

Taking Part in Local Meetings

Introduction

The local union meeting serves to acquaint the members with:

- activities of staff representatives
- problems facing the local
- plans for the future

It allows for democratic discussion and vote on where the local is going and the action it needs to take. The meeting gives the local a sense of unity and purpose which is then communicated both to other members and to management.

One element of a successful meeting is orderly consideration of business. This requires some rules. The following pages give the basic rules you need to know to take part in meetings.

How To Speak

You can speak at meetings like everyone else. But you have to get recognized by the Chair. Raise your hand to signal the Chair that you want to speak. Then wait until the Chair recognizes you—by calling your name or pointing to you. Only the person recognized by the Chair may speak—everyone else must wait his or her turn. By having only one person talking, we get a chance to hear what he or she has to say.

When you speak, keep to the subject being discussed. If the group is talking about raising money for P.E.O.P.L.E.—you talk about the same thing. Stay on the issue—or the Chair will call you out of order. “But how do I get my idea discussed?” You can do this by making a motion.

How To Make a Motion

Want something done?—Make a Motion! The motion is the most important tool you have at a meeting to get your ideas considered. Motions can cover a wide range of actions—from routine business matters at a meeting to major new activities by the local union.

If major action is required, a good idea is not enough. Big changes require time, effort and often money, so that you will have to convince other people that your idea is really a good one. Before bringing up your motion—in fact before the meeting—talk to your fellow workers and officers of the local to get their suggestions.

At the meeting, to make a motion, raise your hand and get recognized by the Chair, then say: “I move that we...” (and tell the Chairperson what you want done).

For example, you might say—“I move that we set up an education committee.” or “...that the local stewards have regular monthly meetings”—or whatever you want to have done.

Before your motion is taken up, there must be a second. Some other person will have to be recognized and say: “I second the motion.” A second to the motion shows that at least two people are interested. Unless there is a second, the meeting will go on to other business. The Chair will ask: “Is there any discussion?” Then you or anyone else can speak—but only on the motion.

How To End Debate

Heard enough? Want to stop the discussion? Get recognized by the Chair and say: "I move we close debate." Sometimes people will say: "I move the previous question" or "I call for the previous questions"—it all means the same thing: Let's end debate.

Then there will have to be a second to your motion by someone else. Next the Chair will ask the people to vote on whether or not they want to end debate. The vote must be carried by two-thirds of the meeting. (Remember, this is not a vote on the motion, but only a vote on ending debate.) After debate stops, there is a vote on the main motion. The Chair will restate the motion: "It has been moved and seconded that we..." Then the Chairperson will say: "Those in favor say 'Aye' " [Pause]. "Those opposed say 'No'." Here the majority rules. The motion is either carried or defeated.

How To Make an Amendment

Sometimes a motion isn't clear—you might want to add to or change part of it. You can do this by an amendment. Again, get recognized by the Chair. Then say: "I move we amend the motion to ..." (add, strike out, substitute, etc.) For example: If there was a motion to have a regular monthly steward's meeting, an amendment to that motion might be to have the meeting two hours prior to each regular membership meeting.

The job of the amendment is to make the main motion better, not to change it entirely. If you don't like a motion, the best thing to do is defeat it, and then make another motion. Don't try to do this by amending the motion, or the Chair will tell you the amendment is out of order.

When it comes to voting, the amendment is voted on first. If it passes, you vote on the motion which now includes the amendment. If the amendment is not passed, then the motion is voted on without the amendment.

Very rarely there is an amendment to an amendment that changes or adds to the amendment and the motion. However, this can be very confusing.

Where there is an amendment to an amendment, the Chair might suggest a substitute, if everyone agrees, just to put it all into a single motion. But don't worry about amendments to amendments—you can go for years without using one.

How To Delay a Decision

Sometimes you don't want to decide yes or no. You need more time to get information—or you don't have enough votes and want to avoid defeat. There are two ways you can delay a decision.

One: You can move to table the motion. After being recognized by the Chair say: "I move we table the motion." If there is a second, the Chair will call for a vote without further debate.

When a motion to table passes, the main motion is put aside. No action is taken and the meeting goes on to other business.

Two: You can delay a decision another way—by referring the motion to a committee. Get recognition then say: "I move we refer the motion to the _____ Committee." You can refer it to Education, Stewards, Political Action or any other committee of the local including the executive board.

When There Is a Problem

Sometimes you get confused at a meeting. It can happen to anyone. You suddenly are not sure of what is happening. You don't have to just sit there and remain confused. Get up and ask the Chair. "I rise for information." The Chair will ask you what you want—then tell the Chair your question.

A more serious issue occurs when, for example, there is a motion on the floor under discussion, and you feel that the member who has just been recognized is not speaking on that particular motion. In these kinds of cases, you can stand up and say: "I rise on a point of order." The Chair will ask for your point and once you have explained ("The Brother/Sister is not speaking on the motion...") the Chair must make a ruling.

Another problem may occur if the Chair has made a ruling which you feel was clearly wrong. If you are convinced that the error was in fact serious enough to justify some action, you may appeal. Rise and say: "I appeal the ruling of the Chair." The question of whether to uphold your appeal or to agree with the ruling of the Chair is then put to a vote by the members. Here, the members make the final decision.

Your Rights

AFSCME Members' Bill of Rights

As AFSCME members, we have the right to...

Membership

No person otherwise eligible for membership in this union shall be denied membership, on a basis of unqualified equality, because of race, creed, color, national origin, sex, age, sexual orientation, disability, or political belief.

Freedom of speech

Members shall suffer no impairment of freedom of speech concerning the operations of this union. Active discussion of union affairs shall be encouraged and protected within this organization.

Freedom from bosses

Members shall have the right to conduct the internal affairs of the union free from employer domination.

Fair elections

Members shall have the right to fair and democratic elections, at all levels of the union. This includes due notice of nominations and elections, equal opportunity for competing candidates, and proper election procedures which shall be constitutionally specified.

Hold office

Members shall have an equal right to run for and hold office, subject only to constitutionally specified qualifications, uniformly applied.

Review financial records

Members shall have the right to a full and clear accounting of all union funds at all levels. Such accounting shall include, but not be limited to, periodic reports to the membership by the appropriate fiscal officers and periodic audits by officers elected for that purpose or by independent auditors not otherwise connected with the union.

Vote

Members shall have the right to full participation, through discussion and vote, in the decision-making processes of the union, and to pertinent information needed for the exercise of this right. This right shall specifically include decisions concerning the acceptance or rejection of collective bargaining contracts, memoranda of understanding, or any other agreements affecting their wages, hours, or other terms and conditions of employment. All members shall have an equal right to vote and each vote cast shall be of equal weight.

Due process

Charges against a member or officer shall be specific and shall be only on grounds provided in the International Constitution. Accused members or officers shall have the right to a fair trial with strict adherence to due process. The accused shall be considered innocent until proven guilty.

Membership

Why become a member?

Unions help employers create a more stable, productive workforce—where workers have a say in improving their jobs.

The union is us!

It's only as strong and effective as it's members.

AFSCME works for the members to ensure:

Strong contracts

The best wage increases possible

Job security

Fair grievance procedures

Comprehensive, quality benefits

Fair treatment on the job