

# VOTING BY E-MAIL

Since the 1990s electronic media have become increasingly vital means of communication, both one-on-one and within a group, and have allowed an organization to conduct business more efficiently and quickly and at less expense.

Because *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 10<sup>th</sup> Edition, was published in 2000 it does not include detailed rules for conducting electronic meetings or taking electronic votes. Although RONR (pp. xx and 2) discourages conducting meetings by e-mail alone, it does approve of conducting votes by e-mail if

- they are authorized in the bylaws; and
- there are special rules in place to govern debate.

Consequently, if a district, zone, or society wishes to take electronic votes they must first be sure it is in their bylaws. (For example, in the LWML Bylaws Article X, Section 2.d and Article XI, Section 2.a.) If it is not, they must amend their bylaws to allow for it. Rules for conducting the e-mail vote should be in the standing rules or procedures manual.

Each group makes its own rules based on its own needs. Below are sample rules for consideration.

## SAMPLE RULES FOR VOTING BY E-MAIL

1. All participants must have access to the necessary equipment for participation in the e-vote. (If any participants do not have access, an e-vote cannot be taken.)
2. The chair (president or committee chairman) shall develop the time frame for the e-vote.
3. A minimum of (hours or days) notice shall be provided to all participants via (e-mail, fax, or telephone) by the (secretary or chair). Such notice shall include the motion and supporting documentation for the e-vote. (The organization must decide for itself how much notice will be given and how it will be delivered.)
4. A second is not necessary for the motion to be considered.
5. The motion to lay on the table is not in order. (Other secondary motions may also be prohibited if desired.)
6. Each new main motion must be made in a separate, new e-mail message with no other message thread included.
7. New motions in a new message thread (may or may not be) be introduced while there is another motion currently being debated. There is no limit on the number of simultaneous threads pending. (OR No more than \_\_\_ main motions can be considered at one time.)

#### OPENING A QUESTION FOR CONSIDERATION

8. The chair shall assign a number to the motion and shall include the number in the subject line. (Example: Motion 1.)
  - The subject line must include the word “Motion.”
  - The first line of the message must begin with “It is moved to (or that)…” If the motion comes from a specific officer or committee member “(name of officer) moves to (or that)…”

#### DEBATE

9. Members shall use “Reply All” in all messages.
10. Members may respond at will, that is, without seeking recognition from the chair.
11. Secondary and incidental motions shall be given a letter designation in the subject line by the chair. (For example: The main motion is given the number 1. There is a motion to amend. The amendment is given the designation “a”. In the subject line the amendment will be designated “Motion 1-a”.)
12. Multiple secondary and incidental motions shall be given succeeding letter designations by the chair. (For example, a main motion, amendment, a motion to refer to a committee and a motion to postpone to a certain time are all pending. The main motion is 1, the amendment is a, the referral is b, and the postponement is c. Motion 1-a-b-c.) As each motion is disposed of, the corresponding letter in the subject line is removed.
13. In the case of conflicting secondary or incidental motions, the chair shall determine preference in recognition by the date/time stamp on the messages. When a higher-ranking motion is made first, the lower-ranking motion is not in order.
14. Messages with a date/time stamp after a secondary or incidental motion is stated by the chair shall be disregarded. The chair shall inform the member who made the disregarded motion that the motion is not in order at the time by using “Reply” rather than “Reply All.”
15. The chair shall close debate by asking, “Are you ready for the question on Motion 1-a?” in the subject line.

#### VOTE

16. The chair shall put the question to a vote by restating the pending question and requesting the members to vote now. The word “vote” shall be in the subject line. (Example: Motion 1-a Vote)
17. The chair shall include the time frame/deadline for the vote.
18. Members shall state, “I vote yes,” or “I vote no” in the first line of the response and use “Reply All”.
19. The secretary shall tally the votes and report the result of the vote to the participants, including the number of votes cast for and against the motion.
20. The chair shall announce the results of the vote.
21. The chair shall either state the next pending motion and open debate or shall declare the thread on “Motion (number)” closed.

SECRETARY'S RECORDS AND MINUTES

22. The secretary (or committee member so designated) shall compile and maintain the complete thread of the motion and its disposition including all secondary and incidental motions.
23. The secretary shall prepare minutes of the vote and shall send the minutes marked "draft" to all the members.
24. These minutes shall be approved at the next regular meeting.
25. Any member shall have the right to request a copy of the message thread of a motion.

Additional rules which could be adopted include what happens if a communication link is lost, number of postings allowed in debate, decorum, definition of calendar day if participants are in different time zones, if the chair may participate in discussion, and how confidential information will be controlled.

SAMPLE MINUTES OF AN E-VOTE

On October 15, 2009, at 2:45 p.m. CST, Catherine Luther, president of the Wittenburg District LWML, e-mailed to all members of the Board of Directors. Motion 1: To allow grant recipient #23 Peace Lutheran Church to redirect their grant funds to build a pre-school instead of an elementary school. E-mail debate continued until October 21, 2009, at 4 p.m. The chairman put the question to an e-vote at 5 p.m. on October 21, 2009. The vote closed at 5 p.m. on October 23, 2009. By a vote of 7 in favor and 1 opposed, the motion was approved.

Suzy Structure  
Secretary

**Reference:** "Rules for Electronic Meetings" by the National Association of Parliamentarians.