

SAMPLE DISCUSSION GUIDELINES FOR NONPROFIT BOARDS

Permission is granted to modify these guidelines as your organization prefers.

1. The chair of the meeting runs the meeting in the service of the body. The chair serves as the facilitator for the meeting and has the primary responsibility for maintaining order. The chair may take part in discussion, but may not answer each individual speaker back, nor lecture or criticize the members. When discussing substantive questions, the chair will usually speak and vote, if entitled to do so, after others have spoken.
2. Members will give their full attention to their colleagues and will put away their cell phones, unless in an emergency situation.
3. All members have equal rights, privileges and obligations. To ensure this, no one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.
4. Members will seek recognition from the chair before speaking. In general, interrupting is not allowed. If necessary to enforce a guideline, the chair may interrupt a member. A member may interrupt a speaker in order to make a Point of Order, which should be done infrequently.
5. Members may address presenters directly once recognized by the chair. Questions for presenters or staff may not become lengthy exchanges.
6. Discussion should be focused on the issues at hand and remarks must be relevant. Members may not paraphrase other members. The body is the final authority as to whether remarks are permissible.
7. Remarks must be courteous and respectful. Personal remarks about other members are not allowed, except for conflict of interest issues. Insults, personal attacks, vulgarity or obscenity, impugning other members' motives, or inflammatory language are not allowed. Members may not criticize the body.



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8. Remarks criticizing past actions of the body are not allowed, unless the body as a whole is discussing the topic, or the member is about to introduce a motion to change or cancel the action at the end of their speech.
 9. If a guideline is broken or a question arises as to whether a remark is allowed under the guidelines, a member may make a Point of Order. The chair rules, subject to Appeal. The chair may also turn to the body immediately to decide the matter. A Point of Order must be made at the time of the offense.
 10. Individual speeches are limited to a maximum of 5 minutes. The body may adopt a shorter limit, or an overall time limit for a given topic, by a two-thirds vote without debate. If a speaker runs over the limit, the chair will interrupt and request that they conclude their remarks.
 11. The motion “Previous Question” or “Call the Question” requires a second and a two-thirds vote, without debate, in order to cut off discussion and vote immediately on the pending motion. Members may not call out “Question!” but must be recognized in order to make this motion.
 12. These guidelines are in effect unless superseded by law, the bylaws, or adopted policy. *Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised, 11th edition* is the parliamentary authority.

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