

## Why Boards and Commissions Training?

You wouldn't be serving on a deliberative body for the benefit of your local government if you didn't feel your service was important. Clearly, your service contributes to the betterment of the community, and that service is enhanced when the deliberative body you represent is more efficient and productive.

The purpose of board/commission training is to help you, as one of the leaders for that deliberative body, make your personal contributions and your board/commission meetings as efficient and productive as possible.

How do you know when your group is working efficiently and productively? The members of your group will have a sense of belonging and value in what they do. They will operate in a positive environment where everybody's contribution is valued and differences are affirmed. Consistent attention will be given to planning, policies, procedures, and roles, and it will be clear what needs to be done, when, by whom, and how. Participation will be evident and there will be a clear decision-making process. Conflict and disagreement will be viewed as learning opportunities, not disruptions.

## Leadership Requires Versatility and Neutrality

As one of the leaders for your group, you will sometimes play the role of facilitator, sometimes the role of director, and sometimes the role of adjudicator. But at all times, you act in the best interests of your group, making decisions based on your objective evaluation of the information provided. Favoritism or prejudice are not part of your job.

## It's All About Good Government

In a democracy, government exists to serve the people. It provides services and collective goods which are beyond the capacity of individuals and communities to provide for themselves. The measure of good government is not whether it does all things for all people, but whether it does - and does well - those things which citizens individually or in groups are unable to do for themselves, and which are defined by legitimate and open processes of public dialogue and debate. How government acts is often as important as what it does, such that good government is measured by process as well as outcomes.

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**“Can't we all just get along?”**

*-- Rodney King, May 1, 1992*

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## Parliamentary Procedures

**P**arliamentary procedures comprise a system for maintaining order during official meetings. They provide a uniform method of conducting meetings in a fair, orderly, and expeditious manner. That is, they help us to “get along” in group decision-making processes.

The real essence of parliamentary procedure boils down to two words: courtesy and respect. Common courtesy to both your fellow board members and the public, and mutual respect for each other and the orderly processes that govern your official conduct.

Parliamentary procedures do not mean that you have to agree on issues, or that your disagreements cannot be passionate. However, you must be careful never to allow that passion to spill over into personal attacks against each other or the public. Regardless of your viewpoint, you must follow the will of the majority while protecting the rights of the minority.

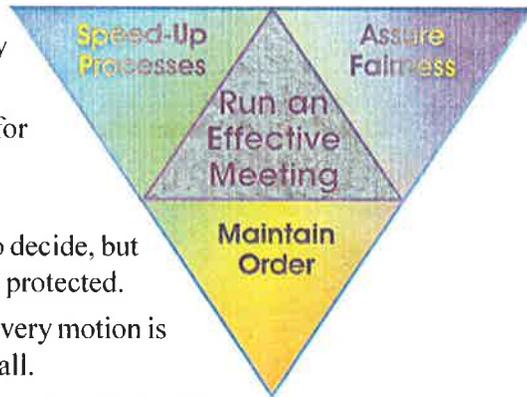
The use of parliamentary procedures alone cannot guarantee that these ideals will be met. Everyone involved with a meeting must work to create an atmosphere of trust, mutual respect, and shared purpose.

When courtesy and respect govern your conduct, parliamentary procedures become easy and natural!

## General Principles

Ideally, parliamentary procedures serve to maintain order, speed-up business processes, and assure fairness. Underlying these ideals are the following general principles:

- “Fairness to all and partiality to none.”
- A quorum must be present for the group to act (cannot be waived).
- The majority has the right to decide, but the minority has rights to be protected.
- Full and free discussion of every motion is considered a basic right for all.
- No member speaks until recognized by the Chair.
- No member can speak a second time on the same question so long as another wants to speak on it for the first time.
- No member can speak more than twice on the same question.
- The chair should be strictly impartial in how s/he runs the meeting.
- Member remarks should be germane to the question before the body.
- Comments should not be used to attack another member’s motives.
- Members should be courteous and actively listen with an open mind when other members speak. In the words of President Thomas Jefferson, “No one is to disturb another in his speech by hissing, coughing, spitting, speaking, or whispering to another.”
- While a member can condemn the nature or likely consequences of a proposed measure, even in strong terms, a member must avoid focusing on personalities and under no circumstances can s/he attack or question the motives of another member.



## Legal Considerations

RCW 42.30 is the “Open Public Meetings Act.” This State code section addresses such issues as who is subject to the Act, all public meetings are open, conditions of attendance, secret voting (which is prohibited), and other issues. Seek advice from counsel for specific questions.

## Short Parliamentary Glossary

*Absentee Voting:* Voting by mail or proxy for a member who is absent.

*Abstain:* To refrain from voting, usually because of conflict of interest.

*Accept:* To approve or adopt a statement, report, or motion.

*Adjourn Sine Die:* Adjourning with no date set for a future meeting.

*Assembly:* A group of people assembled for the transaction of business.

*Business:* Important matters brought before an assembly for action.

*Bylaws:* Specific rules related to structure and administration that an organization makes for itself.

*Call To Order:* Pronouncement by the Chair to convene a meeting.

*Commit:* To refer a motion to a committee.

*Committee:* One or more members appointed to complete a specific task.

*Defer An Action:* To delay action on a motion. Some examples are to postpone, commit, and lay on the table.

*Entertain A Motion:* After discussing, a request by the Chair for a motion.

*Floor:* After a member is recognized by the Chair, s/he is “assigned the floor” and is the only member entitled to make a motion or to speak.

*Good Of The Order:* Informal information to an assembly after business.

*Minutes:* The official meeting record. Minutes need to record official actions, but not necessarily what was said during the debate/discussion.

*Nominee:* A person nominated to fill an office or other elected position.

*Pending:* The term used to refer to a motion under consideration.

*Plurality Vote:* A vote of one or more greater than that received by any three or more other candidates or issues (e.g., 8, 10, 12 = the 12 wins).

*Pro Tempore (Pro Tem):* One temporarily acting in the role of an officer.

*Proxy:* When one person officially allows another to vote for him/her.

*Question:* The business before the assembly. Same as “motion.”

*Recess:* Taking a short intermission. Requires a second, simple majority.

*Recommit:* To refer back to a committee again for reconsideration.

*Rescind:* Cancels an adopted vote. Requires a second, 2/3 majority.

*Secondable:* A motion that requires a second in order to be considered.

*Vacating The Chair:* Temporarily relinquishing the chair (e.g., if biased).

## Special Circumstances

### Special Kinds of Motions

- Calling the question (needs a second; requires a 2/3 majority to pass).
- Rescinding a motion (needs a second; requires a 2/3 majority to pass). Has the effect of repealing a motion already voted on and adopted.
- Motion to adjourn (needs a second; no discussion/debate, just vote).

### Tabling a Motion

- Tabling lays aside a motion. It may be renewed at a later, unspecified time. Needs a second and simple majority to pass. A tabled motion is “taken off the table” with a move, second, and majority vote.

### Motion Out of Order (or Motion Not in Order)

*“The chair rules that the motion is out of order because .....”*  
The Chair must be specific and state the reason why.

### Member Out of Order (serious offense while speaking):

*“The member is out of order because ..... and will desist.”* The Chair must be specific and state the reason why the member is out of order.

### Point of Order

We seem to hear members call for a Point of Order more frequently than necessary. Although it can be called at any time by any member, it should be a very rare instance when Point of Order is raised, and only when a breach of rules has been perceived to have occurred.

- A Point of Order requires the Chair to make a ruling when a member feels there has been a breach of parliamentary rules.
- A point of order must be responded to by the Chair immediately.
- The Chair rules on the point of order.
- If a member does not feel the Chair’s ruling was appropriate, it may be Appealed as follows:
  - A member makes a motion to appeal immediately after the ruling.
  - The motion must be seconded. If no second, it fails.
  - The appeal is to the full membership present. Discussion ensues.
  - A vote follows discussion. Simple majority vote rules

## Motions

Making motions is where the rubber meets the road in parliamentary procedure. Motions become the formal actions of your group, and as such become your group’s legacy for the future. Therefore, motions must be taken with care and all group members need to ensure their propriety.

### Making a Motion

- A member must be recognized by the Chair in order to make a motion.
- A motion must be seconded. A second does not mean someone is in favor of the idea, they just think that it should be discussed.
- It is important that a member make a motion and receive a second before discussing it.
- Once seconded, the motion is “on the floor” for discussion. The Chair restates the motion prior to allowing discussion to ensue.

### Discussing a Motion on the Floor

- “It has been moved and seconded to.....Is there any discussion?” If no one offers to discuss, the Chair immediately proceeds to a vote.
- The person who moved the motion has the right to speak first after the Chair’s call for discussion. The Chair must recognize that person first.
- A member can only speak twice to a motion. The second chance to speak only occurs after everyone (who wanted to) spoke the first time.
- A common mistake chairs make is to close discussion. The Chair does not have authority to close discussion on a motion. Discussion is closed either through a lack of further member comments or a vote (without discussion) of the body (see “call the question” on page 6).

### Amendment to a Motion on the Floor

- A member may move (and it requires a second) to amend a motion on the floor by (1) adding words, (2) striking words, or (3) substituting new language to the text of the motion.
- Amendments require a second and are then open for debate. A vote is taken, and if successful the original motion is debated as changed.
- Amendment must be related to the original motion (not new/unrelated).
- A “friendly amendment” helps shorten debate when both the mover and seconder of the original motion accept the amendment.

## Voting

- The Chair restates the question immediately prior to the vote.
- The Chair takes the vote as follows: “All in favor of the motion, say aye.” Count the yes votes. “All those opposed, say no.” Count the no votes. The Chair announces the result of the vote. A complete announcement should include:
  1. Report on the voting itself (which side prevailed, and vote count).
  2. Declaration that the motion is adopted or failed.
  3. Statement on the effect of the vote or ordering its execution.
- There are three basic ways the body may vote, as directed by the Chair:
  1. *Voice Vote* (the regular method; used for simple majority votes).
  2. *Rising Vote* (used when a voice vote produced an inconclusive result, or when 2/3 majority required). Votes are counted by ayes rising out of their chairs, then noes rising out of their chairs.
  3. *Show of Hands* (an alternative to the voice vote, or to verify an inconclusive simple majority vote).
- There is also the option of voting by General Consent. When a motion is not likely to be opposed, the Chair may simply say, “If there is no objection.....” and proceed to declare the motion approved if the membership shows agreement by its silence. However, if even one member says, “I object,” then the motion must be put to a vote.
- A motion fails on a tie vote; must be a majority for a motion to pass.
- Abstentions are treated as a non-vote (as if a member were absent).
- The Chair’s role is not limited just by being Chair. The Chair may make motions, speak on one side or the other on every motion, and may vote.
- A member may move to adjourn the meeting. Adjournment requires a second. The motion may not be debated. A simple majority carries.

### Nominations

- Chair opens nominations.
- No second needed to nominate a member. However, after nominations are made it does take a motion and second to close nominations.
- Vote follows discussion phase. Nominee with most votes is appointed.

## Presiding Phrases

Part of the Chair’s job is to use standard, known phrases for common parliamentary actions taken by the group. Listed below are phrases for the presiding officer as derived from Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised (2000 edition). Slight variations to these phrases can work just as well, but these standard phrases will at least give you a flavor for how the Chair conducts the meeting and what people expect to hear.

**Opening the Meeting** (after quorum is present): *“The meeting will come to order.”*

**Minutes:** *“Are there any corrections to the minutes? [Correct as needed] If there are no corrections the minutes stand approved”*

**Recognizing Members:** *“The Chair recognizes (use title, like ‘Commissioner .....’)”*

**Stating the Question:** *“It is moved and seconded that.....”*

**Taking a Vote** (once debate has ended):

Voice Vote: *“Those in favor of the motion, say aye. Those opposed, say no.”*

Rising Vote: *“Those in favor of the motion will rise and remain standing until counted. [Count vote.] Be seated. Those opposed will rise and remain standing until counted. [Count vote.] Be seated.”*

Vote by Show of Hands: *“Those in favor of the motion will raise the right hand. [Count hands.] Lower hands. Those opposed will raise the right hand.” [Count hands.] Lower hands.”*

**Announcing Result of the Vote** (following vote):

Voice Vote: *“The ayes have it and the motion is adopted.” [or] “The noes have it and the motion fails.”*

Counted Rising Vote or Show of Hands Vote: *“There are 12 in the affirmative and 10 in the negative. The affirmative has it and the motion is adopted.” [or] “There are 9 in the affirmative and 13 in the negative. The negative has it and the motion fails.”*

**Proceeding Through Business:** *“The next item of business is . . . .”*