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Snippet #107 Substitute Motions

Assemblies work best when they are given a choice between “yes” and “no.” Handling multiple issues at one time often becomes confusing and can result in frustration. Sometimes in the course of discussion, a member proposes a completely new motion to replace the motion that is on the floor. This can create a dilemma: how do we know which motion to bring forward for a final vote? Substitutes are a form of amendment, and follow some customized rules to process them. *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (RONR)* and *American Institute of Parliamentarians Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure (AIPSC)* treat the motion to substitute differently.

RONR treats the substitute as an alternative that will be considered on an equal basis with the pending motion, that is, the current motion being debated. The substitute is not taken up immediately when it is made, but waits until there are no remaining amendments to the pending motion. At that time the substitute is taken up and given the same courtesy. The RONR substitute process answers four questions.

1. *Do we want to make any changes to the motion that is on the floor before we take up the proposed substitute?* Before taking up the proposed substitute, additional debate and amendments on the pending motion are allowed.
2. *Do we want to make any changes to the substitute before we compare the two motions?* The proposed substitute is then taken up for debate and amendment.
3. *Which motion do we want to take forward for final action?* The vote is taken on whether to substitute the proposed text for the pending motion.
4. *Do we want to adopt this motion?* Whether the motion that survives is the original motion or the substitute, the words have been approved by the assembly and can only be further amended by adding new language.

AIPSC takes a different approach. It treats the substitute the same as any other form of amendment. When the motion to substitute is made, it is taken up immediately, interrupting debate on the pending motion.

1. *Do we want to substitute the proposed text for the pending motion?* Once the motion is made, the substitute takes over the floor for debate and amendment. The vote is then taken on whether to substitute the new language for the pending motion. If the vote is in the affirmative, the substitute has replaced the pending motion. If the vote is in the negative, the original language returns to the floor and can be further debated and amended.
2. *Do we want to adopt this motion?* Whichever motion survives, it now comes forward for final action by the assembly.

Whether or not a substitute is in order depends on the situation. For example, if a motion is pending to purchase computers, a motion to lease office equipment would not be germane unless the same funds were needed to accomplish both, in which case the substitute could not be moved if the motion to purchase computers was adopted. Sometimes a substitute can be moved in a much easier fashion, by a member seeking the floor and speaking against the pending motion, finishing by saying “I recommend you vote against this motion, and if the motion fails, I will move to (*insert the substitute*). This gives the assembly another way to make a choice between the two options.

No matter which method is used, it's important for members to communicate with the chair so that the best way to handle the situation can be chosen. It can take a lot more effort to fix unintended consequences than to handle the issues correctly at the beginning.