
- celebrate how much money has been raised and explain how it has been spent

Saying thank you:
As well as electing new volunteers to your branch committee, your AGM may also be the time when a committee volunteer retires from their role. Your AGM provides an opportunity to say thank you and recognise their contribution to your branch. You may also want to recognise volunteers who are remaining on the committee but have been volunteering for a particular length of time.
Long service award certificates and pin badges in recognition of 5, 10, 15 and 20 years of volunteering are available from the Volunteering Team, as well as a certificate and engraved pen for 25 years service, and a certificate and bespoke gift for 35 years. For those who have volunteered for 25 years or more and are retiring, contact the Volunteering Team about a retirement gift.

For more information about long service awards and retirement gifts contact the Volunteering Team.

As well as the invaluable support from your committee volunteers, you will receive help and support throughout the year from many others including individual fundraisers, companies, local care centres and hospices, and health and social care professionals.

Some branches invite representatives from these groups to their AGM to show their appreciation. It can help them to understand how their contribution has made a difference and could motivate them to do more for your branch in the future.

You may wish to consider presenting them with a certificate of recognition. These are available from the Volunteering Team.

Raising awareness:
To help raise awareness outside your membership, invite local dignitaries or people who have supported your branch or may do so in the future. Examples include:
- Members of Parliament or Welsh Assembly Members and prospective candidates
- Mayors and local councilors
- Local health and social care representatives
- Representatives of local organisations such as the Lions Club, Round Table, volunteer centre or carer’s groups
- Representatives from local business

You may even be able to attract the local media to your AGM, especially if local dignitaries are attending. For guidance about getting your event in the media download our guide from the Volunteer Zone in the Awareness Raising section, or contact the Volunteering Team.

Recruiting new volunteers:
The best way to recruit volunteers is to ask. You will have a captive audience at your AGM, so it provides the perfect opportunity for you to ask for volunteers to get involved with your branch. There could be a vacancy on your branch committee, or you could be looking for volunteers who are able to help out from time-to-time at events.

Showcasing what your branch has achieved:
The best way to do this would be to include it as part of the Chair’s report during the formal AGM proceedings, however in addition to this, you could consider:
• A display board with photos/posters highlighting the different events and activities that your branch has undertaken during the previous year
• A photo slide show which runs on a loop as people arrive and before the formal proceedings start
• Asking a committee volunteer, a person with MND or a carer to talk about the branch from their perspective after the formal AGM proceedings
• Creating a ‘special’ issue newsletter/handout which can be given out which highlights the different events or activities of your branch over the previous year

Celebrating how much money has been raised and how it has been spent:
The report delivered by your Treasurer during the formal AGM proceedings will provide an opportunity for this to be highlighted, however in addition you may wish to also consider:
• Highlighting how much has been spent in your area from David Niven House – this information is available from the Information Exchange or from the Equipment Loan and Financial Support Team (01604 611802, support.services@mn dassociation.org)
• Including this information on a display board or on a powerpoint slide show which can run whilst your guests arrive
• Including this in a ‘special’ issue newsletter or handout

Preparing for your AGM

When to hold it
Your AGM should be held in February, March or April. When deciding on a date, consider the following:
• Are the branch officers available?
• If you have a patron or president, are they available?
• Is your preferred speaker available?
• What type of event do you want to hold?
• Is a suitable accessible venue available?
• Does the date clash with any other major event (MND Association event or national event)?

Where to hold it
It’s best to start by giving thought to how many people you plan to invite. Consider using somewhere special – a place that people don’t usually go to, such as the hospitality suite at a local sports ground, a museum, or a stately house. Using an interesting venue/location may encourage people to attend. There may be a charge for a good venue, but think of this cost as investing in developing your branch and raising awareness of our work. It’s also worth asking if they offer a discount to charities.
If you are using a venue you haven’t used before, please take the time to visit the venue before you confirm your booking to ensure that wheelchair users can access the room and make full use of all the facilities.

You will be required to carry out a full risk assessment of the venue. More information about risk assessments, including a risk assessment form are available on the Volunteer Zone or from the Volunteering Team.

Who to invite
In addition to your members and honorary members, such as your president or patron, who must be invited, and in addition to those previously recommended to invite to help you raise awareness, we suggest you also invite:
- People you want to thank
- Someone you would like to take on the role of president or patron
- Local press and photographers

Finding good speakers
An effective report from the chair will inform your audience about what your branch has been doing. This report should include information about the support given to people affected by MND, awareness raising, fundraising and campaigning.

Following this with an interesting and charismatic speaker at your AGM can be a big key to success. Before you choose a speaker, think about your audience and the key messages you want to get across.

Suggested topics for speakers include:
- The challenges of living with MND
- The potential of research
- The impact of care services
- The difference the branch can make to people living with MND and how your audience can get involved

Suggested speakers include:
- A neurologist, or representative from the neurological team
- A representative from a local Special Interest Group
- A director, or representative from one of the teams at David Niven House
- Your president or patron
- A local celebrity who has a particular interest in our work

Make sure you brief your speaker, being clear about the subject of their talk, how long you want their presentation to last (remembering to allow time for questions). It is also good to ask if they will need any equipment e.g. a laptop and projector so you can hire it from the venue if required.
Attracting your audience
Your invite to your AGM needs to capture interest and make the person who is invited want to find out more by attending.

It is recommended to ask for people to let you know if they are planning to attend – this will help with catering requirements etc, however be aware that you are likely to get a couple of extra people turn up on the day.

Example invitation letters are available on the Volunteer Zone or contact the Volunteering Team.

Structuring the meeting
Work our roughly how long the formal part of the meeting will take so that you know how long you have for the speaker, questions and refreshments.

Here is an example of a typical timetable:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2pm</td>
<td>AGM (this formal part should take a maximum of 30 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.30pm</td>
<td>Guest speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00pm</td>
<td>Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.15pm</td>
<td>Thank you and refreshments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remember, if you plan to use the opportunity to present long service awards or retirement gifts you need to factor timing for this in too.

An example agenda is available to download on the Volunteer Zone or from the Volunteering Team.

Agreeing roles
Take a look at our checklist (available on the Volunteer Zone) which lists all the tasks that need to be carried out before, during and after an AGM and identify who in your committee is going to take responsibility for each.

Dealing with the unexpected
If you’ve prepared well, your AGM should run smoothly. Everyone who attends will want to play their part in making sure it is an enjoyable and worthwhile event.

There is always a possibility, though small, that individuals who are not part of the Association may wish to disrupt the event or use it as an opportunity to protest, for example, because the Association funds research involving animals. The risk of this happening is very low, but it’s worth thinking about how you would deal with this should it occur. Venue staff should be able to help with managing security issues. You can discuss this with them as part of your risk assessment when you book the venue.
Organising refreshments
It is good practice to provide both hot and cold drinks. You may also wish to provide cake, or perhaps even a light buffet especially if there are going to be lots of people attending, or depending on the time of day you are holding it. Remember to consider the requirements of any guests with MND who may attend. Do you have an option of soft foods and will appropriate utensils be available?

The formalities
It is important that things run smoothly and correctly on the day and it is therefore essential to get the formal procedures right.

Step 1 – send notification to your members
Members must be given 30 days notice of when the AGM is to be held. The notice of the AGM should specify the time and place of the meeting. It should also include a nomination form for joining the committee and we suggest this is accompanied by information explaining the role of the branch committee and encouraging people to put their names forward.

The notice should also include a request for resolutions. A resolution is a proposal or motion to be discussed and voted on at the AGM. Members should be given the opportunity to get their voice heard and shape the direction of the branch by being invited to put forward a resolution.

It’s also a good idea to include a map and directions to the venue. Include the full address, including postcode for those who use satellite navigation (sat nav).

Examples of invitations, covering letters and nomination forms can be downloaded from the Volunteer Zone or can be obtained from the Volunteering Team.

Step 2 – organise the election of the branch management committee (BMC)
The AGM is the event when your new committee is elected for the coming year. Potential new candidates should be identified well in advance of the AGM and asked if they would consider joining the committee.

Whilst the notice of your AGM will include an invitation for people to put themselves forward, it is unusual for people to put themselves forward without being prompted by someone and the best way to recruit is being asked.

If they agree to stand, ensure that they are nominated at least two weeks before the meeting. The completed nomination form should be given to the branch secretary.

All candidates for the BMC must sign the declaration form as a requirement of the Branch Charter. These should be returned to, and retained by, the secretary.
During your AGM

Setting up
It is important to have the venue ready before any guests and other attendees arrive. This shows professionalism and allows time for your committee members to meet and greet attendees personally as they arrive.

Ensure copies of the agenda, minutes of the previous year’s AGM, and copies of this year’s finances are available.

Upon their arrival, ask all attendees to sign the attendance list. It is a legal requirement to have a signed list of all who attended, including the committee, to show who was there.

Only full members who live in your branch area or who otherwise wish to be linked to your branch (Branch Charter, clause 8) are eligible to vote. A list of those entitled to vote is made available to you prior to your AGM.

The formalities
The formal AGM should be as follows:

- Introduction and welcome from the branch chair
- Apologies
- Minutes of the previous AGM to be agreed (to be proposed, seconded and voted upon by members)
- Matters arising
- Chair’s report
- Secretary’s report (optional)
- Treasurer’s report
- Election of Branch Management Committee (to be proposed, seconded and voted upon by members)
- Resolutions
- Any other business

The election at the AGM should be to select members of the BMC only rather than for particular positions on the committee. These can be decided at the first meeting of the new committee following the AGM.

Your speaker will follow once the formal AGM is over.

Thank your guest speaker immediately after their presentation so as not to hold up proceedings. If they have a busy schedule they may leave shortly afterwards.

Following your guest speaker, it is a good opportunity to thank not only those attending but everyone who has helped at any time throughout the past year. Many casual
volunteers may be unable to attend but should be thanked for their contribution and that thanks should be minuted.

**After your AGM**

Send a thank you card/letter to your guest speaker and anyone else as appropriate e.g. any dignitaries who attended.

Write an article about your AGM and share this in your newsletter or on your website. This will help keep your members/local contacts who were unable to attend updated. An article could also inspire someone to volunteer.

Make notes of what went well or not so well, and ideas that you have, to help you when it comes to organising the following years AGM.

Send a copy of your AGM minutes to the Volunteering Team, by email where possible to volunteering@mndassociation.org

**The formalities**

At the first committee meeting following your AGM, the branch officers (Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary and Treasurer) can be elected. We suggest that the members of the branch committee are asked to nominate themselves for honorary positions at this first committee meeting. If a position is contested, an election should be held in secret ballot.

At this meeting, we ask that the Chair (or other branch officer if you do not have a Chair) signs two copies of the Branch Charter. One should be retained by the secretary for your records and the other returned to the Volunteering Team.

It is a requirement of the Branch Charter that the committee takes up references for new branch officers. This should be done by the secretary following the election of officers. Effectively this means that their election as branch officers is subject to references. In the unlikely event of an unsatisfactory reference being received, the secretary should discuss it with your VDC. More information on taking up references is available on the Volunteer Zone.

The Branch Management Committee (BMC) list should also be checked and returned to the Volunteering Team. This ensures that all new volunteers receive free membership and enables us to update our database with any changes so that volunteers receive relevant communications such as The News, Thumb Print etc.

All forms completed as part of the AGM process should be retained/returned as follows:
Please ensure the necessary documents are returned to the Volunteering Team as soon as possible following your first committee meeting after your AGM. Your branch identity/Association membership cards will be sent out on receipt of these forms.

**Co-opting process**
You may recruit volunteers to your committee throughout the year. Until they are formally elected at the following AGM, you can co-opt them onto your committee.

Please ensure that you provide the Volunteering Team with their contact details and role so that they can be added to our database and provided with their free membership. This will also ensure they receive volunteer and membership communications with us.

**If you would like any further help with planning your AGM, contact your VDC who will be pleased to help you.**

**For more information contact the Volunteering Team:**
Phone: 0345 6044 150
Email: volunteering@mndassociation.org
Website: www.mndassociation.org/volunteerzone

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