

April 21, 2026

What is an electronic/virtual meeting?

While there is a familiarity unknown in most groups before COVID, the only way that a virtual or electronic meeting can be held is by having a provision in the organization's bylaws. Here, in Michigan, during the pandemic and with a state executive order, we were all free to have electronic meetings, but in states without the executive order, there were no provisions allowing meetings. Some of us, even in Michigan, held special meetings in open air and standing apart from each other to amend our bylaws in order to hold electronic meetings.

Exactly what is an electronic meeting?

An electronic meeting has to allow for simultaneous aural communication, debate taking place so everybody can hear (and preferably see) each other in real time. While meetings with video platforms are preferable, a conference call can be a meeting setting. Electronic meetings rely on the availability of all members to be able to participate so an organization has to take into account accessibility issues (arrangements for folks who do not have strong internet or even a computer) when planning for such gatherings. A meeting by email is not in order.

What are some special provisions to consider?

How are members recognized by the chair? Raise-your-hand features can work well and a presiding officer can see the order that hands have been raised. As in any meeting, members may speak a limited amount of time and no more than twice on one topic.

What about interruptions such as raising a point of order? Decide ahead of time if the Chat box will be utilized or if presiders need to pay close attention to hands, either virtual or live.

Who is allowed to speak and vote? Only members can speak and vote; it's necessary to send a meeting link so members can participate. Polls for voting can be used and the listing of who voted for what remains anonymous. In other cases, using a green check or red X can be used to count a vote. Oral responses do not work such as, "Those in favor say 'aye' and those opposed say 'no'" because it's impossible to know the members' intent from the responses that come to the presider intermittently instead of all at one time.

Some groups like to use Chat for writing out motions that are delivered orally and other groups limit the use of Chat entirely. Establishing the presence of a quorum is important and may be done in a couple of ways though, unless everybody is required to be on camera it is hard to know if members are "really" there. Frankly, in some in-person meetings a person may be physically present though completely unengaged with proceedings. By the way, if one person is on a speakerphone to participate, you are holding an electronic meeting.

Help! We've Been Doing it all Wrong.

Member Lyles encouraged all of us to look at what appears in *Robert's Rules of Order Newly- Revised* and take advantage of the appendix of the 12th edition that has specific suggestions for various scenarios. If you already are engaging in electronic meetings, consider if there are any Standing Rules that might clarify the way you're doing business.

Electronic meetings are here to stay, especially for groups with members who attend from not only the next county, but from other states—and countries! Let's make the most of this opportunity to have meetings accessible to many people.

The Louise Saks Parliamentary Unit that meets the third Tuesday morning of months September through May holds all its meetings virtually so wherever you are, we welcome you to come for our educational programs that begin at 9:30 am ET.

Gretchen Denton, PRP