

The Anatomy of a Meeting

Agenda

The agenda is a detailed list of specific items, in the sequence in which they will be covered. Use a consistent order of business from meeting to meeting and distribute hard copies of the agenda to attendees. Post the agenda ahead of time at the school and on your website so members know what issues will be discussed at the upcoming meeting. And be specific. Don't just list "unfinished business." State what items of unfinished business will be covered.

A typical order of business for a regular parent group meeting might be:

- Welcome
- Approval of minutes (from last meeting)
- President's report
- Treasurer's report
- Principal's report
- Committee reports
- Unfinished business
- New business
- Announcements (including date and time of the next meeting)
- 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 president, the group discusses the motion until they are ready to vote. Finally, the president asks for an indication of "all those in favor" followed by "those opposed." There is no need to ask for "abstentions" (those who choose not to vote at all), because abstentions are not counted toward the outcome of the motion.

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, typically prepared by the group's secretary. They include details such as the date, time, and location of the meeting, whether a quorum was present, and the presiding officer. Specific motions and their outcomes (but not exact vote counts) are also included in the minutes. Discussion is not documented in the minutes. The minutes for each meeting are presented for the assembly's 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.

Tabling a Motion

If it is clear that a motion cannot or should not be voted upon at the current time, it is typical to postpone (“table”) it until the next meeting. Technically there should be a new motion to table the current motion, but most groups can agree to delay discussion without layers of parliamentary procedure. Often, it helps to appoint a committee or a member to study the issue and report back to other members at the next meeting. This tactic can save time on circular debate, especially when all of the facts aren’t available.

Resources

There are many guides to Robert’s Rules. If you’d like a reference, go with an abridged version such as Webster’s New World Robert’s Rules of Order, Simplified and Applied. Sticking to a few simple rules can make meetings more pleasant for everyone, from the president to first-timers