



Making a Motion

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Motions are the backbone of a productive meeting. They are the procedural tool used to bring business before the body. Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised 12th Edition (RONR) 3:21. By making a motion, a member formally proposes that the body take certain action. RONR 3:22. When members of a governmental body understand how to make and use motions, they help the body maintain decorum and hold an efficient meeting.

Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised 12th Edition (RONR), which many governmental bodies have adopted as their parliamentary authority, provides ample explanation regarding the procedure for properly making a motion. The basic procedure for bringing a motion before the body involves a member making a motion (e.g., I move that ...), a different member seconding the motion, and the chair then stating the question on the motion for the body to act on. RONR 4:1. To make a motion, a member must first properly obtain the floor by rising, while no one else has the floor, addressing the chair, and waiting to be recognized. RONR 3:30-31. Once recognized by the chair, the member has the floor and may make a motion. In smaller meetings, the procedure may be

more casual.¹ Once the motion has been made, the member yields the floor by being seated. Generally, if two members of the body rise to make a motion at the same time, the first member to address the chair while the floor is open obtains the floor. RONR 3:32.

After a motion is made, it may be seconded. RONR 4:9. If there isn't a second, the chair should ensure that all members have heard the question and ask if there is a second before moving on to other business. RONR 4:10. Members should note that seconding a motion does not necessarily indicate support for the motion. RONR 4:11. Rather, seconding a motion merely indicates that the seconding member agrees the body should discuss the proposed business. For routine matters, there is less emphasis on seconding a motion. If the chair is certain a motion has significant approval by the body, the chair may state the question without waiting for a second. But a point of order could be raised for the need of a second until debate has begun or a vote has occurred. RONR 4:13. After debate or a vote is taken, the lack of a second becomes immaterial.

A motion being made and seconded does not put the question before the

body; only the chair can do that. Once a motion is made and seconded, the chair must state the question immediately unless the wording of the motion was unclear or the chair rules the motion was not in order. RONR 4:16. If the chair rules that a motion is not in order, the body may appeal the ruling. A motion maker may modify or withdraw his or her motion until the time the chair states the question to the body. RONR 4:19. If the motion is modified, a member who seconded the motion generally has the right to withdraw their second. Other members may also suggest the motion be modified if the chair has not yet stated the question or ruled the motion out of order. RONR 4:20.

Once the chair has stated the question, the motion is pending and the matter is open for debate (assuming it is a main motion or a debatable motion). RONR 4:3. Robert's permits discussion only in connection with a pending motion, which is an effective tool to keep a meeting running efficiently. RONR 4:7. However, this rule may be relaxed by smaller boards.

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1. See RONR 49:21 for Robert's alternative rules for small boards. RONR 49:21.