



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.



Snippet #115 Agenda Development

Associations exist to fulfill a stated mission, and the purpose of its meetings is to make decisions or take actions that will help fulfill that mission. The agenda is the order in which those decisions will be made and the minutes are the official record of those decisions.

Parliamentary authorities have traditionally suggested orders of business for meetings. Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (RONR) suggests the following order:

- Approval of minutes of previous meeting(s)
- Reports of officers, board, committees
- Reports of special committees
- Special Orders
- Unfinished business and general orders
- New business

Over time, the purpose of each of these headings has been lost. For example, RONR states that reports are given only at the annual meeting or when the officer (or board or committee) has an action to propose. How many meetings begin with 30 minutes or more of reports that do nothing but update what has already happened, instead of what needs to be done? The category of unfinished business is for items that were on the agenda but not reached when the previous meeting adjourned. If the last meeting's agenda was completed, there is no unfinished business. Perhaps a new item that has not been brought up previously (scheduled for last in the RONR order of business) is the most important decision to be made. Under this scenario it won't come up until last.

Instead of forcing items into a prearranged structure, why not configure the meeting around the business that needs to be done? This will allow you to take into account the current situation and give your business a logical order. Take a pack of sticky notes or note cards and put one item of business on each. See if you can arrange them in a logical pattern. For this meeting, perhaps a subject-based agenda will work best: put all of the decisions about certain subject areas together, such as membership, financial, management, or projects. This helps keep the focus from jumping around based on where a decision came from rather than what the decision is about.

Perhaps this month there are some extremely important issues that require attention. Except for housekeeping items like approving the minutes, why not make sure that there's plenty of time for the most important matters by arranging the items into a priority agenda? That way, if something has to be held over for the next meeting, it's not the critical business, but routine matters.

Don't forget to analyze the items to see if they can best be handled using a consent agenda. (*For more information on consent agendas, see Snippet #102.*)

As you study and rearrange the agenda items for the next meeting, think about how they are interrelated. Which decisions are dependent on the outcome of others? If you have too much business to conduct, which decisions can wait? If something is complicated and not yet ready for action, can you set aside 10-15 minutes for a strategic discussion to help prepare the group for the final decision at a future time?

The agenda sets the framework for a great meeting, and careful attention to its construction can be the difference between a tiresome chore to be completed and forgotten and a great meeting that moves the association forward.