Electronic meetings: Establishing meeting rules
Boards should adopt special rules before holding an electronic meeting to maintain an orderly meeting.

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Electronic meetings have become more popular with the increasing cost and scheduling difficulty of gathering people in one place, at the same time. There have been great strides in technology to allow people to gather simultaneously around their computers. Telephone conferencing is available to anyone with access to a phone. Most organizations (except for publicly elected or appointed boards) can meet using a remote meeting technology as long as everyone can at least hear each other speak. Some organizations allow their members to meet asynchronously – at different times and in different locations via email (or even fax or e-bulletin board) with clearly defined rules adopted by the organization.

Boards seeking to offer an "e-meeting" option to its members will need to make sure that their governing documents allow for them. Public boards are not allowed to hold electronic meetings. Non-profits are bound by state law which defines that members must be able hear one another.

Non-corporate and other voluntary organizations can hold electronic meetings as long as they are allowed in their bylaws. These groups should amend their bylaws to include the kinds of meetings allowed to be held electronically as well as adopt special rules for how they will handle them. For more detailed information concerning this, see "Electronic Meetings: What Kinds of Boards can use them?"

The National Association of Parliamentarians offers the following suggestions to organizations as they consider an electronic meeting option:

For **synchronous e-meetings** (meetings where members are gathered at the same time but not the same place):

- All participants must have access to the necessary equipment for participation. A right of membership is participation; therefore the technology used must be accessible to all members to be included in the meeting. The media selected may impose a limitation on the size of the board or committee able to participate.

- Determine in the bylaws what kind of meetings may be held via e-meetings. For example, each organization must decide for itself whether e-meetings may be used for special meetings and who has the authority to call a special e-meeting.

- Determine how much advance notice will be required for an e-meeting. Is it different from an in-person meeting? Will the content of the notice of an e-meeting be different and will the time required to respond deviate from a typical meeting?

- Is there an option for "mixed meetings" where some may participate in person and others participate via a call or web connection. Keep in mind that items should not be added to the meeting agenda unless all participants have access to the same supporting documentation.

- It should be pre-determined how a member will be considered as present, either through aural or written confirmation. For example, a member would be counted as present if recognized by voice in a telephone conference, or by a written message in a chat room. Since visibility of members is not possible to ascertain the presence of a quorum, once established, it is assumed a quorum continues unless members advise they are leaving the meeting.

- Consideration must be given to how members will be recognized for debate and the number of times a member may speak in debate in order to prevent a few members from dominating the meeting.

Additional considerations for **asynchronous meetings** include:

- An agenda with a specific timeframe must be set for the meeting prior to the call to order. The duration of a meeting is a key component of this type of meeting, therefore a start and end time must be determined for all to know when and how to participate.

- The procedure for handling a motion differs from a synchronous e- meeting. Rules need to be established for the length of time for consideration of specific motions. Likewise, rules need to be established for the length of time to cast votes. Methods for both secret and open voting must be established.

E-meetings can be an effective way to get the business of an organization accomplished. Thinking through the logic of how to run one will help them run smoothly.

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