

Can you kick a member out of a membership meeting?



Nonprofit membership organizations sometimes are plagued with members who create difficulties at meetings. What can you do about that? Can you kick a member out of a membership meeting? And if so, how?

Our article, [Dealing with difficult members](#), lays the groundwork for this article.

Rights and responsibilities

Attending membership meetings is one of the fundamental rights of membership. You can read a list of those rights—and responsibilities—in Weldon Merritt's fine article, [Rights and Responsibilities of the Member](#).

At the same time, members have a responsibility to follow the organization's rules. The first step in dealing with a difficult member is to check your bylaws and other organizational guidelines. If you have adopted *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 11th edition*, then you have a policy in place. Your members are required to treat each other with respect and courtesy at all times. They must be recognized to speak and must follow the guidelines for meetings.

It is sometimes helpful to draw up a set of “standing rules” that explains all this in simple terms. Once your members have adopted these rules, you can remind them of the rules at the beginning of each meeting.

If a difficult member doesn't go along

Hopefully, explaining the rules and modeling them in your own behavior will create a culture of civility. What if it doesn't, and someone says annoying things, fails to follow the rules, or even worse, physically disrupts the meeting?



If someone says annoying things, in general you just have to take it, unless the remarks include personal attacks, insults, profanity, or other comments that break your rules of civility. See our post [Inappropriate remarks at nonprofit board meetings](#) for a discussion of rules of civility, which apply to members as well as to directors on the board.

The chair has the responsibility of enforcing these rules and should gently but firmly interrupt members when they break these rules, and “call them to order.” As explained [throughout our materials](#), the chair runs a meeting as the servant of the group. The chair is responsible for enforcing the rules and ensuring that the meeting runs well. This requires a delicate balancing act, about which you can read more in this post, [How well do you walk this meeting tightrope?](#)

If the difficult member is not responsive to the chair, it might be wise to call a short recess using this language, “Without objection, we’ll take a 10-minute recess.” (Chairs can’t call a recess on their own. The phrase “without objection” indicates that the group is the final authority, but also allows the chair to take the lead.) Someone could then meet with the member and let him or her know that everyone has to follow the guidelines in order to ensure a fair and democratic meeting. Perhaps a private appeal will make a difference.

If that doesn’t work, and disruption continues, harsher steps may be necessary. While the chair can order a NON-MEMBER to leave a meeting, the chair does not have the power to order a member of the organization to leave a meeting. The members themselves, however, do have that power.

Members can order difficult member to leave the meeting

Here is a sample script of how that might work:

MEMBERSHIP MEETING OF THE CHITCHAT CLUB

Member A: *I’m sick and tired of the way the chair is running this meeting. Why are you being so legalistic? The leaders of this club are acting like tinpot dictators!*

Chair: *Member A, under our rules of discussion, members must discuss the issues at hand and may not attack other members.*

Member A: *That’s not going to stop me! I have the right to express my true opinion! And I’m going to keep talking no matter what you say.*

Chair: *If a member continues to speak when others have not had a chance, and goes beyond our time limits, the meeting cannot continue. Member A, will you cease this disruptive behavior?*

Member A: *No I won’t! And another thing, the members of this club are just like sheep following along...*

Chair interrupts Member A and addresses everyone: *Members, it is clear that Member A is not following our rules and is disrupting our meeting. Would any member care to move that Member A be directed to leave the room?*

Member B: *So moved!*

Member C: *Second!*

Chair: *It has been moved and seconded that Member A be directed to leave the room. Is there any discussion?* [pause] *There being no discussion, we will take the vote.*

Chair: *All those in favor of directing Member A to leave the room, please say “aye.”*

Members in favor: *Aye.*

Chair: *All those opposed, please say “no.”*

Members opposed: *No.*

Chair: *The ayes have it, the motion passes, and Member A will leave the room, OR The noes have it, the motion fails, and Member A may remain in the meeting.*

Conclusion

Of course, once this motion passes, there is no guarantee that Member A will vamoose. We are offering a parliamentary script here, which is based on the premise that people know the rules, and feel some obligation to follow them. You may have to educate your members about all this. You should also talk to your attorney and consider hiring security services.

What are your stories on this subject? Please [share them with us](#)—we’re always glad to hear from you!

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