Parliamentary Procedure

Parliamentary procedure is a set of rules for conduct at meetings that originated in the early English Parliaments. The following is a presentation of only the basic rules. For more information on parliamentary procedure refer to Roberts’ Rules of Order Newly Revised.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?
It is a time-tested method of conducting business that allows everyone to be heard and decisions to be made in an orderly fashion.

Agenda
It is customary for organizations using parliamentary procedure to follow a fixed agenda. Here’s a typical example:

1. Call to order
2. Opening Ceremonies (optional)
3. Roll call
4. Reading and Approval of Minutes
5. Reports of Officers, Boards, and Standing Committees
6. Reports of Special Committees
7. Unfinished business
8. New business
9. Announcements
10. Program (if a program or a speaker is planned for the meeting*)
11. Adjournment

Obtaining and Assigning the Floor

1. A member rises when no one else has the floor and addresses the chair: “Mr./Madam President, Mr./Madam Chairman” or by other proper title.
2. The chair recognizes the member by announcing his name or title, or in a small assembly, by nodding to him.

Motions
Members get opportunities to speak through motions. A motion is a proposal that the group takes a stand or takes action on some issue. There are four general types of motions.

1. MAIN motion- is the basis of all parliamentary procedure--provides method of bringing business before the assembly for consideration and action. Can only be considered if no other business is pending. For example, “I move that we purchase T-shirts”.
2. SUBSIDARY motion - a subsidiary motion changes or has an effect on how the main motion is handled.
3. PRIVILEGED motion - a privileged motion is the most urgent. They are about important matters not related to the pending business. For example, “I move that we adjourn the meeting.”
Parliamentary Procedure (cont’d)

How the Motion is Brought Before the Assembly
1. The member makes the motion: “I move that (or ‘to’)…” and resumes his seat.
2. Another member, without rising, seconds the motion: “I second the motion” or “I second it” or even “sec-
   ond.”
3. The chair states the motion: It is moved and seconded that ... Are you ready for the question?”

Consideration of the Motion
1. Members can debate the motion.
   A. Before speaking in debate, members obtain the floor as stated above.
   B. The maker of the motion has first right to the floor if he claims it properly.
   C. All remarks must be addressed to the chair.
   D. Debate must be confined to the merits of the motion.
   E. Debate can only be closed by order of the assembly (2/3 vote) or by the chair if no one seeks the floor for further debate.
2. The chair puts the motion to a vote.
   A. The chair asks: “Are you ready for the question?” If no one rises to claim the floor, the chair proceeds to take the vote.
   B. The chair says: “The question is on the adoption of the motion that... As many as are in favor, say ‘Aye’.
      (Pause for response.) Those opposed, say ‘No’. (Pause for response.)
3. The chair announces the result of the vote.
   A. “The ayes have it, the motion is adopted, and ... (indicating the effect of the vote)” or
   B. “The nays have it, and the motion is lost.”

Voting
The method of voting usually depends on the situation and on the laws of your particular organization. Typically there are five types of votes.
1. By voice - the chairperson asks those in favor to say “aye” and those opposed to say “no”. If it is unclear as to how many said aye and no, a member can move for an exact count.
2. Show of hands - members raise their hands either for or against the motion.
3. Roll call - if a record of each person’s vote is needed, each member answers “yes”, “no” or “present”
4. Ballot - a ballot vote is usually taken when secrecy is desired. Members write their vote on a piece of paper and turn it in for counting.
5. General consent - when a motion is not likely to be opposed the chairperson might say “If there is no objec-
tion” members show agreement by remaining silent. If someone disagrees they should voice their objection, and then the matter must be put to a vote.

IN CONCLUSION
Using parliamentary procedure can be a successful way to get things done at a meeting, but it only works if you use it right. Also, parliamentary procedure isn’t for everyone. Depending upon the nature of your organization, you may prefer, and it may be more appropriate, for you to conduct business on a more informal basis.