

# GATHER THE PEOPLE

Community and Faith-Based Organizing and Development Resources

[www.gatherthepeople.org](http://www.gatherthepeople.org)

## GTP ORGANIZER TRAINING

### Training Guide #36 Basics of Parliamentary Procedure\*

#### **HOW DO YOU GET PEOPLE AT A MEETING TO TALK ON A SUBJECT THAT YOU'RE INTERESTED IN?**

You ask at the beginning of the meeting (or beforehand) that the topic be placed on the agenda.

#### **CAN ANYONE GET UP AND TALK AT A MEETING?**

No. They must be recognized by the chairperson. This is to make sure that everyone has a chance to be heard, not just those who talk the most and the loudest.

#### **WHEN RECOGNIZED, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT ANYTHING YOU WANT?**

No. You must speak to a motion. Everybody has to stay on the same subject. Otherwise the meeting degenerates into frustrating confusion. By staying on the same subject, the business moves along in the most efficient way and the meeting time is made as short as possible!

#### **CAN ANYONE MAKE ANY MOTION AT ANY TIME?**

No. Motions must be related to the agenda items that have been agreed upon, in the order that they are taken up.

#### **WHAT CAN A MOTION BE ABOUT?**

Any action or position you might want the group to take.

#### **WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES?**

To approve a recommendation for action, to instruct a negotiating team, to accept a report, to send a letter, to approve spending money, or almost any other purpose of the organization.

#### **HOW DO YOU MAKE A MOTION?**

Raise your hand and wait to be recognized by the chairperson. When called on, say, “I move that we. . . . (okay the action plan, approve the budget as submitted, send a letter to the councilman, etc.).”

### **AFTER THE MOTION IS MADE, WHAT HAPPENS?**

There must be a “second” to the motion, that is, someone else must say, “I second the motion,” for the motion to be considered. If there is no second, the meeting must go on to other business. The idea is that, for any business to be discussed, at least two people must formally indicate their interest in it.

### **HOW IS THE MOTION DISCUSSED?**

After the motion has been made and seconded, the chairperson asks, “Is there any discussion?” At this point everyone has an opportunity to be recognized and to speak on the motion, one at a time.

### **WHAT CAN YOU DO TO END DISCUSSION AND TO VOTE ON THE MOTION?**

Get recognized by the chairperson. Then say, “I call for the previous question” or “I move the previous question.” This motion to end the discussion requires a second but, unlike most other motions, it is not debatable and must be put to an immediate vote by the chairperson. The motion to end debate, however, does require a two-thirds vote (to prevent steamrolling a minority that wishes to speak).

Often a chairperson who sees that discussion is running out will ask, “Are you ready for the question?” In short, people are being asked if they’re ready to vote. Unless someone shows a desire to have the discussion continue, typically the chairperson will put the main motion to a vote, bypassing a vote on the motion to end debate (because there were no objections).

### **IF THE DEBATE IS STOPPED, THEN WHAT HAPPENS?**

The chairperson restates the motion: “It has been moved and seconded that we. . . .” The vote is then taken by the chairperson in three steps: (1) directing that “those in favor say ‘aye’ (or raise hands),” followed by a quick estimate or count; (2) directing that “those opposed say ‘no’ (or raise hands),” with another quick estimate or count; and (3) stating that “the motion passes (or fails).”

\* Prepared by California Citizens Action League

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