

Village & Post Office Takarla
Tehsil, Balachaur District
S.B.S.Nagar PB. 144521
INDIA



PHONE 91-9463613708
EMAIL khwahishtohelp@gmail.com
WEB SITE www.khwahishtoserve.com
www.facebook.com/khwahishtoserve

Khwahish Sewa Society's Parliamentary Procedure for Conducting Meetings

Introduction

Most groups use some form of parliamentary procedure for their meetings. This factsheet not only briefly explains proper parliamentary procedure for more formal meetings, but also describes acceptable alternatives for decision-making in smaller groups like us.

Rules for Meetings

Just as the object of a game gives direction to its players, traditional principles of a democratic meeting guide group members when they gather:

- *Every member has rights equal to every other member.*
- *The will of the majority must be carried out.*
- *The minority must be heard, and its rights protected.*
- *Only one topic will be considered at a time.*

In order to play a particular game, certain rules for that game must be followed. "Parliamentary procedure" is a set of rules for meetings which ensures that the traditional principles of equality, harmony and efficiency are kept. Robert's Rules of Order, the best-known description of standard parliamentary procedure, is used by many different organizations as their rule book for conducting effective meetings.

1. Parliamentary Procedure at a Glance

Khwahish Sewa Society follows parliamentary procedure "by the book", and the following Nine steps will be followed during the meetings. Proper sequence of steps in having a motion voted on. A motion has nine possible steps:

- Make sure to mention the place, Start time and adjournment time.
- Moved - a proposal from the floor or makes the motion.
- Seconded - another member feels the proposal is worth discussing.
- Stated - by the chair or secretary. Wording is recorded properly and everyone understands the intent of the proposal.
- Discussed - every speaker addresses the chair and must speak only to the motion. Usually, each member may speak only once to a motion except the mover who has first and last chance to speak.
- Amended - changing the wording of the motion by: adding or deleting words replacing with different words. Each amendment has the same 9 steps as a motion.
- Called - after sufficient discussion, either a motion to end debate or a vote is called at the discretion of the chair.
- Restated - ensures everyone understands what is being voted on.
- Voted - chair calls each option: "All in favor?", "Opposed?" or "Abstaining?"
- Declared - results of the vote are announced by the chair.

2. Meeting without a quorum.

A quorum is the minimum number of eligible voters that must be present at a meeting to conduct business. This number is designated in the by-laws of the organization and for a board is usually half the voting members plus one. If no quorum is present when the advertised hour of the meeting has been reached, then:

- The presiding officer (Chairperson) may dismiss the Executive meeting (after setting a time for future meeting); or
- The executive may agree to proceed informally with the agenda, awaiting ratification of any decisions at a future meeting; or
- The group may discuss any items of interest but make no decisions.

3. How can our constitution/Bye-Laws be amended?

A good constitution contains provisions for amendment, so the structure and procedures can continually meet the changing needs and purposes of the group. Usually, a special committee is appointed to review the group's objectives, structure, functions, etc. Copies of its report and recommendations are circulated to all members with the required notice and agenda for the meeting (often the organization's annual meeting). Any amendments proposed during discussion at the meeting require a majority vote for approval, but the motion to amend the constitution needs a two-thirds majority vote for adoption.

4. Who is the presiding officer at meetings?

Often the Chairperson is designated in the constitution or by-laws to chair the organization's meetings. In many groups, however, the chair is assigned to the past-chairperson, special moderator, or to a different person each time on a rotating basis. This allows the Chairperson to take a lead in debates on policy rather than maintain a position of "supposed" neutrality which is directly contrary to his or her usual role as spokesperson for the group.

5. After considerable debate, we still are not ready to vote on the motion.

What can we do?

A motion to postpone the matter until the next meeting may be in order, so that more information can be gathered. A motion to postpone temporarily (to table) allows a motion to be set aside until later in the meeting, allowing more urgent business to be dealt with, permitting amendments to be drafted, or allowing time for implications of the motion to be checked. A motion to take from the table brings it back before the meeting. The motion may be withdrawn at the request of its mover, but only if no member present objects.

6. How should a committee report be accepted by an organization?

A motion to "receive" the report means that the organization is not committed to any of the conclusions or recommendations contained in it. (An example of such a report would be the monthly, unaudited treasurer's report.)

A motion to "adopt" the report in whole or in part commits the organization to some or all of the recommendations of the report, and often implies some action to be taken.

7. Sometimes while one motion is being considered, an alternative motion might be the better one. How can it be presented?

The movers request permission from the presiding officer to read out the alternative motion. The movers of the original motion are asked if they will withdraw their motion, with the unanimous consent of the meeting.

If the original motion is withdrawn, then the alternative motion is moved.

If the original motion is not withdrawn, then the movers of the alternative motion inform the meeting that their motion will be moved if the original is defeated. They thus urge the members to vote against the original motion.

8. Consensus: Another Method of Decision-Making

- Describe the issue or problem confronting the group. State the problem clearly and concisely. If it is complex, then write it out.
- Gather all information relevant to the problem. All pertinent facts and ideas about the problem need to be heard in order to make a wise decision. Distinguish between facts and opinions. A decision can often be made right away. However, action may need to be deferred so that additional information can be gathered.
- List all possible solutions or actions. Explore alternatives. Be creative. Use brainstorming techniques to generate new ideas, from every member.
- Choose the best possible solution. Use a process of elimination; refine and combine parts of your list.
- Make a decision. Formulate a statement of general agreement or consensus;
- Or develop a motion and vote on it. Then, record the results in the minutes.

References

Parliamentary Procedure at a Glance. Jones, O. Garfield. Appleton-Century-Crafts, Inc., 1932.

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