



Minnesota Women of Today

10 Minute Orientation Series: Parliamentary Procedures

What is Parliamentary Procedure?

Parliamentary procedure, or parliamentary law, refers to the rules of democracy—that is, the commonly accepted way a group of people come together, present and discuss possible courses of action, and make decisions. It also defines what duties people typically have when they are elected the president, secretary, or treasurer of an organization. Fundamentally, parliamentary procedure defines how groups of people, no matter how formal or informal, can most effectively meet and make decisions in a fair, consistent manner—and make good use of everyone's time. While parliamentary procedure cannot guarantee that every member of an organization is pleased with the outcome of a decision, it aims to ensure that every member is satisfied by the manner in which the decision was made, and that the organization makes decisions efficiently but with consideration for every member's opinion.

The rules of parliamentary law are constructed upon a careful balance of the rights of:

- the majority,
- the minority, especially a strong minority (greater than one third),
- individual members,
- absentees, and
- all these together.

Bylaws and Policies

Bylaws are the legally binding document of your chapter. They provide the basic framework of your unit and how it functions. Policies pertain to the details, while the bylaws are high-level. Bylaws take precedence over policies, and policies must be in harmony (not conflict) with the bylaws. They may include a statement on how the board is formed; when and how future board members will be elected; an outline of the board's powers and duties; or the process for setting up committees and their powers. Bylaws are not public documents but making them readily available increases your accountability and transparency and encourages your members to pay closer attention to them.

A policy is any written statement approved by the membership that:

- Articulates and defines important objectives, principles or values
- Limits or prescribes what kind of action will be taken in different situations
- Defines roles, responsibilities and authority

Establishing a Quorum

The requirements of your chapter's quorum are defined in your policies and must be established prior to conducting any business in which a vote will be required. If there is not a quorum, no voting can take place.

- A quorum is typically 1/3 of the membership in good standing.
- A member in good standing is defined as any person over the age of 18 whose dues are fully paid (local, state, and national).

For support with parliamentary procedures please contact the MNWT Parli, parli@mnwt.org.

Every Motion Has 6 Steps

1. Motion: A member rises or raises a hand to signal the chairperson.
2. Second: Another member seconds the motion.
3. Restate motion: The chairperson restates the motion.
4. Debate: The members debate the motion.
5. Vote: The chairperson restates the motion, and then first asks for affirmative votes, and then negative votes.
6. Announce the vote: The chairperson announces the result of the vote and any instructions.

Incidental motions

Incidental motions are used as “housekeeping”. They take precedence over main motions, subsidiary motions, and any pending question. The Newly Revised Robert's Rules mention the following permissible incidental motions – these are undebatable motions.

- Point of order (pointing out a breach in assembly rules).
- Appeal the decision of the chair (disagreeing with the chair's ruling).
- Request permission to withdraw or change a motion before taking a vote.
- Division of the assembly (doubting the result of a vote).
- Suspend the rules (temporarily set aside the rules of the assembly).

Order of Business Group Activity

The University of Arizona Extension outlines an activity called Order of Business where participants work together to determine the order of business on a meeting agenda. At the end of the activity, the group will discuss the importance of meeting structure. This is a great activity for States and Chapters to learn more about the importance of agendas and how to create clear expectations for when to communicate what.

Purpose:

- as an ice breaker activity
- to assess what your audience knows about business meetings
- as a lead in to discuss meeting agenda

Set up & materials:

- cards/paper with large text preprinted of business meeting agenda items
- meeting agenda item examples: call to order, creed, pledges, roll call, ice breaker, reading/approval of the minutes, correspondence, reports from officers, reports from chairs, unfinished/old business, new business, announcements, invitation to join, adjournment.

Process:

1. Have participants each take a card (make sure you do not pass them out in order).
2. Ask the participants to work as a group to put the business meeting agenda together from start to finish. Participants may talk to each other.
3. After the group believes they have the correct order, go through it and compare it to your actual agenda. If any items are out of order, explain why.

Discussion:

- How did the group decide the order of business?
- Was it difficult to determine the order of business?
- How does an agenda help the group conduct business?