

Rules of Order— How we run our meetings

As with the General Service Conference, SENY runs its business meetings as informally as possible but according to a Conference modified version of Robert's Rules of Order. (The current edition of Robert's Rules is *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, 10th Edition* also referred to as "RONR.") This allows for greater fidelity to AA Tradition and respect for local needs and preferences. The handout, "Summary of Conference Procedures" details the main points of procedure. Any "Rules of Order" currently in use by the area are subject to the will of the meeting and its right to amend them. Also, while it may be easier for clarity sake sometimes to talk in terms of winning or losing sides when explaining procedure, we are reminded, "the purpose of . . . debate is to reach a group conscience—there are no winners or losers." (From, "How the General Service Conference Operates," a General Service Conference handout.)

Some central ideas on procedure may be outlined as follows:

Courtesy suggests a member raise his/her hand and wait for the chair running the meeting to **recognize** them before they **take the floor** to speak. There are acceptable and expected exceptions to this.

A **motion** is a formal proposal by a member that the group take a certain action. A motion brings business before the meeting. Good motions are simple, clearly stated. Compound motions, those with sub-sections, are allowed, but may make discussion and decision making more difficult. The substance of the motion is referred to as **the question** before the meeting.

A motion requires a **second** in order to be further considered. That is, it needs a second member's agreement that it should be considered. The "second" is simply be called out after the motion is made without waiting to be recognized by the chair.

Motions may be changed before they go to a vote. An **amendment** to a motion on the floor must be germane to the motion (that is, involve the same question). Amendment requires a specifically worded motion saying exactly how the motion in question is to be reworded (amended). A motion to amend must be seconded, then may move to discussion and vote. A simple majority decides. If approved, the amended motion is restated by the chair, and debate on the motion as amended moves on.

Debate is the discussion of the question. It is suggested members limit their comments on a question to two minutes and to not speak a second time until those who wish to have been able to speak a first time. The chair may suggest the closing of debate to move the meeting along once it appears the meeting has had its say. Some procedural motions (see below) are not debatable, but simply move to a vote if seconded.

A motion to **call the question** asks that debate be halted while the meeting decides to proceed to the vote on the question or not. The chair may disallow such a motion if it appears premature. After a second, the motion is not debatable and requires a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote to pass.

A motion to **table** or to **lay on the table** a motion asks the meeting to postpone further discussion of the question to an unspecified later time. After a second, the motion is not debatable and requires a simple majority to pass. To later consider the tabled motion, a motion to **take the motion from the table** must be made and seconded. It is not debatable, and is passed by a simple majority.

A **vote** on the question is taken after sufficient discussion. It is suggested important matters be decided by a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority. This is called seeking **substantial unanimity** (agreement) on the question offering a firmer foundation for meeting decisions. Some procedural matters are decided by a simple majority only. The chair or the recording secretary reads the motion before the vote so the meeting is clear on the question. Except in the election of officers, the vote is by a show of hands. "Yes" votes, "No" votes and "Abstentions" are each counted for the record, but only Yes or No votes count toward the outcome on the question.

After a vote, a **minority opinion**, additional sharing from a member who voted on the non-prevailing side of the question, is allowed/invited.

After hearing the minority opinion or in possession of other new information on the question, a motion for **reconsideration** may be made by a member who voted on the prevailing side of the question.

It may be seconded by any member. If adopted after discussion, the meeting returns to the point in procedure just before the vote on the question and continues.

More About Majority Decisions

Questions before the area committee or assembly are decided by a majority vote following ample discussion and an opportunity for reconsideration of any decision. (See also below.) Depending on the question, the committee/assembly may wish to make its decision based on a simple majority (greater than $\frac{1}{2}$ of the total vote), a substantial majority (at least $\frac{2}{3}$ of the total vote) or a super majority (at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total vote). It is suggested questions of conscience (policy) be decided on the basis of a substantial majority. Abstentions are not considered (counted) toward the decision, but may be recorded for the record. Whatever the basis for decision, the chair should assure the committee/assembly is clear on the method for decision before the vote.

More About Minority Opinion and Reconsideration

AA service principles as outlined in the *Twelve Concepts for World Service* try hard to respect minority views in decision making.

"Concept Five" reminds us that "a traditional 'Right of Appeal' ought to prevail, so that minority opinion will be heard . . ." Seeking a "minority opinion" after a vote allows an opportunity for "reconsideration" of a question based on the strength of additional minority sharing allowing all participants a sense of a fair hearing. In practice, the respecting of minority views works as follows in our meetings.

It is suggested the chair allow for ample discussion on any question before a vote assuring all points of view an opportunity to be heard. To that extent it is the individual member's responsibility to speak up during any discussion period if his/her point of view has not already been stated. To wait until after a vote may only waste meeting time.

After a vote, the chair may ask if anyone who voted on the non-prevailing (losing) side of a question wishes to express a "minority opinion" not already stated during the previous discussion on the question. (In some meetings, it may be expected any member wishing to express a minority opinion after a vote will simply step forward to do so without prompting. This can also save the meeting time.) At this point the chair will allow additional time for one or more members who voted on the non-prevailing side of a question to express a minority view. Members are expected to try not to simply restate points already made, but to raise additional points on the question. This sharing is not subject to discussion (debate).

After a reasonable period for hearing such opinions, the chair may ask if any member who voted on the prevailing (winning) side on the question wishes to offer a motion to reconsider, that is, is there anyone who voted on the prevailing side who wishes to change his/her vote. While such a motion must be offered by a member who voted on the prevailing side of the question, it may be seconded by any member. If seconded, the motion may be debated but not amended, and is decided by a simple majority. If the majority votes to reconsider the question, the question is reopened to full discussion as if the original vote had not taken place. After such reconsideration a question is not open to further reconsideration in that session (meeting).

In summary:

- Following a vote on a question, "minority opinion" is allowed/invited from the losing side
- After hearing the "minority voice," anyone who voted on the winning side may move for reconsideration if they wish to change their vote
- If so moved, any member may second; hold a vote to reconsider; simple majority decides
- If a majority is for reconsideration, reopen discussion on the original motion; move to a decision
- No further reconsideration of the same question in the current meeting.

The respecting of minority opinion may be handled differently in some service meetings, and any meeting may decide to do it differently.