



DELAWARE
DEMOCRATIC PARTY

**PARLIAMENTARY
PROCEDURE**

A Basic Guide to Meeting Procedures for
RD Committees

**Includes elements from 2022 Parliamentary Procedure written by Lydia York,
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Based on Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, 12th Edition

Many organizations follow parliamentary procedures to accomplish their business discussions and decisions.

Purpose of Parliamentary Procedure

Parliamentary procedure was developed by General Henry M. Robert during the Civil War to bring order to officer meetings. The basic premise of Robert's Rules of Order is to protect each member's rights, while seeing that the majority rules. Parliamentary procedure is designed to accomplish one thing at a time, bringing each to resolution before going on to the next, all the while seeing that courtesy is extended to everyone.

Meeting Notice

Ahead of each committee meeting the date, time, and location should be fully publicized and in such a manner as to ensure reasonable notice to all interested persons. Meetings should be submitted for publication on the State Party's website by visiting www.deldems.org/submit-event.

Per State Party Rules, reasonable notice for regular committee meetings is five (5) days.

The Agenda

Building the Agenda

Before each meeting, the Chair should create a detailed agenda. This includes the regular procedures for the committee such as call to order, any opening ceremonies (pledge to the flag, etc.), reading of minutes, treasurer's report, committee reports, announcements, items of unfinished business, items of new business, executive sessions, breaks, next meeting date and location, and any other major items that should come up during the meeting.

Questions to ask before publishing the agenda would be:

- Does the secretary have the minutes ready for approval?
- Does the treasurer have a financial report ready to present?
- Do any officers or standing committee chairs have actions to propose or reports to make?
- Are any special committee reports due?
 - Will any actions be proposed? What are they?
- Were any agenda items not reached at the time the last meeting adjourned?
 - Was anything postponed to this meeting?
- Does the annual planning calendar require that action be taken at this meeting?
- What items will support the strategic direction?
 - How does this meeting promote the organization's progress?
- **Have you kept your ear to the ground so there are no surprises?**

Suggested agenda for a committee meeting:

Call to Order
Pledge of Allegiance
Adoption of Agenda
Approval of Minutes
Treasurers Report
Chair's Report
Special Reports
Recognition of Visitors
Unfinished/Old Business
New Business
Announcements
Adjourn

Finalizing and Approving the Agenda

It is often helpful to ask each person as they arrive if they have any agenda items and to check with committee chairs to see if they have reports to be included. Items of business brought up during committee reports can be handled immediately after the report or added to the order of business during unfinished and/or new business.

Often the agenda is put before the group as soon as the meeting is called to order and the Chair asks for any changes, additions, or suggestions. The agenda can be agreed to by consensus and it remains simply a suggested outline for the Chair. However, if a motion is made and passed to approve the agenda, it becomes the order of the day and must be followed unless a motion is passed to suspend the order. If the "order of the day" is established and the group strays from this order of business, any member may call for the "order of the day" and the Chair is required to immediately bring the meeting back to the current or next item on the agenda.

Attendance & Voting

Quorum

A quorum is the minimum number of members required to be present at the meeting to conduct business. State Party Rules use one-third ($\frac{1}{3}$) as the quorum level. If at least one-third of the members are not present at the meeting, a general discussion can be held on various issues, but no official business can be conducted.

Per State Party Rules, Ex Officio committee members (resident Democratic elected officials and candidates) are subject to special attendance rules in regard to quorum. Their absence from a meeting does not count against quorum, lowering the denominator in the one-third fraction. However, if an Ex Officio member is present they are counted toward quorum for that meeting.

If stated in the by-laws or previously approved by the membership, alternative methods may be used to obtain a quorum, such as using electronic communications (speaker phone, web cam, email, etc.), proxy votes, or other methods.

General Meeting Requirements

- Presiding officer
 - Usually the Chair or President
- Secretary or recorder
- Other officers as stated in the bylaws
- A quorum of members

Voting

There are four basic methods of voting in an RD meeting:

1. *Voice*

The Chair asks members to verbally say “Aye” or ”Nay” to a motion. This type of vote is used when a specific count is not required. When used, the Chair must decide and announce which vote carried the majority and whether the motion passed or failed.

2. *Rising*

Rising means standing or raising of hands. This method is used for a specific count and that count should be announced by the Chair along with the passage or failure of the motion.

3. *Written ballot (no secret ballots)*

The written ballot is used to allow each member to cast their vote while avoiding undue influence by others. The Chair is allowed to vote when using this method. **Secret ballots are strictly prohibited** by Democratic Party Rules and all ballots must be signed, identifying the voter.

4. *Roll call*

The secretary reads the name and records the vote of each member. The Chair then announces the results, often stating which members voted for and against the issue.

Most votes require a simple majority, which is one more than half the members voting (**not 51% of all those present**).

For example, suppose there are 20 members present at a meeting and a vote is required on a motion which needs a simple majority to pass. Since you cannot count a portion of a member, 51% would be rounded up to 11 members.

However, if only 16 of the 20 present members *vote* on the motion, then one more than half of those voting would be 9 members. So, in this example, it would require 9 favorable votes to pass the motion (one more than half those members voting), instead of 11 (51% of those members present).

Abstentions reduce the number of votes needed to approve a motion.

A two-thirds majority is required for motions which limit rights. A two-thirds vote requires a rising or ballot vote.

The Chair does not vote during a voice vote to avoid undue influence by the power of his or

her position. If the Chair cannot determine whether the “ayes” or “nays” have more votes, they may decide to call for a rising vote. In the case of a rising vote, the Chair may vote to create or break a tie, but not both. The Chair is free to vote in a written ballot like any other member. In all cases, a tied vote fails to pass the motion.

If a member does not agree with the determination of the chair on a vote, they may call for a “Division of the House.” If the Division of the House is called for, the Chair must proceed to a counted vote (rising or ballot).

Not all motions require a vote by the body, some are simply ruled on by the Chair (e.g., point of order).

Motions & Amendments

Motion

A motion is simply a tool to transact business. If parliamentary procedure is strictly followed, there should be no discussion or business completed without a motion on the floor. This means there is enough interest for discussion of the issue to proceed. However, this rule is often not strictly adhered to, especially in smaller boards and/or groups which may want to have some open discussion before deciding whether the issue needs to be considered as a formal item of business. However, the Chair should see that most issues proceed quickly to a motion. If a motion is not forthcoming, the item should be referred to another place and time outside the business meeting. The term “business meeting” means just that – a place where business is conducted, not unending discussion of related or unrelated issues.

A second is required by most (but not all) motions to show that more than one person is interested. If there is no second then the motion is lost “for lack/want of second”, and the Chair announces it as such. Until a motion is seconded the maker can withdraw it. Once it is seconded, it becomes the property of the group and is on the floor for discussion or final determination. However, the mover may ask permission to withdraw a motion. If there is no objection, the motion can be withdrawn from consideration.

There are four types of motions:

- Main – to introduce business
- Subsidiary – to change or take action on the main motion
 - This is the most common amendment
- Incidental – deals with rules and parliamentary procedure
- Privileged – handles personal matters
 - Examples: can’t hear, don’t understand, too cold, adjourn

Generally, most committees use only the Main and Subsidiary motions.

Handling a Main Motion

Let’s review the proper procedure for handling a main motion which has been properly made during the meeting. This is the bread and butter of most meetings.

A member rises or raises their hand for recognition and addresses the

Chair, “*Mr/Madam/Ms President/Chairperson.*”

The Chair must recognize the member before the member continues by using their name or some other format and asking them to continue.

The member presents the motion by saying, “*I move...*”.

A motion is **NOT** offered by saying, “*I make a motion...*” or “*I motion...*”. Motions are made in the positive. In other words, motions intend to do something or cause something to happen. Motions are not usually offered to **NOT** do something – simply refrain from making a motion if you don’t want to follow a course of action.

The Chair asks for a second.

Parliamentary law does not require the recognition or recording of who made the second. Consequently, a second only requires a member to call out that they second the motion. A second is required to prove that more than one person is interested in the motion. If a second is required and not made, the Chair will declare that the motion is lost for want of a second.

If seconded, the Chair repeats the motion and asks for discussion.

Discussion on a decision should happen **AFTER** the motion. The motion should happen at the beginning of the discussion. Only during discussion can other motions be made to change the main motion or do something with it. Each member who wants to discuss must be recognized by the Chair. The maker of the motion should have the first right to provide arguments in favor of their motion. The Chair has the responsibility to recognize persons on both sides of the issue, preferably in alternating order if their position is known.

The Chair should not discuss or introduce business. The Chair should only discuss business if he or she gives up the chair to another (vice-chair, etc.). This should not become a general practice and only be used if the Chair feels they have vital discussion concerning the issue before the group. On the other hand, the Chair may provide information previously unknown to the board without giving up the chair if it is given in a factual and neutral matter and allowing the members to discuss its implications and decide how the information should affect its decisions.

If the Chair gives up the chair to discuss a motion, he or she should not take the chair back until the matter is decided, and then must wait for the invitation of the person who assumed the chair in their place.

Bringing the discussion to an end:

1. The Chair can ask for a vote if they have asked for more discussion and there is none.

2. A member can call out “*Question*,” which means they are ready and asking for a vote. The call for the question carries no legal weight – it is only a suggestion. If more discussion is offered, the call for the question is ignored. The Chair states, “*The question has been called. Is there any further discussion?*” If there is none then...”*Seeing none, we will proceed to vote.*”
3. A member can move “The Previous Question.” In this case the member is moving to end discussion and move to a vote. This motion requires a second and, since it curtails the right for further discussion, takes a **two-thirds vote** to pass.

After discussion, the motion must be voted on unless another motion has done something else with it; e.g. – lay on the table, postpone indefinitely, postpone to a certain time, refer to a committee. The Chair states, “*We shall now proceed to vote on the motion to...*” and restates the motion (as amended, if amended) so all understand what they are voting on. If a counted vote is not required, the Chair calls for a voice vote: “*All in favor of the motion say ‘aye.’ All opposed ‘nay’.*”

After the vote, the Chair must announce the outcome: “*The motion is carried/lost.*” If a gavel is used, one tap of the gavel follows the Chair announcement.

Amendments

Amendments can be made to **insert, delete, or change the wording of an amendable motion**. However, an amendment is not in order to completely reverse the meaning of the motion. Amendments are made during discussion of the main or another amendable motion. A second is required, it is debatable and amendable, a majority vote is required, and the amendment can be reconsidered.

If moved and seconded, the amendment must be discussed and voted on **before** going back to discussion on main motion. Why? Because it may change the main motion and change opinions on whether it should pass or fail.

Once the amendment is passed or failed, business proceeds back to discussion on the main motion as it was made or as amended. If amended, the Chair should state the wording of the main motion as amended.

Amendments can be amended (but try to avoid this).

The same procedure applies as for the amendment to a main motion. However, only two levels (an amendment to the amendment) are usually allowed – too many levels of amendments are confusing.

Remember that the “amendment to the amendment” must be decided first (takes precedence), then the “amendment to the main motion,” and then the main motion. Each level of amendment is offered, discussed, and voted upon during the discussion of the motion to which it applies.

Instead of proposing a secondary amendment (amendment to the amendment), tell the group this if it will vote down the pending amendment, you will offer a different version that achieves the same effect. That is, stop considering the secondary amendment to get a better

primary amendment.

Order of Precedence

Order of precedence is the order in which motions must be handled if more than one is on the floor at one time. The chart below shows the order of precedence of some of the more common motions. A motion lower on the chart is out of order if a motion above it is being considered. Whenever a motion is decided it loses its precedence because it is no longer on the floor.

Adjournment
Recess
Points of Order
Lay on the Table
Previous Question
Postpone to Definite Time
Refer to a Committee
Amendment to Amendment
Amendment to Main Motion
Postpone Indefinitely
Main Motion

The motion to adjourn always has highest precedence because it will end consideration of all other business.

See *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, In Brief*, for further directions on precedence procedures.

Reports

Secretary's minutes, the Treasurer's report, and committee reports are just that, reports. They do not require a motion for acceptance and are simply received by the Chair.

The minutes of previous meetings should be read, either at the beginning of the meeting, or sent out to members ahead of time. After reading, the Chair simply asks whether there are any corrections, then declares the minutes approved as read/submitted or corrected. No motion is necessary.

The same procedure is used for the Treasurer's report.

If committee reports contain recommendations for the board, then the person making the report should properly move for the adoption of the report at its conclusion. A second is not required,

since the committee recommendation proves that more than one person is already interested in its passage. Adoption of the report means that the group has approved and adopted the recommendations. If there is disagreement on whether the recommendations should be adopted, discussion on the motion to adopt the report should reveal the pros and cons. If necessary, use the motion “Divide the Question” to consider recommendations separately.

All reports should become part of the Secretary’s records.

Nominations

A nomination is a suggestion, not a motion. Consequently, **nominations do not require a second**. Nominations should be taken for the highest office first and election for that office should be completed. Then those not winning the election can be nominated for succeeding offices. If a nominating committee is used, accept their report, but then the membership should be asked for any additional nominations. A motion to close nominations requires a two-thirds vote since it is closing the privilege of offering names for the office in question.

Example Procedure

Example Procedure

Chair: *Is there any further business?* [Member raises hand to be reconized]

MAIN MOTION:

Member: *Madam Chair*

Chair: *Jeff*

Member: *Since the election is coming up I move that we host a community canvass.*

SECOND:

Member: *I second the motion.*

Chair: *It has been moved and seconded to host a community canvass. Is there any discussion on the motion?*

DISCUSSION:

Member 1: *Madam Chair*

President: *Shirley*

Member 1: *I think this is a great idea because we have the volunteers and our candidates could use our help turning out voters.*

Member 2: *Madam Chair*

Chair: *Pierce*

Member 2: *I would urge the membership to vote against this motion because I am so busy. I just don’t have the time, and I doubt that many of you do either.*

AMENDMENT ONE:

Member: *Madam Chair*

Chair: *Troy*

Member: *I move to amend the motion to add the words “on the afternoon of September 21st.”*

Chair: *Is there a second?*

Member: *I second the motion.*

Chair: *It has been moved and seconded to amend the motion by adding the words*

“on the afternoon of September 21st.” Is there any discussion?

Member: *Madam Chair*

Chair: *Annie*

Member: *I don't think that will work because that is the same day as the big Eagles game and voters won't respond well to us interrupting the game.*

AMENDMENT TWO:

Member: *Madam Chair*

Chair: *Abed*

Member: *I move to amend the amendment by changing the 21st to the 20th.*

Member: *Second.*

Chair: *It has been moved and seconded to amend the amendment by changing the date from the 21st to the 20th. Is there any discussion? [No discussion offered.]*

If there is no discussion, we are ready to vote on the amendment to the amendment to change the date to the 20th. All those in favor say “aye.” Those opposed “nay.” [Makes judgment on prevailing vote.]

The motion carries.

AMENDMENT ONE:

Chair: *We will now resume discussion on the amendment as amended to add the words “on the afternoon of September 20th.” Is there any further discussion? [No discussion offered.]*

If not, we shall proceed to vote on the amendment. All those in favor say “aye.”

All those opposed “nay.” [Makes judgment on prevailing vote.]

The “ayes” have it. The amendment is passed.

MAIN MOTION:

Chair: *We will now resume discussion on the main motion as amended to read: “We will host a community canvass on the afternoon of September 20th” Is there any further discussion? [No discussion is offered.]*

Hearing none, we will proceed to vote. All those in favor of hosting a community canvass on the afternoon of September 20th, say “aye.”

All those opposed say “nay.” [Makes judgment on prevailing vote.] The motion is carried.

Member: *I call for a division of the house.*

Chair: *A division of the house has been called for. All those in favor of the motion please stand and remain standing to be counted. [Those standing are counted.]*

All those opposed please stand. [Those standing are counted.]

The count is 23 to 14 in favor of the motion. The motion is carried.

MOVING TO NEXT ITEM OF BUSINESS:

Chair: *The next item of business on our agenda is...*

[or]

Mr./Madam Secretary, what is our next item of business?

[or]

Is there any further business to be presented?

[or]

That completes our business for today. I declare this meeting adjourned.