

Formal Procedures for Committee Meetings

This information is based on the “Roberts Rules of Order” which are considered to be the standard used in Parliament and Business.

The President or Vice President in the Presidents absence is the Chairperson or Chair of the meeting. With the Secretary, the Chair decides on an agenda which is circulated in advance to members in accordance with the Rules of Incorporation (Rules). Included with the agenda should be all relevant reports, background papers, and financial statements and previous minutes if they have not already been circulated.

At the Meeting

The Chair will:

- make sure the meeting starts on time
- welcome members and organise any introductions
- read and call for apologies
- where appropriate advise of housekeeping details, e.g. time and length of meeting breaks, location of toilet facilities etc
- set a timeframe for the meeting, and work to keep to it
- keep to the agenda
- avoid introducing their own opinion unless it is necessary

The Formal Agenda (Order of the Day)

A formal agenda typically includes the following:

- **Attendance** – and apologies are read, called for and recorded.
- **Previous Minutes** - The Chair calls on the Secretary to read the previous minutes if they have not been previously circulated to members. Corrections or additions are called for by the Chair after which the chair declares that the minutes are approved as read, delivered or corrected; or entertains a motion to that effect.
- **Matters Arising** -from the last minutes are discussed (discussion should be confined to specific questions arising from the minutes, or the action someone was asked to take).
- **Correspondence** - is tabled. Discussion is limited to the essentials, and a motion put that inward correspondence be received, another that outward correspondence be approved.
- **Financial Statements** - are presented by the Treasurer. A motion is needed on a list of accounts for payment.
- **Committee Reports** - are presented and discussed. Do not need a motion unless specific recommendations are made in which case a motion is required for the specific recommendation(s) only.
- **Other Reports** - (brief, on specific subjects, with recommendations attached for consideration) are presented. Recommendations are discussed, and approved or declined through a motion.
- **Motions Put** – motions of which due notice has been given are put. Any motions proposed without sufficient notice may be rejected by the Chair and then accepted as notices of motion for the next meeting.
- **General Business** - This is the time for minor items to be raised. The Chair should discourage the raising of major items at this point unless they are urgent. The Chair decides whether each matter will be discussed or deferred to the next meeting.
- **Next Meeting** - is arranged if not already set.

A Quorum

The Rules require a quorum, or minimum number of people, to be present before a meeting can be held. If a quorum is not present, the meeting cannot commence. If a quorum is lost during the meeting, it is declared closed. Decisions at meetings are valid only if there is a quorum present. Consult your Constitution for quorum requirements.

Understanding Motions

A motion is a formal recommendation put by a member to a meeting for debate and consideration, by saying "I move that.....".

Each motion put (except motions from the Chair) must be supported (seconded) by another member before the motion can be discussed. A supporting member may immediately second the motion without waiting for the Chair's recognition. If a seconder does not automatically support the motion, the Chair must ask for a seconder. If no one offers support, the motion lapses and the meeting moves on.

Once a motion is supported, the Chair restates the motion and asks "is there is any discussion". The proposer is the first member to speak on the motion. Other members can add to this discussion once the proposer has spoken. Whilst a member "has the floor" no other member may speak except for Points of Order, Privilege Questions or Subsidiary Motions as noted below. Any member who attempts to speak whilst another member has the floor should be ruled "out of order" by the Chair. A time limit may be applied to each speaker.

After discussion or if there is no discussion, the motion is put to the meeting for a decision and members indicate by vote whether they agree or disagree with it.

Voting can be by a voice vote (if the issue is not very contentious), a show of hands (if a voice vote is not decisive), or a ballot (especially if there are more than two outcomes, as when electing officers). If a ballot is conducted, two scrutineers are appointed (one from each opposing faction, if any). The scrutineers give each member a slip of paper with a list of candidates on it. Members cross off names of candidates they do not support then the slips are collected by the scrutineers and counted outside the meeting room. After counting is completed and the vote outcome recorded in the minutes, the Chair moves that ballot papers be destroyed. In the event of a tied vote the Chair has the final or casting vote.

All motions with support must be minuted. A summary of discussion may also be minuted and the outcome of the vote is recorded in the minutes as CARRIED or LOST. If a motion is passed it becomes a resolution.

Motions can be amended before they have been voted on - the same procedure is used as when the motion was originally put, but the mover and the seconder of an amendment should not be the same as those of the original motion. If an amendment is not contentious (such as the correction of a name or grammar) and is acceptable to the mover and the seconder of the original motion, it may be incorporated without a vote. The Chair need not accept an amendment if they consider it "vexatious" i.e. just made to cause trouble; cause annoyance with insufficient grounds; unnecessarily delay a decision or; alter the original intention of a motion.

If an amendment is moved and supported, it must be discussed and voted on to decide if the amendment is to be accepted before the main (substantive) motion is discussed. If the amendment is carried it is incorporated into the main motion. The meeting then returns to the main motion with the included amendment if carried or without it if the amendment is lost. The motion is then discussed and voted on. If required, motions can be put to further amend a motion but this should be kept to a minimum and not used as a tactic to delay a decision, alter the original intention or be vexatious.

Points of Order:

Points of Order are introduced by the words "Point of order, ...". These refer to a breach of rules, a violation of the bylaws, or a misrepresentation. Points of order must be made at the time of the breach, i.e. during the putting of a motion or whilst someone is speaking to a motion or at anytime there is a breach of procedure. The Chair must act immediately and the point of order is subjected to the Chair's ruling.

Privilege Questions & Subsidiary Motions:

Before the motion is called upon for a vote, a "Question of Privilege" or "Subsidiary Motion" may be asked of the Chair. Such questions have no relation to the pending motion but are considered of such urgency that they must be resolved before continuing the discussion of a motion. These privilege questions & subsidiary motions are to:

- Adjourn the meeting
- Take a recess
- Lay the question on the table
- Postpone for a certain time or indefinitely
- Commit or refer
- Call for the "Order of The Day" (does not need a seconder)

None of these matters are debatable. When called for by a member and then seconded by another, the Chair must resolve the question by calling for an immediate vote before continuing the discussion on the pending motion. As an example of this process, a Member would attract the attention of the Chair and ask – "I wish to be recognised to consider a subsidiary motion". When granted the floor, the Member would ask – "I move that the main question be tabled for consideration at the next meeting". After obtaining a seconder, there is no debate and the motion is voted on.

"Commit or refer" is used where consideration of complex documents requiring many changes may be best handled by a sub-committee. The sub-committee would then assess and return the document with any revisions for the members to consider at a later meeting.

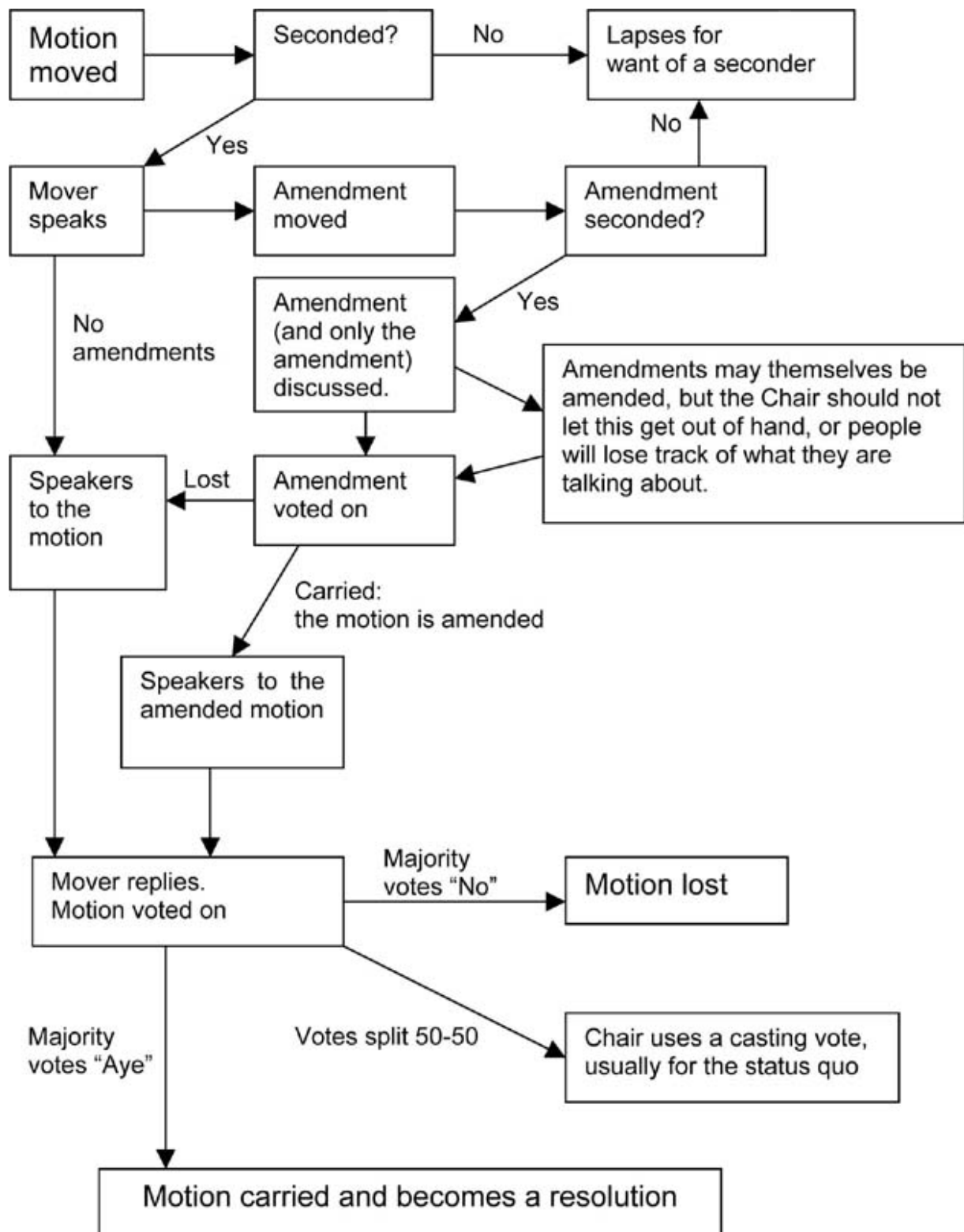
Call for the "Order of The Day" does not need a seconder but suggests to the Chair that the motion is not in keeping with the Agenda.

There are many rules which are attached to the Constitution or Rules of the organisation and are known as the "Standing Orders". A copy of the Standing Orders and the Constitution of the organisation should be available at the meeting for reference.

Some people just love using the standing orders to bog meetings down in amendments and points of order. A Chair needs to be a skilled facilitator to avoid this happening.

Motions and Amendments Flowchart - next page

Motions and Amendments Flowchart



Sample Ground Rules Checklist

Ground rules should be developed by the group that will be bound by them. These rules should cover:

- respect for other people: no interrupting, no long monologues, no personal abuse, allow space for everybody to express their views
- confidentiality: agreement on whether meeting content may be discussed outside the meeting
- responsibility: everybody agrees to take responsibility for timekeeping, keeping to the agenda and voicing their opinions in the meeting rather than afterwards
- physical comfort: agreement needs to be reached about whether breaks are necessary

After the Meeting

- action plans and follow ups are confirmed;
- minutes are checked by the Chair and the minute taker (a minute secretary who is not the Secretary, may be appointed);
- the time frame for circulation of minutes, new reports, background papers, and the next agenda is arranged; and
- minutes are then circulated (sometimes on their own, sometimes not long before the next meeting when reports and background papers called for at the meeting can go out at the same time).

Characteristics of Good Facilitators (Chairperson)

Good facilitators:

- have the confidence of the community with which they are working
- are aware of the different sections within that community
- understand the groups members' strengths
- have a good working knowledge of the subject under discussion and the issues facing the group, but
- present a neutral position on the issues being discussed
- deal with how things are done (the process), rather than with what is done (the content). This does not limit the facilitator from contributing to the content, as there will be times when facilitator input will move the group along;
- value as relevant everything that happens at the meeting, and everyone there
- enable everyone to have the opportunity to express their views
- know who may vote at the meeting
- trust the ability of the group to work through processes and achieve its task
- trust themselves to do the job well
- appreciate that the value of the group is greater than the sum of its parts
- keep the meeting's purpose in mind at all times
- are comfortable with conflict and conflict resolution
- act naturally and openly
- are enthusiastic
- can stimulate discussion
- can laugh at themselves and with others
- support, guide and inform members and involve them in decision-making
- do not dominate proceedings
- know whether a decision is a routine or a strategic decision
- know which decisions relate to governance (policy-making) and which to management of the organisation
- can keep the meeting from being sidetracked
- can keep members to the agenda
- get the job done, and done on time, and
- act on decisions that have been made

Communication Skills

Facilitators need to use skills such as:

- listening - and being aware of personal listening faults such as self-listening (planning what they are going to answer instead of listening to what is being said)
- the ability to speak openly, e.g. to be able to say "I don't know"
- reflecting and summarising - checking back on what has been said earlier
- drawing people out - using open questions
- problem-solving
- acknowledging and affirming
- negotiating and contracting
- using humour (especially when things are starting to get tense)
- using silence - allowing for reflection and learning
- reviewing - offering a final overview of what has been said and decided
- giving and receiving constructive feedback, and
- seeking agreement.

Aspects of Active Listening

Use of non-verbal cues: this is the skill of using non-verbal cues to show you are listening. By using your usual body language of nods, smiles, attentiveness, sounds such as "uh-huh", etc., you show the speaker that you are attending.

Concentration: this is the skill of focusing on the speaker and interacting to draw them out. Steps: focus fully on the speaker; avoid re-focusing attention on yourself; draw the speaker out as necessary; use expressions of interest, open questions (questions that encourage extended answers rather than "yes" or "no") and directives to keep the speaker focused on their theme and help them have their say.

Suspending judgement: if you have critical or negative thoughts about the speaker or what they are saying, put these aside for the duration of the discussion.

Giving feedback: giving feedback to the speaker is both helpful and an indication of how fully you are listening. Steps: summarise briefly the main points of what they said; describe what their voice tone, breathing, facial expression, body position and body movement seemed to indicate about what they were feeling. You can give feedback in any order so long as it is constructive and you affirm and support the speaker.

Paraphrasing: at points during the conversation it is helpful to briefly summarise your understanding of what the other person has said. This enables you to confirm that you clearly understand what is being said to you.

Reaching Decisions by Majority Vote

Pony Clubs are required to use voting as their principal method of decision-making. When voting, there are things to bear in mind:

- be clear about how many votes are required for the proposal to be carried. Consult Constitution to determine what is required.
- all choices should be discussed fully before a vote is taken; and
- voting can be by voice, a show of hands or secret ballot. A secret ballot is the most formal means of coming to a decision, and should be reserved for elections or very sensitive issues.

Remember that:

- voting can set up winners and losers; strong and valid minority viewpoints may be overlooked. Some members of the group may begin to feel undervalued
- taking a vote should not be a way of avoiding full discussion.

Difficulties in Decision Making

Conflict and disagreement can be learning opportunities. By debating issues we are able to more easily understand and resolve them. For this reason conflict should not be ignored, minimised or suppressed.

Some reasons for groups finding it difficult to make decisions include:

- no philosophy, no goal, no plan
- processes for decision-making are not clear
- fear of the consequences
- conflicting loyalties
- interpersonal conflict
- cultural insensitivity
- hidden agendas
- people think it will take too long or it can't be done at all
- there is no chance for people to freely express differences
- inadequate leadership
- clash of interests.

Managing Conflict in a Group

Although there is no right way to resolve conflict in groups, some key elements should be observed:

- allow enough time to deal with conflict
- define the issue in terms that are clear, neutral and acceptable to all parties in conflict
- have at least one person give special attention to the process, someone uninvolved
- use reflective listening to explore the issues: check out what you think is being said at regular points; and
- have parties to the conflict identify their points of view and what their ideal solutions would be.

Resolving Problems

First name the conflict. Then try some of these:

- set ground rules for the meeting
- agree on goals
- agree on a plan
- be clear about the way that decisions will be made (e.g. by consensus, majority vote)
- offer the freedom to express feelings safely
- give constructive feedback
- define the issues
- group the options in broad categories
- rank ideas (e.g. each person chooses their three most favoured options)
- break into small groups to re-examine remaining ideas, and report back to the full meeting
- brainstorm solutions by listing possible ways of dealing with the matter
- try out an idea then evaluate it
- suspend judgement - withhold opinions till more information has been obtained
- compromise
- agree to abide by a majority vote
- agree to differ.