

Problem Solving in Parliamentary Procedure

People ask parliamentarians parliamentary questions all the time. Sometimes these questions are in writing and many times they are not. Questions may range in difficulty from those requiring a simple answer to complex, detailed inquiries. Members will find many times the answers are also simple, but there are also frequent occasions that require research, consultation with parliamentary authorities, and sometimes assistance from other parliamentarians.

Tools for Problem Solving

There are many tools available for problem solving. Here are a few:

1. *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 11th edition. It is always a good idea to make the parliamentary authority of the organization the first resource you consult for answers.
2. *Parliamentary Law*. This book was written in 1923 to supplement the early editions of Robert's Rules of Order. Even though many of the answers have been incorporated into the current RONR, we can still find answers here that are not found elsewhere.
3. Robert's Rules of Order Website. The frequently asked questions and official interpretations may provide answers you seek. In addition both parliamentarians and the public post questions and answers to the online forum. Frequently the authors of RONR will weigh in on the answers. This part of the website may not always have correct answers so check to see whether one of the authors has contributed or another knowledgeable parliamentarian.
4. The *National Parliamentarian* magazine has a question and answer column that has helpful information. It is a little harder to dig this out as the Q and A columns are not indexed. There have been four Q and A books published that were indexed but they are all four currently out of print. If you have a friend who is a long-time member, chances are they may have a copy.
5. Bylaws and articles of the organization. If the question you are trying to answer seems to be directly related to how an organization does things, the best resource may be the governing documents. Chances are the governing documents along with RONR will provide what you need to know.
6. State statutes. Although parliamentarians do not interpret the law, we can determine if the answers to the questions may be found in the law. If the bylaws are silent and if the answer is not found in RONR, there may be absolute rules or default rules found in the state laws.
7. Other parliamentary authorities. Occasionally there may be an answer in another parliamentary authority. What these manuals have to say would not be definitive but they may shed some light on a specific situation. And if RONR is not the parliamentary authority, one of the others may be the named manual in the governing documents.

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A parliamentarian needs many resources close to hand. Research is a necessary component of helping others with their parliamentary questions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS FROM RONR, CHAPTERS 1-4

1. What another manual may have to say in conflict with the adopted parliamentary authority then has no bearing on the case.
2. No member should hesitate to object if he feels it is desirable to do so, but he should not object merely for dilatory purposes.
3. When a particular incidental motion is in order, it takes precedence over the main motion and any other motions that may be pending.
4. The expression "privileges of the floor," sometimes used in legislative bodies or conventions, has nothing to do with having the floor, but means merely that a person is permitted to enter the portion of the hall floor otherwise restricted to members and necessary staff.
5. Notice of the time, place, and purpose of the meeting, clearly and specifically describing the subject matter of the motions or items of business to be brought up, must be sent to all members a reasonable number of days in advance.
6. With but few exceptions, incidental motions are related to the main question in such a way that they must be decided immediately, before business can proceed.
7. Although any society has the right to define, in its bylaws, what shall constitute a session of the organization, it is usually unwise in ordinary societies to adopt a rule making regular sessions last over a long period of time.
8. The society meets again at the time provided in its bylaws or other rules, or as already established by the adoption of an earlier motion.
9. Aside from rules of parliamentary procedure and the particular rules of an assembly, the actions of any deliberative body are also subject to applicable procedural rules prescribed by local, state, or national law and would be null and void if in violation of such law.
10. Even in a small meeting, the presiding officer of an assembly should not be addressed or referred to by name.
11. To change what the assembly has adopted requires something more (in the way of a vote or previous notice to the members) than was necessary to adopt it in the first place.
12. A motion to go into executive session is a question of privilege, and therefore is adopted by a majority vote.
13. In the case of a state or national organization that holds annual or biennial conventions, each convention constitutes a session of the organization—having one agenda or program—which may be broken up into separate meetings in the morning, afternoon, and evening, or into many meetings held over several days.

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14. Such an assembly's membership is limited to persons who are recorded on the rolls of the society as voting members and who are in good standing.
15. Before a subject can be considered, it must be placed before the assembly in the form of a motion.

Answers to 15 Research Questions

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