



**What's a Snippet?** Glad you asked! A Snippet is short article about meetings or parliamentary procedure. New snippets are released on the first day of every month at [www.agreatmeeting.com](http://www.agreatmeeting.com).



## Snippet #185 Policies vs. Procedures

Rules exist all around us and operate on several levels. Associations know they must abide by legislative directives and their state statutes, and the bylaws have a content structure set forth in the parliamentary authority. It's the next level where chaos threatens to take over, because there's no common structures or definitions. We use the terms casually: "It's probably in the P&P." But why are there TWO Ps and how do we tell the difference between them? Who decides which is which? Does it matter?

There are several different ways that associations, through their designated boards or assemblies, make decisions on behalf of the membership. One way is by making external statements expressing the value-driven opinion of the association. These statements are intended for publication to put the association's viewpoint on the record, such as a statement taking a stand on a public policy issue like gun control or immigration. It's important to keep track of these statements because, like all main motions, they stay in effect until rescinded.

A second type of decision is a value statement of continuing expectation or a standard to be maintained. Such policy statements are intended for the internal workings of the association. These are pretty easy to identify because they state a condition or a general standard by which other decisions can be made. One example is an ethics policy, defining the value the association places on certain types of conduct. Another common type of internal policy is a conflict of interest policy that defines conditions under which a conflict of interest occurs and what steps will be taken to reconcile the situation. Other internal policies might describe a philosophy that guides certain types of management, such as an affirmative hiring policy or a financial policy that requires a certain maximum level of risk in investments or allocates the appropriate mix of investments. Both the external and internal policy statements deal with the *what* of the association. What do we believe? What value do we place on certain attributes?

Procedures, on the other hand, define how certain things are done. A procedure is a plan or directive for implementation of a stated objective and includes the important details that accomplish the goals or outcomes of a policy. Procedures are historical information passed on from one group to its successors, and are subject to the will of the successor. For example, a nominating committee might design a procedure for seeking nominations for office with a specific timeline for action. A subsequent committee, able to use this information as a guide, might decide to do it differently. Procedures are flexible to the current conditions and expected to change as conditions change. One important caveat – procedures do not impose new rules. One frequent problem with nominating committee procedures is the inclusion of additional criteria for nomination not found in the bylaws. Although a nominating committee might list desirable characteristics of a candidate or value certain experience in choosing candidates, it can't declare someone ineligible to run because of criteria they have determined. Becoming a candidate is a member right that can only be limited by a provision in the bylaws.

It's best to keep policies and procedures separated, which will make it easier to recognize who has the authority to change them. Policies are generally adopted by a board of directors or, in some cases, by a delegate assembly. In either case, these policies must be memorialized in a document such as a book of resolutions for delegate assemblies or a separate set of policies for boards. Procedures should be housed in a separate document from the policies to keep detail out of the policies and rules out of the procedures. More complicated processes, such as nominations, elections, conferences, or awards can be detailed in subject-matter handbooks. These handbooks can be an excellent way to capture and share the wisdom and experience of positions and committees.