

## Introduction

### **Purpose of document:**

SGPS Council proceedings, be it through Council or General Meetings, ascribe to Robert's Rules of Order ("RRO"). RRO has been implemented by the SGPS Council for over 9 years and has been entrenched in Bylaw. Current Council and General Meeting proceedings, e.g., "asking for mover, seconder, etc.", is adapted from RRO. Although this formal system for group decision-making is effective for some non-for-profit organizations, others find it counterproductive to the goals of the organization, including the need for nurturing productive working relationships among the members. The following document (prepared by the Speaker and Deputy Speaker 2022-23) outlines and compares various forms of governance so that discussions and debates on whether to keep or remove RRO can be informed.

### **Document overview:**

This document will highlight 5 forms of governance (RRO, Atwood's Rules for Meetings, Democratic Rules of Ordinance, Martha's Rules, and Consensus Decision Making). This list is not all encompassing but provides a brief introduction to each of these governance structures to begin conversation on this topic, as well a summary comparative chart is present at the end of the document. A link is provided within each section to allow for more in-depth reading.

### **Creation of document:**

In order to prevent the injection of inherent biases and personal preferences, this document will undergo a three-stage review process.

1. Deputy Speaker and Speaker will populate the document.
2. Executive Director will review the document.
3. The document will be reviewed by our SGPS Commissioners (non-voting members of SGPS Council) to ensure that neutral and objective language is used throughout.

### **Important notes:**

1. The Speaker would like to stress that the rules of governance for Council do not have to be one that is set in stone. For many organizations, bylaws, policies, and governance are very much considered "living documents" in the sense that it would be updated depending on specific organizational needs at that time, the surrounding circumstances (e.g., pandemic and remote meetings), and other considerations.
2. Governance structures are most effective when they embody and strengthen the message and values of the organized body. In considering a pivot in how Council governance is structured, Council must reflect on how they want to operate and how they can select a governing structure that best supports this.

## RRO

[https://assembly.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/roberts\\_rules\\_simplified.pdf](https://assembly.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/roberts_rules_simplified.pdf)

<https://robertsrules.com/>

This structure for governance was developed in 1876, as an attempt to standardize and encompass customs and traditions in democratically-elected legislatures. The current 12<sup>th</sup> iteration of RRO is 633 pages, as it is meant to serve as an encyclopedia for legislature, designed to answer all questions and occurrences within group meetings. The basis of RRO is to a) propose an idea, b) debate the ideas advantages/disadvantages, and c) vote whether to carry out said idea. RRO is what SGPS Council currently adopts.

## Atwood's Rules for Meetings

<https://www.local8iaff.org/docs/Atwood's%20Rules%20for%20Meetings.pdf>

Atwood's Rules for Meetings was developed by Roswell Atwood in 1956 as an alternative to RRO. This manual is upheld by the International Association of Fire Fighters. This follows a similar structure to RRO, however it is presented in a more condensed document (about 180 pages) covering likely meeting situations that could occur as opposed to all situations. Some prominent differences include: motions require majority vote- unlike under RRO where the chairperson is responsible for handling certain motions, postponing a motion may be reconsidered under Atwood's Rules- under RRO this requires an affirmative vote.

## Democratic Rules of Ordinance

<https://www.democraticrules.com/>

Democratic Rules of Order were initially created in 1994 and "use concise, common-sense rules without jargon or unnecessary protocol to fully protect every member's right to equal participation in orderly meetings". Created by Peg and Fred Francis, these rules can be adapted to small groups using consensus or large organizations with a formal chair. There have been 10 iterations of these rules with the current document consisting of 27 pages. Three major differences from other rules of order include:

1. It's rule allowing informal discussion of an idea before forming a motion- can be a time saver;
2. The mover's privilege allowing the mover and members to reword a motion during discussion can make perfecting the wording of the motion easier. This rule cannot be abused as a change requires a formal amendment if more than one member objects;
3. An amendment cannot be amended. Instead, the motion can be quickly defeated without more discussion and a new motion proposed embodying the useful ideas from the discussion.

## Martha's Rules of Order

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/088610998600100206>

Martha's Rules were developed by Martha's Housing Co-op for families in Madison, Wisconsin. This framework involves a five-step procedure for discussing and deciding on issues in large group meetings. To expedite consensus decision making, Martha's Rules test whether an issue is important to warrant extra time to achieve consensus. The five steps are as follows:

1. Preparation: Facilitator and participants should know the topics ahead of time so they can prepare and reflect.
2. Generating proposals: This step is necessary when a member raises an issue, but a specific proposal has not been presented to the group. For example, a member might want to take a particular action but is unsure of the best way to go about it. They can raise this point and generate discussion and once the facilitator senses that the issue has been well explored, they guide the discussion on to the next step.
3. Making proposals concrete: Facilitator tries to bring together the ideas into one or more proposals to which the group finds answers. The facilitator must try to separate questions of principle from questions about practical details and it is important to identify people who are willing to work on a proposal if it is implemented.
4. Voting a “sense” vote and then a “vote” vote
  - a. “Sense” Vote: meant to discover the group’s feelings about a proposal. Everyone can vote either thumbs up (*like* the proposal), thumbs side-ways (can *live* with the proposal), or thumbs down (*uncomfortable* with the proposal).
  - b. “Vote” Vote: This vote is in place to understand what aspects of the proposal those in the sense vote were uncomfortable about. After hearing the objections of those who were uncomfortable the question is, “Should we implement this decision over the stated objections of the minority, when a majority of us feel it is workable?” A “yes” vote means that majority rule is favored in this case. A “no” vote means that the person favors postponing the decision.
5. Implementation and review: It is crucial that everyone understands what has been decided. The facilitator should state the adopted proposal and make sure that everyone agrees to it. It should be made clear what will be done, who will do it, what criteria will be used to judge when the job is done, and whether and when the decision should be reviewed.

## Consensus Decision Making

<https://www.consensusdecisionmaking.org/>

Consensus decision making is a process used by groups seeking to generate widespread levels of participation and agreement. There are variations among different groups regarding the degree of agreement necessary to finalize a group decision. The process of group deliberation, however, has many common elements that are definitive of consensus decision making. These include:

1. Inclusive: As many stakeholders as possible are involved in group discussions.
2. Participatory: All participants are allowed a chance to contribute to the discussion.
3. Collaborative: The group constructs proposals with input from all interested group members. Any individual authorship of a proposal is subsumed as the group modifies it to include the concerns of all group members.

4. Agreement Seeking: The goal is to generate as much agreement as possible. Regardless of how much agreement is required to finalize a decision, a group using a consensus process makes a concerted attempt to reach full agreement.
5. Cooperative: Consensus participants are encouraged to keep the good of the whole group in mind. Everyone’s preferences should be voiced so that the group can incorporate all concerns into an emerging consensus proposal. Individual preferences should not, however, obstructively impede the progress of the group.

**TABLE BRIEFLY COMPARING THE FIVE FORMS OF GOVERNANCE**

	Robert’s Rules of Order (RRO)	Atwood’s Rules for Meetings	Democratic Rules of Ordinance	Martha’s Rules of Order	Consensus Decision Making
Level of Structure	High	High	Moderate	Low	Low
Formal language	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Pros (2 each; there may be more)	Widely used by governmental and other non-profit organizations	Motions and rules are very similar to RRO	Rules can be adapted to small groups using consensus or large organizations with a formal chair	Accessible language that could encourage and increase participation	Fosters open communication and dialogue between all members of the community
	Has been used by the SGPS Council for 8+ years	Rules document provides instruction for the most common occurrences within meetings	Similar in structure to current RRO implemented at SGPS however provided in more layman's terms	Beneficial for group collaboration and idea generation	Does not include formal structural language that must be learnt and adhered to
Cons (1 each; there may be more)	Recently, organizations have moved away from RRO due to its ties and relationship with colonial structures	Document length is substantial (~180pgs) and jargon used can pose a barrier to reader understanding	Rules would need to be purchased as they are not publicly available	Voting system would need to be adapted for online meetings as meeting format favours in-person	Can be time intensive to reach full group consensus on all issues