

Advisory Council Meetings and Robert's Rules of Order

Parliamentary procedure is a set of rules for conducting a meeting that allows everyone to be heard. It gives the group structure and a consistent format which helps them make decisions and achieve their goals and objectives democratically. Robert's Rules of Order is the most widely accepted guide to parliamentary procedure.

Basic meeting management:

1. **Conduct business one item at a time.** Jumping around from one item to another can be confusing, and it generally delays progress on any of the items.
2. **Let the chairperson do their work.** The chair is the gatekeeper for the meeting. A good chairperson keeps the group on task and the meeting flowing.
3. **Don't allow too much crosstalk.** This helps you keep control and ensures everyone will hear the business at hand. Allow time for socializing before or after the business part of the meeting.
4. **Limit discussion to the topic at hand.** Keep things focused, and don't be shy about asking speakers to deal only with the current topic.
5. **Cut off discussion when it becomes redundant.** For controversial issues, setting a time limit for each speaker can help. When discussion becomes circular, summarize the points on each side and ask for anything new—or shut off discussion by calling for a motion.

An orderly, well-run meeting is better for all those attending. You'll get more business done in a shorter time, giving everyone a sense of accomplishment. Groups – especially Advisory Councils that have busy parents, community and school representatives - that limit meetings to one hour have much better luck getting people to return the next month.

Agenda. The agenda is a list of items/topics, in the sequence in which they will be covered. Use a consistent order of business from meeting to meeting. The draft agenda must be posted ahead of time, in keeping with open meeting laws. The advisory council should adopt the agenda, with any changes, as the first order of business at each meeting.

A typical order of business for a regular advisory council meeting might be:

1. Call Meeting to Order/Roll Call
2. Adoption of Agenda
3. Approval of minutes (from last meeting)
4. Topic for Discussion
5. Topic for Discussion
6. Topic for Discussion
7. Announcements (including date and time of the next meeting)
8. Adjournment

Motion. A motion is a formal way to propose something on which the group should vote. The proposer says, “I move that...” and clearly states what is being considered. Someone else “seconds” the motion. Guided by the Chairperson, the group discusses the motion until they are ready to vote.

Finally, the Chairperson asks for an indication of “all those in favor” followed by “those opposed.”

Advisory councils need a motion to approve the agenda, approve the minutes and adjourn the meeting.

Quorum. A quorum is the minimum number of members required to conduct business at a meeting. Usually, this number is stated in the group’s bylaws. If a quorum is not indicated in the bylaws, Robert’s Rules of Order sets it at a majority of members.

Minutes. The minutes are the permanent record of the business conducted during a meeting. They include details such as the date, time, and location of the meeting, who was present, whether a quorum was present, and the presiding officer. Specific motions and their outcomes (who made the motion and who seconded it, vote count) are also included in the minutes. A brief summary of the topic and discussion is documented in the minutes. The minutes for each meeting are presented for approval at the next meeting.

Adjournment

Adjournment is simply a formal way to close a meeting so everyone knows the session has come to an end. The time of adjournment is recorded in the meeting minutes.