



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 #164 Strategic Discussions

Parliamentary procedure is an effective decision-making process ensuring fairness for all participants. The key is the word *decision*. If there's no decision to be made, it just doesn't work.

A group may need to have a discussion of a strategic nature with no intention that it will result in a motion for action at that meeting, but might (or will likely) result in a motion that will be debated in the regular way at a future meeting. Strategic discussions are exploratory and might include some brainstorming where multiple options are considered and analyzed.

Motions for a specific action and strategic discussions are not interchangeable concepts, and should never be used for the same issue during the same meeting. A strategic discussion that results in proposing a motion immediately is likely to generate more problems than solutions. There's the danger of groupthink, personality-driven decisions, or hasty conclusions. Enthusiasm for a quick solution can replace common sense and good judgement.

Strategic discussions are used for higher level planning and long-term objectives; therefore, by definition, they are not so urgent that action is required immediately.

The procedures and rules for strategic discussion are:

1. An initial time limit (usually 15-30 minutes) is set by the chair and approved by the members. Upon expiration of the initial time limit, the discussion ends and regular session resumes.
2. The chair begins the discussion by objectively framing the issue for the members and describing known alternatives.
3. The group identifies additional options. All of the options are then discussed, either in turn or concurrently.
4. The chair guides the discussion, determining the degree of formality necessary in recognizing members to speak, and ensuring equal and fair participation.
5. There is no limit on the number of times a member may speak during strategic discussion, but the chair must take care to keep the discussion from being driven by just a few individuals. Some chairs may choose to go around the table, recognizing each person to speak but also allowing a member to pass. The discussion may go around the table several times.
6. No motions are allowed during the strategic discussion, other than motions to extend the discussion time or return to regular session. Either motion requires a majority vote, which is a departure from the usual parliamentary rule that a two-thirds vote is required to extend or close debate.
7. Motions arising out of a strategic discussion are not allowed at the same meeting. This rule can be suspended by a two-thirds vote. Motions arising out of strategic discussion during the same meeting require a two-thirds vote for adoption.

Once you've identified the decision to be made, Robert's Rules will help you make it in a fair and impartial manner. Resist the temptation to push too fast – it might take far longer to reverse hasty actions.