

Q: What is a "Consent Agenda" and how will it make our meetings go faster?

At every board meeting, at least a few items come to the agenda that do not need any discussion or debate either because they are routine procedures or are already unanimous consent. A consent agenda (Roberts Rules of Order calls it a consent calendar) allows the board to approve all these items together without discussion or individual motions. Depending upon the organization, this can free up anywhere from a few minutes to a half hour for more substantial discussion..

What belongs on the consent agenda?

Typical consent agenda items are routine, procedural decisions, and decisions that are likely to be noncontroversial. Examples include:

- Approval of the minutes;
- Final approval of proposals or reports that the board has been dealing with for some time and all members are familiar with the implications;
- Routine matters such as appointments to committees;
- Staff appointments requiring board confirmation;
- Reports provided for information only;
- Correspondence requiring no action.

How are items on a consent agenda handled?

A consent agenda can only work if the reports and other matters for the meeting agenda are known in advance and distributed with agenda package in sufficient time to be read by all members prior to the meeting. A typical procedure is as follows:

1. When preparing the meeting agenda, the president or chairperson determines whether an item belongs on the consent agenda.
2. The president prepares a numbered list of the consent items as part of, or as an attachment to the meeting agenda.
3. The list and supporting documents are included in the board's agenda package in sufficient time to be read by all members prior to the meeting.
4. At the beginning of the meeting, the chair asks members what items they wish to be removed from the consent agenda and discussed individually.
5. If any member requests that an item be removed from the consent agenda, it must be removed. Members may request that an item be removed for any reason. They may wish, for example, to discuss the item, to query the item, or to register a vote against the item.
6. Once it has been removed, the chair can decide whether to take up the matter immediately or place it on the regular meeting agenda.
7. When there are no more items to be removed, the chair or secretary reads out the numbers of the remaining consent items. Then the chair states: "If there is no objection, these items will be adopted." After pausing for any objections, the chair states "As there are no objections, these items are adopted." It is not necessary to ask for a show of hands.
8. When preparing the minutes, the Secretary includes the full text of the resolutions, reports or recommendations that were adopted as part of the consent agenda.

How to start using a consent agenda

In order to start using a consent agenda, the board should first adopt a rule of order allowing for the consent agenda process. A sample rule is:

“A consent agenda may be presented by the president at the beginning of a meeting. Items may be removed from the consent agenda on the request of any one member. Items not removed may be adopted by general consent without debate. Removed items may be taken up either immediately after the consent agenda or placed later on the agenda at the discretion of the assembly.

It is important to make sure that all directors know what items belong on the agenda and how to move items to and from the consent agenda. For this reason, instruction on using the consent agenda should be part of the board orientation program.