

Advisory Council Meetings and Robert's Rules of Order

Robert's Rules will help your meeting run more effectively - and you only need to know a few key concepts...

Parliamentary procedure is one of the most effective means by which individuals can take orderly action as a group. It is a set of rules for conducting a meeting that allows everyone to be heard. It gives the group structure and a consistent format which helps them make decisions and achieve their goals and objectives democratically. Robert's Rules of Order is the most widely accepted guide to parliamentary procedure. They keep a meeting organized and flowing.

The genius of Robert's Rules is that they work well for groups of all sizes and types. How you apply the rules of parliamentary procedure is entirely up to you and your group. Large groups (i.e. legislature) will adhere to the strictest strict interpretation. Smaller groups i.e. FRYSC Advisory Councils, school PTAs, etc. can be more flexible, i.e. by only using the basic procedures.

Basic meeting management:

1. **Conduct business one item at a time.** Jumping around from one item to another can be confusing, and it generally delays progress on any of the items.
2. **Let the chairperson do their work.** The chair is the gatekeeper for the meeting. A good chairperson keeps the group on task and the meeting flowing.
3. **Let committees do their work.** Your general meeting is to resolve the major issues. Save everybody's time by letting committees deal with the smaller details.
4. **Don't allow too much crosstalk.** This helps you keep control and ensures everyone will hear the business at hand. Allow time for socializing before or after the business part of the meeting.
5. **Limit discussion to the topic at hand.** Keep things focused, and don't be shy about asking speakers to deal only with the current topic.
6. **Cut off discussion when it becomes redundant.** For controversial issues, setting a time limit for each speaker can help. When discussion becomes circular, summarize the points on each side and ask for anything new—or shut off discussion by calling for a motion.

An orderly, well-run meeting is better for all those attending. You'll get more business done in a shorter time, and everyone will be happier. Groups – especially Advisory Councils that have busy parents, community and school representatives - that limit meetings to one hour have much better luck getting people to return the next month. As for the terms and procedures you find in Robert's Rules, there are a few fundamentals that you should know.

Agenda

The agenda is a detailed list of specific items, in the sequence in which they will be covered. Use a consistent order of business from meeting to meeting and distribute hard copies of the agenda

to attendees. Post the agenda ahead of time at the school and on your website so members know what issues will be discussed at the upcoming meeting. And be specific. Don't just list "unfinished business." State what items of unfinished business will be covered.

A typical order of business for a regular Advisory Council meeting might be:

1. Welcome
2. Approval of minutes (from last meeting)
3. Budget report
4. Coordinator's report
5. Discussion of Needs and Activities
6. Committee reports
7. Unfinished business
8. New business
9. Announcements (including date and time of the next meeting)
10. Adjournment

Motion

A motion is a formal way to propose something on which the group should vote. The proposer says, "I move that..." and clearly states what is being considered. Someone else "seconds" the motion. Guided by the Chairperson, the group discusses the motion until they are ready to vote. Finally, the Chair asks for an indication of "all those in favor" followed by "those opposed." There is no need to ask for "abstentions" (those who choose not to vote at all), because abstentions are not counted toward the outcome of the motion.

Tabling a Motion

If it is clear that a motion cannot or should not be voted upon at the current time, it is typical to postpone ("table") it until the next meeting. Technically there should be a new motion to table the current motion, but most groups can agree to delay discussion without layers of parliamentary procedure. Often, it helps to appoint a committee or a member to study the issue and report back to other members at the next meeting. This tactic can save time on circular debate, especially when all of the facts aren't available.

Quorum

A quorum is the minimum number of members required to conduct business at a meeting. Usually this number is stated in the group's bylaws. If a quorum is not indicated in the bylaws, Robert's Rules of Order sets it at a majority of members.

Minutes

The minutes are the permanent record of the business conducted during a meeting, typically prepared by the group's secretary, if there is one. They include details such as the date, time, and location of the meeting, who was present, whether a quorum was present, and the presiding officer. Specific motions and their outcomes (but not exact vote counts) are also included in the minutes. Discussion is not documented in the minutes. The minutes for each meeting are presented for the assembly's approval at the next meeting.

Adjournment

Adjournment is simply a formal way to close a meeting so everyone knows the session has come to an end. The time of adjournment is recorded in the meeting minutes.

Resources

There are many guides to Robert's Rules. If you'd like a reference, go with an abridged version such as Webster's New World Robert's Rules of Order, Simplified and Applied. Sticking to a few simple rules can make meetings more pleasant for everyone, from the president to first-timers.

Compiled from:

"Robert's Rules: What You Should Know", by Christy Forhan; www.ptotoday.com/pto-today-articles/article/402-roberts-rules-what-you-should-know

"Parliamentary Procedure 101", by Paula Tarry, Barren Co. Extension Agent for 4-H Youth Development; for Region 11 FRYSC Region Meeting, March 10, 2009.