

Motion-Making Made Simple

ISRI follows Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised (see bylaws Section 8.06). Robert's Rules can be complex, and professional parliamentarians spend years studying and debating its provisions. For your role as a Board Member, we have created this resource to attempt to simplify and distill Robert's Rules down to what you will most likely need to use. If you have any questions, please contact Heather Lyons, ISRI's general counsel at hlyons@isri.org.

Notice Requirements for Certain Motions

Most motions that do not require amending the Bylaws have no specific notice requirement. However, a substantive, "main" motion (e.g., a motion to do, enact, or spend money on something) has a higher chance of success if fellow board members have notice of what the motion is, and the business case for adopting it. Typically, motions come out of committees, although any individual member is free to make a motion.

Motions to amend the Bylaws must be provided to other board members at least 7 days in advance. There are some unusual situations, outlined in Article XIII of the bylaws, which require a longer notice period.

Other motions, known as "secondary" motions, deal with procedural issues. Those are simply made from the floor, upon recognition of the presiding officer (in ISRI's case, typically the Chair).

Lifecycle of a Main Motion

Step 1: Be Recognized by the Chair.

Example: Member A: "Mr. Chair?" Chair: "The Chair recognizes Member A."

Step 2: Make a Motion.

Example: "I move that we organize a virtual advocacy day."

Step 3: Second the Motion.

Example: Member B: "Seconded" (Note: Seconds can be spontaneous; the Chair does not need to, but may, ask for seconds. The members making seconds do not need to be recognized by the Chair.)

Step 4: Repeat the Motion.

Example: Chair: "It has been moved and seconded that we organize a virtual advocacy day." (Note: The wording the Chair uses is the official wording of the Motion. If a main motion is complex or is very detailed, it is extremely helpful to provide a written copy for the Chair to read and to be displayed to the rest of the Board. This also makes possible edits via motions to amend easier).

Step 5: Discuss the Motion.

Example: Chair: “Is there any discussion?” (Note: Members wishing to discuss must wait to be recognized by the chair. The process for signaling a desire to be recognized will depend on the format of the meeting; the Chair will give instructions).

Step 6: Vote on the Motion.

Example: Chair: “If there is no further discussion, we will take a vote. All those in favor say aye? All opposed say nay. The ayes have it and the motion is adopted.” (Note: In cases where a voice vote is too close to call, a roll call vote or written ballot may be used).

Rules to Remember

- Only one main motion may be pending at a time.
- A “point of order” is made to correct a procedural deficiency, not to bring up a substantive point. Per Robert’s Rules, points of order should not be made for “minor irregularities of a purely technical character” if they do not prevent the transaction of business.
- You may move to amend a motion, but only if it is pending.
- Motions to close debate, suspend or modify a rule of order, prevent the introduction of a question for consideration, close nominations/polls/voting, and take away a membership or office require a 2/3 majority vote.
- You can move to refer a matter to a committee, subcommittee, or other sub-part of ISRI by using a motion to refer.