



Parliamentary Procedure - Inclusivity

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Is inclusivity an integral part of your meetings? Do all governing body members have a chance to participate? Imagine if the chair (mayor or president) had total power to decide how a meeting is run, how debate is conducted, and who may participate. The result would be a governing body that operates without any rules or procedures, except what the chair or ruling majority determine.

Meeting rules (parliamentary procedure), such as Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised 11th Edition (RONR), were developed to facilitate decisions by the majority while providing opportunities to hear all views and provide an orderly way to disagree without being disagreeable. In short, parliamentary rules promote inclusivity and allow all governing body members to voice their views and participate. Parliamentary rules and RONR in particular are intended to facilitate rather than obstruct discussion, to ensure courtesy is afforded to all body members and to ensure each proposition can receive a full and free discussion. Issues are addressed one at a time, so that the governing body has a common understanding and is focused on substance. A basic tenet of inclusivity is fairness to all. RONR encourages this

by respecting the rights of all members, whether part of the majority or not.

Under RONR, inclusion is a shared responsibility between the chair and body members. The chair manages the meeting, by making meeting rule decisions and maintaining order. Members maintain decorum, may question the chair's parliamentary rulings, and may overrule the chair's meeting rule decision if they believe it is incorrect. The concept of inclusivity manifests itself in many ways, starting with motions. Generally, any member of the body may make a motion. It takes one additional person to second the motion to advance it for discussion. The emphasis on inclusivity is shown through the concept that two people can initiate discussion and action by the entire body. There is no need to show a majority prior to making the motion.

Furthering the RONR concept that everyone has an opportunity to be heard, the chair's responsibility is to make certain that discussion (RONR uses the term debate) is conducted fairly and all viewpoints are heard by allowing every governing body member the opportunity to speak and preventing one person or small group from dominating the discussion. To accomplish this, RONR tells the chair to limit the amount of time

each member may speak to an issue (no more than two times per motion up to 10 minutes each time). *RONR (11th ed.) pp 387-389*. Also, where possible, the chair should direct discussion that alternates between viewpoints and allow every member the opportunity to speak before a member speaks a second time.

RONR also encourages full discussion on every motion. The RONR view is that too much discussion is better than too little. To end discussion, either unanimous consent or a motion (with a second and a two-thirds majority vote) is required. Alternatively, a multifaceted matter can require significant consideration and input. Under RONR, the body, by a two-thirds majority vote, can suspend the rules to allow additional speaking time so that all members can fully discuss the issue. *RONR (11th ed.) pp 197-209*.

Recall that the chair is responsible for maintaining meeting decorum and discipline. This is accomplished by reminding members to address their comments to the chair, not each other; to make comments about the issue at hand, not last week's agenda (or other non-germane matters); to refrain from attacking a member's motives and debate issues not personalities *RONR (11th ed.) page 392, II. 5-10*.

Members are responsible for ensuring the chair conducts a “fair and appropriate” approach to maintaining meeting order and rules. If a member of the body believes the chair or another member of the body is not following the meeting rules, a member can make a Point of Order. *RONR (11th ed.) pp 247-251*. The Point of Order requires that the chair rule on the action. If the member disagrees with the chair, s/he may “appeal

the ruling of the chair,” which asks the body whether it agrees with the chair’s parliamentary ruling. If the body agrees by majority vote that the chair’s ruling was incorrect, the chair is overruled, the error is resolved, and discussion resumes. *RONR (11th ed.) pp. 247-55*. In future months, we will delve deeper into the chair and member responsibilities discussed above.

About the Author:

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Share your meeting rule/parliamentary procedure suggestions or questions by emailing Daniel at daniel.foth@wisc.edu

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HR Matters column article by Lisa Bergersen discussing what diversity, inclusion, and equal employment opportunity mean in the workplace, why they’re important, and how organizations can implement them.

Governing Bodies 410

Legal comment answers questions regarding public comment periods at city council or village board meetings including the following: whether public comment period is required; ability of governing body members to respond to matters raised during public comment

period or speak as member of public during such a period; first amendment forum analysis for evaluating body’s ability to limit subject matter or persons who can speak during public comment period; examples of reasonable content-neutral time, place and manner regulations; and dealing with disorderly persons.



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