

Why Have a Parliamentarian?

By Patti Beemer

What does a parliamentarian do for your club or our organization? In the simplest sense, the job is to be knowledgeable of the bylaws, standing rules, and procedures and provide guidance to ensure they are followed. Parliamentary procedure is vital to the fair operation of governments, corporations, charities, churches, and other organizations operating on democratic principles.

Within Multiples of America, the appointed parliamentarian serves to meet these needs for the membership. Our parliamentarian serves as a confidential resource for clubs and their members needing assistance. Some of the more common club issues include:

- Inappropriate member conduct (in person and via social media)
- How to handle financial impropriety
- How to create or update a club's bylaws, standing rules, or voting procedures.

Club members who contact the parliamentarian may receive options for consideration on how to handle a variety of needs; but, ultimately, the decision on how to act is theirs.

Throughout the year, the parliamentarian reviews club bylaws (for all clubs who file as subordinates under our group exemption) to ensure they comply with the organization's bylaws. The parliamentarian accepts amendment proposals to the bylaws and standing rules for review by the Board of Directors during their midterm meeting, and they are shared with members via the Election Mailing prior to convention. Additionally, the parliamentarian prepares voting credentials for delegates at convention (based on their club president's credential filing) and oversees the voting at convention.

Why do clubs need a parliamentarian?

Clubs need someone with knowledge of the club and objectivity whose major focus can be to see that the rules and procedures for the club are followed. Without a parliamentarian or other party focused on these duties, there can be problems during times of debate or change. When everyone agrees on a course of action, it may seem like following procedures isn't really necessary.

However, when there is debate or disagreement on the proposed action, etc., problems may escalate if clubs haven't been following their bylaws or standing rules on a routine basis. The situation may get personal and the outcome may be judged as unfair. Especially within volunteer organizations, actions need to be seen as fair. The organization president should always

As the National Association of Parliamentarians (NAP) describes it: Parliamentary procedure defines how a democratic organization works, how its members make decisions, how its leaders run the organization to meet the needs of its members, and the rights of members and non-members.

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remember the majority rules, but the minority always has the right to be heard. Parliamentary procedure ensures this happens, and having someone focused on these needs is encouraged. Parliamentarians make recommendations, but the decision on how to proceed or handle an action is always made by the presiding officer.

When it comes to the qualifications as to who will be appointed to the position of parliamentarian, it varies from organization to organization. Some serving as our organization's parliamentarian have become a member of the National Association of Parliamentarians, which involves training and passing a certification test.

Most clubs or groups that meet on a regular basis have bylaws and/or standing rules that govern their specific operations, and for small groups this type of certification is usually not necessary. The bylaws stand first in the way of guidance and, if written with care and updated as often as needed, will provide a path forward.

For larger groups, it is recommended they consider having parliamentarians that are usually appointed by the presiding officer or the executive committee. The person chosen should be familiar with *Roberts Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, an authoritative guide to parliamentary procedure for anything not specifically addressed in the bylaws.

Also, they should review the bylaws, standing rules and procedures on an ongoing basis to ensure they meet the needs of the organization and the members. They should be a confidential resource for all members and officers to aid them in carrying out their duties. By taking these steps, members may avoid future problems and provide continuity and fairness for all. Without a parliamentarian, meetings could become disorganized, chaotic, and lack decision making.

Thank you to all supporting parliamentary procedure, for keeping us fair, just, and effective in our meetings!

Feel free to reach out to the Multiples of America parliamentarian via email at parliamentarian@multiplesofamerica.org.