



Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised [RONR (11th ed.), pp. 97-99]

EXTENSION OF PARLIAMENTARY LAW TO ELECTRONIC MEETINGS

Except as authorized in the bylaws, the business of an organization or board can be validly transacted only at a regular or properly called meeting—that is a single official gathering in one room or area-of the assembly of its members at which a quorum is present.

Among some organizations, there is an increasing preference, especially in the case of a relatively small board or other assembly, to transact business at electronic meetings—that is, at meetings at which, rather than all participating members being physically present in one room or area as in traditional (or "face-to-face") meetings, some or all of them communicate with the others through

electronic means such as the Internet or by telephone. A group that holds such alternative meetings does not lose its character as a deliberative assembly so long as the meetings provide, at a minimum, conditions of opportunity for simultaneous aural communication among all participating members equivalent to those of meetings held in one room or area. Under such conditions, an electronic meeting that is properly authorized in the bylaws is treated as though it were a meeting at which all the members who are participating are actually present.

If electronic meetings are to be authorized, it is advisable to adopt additional rules pertaining to their conduct

TYPES OF ELECTRONIC MEETINGS

Various provisions for electronic meetings are possible, so that more than the minimum standard of an audioconference may be required. Thus, if the bylaws provide for meeting by video conference (but not merely by "teleconference" or "audioconference"), the meeting must be conducted by a technology that allows all participating members to see each other, as well as to hear each other, at the same time. Provision may also be made for the use of additional collaborative technology to aid in the conduct of a meeting.

It is important to understand that, regardless of the technology used, the opportunity for simultaneous aural communication is essential to the deliberative character of the meeting. Therefore, a group that attempts to conduct the deliberative process in writing (such as by postal mail, e-mail, "chat rooms," or fax)—which is not recommended—does not constitute a deliberative assembly. Any such effort may achieve a consultative character, but it is foreign to the deliberative process as understood under parliamentary law.

ELECTRONIC MEETINGS IN COMMITTEES

As in the case of a board or any assembly, committees that are expressly established by the bylaws can hold a valid electronic meeting only if authorized in the bylaws to do so. A committee that is not expressly established by the

bylaws, however, may instead be authorized by a standing rule of the parent body or organization, or by the motion establishing the particular committee, to hold electronic meetings.

ADDITIONAL RULES FOR THE CONDUCT OF ELECTRONIC MEETINGS

If an organization authorizes its assembly, boards, or committees to hold electronic meetings, such a provision should indicate whether members who are not present in person have the right to participate by electronic means, or whether the body may choose to allow or disallow such participation; and, conversely, whether there is required to be a central location for members who wish to attend meetings in person. The notice of an electronic meeting must include an adequate description of how to participate in it (for example, the telephone number to call for a teleconference must be provided). Various additional rules (in the bylaws, special rules of order, standing rules, or instructions to a committee, as appropriate) may also be necessary or advisable regarding the conduct of

electronic meetings, such as rules relating to: the type of equipment or computer software required for participation in meetings, whether the organization must provide such equipment or software, and contingencies for technical difficulties or malfunctions; methods for determining the presence of a quorum; the conditions under which a member may raise a point of order doubting the presence of a quorum, and the conditions under which the continued presence of a quorum is presumed if no such point of order is raised; methods for seeking recognition and obtaining the floor; means by which motions may be submitted in writing during a meeting; and methods for taking and verifying votes.



In light of the fact that many organizations are needing to conduct business using electronic meetings, due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the Robert's Rules Association and its publisher Hachette Book Group have made available [Sample Rules for Electronic Meetings](#), which will be included as an appendix in the forthcoming 12th edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*.
