

NAEYC Affiliate Group Business Meetings...

Parliamentary Procedure

Criteria for Effective Affiliate Groups

The Affiliate Group's board functions as its official governing body, with supervision, control, and direction of the group's affairs.

Policies and procedures are distributed to all board and committee members upon election/appointment and are available during board and committee discussions.

Affiliate Group decision-making and planning processes fully involve members.
ADP I-B-2a, I-B-3b, I-F-1a

Imagine if a group of 10 people tried to play a game such as Monopoly or Bridge without using rules! *Robert's Rules of Order* (Robert, 1989) have become the standard authority for some ground rules about how to conduct a fair, efficient, and orderly business meeting. Most Affiliate Group business meetings are informal. Sometimes decision-making progress gets bogged down, however, so it's important to know when to fall back on the formalities.

The recommendations here are based on Pohl (1992) and "The Basics of Parliamentary Procedure" written by Esther Weir. Every Affiliate Group is encouraged to keep a copy of *Robert's Rules* for use by its president and/or parliamentarian as well as committee chairs.

These are among the benefits of using parliamentary procedure:

- sticking to the rules saves time
- parliamentary procedure is a democratic way to conduct a meeting
- the process protects the rights of the majority, the minority, and individuals
- the rules are flexible
- participants gain a real sense of accomplishment

If your Affiliate Group board is unsure about how to begin, you might study one section of the rules at a time, such as how to make a motion, and then implement what you learn. A "field trip" to observe a well-conducted meeting might be a valuable experience also.

My experience in government is that when things are noncontroversial and beautifully coordinated, there is not much going on.
—John F. Kennedy

How to Conduct the Meeting

Let's briefly walk through each of the items on a typical agenda to give an idea of how a meeting is conducted. The speaker is the presiding officer (president, chair), unless otherwise identified.

A quorum is necessary to legally transact your Affiliate Group's business. Your bylaws establish the number of board members needed to make a quorum; most require a majority of the members. Before calling the meeting to order, the president makes a count to determine whether the required number of board members are present. Without a quorum, the group must choose to meet on another day, adjourn, or recess and wait for other members to arrive.

• *Call to order and welcome*

The president opens the meeting on time, sometimes by tapping a gavel to garner attention. "The meeting will now come to order. The _____ Affiliate Group welcomes you to its (type of) meeting." Most Affiliate Groups find that the stage is set for a more inclusive meeting if board members and any guests then introduce themselves.

- *Adoption of the agenda*

Copies of the agenda are distributed if they were not mailed in advance. After giving members time to look through the agenda, the president asks, "Are there any additions, deletions, or other changes in the agenda?" Any changes are made accordingly.

The agenda is usually adopted by consent, but may be voted upon.

- *Approval of minutes of previous meeting*

Reading of the minutes may be done by the secretary, or may be dispensed with if copies are distributed. The president asks, "Are there any corrections?"

Corrections may be offered at this time. After making any corrections, the chair asks "Are there further corrections?"

When no further corrections are offered, the president states, "If not, the minutes stand approved as read (or corrected)." No formal motion is needed; general consent indicates approval. The secretary then initials and dates the approved minutes.

- *Treasurer's report*

This report is usually heard at every meeting. "The treasurer's report will now be heard." After the report, the president asks, "Are there any questions?" Treasurers are encouraged to provide a written report to the secretary. No action is necessary.

- *Standing committee reports*

Only those committees with reports are included on the agenda, usually in the order in which they are listed in the bylaws.

Routine reports may be submitted in writing. "The next item of business is standing committee reports." Recommendations may be made, but no actions are taken at this time.

- *Special or ad hoc committee reports*

These committees are placed on the agenda in the order in which they were appointed. These reports may offer recommendations, but action is taken later in the meeting.

- *Unfinished (not old) business*

Business pending from previous meetings may be taken up again. "The next order of business is unfinished business...." The procedure for handling motions is described in the next section.

- *New business*

"Is there any new business?" asks the chair, at which time new matters at hand are considered.

- *Good of the order*

Some groups include this optional item as a time in which informal observations or resolutions about the effectiveness of the organization are offered. Any action is brought up as new business in a future meeting.

- *Announcements and/or program*

Information may be shared by board members at this time. The program may be presented at any time during the meeting to fit the presenter's schedule, but usually takes place during the meeting as action may arise from it. The president introduces the person in charge of the program, but remains in charge of the meeting throughout the program.

- *Adjournment*

The president declares the meeting adjourned when all business is complete, or at the adjournment time.

Tips for Presidents and Committee Chairs

Presiding officers set the tone for how business are conducted. These basic recommendations will help assure that your meeting runs smoothly.

- Start on time and stick to the agenda. Make sure participants have all the information they need to make an informed decision. See that minutes are recorded and distributed.
 - Know basic parliamentary rules and follow them. Seek the advice of a parliamentarian.
 - Keep the meeting moving. Involve participants. Keep responses short and to the point.
 - Speak clearly, and ask that others do so as well. Sum up what each speaker said.
 - Insist on order, but invite constructive criticism and even disagreement. Ask questions if you disagree, but remember as the presiding officer you are neutral. If you have a comment, ask for the floor as a participant.
 - Keep a low profile. Address the group as a whole in an impersonal, objective manner.
 - Recommend additional study of the issue rather than proceed with aimless discussion.
 - Ask for support. Clarify issues by obtaining consensus.
 - At the end of the meeting, check to see if members feel the agenda was adequately covered.
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Procedures for Moving Forward

When the presiding officer recognizes that there is common agreement on business or questions of no great importance, the procedure called general consent can be used to save time. No formal motion is needed to take action. The chair states, "If there is no objection, (pause) the minutes as corrected stand approved." The absence of objection indicates consent.

If a chair is in doubt about a procedure, the question is given to the group to decide by asking, "What is your pleasure?" If the question is about parliamentary procedure, the chair may be asked to express an opinion, which the president may accept or decline.

For suggestions about how to build consensus and work together as a more effective team, see the Teamwork section in Chapter 5 of this *Handbook*.

Acting on Motions

Motions are formal proposals made by a board member, and intended for the group to take a specified action, such as "I move that the Affiliate Group keep the same dues structure." Motions should be stated positively rather than negatively, as in "I move that the Affiliate Group not raise the dues."

The person making the motion must be recognized by the chair before making a motion. Motions must be seconded, except those presented by a committee. The motion is offered in writing, preferably on a form (such as the one suggested in the Agenda section of this chapter) which the secretary can use for recording purposes.

Only the chair can place a motion before the group. The president restates it and opens discussion on the pending motion. The maker of the motion has the right to speak on it first after recognition by the chair, but does not have the right to speak against the motion.

When the debate appears to be closed, the chair asks, "Are you ready for the question?" If no one objects, the chair puts the question by saying, "The question is on the adoption of the motion...."

Then the motion is stated and put to a vote by a method at the discretion of the chair. Methods of voting include:

- **By voice**—“All those in favor of the motion, say aye/yes (pause); opposed no.”
- **By rising**—Used to verify inconclusive voice votes or voting on a motion that requires a two-thirds vote (such as a change in bylaws, a motion to amend or rescind something previously adopted, or if the rights of members are curtailed such as closing nominations or calling for the previous question). A count must be taken if there is any doubt about the outcome of the voting.
- **By show of hands**—An alternate to the rising vote.
- **By ballot**—Use for secrecy. This is the only time that the president may vote except in the case of a tie.

Classes of Motions

According to parliamentary procedure, only one question can be considered at a time. A main motion can be made only when no other motion is pending (stated, but not yet voted upon). It must be adopted, rejected, or disposed of by vote before any other business can be brought up.

Secondary motions, however, may be considered while the main motion is pending. The rank of motions is as follows:

1. Main motions

- Original main motion**—brings a new, substantive subject before the group to debate and take action.
- Incidental main motion**—brings up business related to past or future action, includes words such as *adopt* or *ratify*. Recommendations prepared by a committee at the group's request are incidental main motions.

2. Secondary motions

a. **Subsidiary motion**—assists the group in treating or disposing of the main motion in one of these methods

- *lay on the table*—to put it aside temporarily when something more urgent arises or more information is needed. A motion to table is not debatable because time is lost when urgency dictates otherwise.
- *previous question* calls for the pending motion to be put to vote. This requires a two-thirds vote for adoption because it curtails the rights of the group to further debate.
- *limit or extend limits of debate* allows control over the length of time of debate
- *postpone to a certain time* (postpone definitely) allows a motion to be postponed for any length of time during the meeting or to a future time
- *commit or refer* is used to give a pending question to a committee for further investigation or to put it into better condition for the assembly to consider
- *amend* allows the group to change or modify the motion to make it more acceptable
- *postpone indefinitely* kills the motion

b. **Privileged motion**—does not relate to pending business and may interrupt all other proceedings, such as a motion to adjourn, recess, or to address the rights or comfort of the board.

To bring up a privileged motion, a board member rises and addresses the chair without waiting for recognition (because there may be an emergency) and says “I rise to a question of privilege affecting the assembly” or “to a question of personal privilege.”

Privileged motions are not debatable, but the president may indicate that members may vote no and thus kill the motion.

c. **Incidental motions**—arise out of a question that is pending and must be decided immediately before business can proceed. Most incidental motions are not debatable.

These are examples of incidental motions: point of order, appeal, suspension of the rules, objection to the consideration of a question, method of voting, nominations.

3. *Motions that bring a question back before the assembly*

a. **Take from the table**—when no other business is pending, a motion may be made to take a motion from the table.

b. **Rescind or amend something previously adopted, or discharge a committee**—in order when no other business is pending. Adoption requires a two-thirds vote or a majority if a notice has been given that the motion was to be called up.

c. **Reconsider**—takes precedence over any other motion and applies to action taken earlier in the same meeting. Can only be made by a member who voted on the prevailing side of the earlier motion (“yes” if it was approved, “no” if it was lost). Requires only a majority vote. The purpose of reconsidering is to correct an ill-advised action or to make use of added information.

Preparing Resolutions

Resolutions are used to state an opinion, recommend action, or express a courtesy. Resolutions all follow this format; note especially the rules regarding capitalization and punctuation:

Whereas, ... (usually used no more than three times) A comma is used after *whereas*, the next word is capitalized, and a semicolon is placed at the end of each clause;

Therefore, be it resolved, ... Follows the same style as “Whereas,” except that the introductory words are underlined or in all capital letters;

Be it further resolved, ... Continues the same style; the resolution ends with a period.

Amending

Bylaws, motions, and resolutions may be changed or modified through amendments.

Only two amendments are allowed for a motion: the primary and secondary (amendment to an amendment). To amend within a sentence, the term is to *insert*; at the end of a sentence, the term used is to *add* or *strike out*. Similarly, a group may *strike* a whole paragraph and then *substitute* if a change is needed.

The group votes on amendments first, then on the amended motion.

Conducting Elections

To ensure confidentiality and fairness, elections are conducted by paper ballot according to the procedures outlined in the Affiliate Group bylaws.

A committee of at least two people tabulates the results, and then checks the tabulation for accuracy before announcing the results of the election. For further details, see the section on Nominations and Elections in Chapter 1 of this *Handbook*.

Going Into Executive Session

Boards may opt to go into executive session in order to discuss confidential business such as personnel matters. Officers, voting members, and ex officio members may attend. Minutes must be taken, but are only approved in executive session. All persons attending are bound to keep the proceedings secret.

For Further Information

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