



Society Strategies

Federation of Genealogical Societies

P.O. Box 200940 Austin TX 78720-0940

Series Set III Number 1

April 1996

Set I Strategies for Vice-Presidents

Parliamentary Procedure

by Phyllis Brown Miller, CALS

Supplemental Page

This strategy paper, written some years ago, is an FGS *Classic* that contains ideas and strategies still relevant today in society management.

Parliamentary procedure never goes out of style. This paper covers the basics of rights and responsibilities of the members and the society, debate, and general principles.

The FGS address on page 1 is incorrect.

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Federation of Genealogical Societies

P.O. Box 830220 Richardson TX 75083-0220

Series Set III Number 1

April 1996

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Set III Strategies for Vice-Presidents Parliamentary Procedure

by Phyllis Brown Miller, CALS

INTRODUCTION

Parliamentary procedure provides a structure that encourages individuals to cooperate in making decisions. It regulates the order of business, proposals, votes and debate by the group in a fair and orderly manner. Parliamentary procedures are the rules of democracy.

Historically, parliamentary rules have been evolving for centuries beginning with some basic rules being used by the Great Council of the Norman kings of England. Parliamentary procedures, as we know them, were established by the English Parliament and refined through centuries of use. English settlers brought their experience and rules of Parliament to the New World. Virginia's governor authorized the first representative assembly in America in 1619 as the House of Burgesses. Thomas Jefferson's Manual, published in 1801, was the first to interpret parliamentary principles for the democracy of the United States.

People with similar interests have been meeting for generations to share ideas, act together on matters of concern, and to make decisions. Parliamentary procedure respects all members' rights, respects the wishes of the majority, protects the rights of the minority and absentees.

Some people seem to believe that only the officers of a society need to know basic parliamentary rules. That is like saying only the quarterback and a wide receiver need to know the rules of football. Most of us do not want to participate in a game if we do not know the rules. It should be the same for members of your society. You and the society will benefit if everyone knows the basic rules of parliamentary procedure.

The basic methods to transact the organizational business and the principles to accomplish a successful meeting are not difficult to acquire. You will be more self-assured with this

knowledge, will contribute more to the society, and enhance the enjoyment of your membership.

MEMBERS' RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Members have the responsibility to know parliamentary procedures in order to utilize fully the membership rights of:

- attending meetings
- actively contributing to the meeting through debate
- making and seconding of motions
- voting
- participating in elections
- holding office if elected
- carrying out the will of the majority vote
- participating in changes in the society's governing documents.

Members have the right to vote as long as current dues are paid or until officially dropped from the membership roll, as long as they abide by the rules adopted by the society and fulfill other requirements as stated by the society. Examples of these "other requirements" would be documenting an ancestor for a lineage society membership.

Members have the right to expect that meetings will be conducted in an efficient and proper manner with respect for all members' rights. Membership gives an inherent right to vote, unless stated otherwise in the governing documents. Members may not be forced to vote. One should abstain from voting on any motion in which he, or she, has a direct personal or financial conflict of interest.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SOCIETY

The Society has the responsibility to meet objectives as stated in the Bylaws (and/or Constitution), and to provide membership services as outlined in the governing documents.

It is the duty of the elected officers and executive committee to see that these responsibilities are met. **Officers and committee chairs have the responsibility to work cooperatively with their peers, in the best interests of the society.**

In descending order, the ranking documents governing an organization are:

- national, state, and local laws or codes for non-for-profit groups
- the Certificate Charter if granted by a superior or parent organization, or
- the Corporate Charter, if incorporated
- the Constitution and/or Bylaws of the society (most organizations prefer a single document that is called Bylaws)
- Rules of Order
- Special Rules of Order
- Standing Rules

The Bylaws, Rules of Order, Special Rules of Order, and Standing Rules should be reviewed every three years. Needed revisions are presented to the membership for their approval – usually at an annual meeting.

Large societies usually adhere closely to established parliamentary procedures, and rightly so. Very small societies may choose only to meet the bare requirements of calling a meeting to order, and reading and taking minutes. A group of five or ten people would not need to be as formal in their meetings as group trying to conduct business with 100

people in attendance.

The following principles are adapted from Louise Bereskin's book *Pointers on Parliamentary Procedure*, available from the National Association of Parliamentarians, 213 South Main Street, Independence, MO 64050-3850.

BASIC RULES AND PRINCIPLES

- 1. The organization is paramount.**
Decisions by the membership of the organization supersede those of any individual or small group. The power of the meeting is in the hands of the voting members.
- 2. All members have equal rights.**
These rights include participating in the business meetings of the society by making motions, speaking in debate, and voting.
3. An established minimum number of voting members must be present to transact business legally. Bylaws should state the number, or percent, needed for a quorum. If not, the general rule is that a majority of the entire membership must be present in order to transact business.
4. Only one main motion may be placed before the assembly at a time, and only one member may have the floor at any one time.
5. Members are allowed full debate before action (voting) on a main proposition is taken. This right can only be suspended by a two-thirds vote.
6. A proposition or issue is the only item under discussion, and never the person who introduced it or any other personality. **Personal remarks are always out of order.**
7. A question once settled may not be presented in the same form in the same session. This is to avoid wasting time.

The only way to bring up the same question again in the same session is by moving to reconsider the vote on that motion. Some motions cannot be reconsidered, such as the motion to adjourn or recess.

8. A majority vote decides a question except in cases where basic rights of members are involved; then a larger vote is required. A majority vote is more than half of the votes (51%) cast by persons legally entitled to vote, not counting blanks or abstentions, at a regularly or properly called meeting at which a quorum is present.
9. A two-thirds vote is necessary for any motion that deprives a member of his rights in any way – such as changing the rules of debate, cutting off the debate, closing nominations or the polls, and rescinding actions without notice.
10. Silence gives consent. Those who do not vote when the vote is taken agree, by their silence, to allow decisions to be made by those who do vote.

GENERAL RULES OF DEBATE

In order to take part in debate, a member must be recognized by the presiding officer. The member then may take part in the proceedings if abiding by the accepted rules of debate. In *Robert's Rules of Order* (1990), they are:

1. A member may speak a maximum of twice on the same questions on the same day.
2. Every member has the right to speak once on a question before any member is allowed to speak the second time.
3. Each speaker is limited to ten minutes unless your bylaws state a different time limit on debate.
4. The person who makes a motion has the right to be the first to debate.

Parliamentary Procedure

5. All comments must be limited to the pros and cons of the question before the assembly.
6. All comments are addressed to and through the presiding officer.
7. Officers are referred to by their titles; members are referred to as “the member,” not usually by name.
8. When a member has been assigned the floor, all other members should be seated.
9. The maker of a motion may not speak against his motion, but may vote against it.

Committees and Boards: How to be an Effective Participant, by Alice Pohl. Every member of an organization should read pages one through 122 of *Robert's Rules of Order* (1990). This latest edition is easier to understand than previous editions.

Ask your local reference librarian for the name of the local parliamentary study group, unit or chapter in your area. Contact them to learn of workshops they may offer in the near future. Perhaps a seminar can be presented to your society.

Many useful books on parliamentary procedure are available at your library. Start with special topic books that fit your needs, such as

We hope you find the ideas in the Paper useful. It is from a Series of six individual sets.

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