

# Robert's Rules of Order - Explained

By following Robert's Rules of Order, your chapter's board can maintain order, ensure fairness, and make informed decisions during meetings. It is essential to encourage a culture of respect, participation, and transparency to effectively serve your mission.

While knowing and following all of Robert's Rules is difficult, we have prepared a brief that will assist you in keeping order during your chapter Board meetings.

## **For the Chair (Chapter President or their designee in their absence)**

The Chair speaks of themselves only in the third person - that is, they never use the personal pronoun "I". In actual parliamentary proceedings they always refer to themselves as "the chair" or with his official title, as in, "Your President is pleased to report...". The chair also does not mention a member's name and does not address an individual member as "you" except in connection with certain disciplinary procedures. Note: the chair of the meeting should not make motions during the meeting.

## **Before the Meeting**

### **Agenda Preparation**

The chairperson, often the president, should work with the Chapter Administrator and other members of the Office of the President to create a detailed agenda for the meeting (see sample here: [CLRP > Office of the President > MPI Chapter Board Service > Sample Board of Directors Meeting agenda \(Sample Template\)](#))).

The agenda should include all items to be discussed, reports to be presented, and any motions to be made.

### **Distribution of Materials**

Share the agenda and any relevant materials, such as reports or financial statements, with board members well in advance of the meeting.

Encourage members to review these materials prior to the meeting.

### **Reminder and RSVP**

Send out a reminder notice a few days before the meeting, requesting RSVPs from all board members.

## **During the Meeting**

### **Call to Order**

The chairperson or president calls the meeting to order at the scheduled time.

Ensure there is a quorum, meaning that a minimum number of board members are present to conduct official business. For MPI chapters, this means a majority of the Chapter Board of Directors, as per the MPI Chapter Bylaws.

### **Adoption of the Agenda**

The chairperson asks for a motion to adopt the agenda.

A board member must move to approve the agenda, and another member must second it prior to the vote.

The agenda can be modified, if necessary, but this should also be done by motion and vote.

### **Recognition of Members**

Throughout the meeting, the chairperson recognizes members who wish to speak.

Members should address the chair and avoid interrupting others.

### **Motions**

When an agenda item involves a decision, a member should make a motion. For example, "I move that we allocate \$5,000 for our upcoming community event."

It is important to say precisely what the words of the motion are to be. The group votes on exact language, not on a vague idea. Motions must be written exactly as they are proposed in the minutes. It is the minute taker's responsibility to copy them accurately.

After making a motion, the member must wait until later to give reasons for making the proposal.

A defeated motion cannot be renewed in the same meeting in which it was defeated.

Another member must second the motion for it to be considered unless the motion is made on behalf of a committee. Note: for meetings with less than 12 Board members in attendance, special exceptions apply (see Procedures in Small Boards below).

Note: Seconding a motion does not imply that the member supports the proposed motion. It only indicates that the member agrees that the motion should be considered.

Neither the making nor the seconding of a motion places it before the assembly; only the chair can do that, by the third step (stating the question). When the chair has stated the question, the motion is pending, that is "on the floor". It is then open to debate.

### **Obtaining the Floor and Processing a Main Motion**

1. Member addresses the Chair,  
"Mr./Madam President."
2. The Chair recognizes member by calling his/her name.
3. Member proposes motion,  
"I move that \_\_\_\_\_."
4. Another member seconds the motion,  
"I second the motion."

5. The Chair states the motion,  
"It has been moved and seconded that \_\_\_\_."
6. The Chair calls for debate,  
"Is there any discussion?" "Are there any remarks?" "Are you ready for the question?"
7. The Chair takes the vote when the debate has ended.  
"The question is on the adoption of the motion that \_\_\_\_."  
"Those in favor say, 'Aye'. Those opposed say, 'No'."
8. The Chair announces the results of the vote.  
"The ayes have it. The motion is carried, and we will (repeat motion)."  
"The noes have it. The motion is lost, and we will not (repeat motion)."

### **Steps to Making Motions and Common Mistakes**

#### **1. A member stands up, is recognized, and makes a motion.**

*Common Mistake: Members do not stand up, do not wait to be recognized, and typically start to discuss their motion before completing Steps 2,3 & 4*

#### **2. Another member seconds the motion.**

*Common Mistake: The person seconding the motion starts discussing it.*

#### **3. The presiding officer restates the motion to the assembly.**

*Common Mistake: Motion is restated differently from the wording of the maker. It should be exactly as the person who originally stated the motion.*

#### **4. The members debate the motion.**

*Common Mistake: Debate gets out of control. Members talk to each other across the room rather than through the presiding officer. Remember that each member should have the opportunity to speak to a motion only twice.*

#### **5. The Presiding Officer asks for the affirmative votes & then the negative votes.**

*Common Mistake: The presiding officer states 'All in favor' and fails to tell the members what to do as a matter of voting (for example, 'say aye', 'stand up', 'raise your hand', etc. Remember that the negative vote must also be counted.*

#### **6. The presiding officer announces the result of the voting; instructs the corresponding officer to take action; and introduces the next item of business.**

*Common Mistake: Presiding officer fails to pronounce the result of the voting. No one is instructed to take action.*

## **Consent Agendas**

A consent agenda (also known by Roberts Rules of Order as a “consent calendar”) groups routine meeting discussion points into a single agenda item. In so doing, the grouped items can be approved in one action, rather than through the filing of multiple motions.

### **The Rules for Using a Consent Agenda**

If you believe a consent agenda may enable more efficient meetings, you will need to follow these essential use rules:

- All documentation associated with consent items must be provided to meeting participants in advance so that they can still make an informed vote on all grouped items. Board members must review the documentation before the meeting to ensure they are informed of the issues to be passed as part of the consent group.
- Board members must be given an opportunity to ask associated questions—and have them answered—before the vote. Questions and answers should be shared with all meeting participants. Simple questions, clarifications, or short amounts of dialogue relative to a consent item may be discussed after the motion, but before approval. What is important is not to remove consent items entirely from the consent agenda for the sole purpose of answering a simple question, as this would undermine the efficiency of the consent agenda process.
- On meeting day, include the consent agenda as part of the meeting agenda, or as a separate agenda document.
- At the start of the meeting, the meeting chair should ask meeting attendees if anyone wants to discuss any of the items listed on the consent agenda.
- If it is determined that an item on the consent agenda requires discussion it must be removed from the consent portion and addressed individually. For future meetings in which there is no question or concern over the item, it may be placed back into the consent portion of the agenda.
- An item from the consent agenda must be moved at the request of any Board member if the individual wants to vote against the specific item—as the item no longer has the consolidated approval of the team. This discussion step is critical, as consent agendas may not be used to force the approval of items through a process that eliminates their individual review.
- The Chair must read aloud the remaining consent items and may move to adopt the consent agenda as a whole. It is not necessary for a vote to be taken on the consent agenda. Instead, the items may be approved, pending the absence of any objections.
- The Chapter Administrator must include in the meeting minutes the full text of all resolutions and reports that were approved as part of the consent group, even though they were not reviewed at the meeting, but instead, before it by each Board member.

### **What Types of Items Should be Included in the Consent Portion of the Agenda**

For greatest efficiency, include the following types of items in the consent portion of your meeting agendas:

- Topics of a routine/recurring nature
- Procedural decisions
- Non-controversial issues that do not require debate or deliberation
- Items previously discussed for which the team has come to a consensus, but that still need an official vote

**The following items are typically best suited as consent items**

- The previous meetings' minutes
- Financial reports or any other reports that are informational only and that do not require debate
- The administrator's report
- Individual program/department reports
- Committee appointments

**Consent Agenda Conclusion**

It is important for all Board members to bear in mind that transparency and accountability should not be sacrificed for the sake of expeditious time management. With the use of a consent agenda, you can ask clarifying questions before the meeting, request discussion when necessary, and pull items that one feels they cannot approve. There are efficiencies to be gained from consent agendas as they can be used as a tool to free up meeting time for discussion on valuable, impactful topics, but only when used correctly and when proper attention is still paid to each item included.

**Debate**

The chairperson opens the floor for debate. Members can discuss the motion, asking questions and expressing their opinions.

In the debate, each member has the right to speak twice on the same question on the same day but cannot make a second speech on the same question so long as any member who has not spoken on that question desires the floor. A member who has spoken twice on a particular question on the same day has exhausted their right to debate that question for that day.

**Amendments**

Members can propose amendments to a motion to modify or change its wording or intent. The process for amending a motion involves making a motion to amend, which is subject to debate and vote. Once amendments are made, the main motion is voted on with the amendments incorporated.

**Three Basic Processes of Amendment**

1. To insert or add  
 "I move to amend the motion by inserting the word, 'red', before the word, 'roses'."
2. To strike out  
 "I move to amend the motion by striking out the words, 'long stemmed', before the word, 'roses'."
3. To strike out and insert

"I move to amend the motion by striking out the word, 'flowers', and inserting the word, 'roses'."

To substitute is to strike out a paragraph, or entire text and insert another. An amendment must be related (germane) to the motion being carried out. An amendment is voted upon first; then the motion as it is amended is voted upon.

#### **Withdrawal of a Motion**

The maker of a motion can withdraw it with the consent of the assembly. If there is no objection, the motion is considered withdrawn.

#### **Calling the Question**

At any time during a discussion, a member of the voting body may "call the question" which terminates all further discussion and requires an immediate vote on the motion.

## **How Can a Group Change Its Mind?**

#### **Motion to reconsider**

If a motion has been either adopted or defeated during a meeting, and at least one member who voted on the winning side wants to have the vote reconsidered, such a member may make the motion to reconsider. This motion can generally only be made on the same day on which the vote sought to be reconsidered was taken.

#### **Motion to rescind or amend**

The motion to rescind or amend a decision may be made after a meeting is over, regardless of how you voted on the original motion. There is no time limit on making either of them. Both are main motions.

Previous notice must be given to alert members ahead of time to the fact that the motion will be made.

If it is not, the motion requires:

- a. A 2/3 vote or
- b. A majority of the entire membership of the voting body.

If notice is given, the motion requires a majority vote for adoption. Notice may be given at the meeting immediately preceding the meeting at which the motion is to be made or in the call of the meeting (written notice that the meeting is taking place).

**Between the time that a motion is made but *before the chair states the motion***, any member may informally offer modifying suggestions to the maker of the motion. The maker may accept or reject these.

**After the chair has stated the motion**, the maker of the motion may *request unanimous consent* from the members to modify the motion.

**By means of the subsidiary motion to Amend (see above)**, any member may propose changes to the motion before the motion is voted upon. These proposed changes must be seconded and may be amended and/or debated.

**If a motion needs more research**, the members may vote to *Refer the Main Motion to a Committee* (see above). When the committee returns the motion to the assembly, the committee normally proposes amendments for the assembly to vote upon.

**Sometimes the motion is so complex** that the only way to do it justice is for a member to urge its rejection and offer to propose a simpler version as a *Substitute Motion*. Upon defeat of the complex motion, anyone may propose the *Substitute Motion*.

### **Renewal of motions**

This motion makes a motion after it has been previously voted on. If, for example, a motion is passed/defeated and after the meeting is over, you feel that the assembly made the wrong decision, you can make the same motion again at the next monthly meeting. You can do this regardless of how you voted on the original motion.

### **Voting**

Voting is typically done by a show of hands or by voice. In some cases, a secret ballot may be used. A member can request a recorded vote (e.g., by a show of hands, standing or ballot).

A majority vote is generally required for motions to pass. Some motions may require a higher majority, as specified in your organization's governing documents.

### **Raising a Point of Order**

If a member believes that the rules of order are being violated, they can raise a point of order, which the chairperson must address.

### **Minutes and Records**

The Chapter Administrator or recording officer should take minutes of the meeting, including key decisions, motions, and actions taken.

These minutes should be approved by the board at the next meeting.

### **Parliamentary Procedures**

The chairperson should ensure that discussions are conducted in an orderly manner, following Robert's Rules of Order.

If a member is out of order, the chair can rule on it. Members can appeal this ruling if necessary.

### **Adjournment**

The chairperson asks for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

After a second and a vote, the meeting is officially closed.

## **Procedure in Small Boards**

In a board meeting where there are not more than about a dozen members present, some procedures can be adjusted:

- Motions need not be seconded.
- There is no limit to the number of times a member can speak to a debatable question. Appeals, however, are debatable under the regular rules – that is, each member (except the chair) can speak only once in debate on them, while the chair may speak twice.

- Informal discussion of a subject is permitted while no motion is pending.
- When a proposal is perfectly clear to all present, a vote can be taken without a motion's having been introduced.

## **After the Meeting**

### **Follow-up**

Ensure that any action items, resolutions, or tasks assigned during the meeting are carried out.

### **Minutes Approval**

Circulate the draft minutes to all board members for review and corrections.

At the next meeting, the board should approve the minutes.

### **Fulfill Reporting Requirements**

Share important decisions, reports, and financial statements with relevant stakeholders, such as members, donors, or regulatory bodies.