

Robert's Rules of Order: The Fundamentals

1. Why should our charter school governing board use Robert's Rules of Order (RRO)?

It's important for people at the meeting to understand what decision has been made and for the board to set a tone of professionalism. Charter school governing boards are governmental bodies, which mean specific statutes apply to their actions.

2. Which person on the board should know how to use RRO?

Everyone. However, the person leading the meeting (typically the Chair or President) is responsible for conducting the meeting using RRO and for making decisions on the parliamentary process should questions arise. Individual board members should assist the Chair by clearly stating motions, asking to be recognized to speak, and by adhering to the written agenda.

3. How do I make a motion?

Start with the words, "I move that" +or "I make a motion to" +and then state your intention. Use the exact words that will be recorded in the minutes. Never expect your board members to vote on a concept or an ambiguous motion. The motion must be seconded before debate and the vote.

4. What's the difference between a motion and a resolution?

A motion is typically a sentence or two that is developed during the board meeting. A resolution is a longer, written document that may detail certain facts, then state a list of actions or requirements. Usually, a resolution contains several paragraphs each beginning with "whereas," then transitions to "be it resolved." Both a motion and a resolution may be presented to the board for a vote.

5. How do I amend a motion?

State, "I make a motion to amend the motion to" .+ Some boards use the phrase "friendly amendment" to mean an amendment that is meant to help clarify intent or improve grammar. The Chair may permit this type of amendment without a formal vote on the amendment. However, proper procedure is to amend the main motion by vote and then vote on the main motion.

6. How do I offer a substitute motion?

During debate on a motion, a member may offer a motion that fundamentally changes the intent of the main motion. Substitute motions cannot be amended. It's often best just to state the intent to offer a different motion after the pending motion is voted down.

7. May I abstain from a vote?

Board members with a real or potential conflict of interest should recuse themselves from voting. This is done by stating the reason and then stating "I recuse" when called upon for a vote. Sometimes board members don't want to take a stand on a

controversial decision before the board and simply abstain. Charter school board members are elected to represent the school's members so this isn't a good practice. The only reason a board member should refrain from voting is when there is a real or potential conflict of interest. Board members may not be compelled to recuse themselves.

8. Can board members participate in a vote via proxy or the telephone?

This depends on the provisions of the governing board's bylaws. Boards decide this type of provision when they are formed. It's best to have board members present when there is a vote.

9. May I add items to the agenda at the beginning of the meeting?

Boards may amend the posted agenda at the beginning of the meeting, but generally it isn't wise. If the additional agenda item is routine or insignificant, it's fine to consider it without a 24-hour notice. If the agenda item is at all controversial or something that would be of interest to stakeholders, it should instead go on the next meeting's agenda. The agenda must be voted on at the beginning of the meeting, which means if a member disagrees about adding an item there will be opportunity to discuss it and have a recorded vote.

10. What if I want to talk about something on the consent agenda?

The consent agenda is determined at the beginning of the meeting. Any posted agenda items that don't need discussion may, collectively, be voted on by approving the consent agenda. Once an agenda item is approved on the consent agenda, however, it cannot be pulled off and discussed during the meeting.

11. What if my board gets sidetracked during debate on a motion or debate is taking an inordinate amount of time?

Call the question! State, "I call the question" or "I move the previous question." This motion needs a second, but is not debatable. A vote is immediately taken to determine if the motion on the table will be voted upon immediately. If two-thirds of the board supports the motion to call the question, the Chair restates the motion before the board and a vote is immediately taken.

12. Do we need to have a roll call vote for every motion?

No, but the minutes need to reflect who voted and how they voted. The Chair may decide to just ask for "ayes" and "nays" rather than using a roll call vote for routine agenda items. Moreover, the Chair may simply ask if there is any opposition before declaring the vote outcome. These votes can be recorded as unanimous. Any split votes should record the individual's vote. Minutes can reflect a list of members voting in favor and opposed.

13. Does the Chair vote?

Yes. Furthermore, the Chair may voice his opinion during debate. The primary responsibility of the Chair is to ensure the meeting flows and is orderly, but may be involved in debate and vote.

14. May we vote by ballot?

You can, but with less than nine members, there really isn't any purpose and may be viewed as being secretive by the audience. The only time a ballot vote should be used is for selecting officers of the board if that is what's stipulated in the bylaws. This isn't considered a best practice, however.

15. How does a meeting need to be posted in order for the board to conduct business via voting?

A charter school governing board can vote at any regular meeting. These are the monthly meetings established at the beginning of the school year with an agenda posted at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting. The board may also hold a special meeting by posting an agenda at least 24 hours before the meeting. Votes can be taken at a special meeting, provided they are included in the posted agenda. Governing boards may also hold workshops or retreats. Votes are not taken during these meetings; however, they must still be properly posted.

16. What if I disagree with how the meeting is being conducted or am confused about what's going on?

You can state, point of order and state the issue of concern. Asking for a point of order is a reminder for everyone to clarify actions and ensure adherence to RRO.

17. Should our meeting minutes be posted before they're approved?

No. Minutes should be accurate, and approved, before they're made available to the public. Instead, the board may choose to include a short summary of the meeting in the school newsletter, for example. This summary is not meant to be the official meeting minutes, rather brief communication of board action.

18. How can I get something added to the board agenda?

Contact the board president, who has the responsibility of compiling and posting the agenda. A best practice is submitting an agenda item at least one week prior to the meeting so that board packets may be distributed a week before the regular meeting.