

The 6 Basic Stages of a Meeting

Call to order is made by the board chair/president to begin the meeting.

Reading and approval of minutes from the last meeting are required before the minutes can become part of the official record.

Reports are made by officers (e.g., the treasurer), boards, and committees.

Unfinished business involves any business carried over from the previous meeting due to ongoing debate or a lack of time.

New business can be brought up by any member for debate and action.

Adjournment motion made by the chair to close the meeting.

Follow these tips:

- *Send minutes in advance* to ensure an efficient meeting and prevent them from needing to be read during the meeting.
- *Avoid discussing "old business"* that has already been voted on to prevent extraneous, repetitive discussions from meeting to meeting.
- *Develop an agenda* to ensure transparency and tailor the meeting structure to the unique needs of your organization. Be sure to include times for discussing specific agenda items, which can help keep the meeting moving and on schedule. Agendas must be formally adopted by the group at the start of a meeting.

Four Types of Motions

Main motion brings new business before the board.

Secondary/Subsidiary motions allow the board to change or eliminate a main motion. Some examples include postponing or amending a main motion.

Privileged motions involve an urgent matter unrelated to pending business. Someone can "raise a question of privilege," for example, to stop pending business and address an immediate need such as excessive background noise.

Incidental motions relate to current business or procedures.

Examples include "point of order" to alert the board to a perceived failure of the chair to maintain appropriate order for a meeting, and "suspension of the rules" to provide leniency from specific rules.

Follow these tips:

- *Be precise with your language* when stating the words of a main motion or an amendment.
- *Share copies* of main motions or amendments with directors in advance of the meeting as appropriate, especially for more complex motions.

Rules of Debate

The board chair designates the order of speakers, and directors cannot indicate their desire to speak until the previous speaker is finished. Individuals may speak twice for up to 10 minutes each on any given motion. Preference is given first to those who have not yet spoken. Any change to this requires a two-thirds vote to either further limit or extend debate.

If debate over a single motion is running long or otherwise creating tension, a "motion for a previous question" (once seconded and adopted by a two-thirds vote) allows you to close the debate and move the motion to an immediate vote.

Follow these tips:

- *Alternate speakers* from each side when there are opposing positions.
- *Stay on topic.* All debate must be relevant to the motion at hand.
- *Avoid criticizing individuals* during debates. Focus on debating the merits of their arguments.
- *Direct comments to the board chair* rather than directly at other directors or speakers.

Understanding Amendments

Amendments are intended to bolster agreement by changing the wording of a main motion. This can be done by inserting, striking out, or substituting words or paragraphs within the motion. Again, it is important to be precise in stating exactly where the change should occur and what it would say.

Amendments cannot be amended once they are approved, unless the board moves to amend a larger portion of the main motion that also includes the new amendment.

Follow these tips:

- *Avoid secondary amendments.* While an amendment to a main motion may be amended once, the procedures for this are complex. You can circumvent the need for this by asking other board members to defeat a proposed amendment if you agree to submit a different amendment.
- Use the "Settled Rule" to prevent anyone from submitting amendments like any that were previously defeated.

Postpone, Refer, Reconsider, or Rescind

To **postpone** an agenda item requires a majority vote. Generally, items can only be postponed to the next regular meeting, for a period of no more than three months from the initial meeting date.

Board members also can opt to **commit** or **refer** a main motion to a committee to gather additional information or fine-tune an amendment. If approved, an item can be referred with specific instructions to the committee, such as a desired amendment or time frame to complete the work.

To avoid raising, debating, and voting on the same proposals multiple times, *Robert's Rules* stipulates that the same question, once voted on, cannot be brought back for further discussion at the same meeting.

Directors can only make a motion to **reconsider** an item at the same meeting if they were on the winning side of the previous relevant vote. If the motion to reconsider is adopted by a majority vote, the motion is then back up for debate.

If new information raises serious concerns about a specific motion from a past meeting, directors can vote to **rescind** or **renew** the motion at the next meeting.

Follow this tip:

- *Notify the board in advance* of plans to request that a motion be rescinded. With notification, the board needs a majority vote for it to pass. Without the notification, you need a two-thirds vote of the board, or a majority vote of the entire membership of the voting body.