

### ***Efficient Meetings with Robert's Rules***

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (RONR) is one tool that Sport Organizations can use to govern effectively, particularly when conducting formal meetings such as Member Meetings or Board meetings.

RONR is the most used book on meeting procedures and is a helpful guide for conducting effective meetings. The most current edition of RONR is the 12<sup>th</sup> Edition (2020).

It is important to understand that your governing documents and applicable legislation take priority over RONR. This means that if RONR ever conflicts with those written authorities, the rule or procedure that takes precedence over RONR must be followed.

This summary provides key points from RONR which, combined with your organizational rules (i.e. bylaws/policy) will help you efficiently navigate your meetings. It provides streamlined solutions for common meeting challenges, but it does not represent the entirety of the rules in RONR or any of its exceptions. It should not be considered as a replacement to RONR.

#### **Robert's Rules 101**

The fundamental essence of any formal meeting is that all recognized members can initiate ideas, oppose ideas, and to do so in a fair and free manner.

There are six general principles of RONR to support this overarching objective. They are:

- **Majority rule:** The majority's decision will rule in your meeting. This typically means a decision that is made by more than half of the eligible votes cast, however sometimes a higher vote majority is required (i.e. 2/3 vote).
- **Minority rights:** While the majority will rule, the perspectives of individual members who represent the minority opinion or vote must always be heard, respected and encouraged.
- **Member rights, privileges and obligations:** The right to speak and be heard at the meeting, to receive the meeting notice, to attend, to vote, to nominate, and to run for office are rights that all members should be offered in equal measure. These rights however can be restricted in reasonable ways – such as mandating certain qualifications or experience required to serve on a Board - but any such restrictions must be transparent and equally applied to all members.
- **Member rights to information:** Information is the currency by which decisions are made. All members at a meeting must have equal and timely access to appropriate information, so that they make informed decisions.

- **Courtesy and respect for others at all times:** This principle is absolute and must be adhered to at all times.
- **Members have rights to an efficient meeting:** Rules exist for both members and the Chair of the meeting to regulate discussion and ensure that matters are attended to as efficiently as possible.

## The Role of the Chair

Any successful meeting is often attributed to the efforts of the Chair. The Chair serves as the 'referee' of the meeting, ensuring that the rules are followed and that the meeting is conducted in an efficient and respectful manner.

The Chair's primary responsibilities are:

- **Maintain Order:** The Chair is the first line of defence to enforce the rules if they are broken, ensuring that the above six principles are followed. The Chair works to keep debate impersonal and focused on the specific topic of discussion. The Chair should aim to remain neutral and impartial where at all possible. Remarks should be addressed through the Chair.
- **Be Time Conscious:** It is the Chair's duty to keep members on track and help them in attending to the core business of the meeting. They ensure that motions are stated clearly and repeated as necessary, that debate is relevant (germane) and that the assembly follows the established agenda. The Chair may recognize when debate is stale and encourage members to conclude debate.
- **Preserve Member Rights:** The Chair recognizes members when it is their turn to speak, alternates speaking opportunities, seeks perspectives from both sides of the debate, and ensures that only one member speaks at a time. The Chair is also able to offer firm, but polite intervention when necessary, to preserve the rights of members.

## Motions

The primary procedural mechanism of RONR is the **motion**, namely the **main motion**, which is essentially the topic or specified item of business under discussion.

Only one main motion can be discussed at a time. A main motion can involve just about any topic, and it presents that topic to the members for consideration and a decision.

A main motion is processed via six key steps:

1. **MEMBER IS RECOGNISED AND MAKES THE MAIN MOTION:** one main motion at a time and only introduced when no other motion is pending.

2. **MAIN MOTION IS SECONDED:** the seconder does not have to be in favour of the motion; the intent of the second is to confirm that more than one member wishes to debate/consider the matter contained within the motion. If no one seconds the motion, it is dropped from consideration.
3. **CHAIR STATES THE MOTION TO THE ASSEMBLY:** this statement provides clarity on the matter to the members, but also signifies the point at which the motion now belongs to the group, and not the mover of the motion.
4. **CHAIR ASKS FOR DISCUSSION (DEBATE):** the members may speak in favour or in opposition to the proposed matter, ask questions, and potentially make subsidiary motions that affect the main motion (i.e. amendments, limit or extend debate). The Chair regulates the discussion to keep it respectful and moving forward effectively.
5. **CHAIR TAKES THE VOTE:** the Chair restates the motion and calls for votes both *in favor* and then *in opposition (opposed)*, noting the required threshold to adopt the motion. The Chair counts the vote or engages any assigned scrutineers to do so.
6. **CHAIR ANNOUNCES THE RESULT OF THE VOTE AND IDENTIFIES ANY RESULTING ACTION:** the Chair clearly indicates whether the motion has been adopted (*carried*) or opposed by the majority (*defeated*). If the motion is adopted, the Chair further indicates any resulting action from its adoption.

Beyond the main motion, there are additional procedural motions that serve to either support/compliment the main motion (and others), that serve to address matters of immediate or overriding importance, or that serve to reintroduce business that was previously considered.

The classes of motions under RONR, include:

- **Main Motion/Resolution:** The main topic of discussion and decision. As an example, a Motion to “allocate \$5000 towards the purchase of new computer equipment for the office”.
- **Subsidiary Motion:** Assists the members in treating or disposing of a main motion. Using the example above, this could include a subsidiary motion to amend (i.e. strike ‘computer equipment’ and insert ‘furniture’), or a motion to postpone the decision to a later date (i.e. postpone to the next Board meeting), or a motion to refer the matter to a committee first for consideration and make recommendations back to the members before they decide (i.e. refer to the Operations Committee to report back at next meeting).
  - There are seven different subsidiary motions.

- **Privileged Motion:** Pauses consideration of the main motion to address general matters of importance. For instance, if the meeting is stretching beyond the designated time, a member can make a motion to adjourn the meeting. Or a recess can be proposed. Or a question of privilege can be raised to address discomfort, such as the room temperature is too hot, or the internet connection of a speaker is poor.
  - There are five different privileged motions.
- **Incidental Motion:** Dealing with questions of procedure arising out of another pending motion (or sometimes another item of business). Examples include making a *Point of Order* (a member believes a rule has been broken), an *Appeal* of the ruling of the Chair, or moving to *Divide* a main motion into two or more parts. Various types of requests and inquiries are also considered to be *incidental*, some of which are responded to by the Chair and others which can be granted only by the group.

Subsidiary and Privileged motions have a specified order of precedence, or ranking, that are relative to each other as well as with the main motion. They are also processed like a main motion; however, some have slightly differing rules (i.e. some do not require a second) and, when applied to a main motion or other pending motion, must be processed in the proper order.

Incidental motions do not fall neatly into any order of precedence since they typically arise out of another item of business. They can often interrupt the speaker and usually require a response from the Chair (i.e. ruling, point of information). There are eleven different kinds of incidental motions, most of which are rarely, if ever used, relying more on the cooperation between the members and the Chair.

Each of these classes of motions all work towards a set objective: a fair and democratic means to achieve productivity and efficiency within a meeting. The table below can help guide meeting participants according to RONR.

*RONR provides several ways to help make meetings more efficient and equitable. The assistance of a parliamentarian, who is an advanced expert on RONR and meeting procedures, is also strongly recommended, in particularly when your meeting rules and procedures are not straightforward, or the meeting includes challenging or contentious issues.*

*Our team at Sport Law can assist your organization in hosting efficient and effective meetings – contact us at [hello@sportlaw.ca](mailto:hello@sportlaw.ca)*

***Condensed Guide to Parliamentary Procedure for Meetings***

Based on Robert's Rules of Order

<b>Motion Type</b>	<b>I want to...</b>	<b>I say...</b>	<b>Interrupt the Speaker?</b>	<b>Must it be Seconded?</b>	<b>Is it Debatable?</b>	<b>Vote Requirement</b>
<b>Main Motion</b>	Introduce new business to the group	"I move to..."	No	Yes	Yes	Majority (unless the governing documents or legislation state otherwise)

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Motion Type	I want to...	I say...	Interrupt the Speaker?	Must it be Seconded?	Is it Debatable?	Vote Requirement
Privileged Motion	Adjourn/End the meeting now	“I move to adjourn”	No	Yes	No, however the members may motion to ‘Fix the Time’	Majority
	Recess/Take a break	“I move that we recess for 10 minutes...”	No	Yes	No, however it is amendable without debate (recess length)	Majority
	Make a request related to my rights, or the group’s rights	“I rise to a question of privilege”	Yes	No	No	No vote, ruled upon by the Chair
	Return to the prescribed order /Bring the meeting back on track	“I call for the orders of the day”	Yes	No	No	No vote, resolved by the Chair

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Motion Type	I want to...	I say...	Interrupt the Speaker?	Must it be Seconded?	Is it Debatable?	Vote Requirement
<b>Subsidiary Motion</b>	Make an improvement to the main motion (amend)	“I move that we amend the motion by...”	No	Yes	Yes (only the proposed amendment)	Majority (voted on before the main motion)
	Make an amendment to an amendment (secondary amendment)	“I move to amend the primary amendment by...”	No	Yes	Yes (only the secondary amendment)	Majority (voted on before the primary amendment)
	Have a small group study the question further before deciding	“I move to refer this topic to committee...”	No	Yes	Yes, as to the desirability to refer only	Majority
	Postpone decision until a later (and defined) time	“I move to postpone this matter until...”	No	Yes	Yes, as to desirability and to what time	Majority

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	Limit or extend speaking times and/or opportunities	“I move that debate be limited/extended by...”	No	Yes	No, however it is amendable without debate (times or opportunities)	$\frac{2}{3}$ Majority
	End the debate immediately and get to the vote	“I move the previous question”	No	Yes	No	$\frac{2}{3}$ Majority
	Set aside the pending motion to do something else of immediate urgency	“I move to lay the motion on the table”	No	Yes	No (but the Chair may ask the mover to briefly state the reason)	Majority



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Motion Type	I want to...	I say...	Interrupt the Speaker?	Must it be Seconded?	Is it Debatable?	Vote Requirement
<b>Incidental Motion</b>	Request procedural information or specific information related to the business at hand	“I rise to a parliamentary inquiry / request for information”	Yes	No	No	No vote - Chair provides response (or directs others to respond)
	Note a procedural rule that has been broken	“Point of Order!”	Yes	No	No (but the Chair may ask the member to explain their point)	Normally ruled upon by the Chair (but the Chair may ask the members to vote)
	Dispute the decision made by the Chair	“I appeal the decision of the Chair”	Yes	Yes	Yes (in most instances – see RONR)	Majority or tie votes sustains the decision of the Chair
	Split the business of the main motion into two or more separate motions	“I move to divide the main motion into # parts as follows...”	No	Yes	No	Majority

### **Tips for Presiding Over a Meeting**

- **Follow the agenda**
  - This will keep the meeting moving properly and will give you a roadmap to help fulfil your role as Chair. Scripting for each item of business on the agenda is also recommended.
- **For formal decisions, get the motion on the floor first, then debate**
  - This helps to be clear on the intent of the discussion (the specific business to be considered), ensures that the motion is moved and seconded, and can assist you in applying proper speaking rules.
- **Use the words “If there are no objections...” in place of formal motions (as appropriate)**
  - If you sense that everyone is in agreement and there is no opposition to the matter, you can seek *unanimous consent of the group* by asking this question. This allows you to move forward without compromising the member’s rights, noting that this is only used for matters that are non-contentious. If no objections are raised after the statement is made, you can note that the matter is adopted by unanimous consent. If a member objects, a formal motion is required.
- **Keep members on topic by repeating the current motion at timely intervals**
  - During extend periods of debate, or when multiple motions are pending (i.e. main motion plus an amendment), it is easy to forget the purpose of discussion. Remind members frequently to keep discussion on track, mitigating confusion. Also remind members of time allotments for topics, if noted in the agenda.
- **Try to balance debate**
  - Try to rotate perspectives between “Yes” and “No” arguments. As Chair, you can potentially participate in debate, but to do so fairly you may need to relinquish your position as Chair temporarily to another member.
- **Recognize when debate is repetitive and stale**
  - Ask the members, “Are we ready to vote?” The group may say no and continue, or they realize that it is time to make a decision.

- **In instances of heated debate, remind members of decorum and, if necessary, take a recess**
  - You must do your best to prevent the meeting from getting out of control, and these tips will often help to regulate the discussion and prevent the need for stricter meeting rules.
  
- **It is okay not to know every answer or to make a mistake! The Chair can rely on the members if necessary.**
  - You can admit that you are unsure before making a ruling or proceeding. You can also let the members decide in this instance, pause the proceedings to request support (such as from a parliamentarian) or call for a recess to consider the available options. If you make a mistake that is okay. Just stop and correct it (asking for help if necessary), then move on.