

Electronic Meetings

Robert's Rules of Order 11th Ed.



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Electronic Meetings

Excerpt from Henry M. Robert III PRP Presentation to NAP Convention 9/23/11

.. regarding reasoning for Electronic Meetings in RONR 11th Ed.

arising questions.

2. Giving formal recognition to formerly new practices that have reached an established status.
3. Correcting inconsistencies or ambiguities discovered in the existing work.
4. Making alterations in arrangement of method of presentation to make the book more useful.
5. Mitigating common misunderstandings of parliamentary law which are doing widespread harm.

He transmitted to us the authority to interpret and to a limited degree to extend his work, but not to revamp it wholesale.

Let me provide some examples of each of these, the better to give their flavor.

First, I noted that our primary role is to apply existing principles of parliamentary law to newly arising questions, resulting in more fully developed rules derived through the technique of interpretation. This is perhaps the most common of the five cases.

In the tenth edition, published in 2000, we had to deal with the new concept of the "electronic meeting." The definition of meeting included "a single official gathering

of [an assembly's] members in one room or area" (RONR 10th ed., p. 79, l. 17-18). We recognized a modification of this when the bylaws authorize meetings by videoconference or teleconference, over the Internet or otherwise. In doing so we sought to look behind the literal language of the definition to the concept it sought to embody, identifying this as the notion that "the opportunity for simultaneous aural communication among all participants is central to the deliberative character of a meeting" (p. xx). Applying this concept to the new technology, we concluded that if the bylaws authorize an "electronic meeting," then "such a meeting must be conducted by a technology that allows all persons participating to hear each other at the same time (and, if a video conference, to see each other as well)" (p. 482, l. 30-33). Otherwise, whatever process is carried on does not comprise a deliberative body in the parliamentary sense, but is at best a temporary concatenation of individuals acting within the framework alluded to in the eleventh edition (RONR, 11th ed., p. 2, ll. 21-24), where certain parliamentary rules may sometimes find application. The eleventh edition has seen significant further development in this field. It devotes a new subsection to electronic meetings, with substantially expanded guidance regarding what is required for their authorization and the options for their conduct

What is an Electronic Meeting?

- RONR 11th Ed, pp. 81-82 defines a **meeting** as a single official gathering of its members in one room or area to transact business for a length of time during which there is not cessation of proceedings and the members do no separate unless for a short recess...
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- (For modifications of the “one room-or-area” requirement when the bylaws authorize **electronic meetings**, see pp.97-99.)

Electronic Meetings

- 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, as defined on pp. 81-82, a single official gathering in one room or area – of the assembly of its members at which a quorum is present.

Electronic Meetings Defined

- Is a meeting 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.



Electronic Meetings – a deliberative Assembly

- 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 communications among all participating members equivalent to those of meetings held in one room or area.

Electronic Meetings – a deliberative Assembly

- What is simultaneous aural communications?
 - Pronounced [awr-uhl]
 - *adj.* Of, relating to, or perceived by the ear.
 - It means that participants hear (aural) the proceedings at the same time
 - Sometimes called synchronistic communication

Electronic Meetings – a deliberative Assembly

- 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.

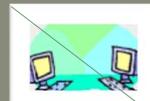
Types of Electronic Meetings

- Various provisions are possible so that more than the minimum standard of an audio conference may be required.
- If the bylaws provide for a videoconference then technology must be so that all must be able to see and hear at the same time.
- Provisions may be made for additional collaborative technology.

Electronic Meetings

– **NOT** a deliberative Assembly

- ...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 consultive character, but it is foreign to the deliberative process as understood under parliamentary law.

Electronic Meetings in Committee

- As in the case of a board or any assembly, committees that are expressly established by 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,

Electronic Meetings Additional Rules for the Conduct of

- If electronic meetings are authorized, it is advisable to adopt additional rules pertaining to their conduct.
- If the organization authorizes its assembly, board, or committees to hold electronic meetings, should consider the following:

Electronic Meetings Additional Rules for the Conduct of

- ---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 a meeting in person.
- ---The notice of the electronic meeting must include an adequate description of how to participate (e.g. phone number)

Electronic Meetings Additional Rules for the Conduct of

- --- 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:

Electronic Meetings Additional Rules for the Conduct of

- The type of equipment or computer software required for participating in meetings, whether the organization must provide such equipment or software, and contingencies for technical difficulties or malfunction
- Methods for determining the presence of a quorum



Electronic Meetings Additional Rules for the Conduct of

- 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



Electronic Meetings Additional Rules for the Conduct of

- Means by which motions may be submitted in writing during a meeting
- Methods for taking and verifying votes
- Adoption of provisions for ensuring that non-members cannot participate in meetings (unless properly invited to do so) especially during any meeting or portion of a meeting held in executive session.

Electronic Meetings

- RONR has provided much needed guidance in the area of the ubiquitous electronic meeting, but for many the guidance is not complete
- There is guidance from parliamentarians that is helpful.

(Handouts in addition to this presentation)

ELECTRONIC MEETINGS REPRINTS

E-Meeting – the Future Is NOW!

Nancy Sylvester, CPP-T, PRP

Reprinted from the *National Parliamentarian*, Second Quarter 2000 2

E-Meeting-The Future Is Now! Part II

Nancy Sylvester, CPP-T, PRP

Reprinted from the *National Parliamentarian*, First Quarter 2001 6

Rules for Electronic (e-mail) Meetings or The E-liberative Assembly

John D. Stackpole, CPP, PRP © 2001

Reprint from *Parliamentary Journal*, Volume XLII, Number 3, July 2001 10

Voting in Electronic Meetings

James H. Stewart, PRP

Reprint from *Parliamentary Journal*, Volume XLIII, Number 2, April 2002 27

A Response to James Stewart’s Comments on E-Voting

John D. Stackpole, CPP, PRP

Reprint from *Parliamentary Journal*, Volume XLIII, Number 2, April 2002 30

Bylaws for E-Meetings

John Stackpole, CPP, PRP

Reprinted from the *Parliamentary Journal*, Volume XLIV, Number 2, April 2003 .32

2005 Report on E-Meetings

National Association of Parliamentarians® Education Committee

The 2003 biennial convention of the National Association of Parliamentarians, recognizing NAP’s leadership in education related to parliamentary procedure and effective meeting practices, directed its education committee to consider the development of a sample set of rules for electronic meetings. The committee produced the following report, including guidelines that members may use when establishing rules for electronic meetings. The 2005 NAP biennial convention adopted the resolution and recommended guidelines as presented in this report.

Note: Mary Loose DeViney, PRP, Member of the NAP Education Committee

Electronic Meetings

Thanks for attending!

Questions and Comments?

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