

Responsibilities of Elected Officers

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The roles and responsibilities of elected officers in organizations, including a special section on how presiding officers can get off to a good start.

mistake to insist on exact procedure, as long as no one is being defrauded rights and the will of the group is being carried out. In larger groups, a parliamentarian can assist with the technical aspects of parliamentary law.

So You Are Newly Elected — What Do You Do Now?

The success of meetings depends largely on how well officers understand and carry out their responsibilities.

The duties and privileges of officers will vary greatly in different organizations and therefore an organization's bylaws should clearly define the duties involved. If the bylaws don't, the duties will be limited to presiding at organizational meetings.

The following outlines basic suggestions for successfully carrying out the role of an organization's newly elected officer.

1. **Become knowledgeable about your organization's bylaws.**
 - Typical bylaws will contain an organization's correct name and the reason for its existence. It will outline the membership's rights and limitations and what parliamentary authority the organization follows.
 - For members, it will clarify rules of attendance, membership dues, honorary memberships, and qualifications.
 - For officers, details regarding procedures for nominations, voting, officer terms, executive and standing committees, quorum determination, annual meeting requirements, and voting criteria will be addressed.
 - A periodic review of the purpose of your organization will help focus the group and keep it from running adrift into side issues. It also will help determine if something is outmoded and adjustments are necessary.
2. **Establish a shared vision and values.** For an elected officer's success, the membership must share in the organization's mission and purpose. Often it is assumed that everyone knows **why** a group exists (after all, it has been around for years). However, a timely review for old and new members alike can help refocus a membership.
3. **Develop a working knowledge of parliamentary procedure.** A good presiding officer is familiar with basic parliamentary procedure. In small groups it is usually a

The Role of Elected Officers

General parliamentary law requires only two officers: a presiding officer (president or chairman) and a recording officer, typically known as the secretary. Most organizations also will have a treasurer and many will have standing committees.

The **presiding officer**, unless other duties are specified in the bylaws, is responsible for:

- seeing that the group's business is transacted in a proper and expedient manner,
- ensuring that all members observe the rules of debate,
- assuring that order and decorum is always maintained, and
- authenticating by signature the actions of the assembly.

Vice-president: Assumes responsibilities of the presiding officer in his or her absence.

Secretary: Records the minutes of an organization's meeting. The minutes contain what was accomplished at the meeting and not what was said by the members.

Content of the minutes should include: the kind of meeting held (regular, special, etc.); the organization's name; the meeting date, time, and location; the names of the presiding officer, and secretary in attendance; and whether the minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved as read or corrected.

The body of the minutes should contain a separate paragraph for each subject matter covered. The last paragraph should state the time of adjournment. Minutes should be signed with the name and title of the recording secretary, and a copy of the minutes should be prepared and given to the presiding officer well in advance of the next meeting.

Minutes are the legal record of an organization and should not be destroyed.

Treasurer: Duties of this office will vary greatly among groups. The treasurer usually is the primary custodian of trust funds for the organization. A treasurer may pay bills as

directed by the organization. The authority to do so will vary widely. An organization's bylaws should leave no doubt as to what approval is required to disburse funds by the treasurer. A treasurer's report should include:

- Receipts and disbursements
- Assets of the organization and amounts due the organization

- Liabilities of the organization
- Balance on hand at the beginning and close of the reporting period.
(Annual reports must contain disclosure of all receipts and expenditures for the entire year.)

Getting Off to a Good Start as the Presiding Officer

1. **Review the rules of your organization and its purpose.**
2. **Review your role as a presiding officer.** (You were selected to lead based on your qualifications, knowledge, and dedication.)
3. **Review the rules** of parliamentary procedure and consider selecting a parliamentarian who is willing to become well informed on the bylaws, standing rules, and other guidelines of the organization.
4. **Plan ahead!**
 - Review the previous years' records and prepare a calendar of activities with the membership.
 - Schedule an orientation/goal-setting session at the beginning of your term. Review the bylaws and purpose of the organization with others.
 - Plan for the next meeting as soon as the current meeting is completed. Confer with the secretary about any unfinished business; discuss with officers and committee chairs about items that should be prepared and presented at the next meeting.
 - Prepare and distribute an agenda (include printed minutes and treasurer's report).
 - Prepare support materials for items on the agenda.
 - Consider meeting room arrangements to maximize member participation and comfort, and provide an inclusive atmosphere.
 - Consider "what if this happens...." with the parliamentarian and other officers and committee chairs.
5. **Set up the meeting area and greet members as they arrive.** Consider assigning this responsibility to others.
6. **Be considerate of members' rights and responsibilities** as you keep to the established agenda. Encourage debate and exercise consideration for others and courtesy to all. Use general consent to expedite business.
7. **Strive to seek the best interest of everyone.** This means ensuring that **all members** and not just a few share in the benefits of the group. It involves taking into account the **interests of the public at large** rather than the vested interest of only a few. When presiding, it is important to use active listening in order to repeat motions that have been made and interpret the consensus of the group.
8. **Being an elected officer means more than presiding over meetings.** It involves exercising good leadership that is inclusive. For more information on leadership, visit the UNL Extension Publications Web site at <http://extension.unl.edu/publications>.

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