



What's a Snippet? Glad you asked! A Snippet is short article about meetings or parliamentary procedure. New snippets are released on the first day of every month at www.agreatmeeting.com.



Snippet #119

Quorum

The quorum is the number of members that must be present in order to transact business. In essence, the authority to take action is passed from the entire membership to a smaller group. The quorum can be set in a number of ways: by statute, in the bylaws, or in the parliamentary authority. For the most part, statutes set a minimum quorum but not a maximum. In the absence of a provision in the bylaws, *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* states that a quorum is a majority of the members. This might be just fine for a board of directors, but achieving a quorum gets very difficult when the membership is very large or spread over a large geographic area. It's best to clearly state the quorum in the bylaws to meet the unique circumstances of the association.

What's the best quorum? The answer is: it depends. A quorum set too low can allow a small unrepresentative group to take action when, had a larger quorum been required, cooler heads might have prevailed. A quorum set too high means meetings are stopped – or can't begin – due to lack of a quorum. If the pattern of attendance indicates a trend toward *not* having a quorum, or if getting a quorum is becoming more work than putting together the agenda, it's time to address the problem before it becomes impossible.

The quorum can be expressed as a whole number or as a percentage. There are pros and cons to both. If the quorum is a whole number it is easy to tell when a quorum is present, and the number stays constant from meeting to meeting. On the other hand, as the association grows, the quorum may become too small and need to be adjusted periodically. If the quorum is expressed as a percentage, it must be established anew for each meeting. For local associations, the calculation must be made each time the membership number changes. For conventions, the calculation should be made as of a specific date, which is described in the bylaws along with the quorum percentage, and made known well in advance of the convention..

The quorum might be multi-layered. It might include a requirement that certain officers or that a minimum of geographic or topical interest groups are present. Such quorums may be well-intentioned, but unless there is a very good reason for them, they may cause more problems than they are worth.

Some statutes (which supersedes RONR, your bylaws, and your charter) state that, if a quorum is present at the start of the meeting it continues until adjournment, regardless of the number of people who have left. In such case, members who leave before the meeting adjourns have given their consent to whatever happens afterward.

Actions taken without a quorum are null and void, although it's possible to ratify actions at the next meeting (provided there is a quorum). Any actions taken by members (such as purchases) are the responsibility of the individual, not the association, until the action is ratified. It's risky to take an action and assume it will be all right later. In this case, it's safer to get permission than ask forgiveness.