

FINDING THE RIGHT PARLIAMENTARIAN

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Association leaders cannot afford to ignore parliamentary procedure basics during meetings. Courts have held that all organizations, including business, professional, educational, and governmental, are subject to principles and rules of common parliamentary law. All profit and nonprofit corporations and associations must observe its rules. As a result, ignoring or incorrectly applying parliamentary procedure can lead to embarrassment and lawsuits.

Associations frequently retain parliamentarians to advise on procedure during conventions and board meetings. Such procedural advisors can turn long, difficult meetings into short, painless ones. However, most associations only utilize parliamentarians to ensure that meetings are conducted properly and efficiently. A professional parliamentarian can provide many additional useful services outside of an annual convention, including:

- Train officers and committee chairs;
- Conduct parliamentary workshops for local presidents and members;
- Supervise credentials and elections;
- Preside over particularly contentious meetings;
- Provide formal parliamentary opinions;
- Create or revise bylaws; and
- Advise on parliamentary tactics and strategy.

Unfortunately, finding a skilled parliamentarian can be difficult. Yellow pages and city directories seldom have a listing for "Parliamentarians." Sometimes local attorneys are asked to assist with meetings. Because few lawyers are trained in parliamentary law, however, the officers of the organization may know more about procedure than the advising attorney. Past officers are sometimes called on to serve as parliamentarian.

Unfortunately, serving as an officer gives no assurance that the individual became proficient at procedure, and some members may view the officer as being associated with a particular view within the organization.

WHERE TO LOOK

The best means for finding a professional and objective parliamentarian is to contact the two non-profit organizations that examine and certify parliamentarians: the American Institute of Parliamentarians and the National Association of Parliamentarians. Each organization has various classifications of membership, ranging from beginner to the highest levels of parliamentary proficiency. In addition, each organization makes referrals of parliamentarians.

The American Institute of Parliamentarians (AIP) has two levels of parliamentary proficiency—the basic Certified Parliamentarian and AIP’s highest parliamentary classification, Certified Professional Parliamentarian (CPP). A CPP designation denotes that the parliamentarian has extensive experience in parliamentary education and service, has passed a closed-book written examination, and has passed an oral examination before a panel of national parliamentarians. The two examinations are based on numerous parliamentary authorities (different types of organizations use different books), including *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, *The Standard Code of Procedure*, and *Demeter's Manual of Parliamentary Law and Procedure*. The American Institute of Parliamentarians can be contacted at www.aipparl.org.

The National Association of Parliamentarians (NAP) also has two levels of parliamentary proficiency--Registered Parliamentarian and NAP's highest parliamentary classification, Professional Registered Parliamentarian (PRP). The PRP designation denotes that the parliamentarian has passed a written examination based on *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* and completed a course of lectures and hands-on training in the skills necessary for a professional parliamentarian. The National Association of Parliamentarians can be contacted at www.parliamentarians.org

WHAT KIND OF PARLIAMENTARIAN DO YOU NEED?

The classifications from AIP and NAP can be used to find a parliamentarian appropriate for any meeting situation. A parliamentarian with some basic certification might be adequate for a small, local organization with uncomplicated business. National organizations almost always utilize a Certified Professional Parliamentarian or a Professional Registered Parliamentarian (or an individual with both designations).

Both the American Institute of Parliamentarians and the National Association of Parliamentarians have thousands of members. However, the number of members acknowledged as highly proficient in parliamentary procedure is much smaller. There are several hundred parliamentarians with either a CPP or PRP designation. Fewer than fifty parliamentarians in the country have both the CPP and PRP designation.

A GOOD INVESTMENT

Like arranging a meeting, finding an appropriate parliamentarian should be approached logically and seriously. A lengthy and badly run convention or board meeting will cast a pall on any other accomplishments during the year. On the other hand, a successful and well-run convention or board meeting will please and invigorate members. The cost of a qualified parliamentarian is well worth the expense. Association executives can be confident that a meeting has been conducted properly and the benefit of an efficient and effective convention.

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