

SETTING YOUR AGENDA

Your organization holds business meetings to make decisions and share information pertinent to its mission. The order in which topics are presented to the members may be referred to as order of business, orders of the day, agenda, and/or program, but the concept is the same. Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (12th Edition) (RONR) defines this concept as, "An order of business is any established sequence in which it may be prescribed that business shall be taken up at a session of a given assembly" (RONR 41:2). This becomes the map for how the assembled members will navigate the numerous matters they will consider while gathered. Creating this map is the first step in ensuring an effective and productive meeting.

Standard Order of Business

If your organization has adopted RONR as its parliamentary authority and meets less than a quarterly interval, there is a standard order of business that can be used to guide the meeting (RONR 41:6). The standard order of business is as follows:

- 1) Reading and Approval of Minutes
- 2) Reports of Officers, Boards, and Standing Committees
- 3) Reports of Special (Select or Ad Hoc) Committees
- 4) Special Orders
- 5) Unfinished Business and General Orders
- 6) New Business

(RONR 41:5)

Your organization may have its own order of business that is outlined in the bylaws or is customary. Regardless of the origin of your order of business, the information below should be helpful in deciding what topics go where.

READING & APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The first piece of business that the body must attend to is approving the minutes from the previous meeting. If the minutes have been disbursed to the membership before the meeting, there is no need to read the minutes (RONR 41:9). Members can provide any corrections they may have at that time. These corrections can be accepted through unanimous consent. Although no motion is required to approve the minutes, it is not out of order (RONR 41:10).

REPORTS OF OFFICERS, BOARDS, AND STANDING COMMITTEES

This part of the agenda is where the majority of the business can expect to be transacted, which is why it is given a place of priority in the standard order of business. It is the role of the presiding officer to speak with the respective officers and committee chairs beforehand to confirm that there is a report to be presented to the body. If there is no report for a given meeting, the presiding officer will not call for the report during the meeting. All committee reports should be provided in writing, with limited exceptions (RONR 51:23).

Most often, reports are for information only. When this is the case, no motion is required after the report is made. It is the opinion of RONR that a motion "to adopt" or "to accept" a report is seldom wise except when the report is to be issued or published in the name of the organization (RONR 51:13). If there is a specific recommendation of action from the committee, and it should be on behalf of the majority of the committee, that recommendation should be made in the form of a



motion(s) at the end of the report. Any such motions would not require a second as it is coming from a committee made of multiple members, the majority of which having already approved or the recommendation (RONR 51:11).

Reports from officers should follow the same rules as those of committees. There is one major exception in that if there is some proposed action that the officer would like to propose a proper motion must be made from the floor by a member other than the reporting officer (RONR 48:19). It should be noted that the report of the treasurer, if it is provided just to keep the body updated on the current financial standing at a moment in time, does not require any action from the body. RONR actually states that such action would actually be improper unless it is a report of sufficient importance, such as an annual report, which will be referred to auditors. Ultimately, it would be the report of the auditors that would be presented for acceptance (RONR 48:20-24).

REPORTS OF SPECIAL COMMITTEES

A report of a special committee follows the same protocol as standing committees. The only key difference is that the life of the committee is only the time it takes to complete the task it has been assigned.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Often incorrectly referred to as “Old Business” the category of Unfinished Business is the area to attend to matters carried over from a previous meeting. These items typically fall into one of the following categories:

1. Items that were pending when a previous was adjourned.
2. Items that were on a previous meeting’s agenda that were not discussed.
3. Items that were postponed to the current meeting.
4. Items that were made a general order to be taken up at the current meeting (RONR 41:23).

It is the duty of the presiding officer to know what items to be classified as Unfinished Business. Therefore, it is not necessary to call for items to be placed under Unfinished Business (RONR 41:24). If there are no items within this category, the presiding officer should just not mention and move to the next on the agenda.

NEW BUSINESS

Under this category members are welcome to introduce any new items that they would like the body to consider. Any item that is relevant and appropriate for consideration may be brought at this time. The introduction of a matter is done so by placing a motion, with an accompanying second, in front of the body, when no other matter has the floor.

CLOSING THE MEETING

For most bodies that have adopted an agenda the presiding officer can adjourn the meeting when the end of the agenda has been reached. There is no need for a motion. The presiding officer would ask the body, “Is there any further business?” If there no response that introduces a valid and appropriate item brought forward the presiding officer states, “Since there is no further business, the meeting is adjourned.” It should be noted that a motion to adjourn however is not out of order. If the body has a custom of seeking a motion a motion can be placed in front of the body.

