



## ASK *the experts*

# Should You Use Robert's Rules of Order?

*What are the rules for nonprofit board meetings?*

**Q:**

Should a nonprofit organization adopt Robert's Rules of Order for its board meetings? Are there alternatives to Robert's Rules? Is there a state law that governs nonprofit board meetings?

**A:**

Using Robert's Rules of Order for nonprofit board

meetings is an extremely widespread practice. It's also not a good idea! There are serious problems with using Robert's Rules of Order to govern meetings of a nonprofit board:

- They aren't based on the legal requirements established by state law and court decisions. In many instances, they conflict with legal requirements. Following Robert's Rules does not mean a board decision has been reached lawfully. So a board that uses Robert's Rules may see its decisions successfully challenged in court.

- They are highly technical and complex. Many people find them intimidating and are thus reluctant to participate in board meetings.

Fortunately, there are alternatives to Robert's Rules. One particularly helpful guide is *Parliamentary Law and Practice for Nonprofit Organizations*, written by Howard L. Oleck and Cami Green, and published by the American Law Institute-American Bar Association Committee on Continuing Professional Education (ISBN 0-8318-0598-6). Check your local library or bookstore.

Yes, there is a state law that governs board meetings. Each state has a nonprofit corporations law, which addresses many details of board pro-

cedures, including election of board members, quorum requirements, voting methods, notice of meetings, and so on. You should be able to obtain a copy of it from your local library or from your Secretary of State. There may also be state court decisions that affect your board's procedures. If you have specific questions about procedures in your state, consult with an experienced nonprofit attorney in your area. ■

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