

Leading Effective Meetings: Making Basic Parliamentary Procedure Work



Meetings often become stressful and chaotic when a group is attempting to make a decision based on consensus. Multiple individuals are attempting to discuss at the same time while others sit in the back of the room and are disengaged from the topics being discussed. Meetings ran ineffectively result in arguments among participants, poor decisions being made, and people leaving the meeting feeling confused and frustrated. A basic understanding of parliamentary procedure leads to organized meetings and positive decision making experiences for participants.

Parliamentary procedure is an organized method of running effective meetings. The use of parliamentary procedure provides a way of conducting business in a fair and democratic manner. The purpose is to help a group of decision makers accomplish their goals. It is important to understand that the "rules" of parliamentary procedure are simply guidelines to follow, not laws. The most commonly used system of parliamentary procedure is Roberts Rules of Order, which provides an in depth description of procedures used in conducting meetings.

Parliamentary procedure can be intimidating, confusing, and boring – especially for those who have had little or no experience. Starting with the basics provides an understanding of the practical approach for running meetings. For an in-depth review of parliamentary procedure, one should refer to *Roberts Rules of Order*.

The use of parliamentary procedure is helpful for the management of a meeting. Only one item of business may be handled at a time and participants must be recognized by the chair before speaking. All members (participants) have equal rights, privileges, and obligations. The majority rules and has the right to make decisions and the minority has rights which must be respected.

Having an agenda is critical to having a well run, organized meeting. Agendas are typically developed by the chair with input from the members and it is a formal listing of the business that is to be conducted at the meeting. The agenda, along with the secretaries minutes should be sent out to members prior to the meeting.

Not only does the chair have responsibility at a meeting but so do the participants. It is the responsibility of the participants to establish and maintain effective meeting structure. As a participant, you are granted the right to participate in the meeting and to follow correct parliamentary procedure. It is also expected that you will be involved with group discussion.

Effective meetings use parliamentary procedure and stress that members understand the basic principles behind the structure. The key to understanding parliamentary procedure is learning the motions and practicing using the procedure and lingo. It's easy to become overwhelmed by all of the motions but one should only concentrate on those that will be used on a regular basis.

Parliamentary procedure is based on proven methods that have worked for hundreds of years. Whether you are a leader or a participant in a meeting, having a basic understanding of parliamentary procedure will make the meeting run more smoothly and you will feel as if you accomplished your goals. Having a working knowledge of parliamentary procedure is a vital skill that is used in wide range of meetings (school boards, county fair boards, 4-H clubs) as well as in government.