

Procedures for Chairing Effective Meetings

Regional Economic Development Branch

Factsheet

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(replaces OMAFRA Factsheet 05-035, *Successful Meetings*)

INTRODUCTION

Meetings are an essential part of conducting the business of your board or organization. They bring together members of your group to discuss ideas and make decisions for the successful operation of programs and initiatives. However, meetings can also be a source of frustration if participants talk off topic, monopolize discussion time, have difficulty making decisions or fail to respect the contributions of others. Most organizations reach a point where it becomes practical to adopt a set of agreed upon rules and procedures to make sure their meetings run as effectively and efficiently as possible.

This factsheet explains basic meeting procedures and rules and how to apply them. It helps you determine what sorts of procedures will work best for your board or organization and how to adapt meeting rules to best achieve your group's purpose and goals.

YOUR ROLE AS MEETING CHAIR

As Chair of the meeting, you shoulder the responsibility to ensure that:

- the meeting runs smoothly
- all members participate
- all agenda items are covered, and
- all outcomes are understood and respected

Meeting participants want their opinions and ideas heard and their time used wisely. It is important that you, as Chair, remain neutral and focus on meeting management. At each meeting, you will use your facilitation skills to make sure meeting participants:

- adhere to the agenda and discuss only one agenda item at a time
- are aware of priority items on the agenda
- maintain order and constructively discuss agenda items
- know and follow meeting procedure

- understand, decide or vote on the outcomes of the meeting
- are delegated the responsibility and authority to carry out any necessary follow up work after the meeting

A set of meeting rules or guidelines, more formally referred to as parliamentary procedures, will assist you in providing a consistent framework to reduce confusion, allowing everyone to express their viewpoints, and ensuring democratic decision making.

Reflect: What are some of the challenges you face as Chair of your group? When you meet, what sorts of things impede meeting progress? Do you achieve the results you want? What current meeting behaviours are effective?

FAIR AND CONSISTENT MEETING GUIDELINES

Parliamentary procedure simply refers to the practices and rules that you, as Chair, use in meetings to ensure business is conducted in an orderly way and that everyone has a fair and equal chance to be heard.

One of the most well-known and widely-used parliamentary procedure books for meetings is *Robert's Rules of Order*, first published in 1876! Henry Robert, an officer in the Army, was embarrassed by his inability to effectively chair a public meeting that regrettably erupted into chaos. He wrote a set of general meeting rules that anyone could apply to make their meetings orderly and productive.

Your board or organization probably uses some of his rules now, such as:

- only one person speaks at a time
- no interrupting
- key decisions must be voted on
- there must be majority support before a decision or action is carried out

Reflect: Does your board or organization use any of these rules? What other rules does your board or organization use? Are your rules written down and followed at every meeting? Are some of your rules unwritten or informally understood as just being courteous?

KEEP RULES SIMPLE

Coming in at just over 800 pages, *Robert's Rules of Order* is not practical for most Chairs and volunteer boards to implement. However, Robert's basic principles for having good meetings are quite simple and can be applied by any organization. A good meeting:

- allows everyone on the board to be heard
- gives equal rights to all board members
- promotes decision making in an orderly, systematic fashion, free of confusion and interruptions
- ensures that the will of the majority is carried out

Ideally, you want to spend as much time as possible dealing with the business of the board, not on applying many complex and formal parliamentary rules. It's a bit like playing a game. You want to have fun participating in the game, not learning a set of complicated rules or quibbling about their interpretation.

"Robert's Rules is about conducting good meetings without any more formality than is absolutely necessary to protect the rights of everyone and keep things orderly. The rules are there to help, not hinder, business." In fact, General Robert once said, "Never be technical or more strict than is absolutely necessary for the good of the meeting."

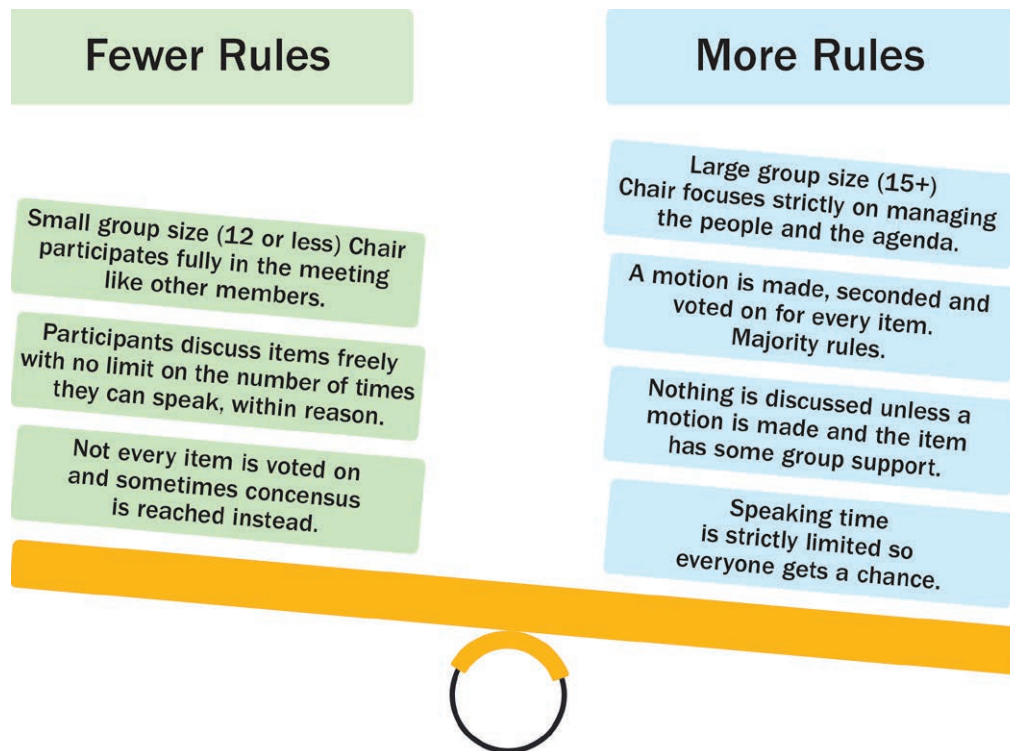
—C. Alan Jennings, Professional Registered Parliamentarian

Reflect: Do you think your board's business is carried out in an orderly and systematic fashion? Does everyone have equal opportunity to speak or share their viewpoints? Do some members dominate the discussions? Can you identify any new rules that might make things better at your meetings?

FIND THE RIGHT BALANCE

What sorts of rules and procedures will work best for your board or organization? As a meeting Chair, your goal is to be fair and efficient, without getting bogged down by process. You don't want to impede meeting progress with unnecessary, confusing or complicated rules, but you want enough structure to:

1. protect everyone's rights
2. keep things orderly



Many of the books and resources written about parliamentary procedures are for very formal and structured circumstances, such as parliament or municipal meetings, where there are large numbers of people involved and many contentious issues. Often small groups and volunteer boards find that they can get their business done without the need for a lot of rules and formalities.

Finding the right balance of rules and procedures for your board or committee will initially be by trial and error. If your meetings are becoming unruly or disorderly, or people are not getting time to speak, it's a sign that more rules are needed. If you find you are spending too much time debating interpretation of the rules, or making decisions more complicated than they need to be, perhaps you have too many rules.

“...Board meetings aren't like town meetings at all. Board meetings require greater flexibility and informality than mass meetings. Members speak when they have something to say, rather than waiting to be recognized by the Chair. Motions are flung out onto the table without invitation, and most procedural steps that are rigidly enforced at town meeting are given short shift at a board meeting.” —Paul Gillies

STYLES OF DECISION MAKING

Making decisions about what the organization should or shouldn't do is the ultimate purpose of the board. Two common approaches to decision making are compared in this chart. Both approaches are valid, but one may work better for your board than the other. You might even modify the approaches to come up with an effective adaptation. The main goal is twofold:

1. make good, democratic decisions without getting bogged down in unnecessary process
2. adopt a style that works and use it consistently

Less Formal	More Formal*
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A member states an issue or topic for discussion. “We need to decide who our suppliers should be.” 2. Board members share facts, and ideas are discussed and debated. 3. The best idea or suggested action is worded into a motion. The Chair ensures the wording and intent is precise. 4. There is no need to ‘second’ the motion. 5. The members vote and the motion and outcome are recorded in the minutes. 6. There may be consensus, rather than a need to vote, because the motion was made after discussion, so it incorporates the views of the members. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A member makes a motion. “I move that...” 2. Another member seconds it. 3. The Chair restates the motion and ensures the wording and intent is precise, then the motion is recorded. 4. Members discuss and debate the motion. At this point, they may choose to amend the motion, which then goes through steps 1–3 again. 5. The Chair determines when the motion has had enough discussion, and puts the motion to a vote. 6. The motion passes if at least 51% vote in favour.
<p>* Simplified rules are presented here. For more detailed and comprehensive parliamentary rules, you may consult <i>Robert's Rules of Order</i>, or Herb and Susan Perry's <i>Call to Order</i>.</p>	

A GOOD PLACE TO START

Chairing a meeting for the first time may feel onerous. Here are eight common meeting procedures to get you started. The idea is to implement only the ones you think your group needs. Start with a few basic rules. Monitor and evaluate how successful they prove to be in your meetings. Adjust as required by adding more rules or removing some. The following chart outlines the conditions for an effective meeting and the ways that this can be accomplished.

Condition(s) for An Effective Meeting	How to Accomplish It
<p>Set Clear Roles if...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is confusion among board members about individual responsibilities • meetings are off-track and off-topic • there is no formal record keeping • a few members seem to be doing all the work 	<p>Your board or organization may benefit from assigning these four key roles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Chairperson to facilitate board meetings. This person is often the Director, President or Leader of your group, but could be any board member with the right skills. b. Vice Chairperson who would step in to run meetings in the absence of the Chairperson. c. Secretary or Recorder to keep accurate account of what happens at the meeting. d. Treasurer or Financial Director who oversees the financial records for the board and often plays a key role in determining the feasibility of many ideas and decisions. <p>All other board members are expected to attend meetings, put forth ideas, debate and discuss and make motions or decisions. Some of these people may take on additional roles, such as heading up a fundraising committee, volunteer recruitment, social media, marketing or research.</p>
<p>Have a Basic Agenda and Take Minutes if...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discussion or debate goes on too long • members are unprepared for discussion • members have difficulty recalling what was decided • some members are monopolizing the meeting time • not all issues get fairly addressed 	<p>A clear agenda makes the Chair's job easier and keeps everyone on track. (See Appendix A for a sample agenda). Find a template that works for your group and stick with it. Major headings will remain the same for each meeting, only the topics of discussion will change. Indicate who is speaking about each agenda item and assign an estimated time limit (e.g., 5 minutes, 30 minutes). Circulate the agenda a few days in advance of the meeting so members can prepare.</p> <p>A Recorder or Secretary should take meeting minutes. Minutes do not have to be elaborate, but should succinctly state the decisions that were made at the meeting and the rationale for making those decisions. Minutes should not be a verbatim record of everything that was said. These minutes become a valuable reference for future groups who can understand a sequence of events leading to an action, refer to decisions made or determine appropriate next steps. This avoids back tracking and duplicating efforts. Circulate the minutes to board members a few days after the meeting so everyone has the same understanding of meeting outcomes, and inaccuracies can be identified and corrected. Official minutes should be stored in a central location.</p>
<p>Have a Quorum if...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few members are making decisions for everyone and they may not reflect the views of the majority • the vote must be legitimate to legally transact board business (e.g., to approve a large expenditure; to meet stipulations of a grant application) 	<p>When boards and organizations use voting as a method of decision making, they must have a minimum number of voting members, as stated in their constitution and/or by-laws, to be legitimate.</p> <p>It is always advisable to have as many members as possible participating in any decision making process. If you don't have quorum, it is best not to make final decisions. You may choose to adjourn the meeting or proceed with the agenda, deferring any decisions until more members are present.</p> <p>Avoid discrepancy by ensuring that the number of voting members required for quorum is written in your constitution, by-laws or meeting rules.</p>
<p>Make a Motion if...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it is an important issue or directive that will be voted on • there is confusion about what should be decided/voted on • there are many interpretations of what is being said • the secretary is having difficulty clarifying what to record 	<p>A motion is made by a board member who puts forward an idea or proposal for the other members to consider and take action on. For example, "I move that we include chickens in our <i>How-to-Raise</i> factsheets." Some groups use motions for all their business, while other groups choose to make motions only on critical or key issues. Still other groups don't use motions at all. Whether your board chooses to use motions or not, the goal is to present clear and focussed ideas to members so they can deliberate and decide. (See the Two Styles of Decision Making Chart).</p> <p>A benefit of making a formal motion is that it helps the board clearly articulate what the discussion is about and to pinpoint exactly what the required action is. This becomes a concise and well-worded directive to include in the meeting minutes.</p>

Condition(s) for An Effective Meeting	How to Accomplish It
<p>Vote or Decide if...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there isn't obvious general consensus • it's time to get closure on the issue • it is an important issue or directive and a formal record of the decision, showing all those in favour or against, is necessary 	<p>After a motion is made and discussed, board members must decide if they want to accept it or take action on it. Acceptable ways of showing support for an idea are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show of hands – all in favour raise their hands • Voice – all in favour say 'yes' • Roll Call – each member's name is called, they say 'yes' or 'no' • Ballot – members vote on a slip of paper for confidentiality • General Consent – the Chair thinks there is group consensus, so says, "if there is no objection, the motion carries." <p>In some circumstances, you may allow e-mail voting. For example, if heavy rains destroy your organization's experimental seed plot two days before it goes on exhibit, you need board approval to replace it right away and don't have time to call a meeting.</p> <p>Your board will have to decide if the Chair is allowed to vote or not. Some organizations allow the Chair to vote:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all the time, or • only when there is a tie, or • never, because the Chair must remain neutral and focus strictly on meeting management
<p>Begin and Adjourn the Meeting on time if...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Late-comers frequently delay the start of the meeting • People feel their time is not respected • Meetings drag on too long 	<p>It is good practice for the Chair to 'call the meeting to order' and indicate the starting time for the meeting records. Similarly, at the end of the meeting, the Chair, or another member, can ask for the meeting to be adjourned. The time of adjournment is recorded.</p> <p>Meetings can be adjourned before all business on the agenda is covered, but a plan should be in place to address the remaining items.</p> <p>Punctuality is appreciated by meeting participants. Chairs who start and end meetings on schedule show that they value other people's time and they demonstrate that punctuality is the expected standard of conduct.</p>
<p>Postpone the Decision if...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a legitimate reason that your group can't decide or vote (e.g., the Treasurer is absent, the survey deadline is extended) • too many members are absent 	<p>If the group cannot come to a decision because, for example, it doesn't have the required information to vote, the issues can be postponed to the next meeting, when the information is available. Postponing, or tabling as it is sometimes called, should not be used as a stalling or avoidance tactic.</p> <p>Some groups require a formal motion to postpone the decision, while other groups decide to do it by general consensus or by the suggestion of the Chair.</p>
<p>Receive and Adopt Reports if...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members do not judiciously read reports, so have difficulty making informed decisions • Recommendations are not implemented and reports are not acted on 	<p>Sometimes committees or members submit reports to the board for acceptance or adoption. For example, the Treasurer may present monthly or quarterly financial reports asking for a motion to pay the bills. Or, the volunteer recruitment committee might submit a report making recommendations to recruit new members. By formally 'receiving' and/or 'adopting' the reports, the board is acknowledging the work in the reports and requiring members to read and understand the contents so they can make an informed decision.</p> <p>The board may vote to 'receive' a report, but not commit to any recommendations in it. Alternatively, the board may 'adopt' the report which implies the recommendations will be acted on.</p>

Reflect: Consider your own group and its meetings.
What procedures could you implement?

PRACTICE, IMPROVE AND ADAPT FOR THE BEST OUTCOME

Your skills as meeting Chair will improve as you learn, practice, and adapt the rules and procedures that will achieve the best results for your group. It can be personally rewarding to Chair a successful meeting!

Once you've found a set of rules and procedures that really work for your board, write them down! Include them in your governance documents, such as the constitution, by-laws, or policies and procedures. Don't waste precious time trying to recall "what did we do last time this happened?" You can refer to your organization's rules for clear direction and they will be appreciated by your successor as well as the Vice Chair who might have to fill in for you from time to time.

Finally, no matter how good your meeting rules and procedures are, they need to be reviewed from time to time. You can adapt your meeting procedures so the best outcomes can be achieved.

A few practical procedures and some helpful rules will result in less confusion, more constructive dialogue and better decisions. Your job as Chair will be much easier and your group will experience greater success at meetings.

RESOURCES

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APPENDIX A

Sample Agenda

Agenda Item	Role/Person	Time allocated
Call to Order: Opening Remarks/Welcome Record meeting start time, names of those members who are present and those who are absent.	Chair	2 minutes
Approval of the Meeting Agenda Circulate prior to the meeting so members have a chance to prepare. Some members may have items to add. (see Other Business below).	Chair	5 minutes
Minutes of the (insert date) meeting Review minutes of the previous meeting and make any corrections before accepting them. Ideally the minutes are sent out a few days after the meeting so members have a chance to review them for accuracy so meeting time is not used for reading minutes	Chair	10 minutes
Reports and Business Items All reports (e.g., Treasurer's report, accessibility committee report) and business items that need discussed or voted on are listed in a preferred order.		
Financial Report	Treasurer	15 minutes
Social Media Report	Corrine	20 minutes
Town Hall Window Display Update	Asad	5 minutes
PayPal Information Update	Loretta	5 minutes
Library Community Info Sessions	Mark	15 minutes
Other Business This is where new items are added (see above Approval of the Meeting Agenda) at the meeting.		15 minutes
Announcements Members may have special events, invitations, or reminders to announce.		5 minutes
Adjournment The Chair (or sometimes a member) motions or suggests that the meeting be adjourned. The adjournment time is recorded. It is helpful to mention the time and place of the next meeting.	Chair	2 minutes

APPENDIX B

Use this template to jot down some rough ideas about the kind of rules you think would help your organization. *Call to Order*, by Herb and Sue Perry is an easy-to-use book, specifically written for non-profit organizations. You may find it a useful reference as your board or organization develops its meeting rules and procedures.

Meeting Rules for Our Board/Organization	
Roles	What roles would benefit our organization? What would be expected of each position?
Agenda and Minutes	Who will prepare the agenda? What headings will we use? Do we need minutes? Who will take the minutes? What details will be included in the minutes?
Quorum	Do we need a quorum or will we make decisions regardless of how many members attend the meeting? What will our quorum be —50% +1? 66%? 75%? What will we do if we don't have quorum?
Motions	How will we make decisions? Will we make motions for all business or just important issues? What process will we use to ensure ideas are clearly articulated and presented? Will we limit the time members can speak?
Voting	How will members show support for an idea or motion? Will we allow e-mail voting? Will the Chair vote? Always? Sometimes? Never? Will we vote on everything? Will we use consensus decision making?
Beginning and Adjourning	Who will call the meeting to order? Who can adjourn it? Can the meeting be adjourned before all agenda items have been addressed?
Postponing	Will postponing of decisions be allowed? How long is it acceptable to postpone items? Who decides when it is appropriate to postpone an item? Do we require a motion to postpone?
Receiving and Adopting Reports	Will reports simply be heard and discussed or will they be formally received and adopted? How will they be received or adopted?



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