

# **Introduction to the ACA Parliamentarian & Guiding Principles**

(2025-05-10)  
ACA WSO

# Overview

Topics We'll Be Covering This Session

## **Role of a Parliamentarian**

**Guiding Principles and Governing Documents**

**Before the Conference**

**During the Conference**

**After the Conference**

**Questions ??**

## **Role of the Delegate**

**The Conference Chair & Parliamentarian**

**Role of Point of Order**

**Role of Point of Safety**

**Role of the Point of Info/Request for Information**

**Role of the WSO Point of Information/WSO Request for Information**

**Questions ??**

# Parliamentarian/ Meeting Consultant: Background



## Michael E. Malamut

- National Association of Parliamentarians  
Professional Registered Parliamentarian  
Questions & Answers Committee, Chair (2017–2019, 2023–present)
- American Institute of Parliamentarians  
Certified Professional Parliamentarian & Teacher  
Opinions Committee, Member (2000–present), Chair (2008–2023)
- BoardSource, Certified Governance Consultant
- American Bar Association Business Law Section Nonprofit Organizations  
Committee Chair (2013–2017)
- American College of Parliamentary Lawyers, President (2009–2012)
- Dedham, MA Commission of Trust Funds, Member (2006–2019), Chair  
(2014–2019)
- Work with several International 12 Step Recovery Fellowships, including  
serving as regular meeting parliamentarian with Debtors Anonymous since  
1999 and Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous since 2005

# Role of a Parliamentarian

- An **advisor** to the presiding officer (not a decision-maker)
- Often a **trained professional** in parliamentary procedure
- May or may not be a member of the organization

It is often better that the parliamentarian not be a member of the organization in order to be an objective and impartial adviser.

# Role of a Parliamentarian



## Key Principles

- Must be **neutral and impartial**
- **Does not vote** or join debates
- Offers **opinions**, not rulings – only the chair makes rulings

# Role of a Parliamentarian



## Why It Matters

- Helps keep meetings **legal, fair, and efficient**
- Ensures that **everyone's rights** are respected
- Parliamentarian has a role under OPPM in determining whether a proposed alternative maintains the integrity of the original proposal/is within the scope of the notice

# Guiding Principles

Based on the ideals found in both parliamentary guides and service spirit of ACA:

- **Impartiality & Neutrality**

- The Parliamentarian must remain nonpartisan and not influence outcomes based on personal views or affiliations.
- The Parliamentarian is a **servant leader** role: providing advice, never ruling or making decisions themselves.

# Guiding Principles

- **Confidentiality & Discretion**
  - i. Sensitive strategic discussions with Conference Chairs before and during the Conference require discretion.
- **Respect for the Group Conscience**
  - i. ACA emphasizes collective decision-making. The Parliamentarian helps ensure that **group conscience** is achieved through fair process.



# Guiding Principles

- **Service, Not Control**
  - i. The Parliamentarian is a **servant leader** role: providing advice, never ruling or making decisions themselves.
- **Clarity and Education**
  - i. Especially in ACA's peer-led structure, the Parliamentarian may help **educate members and delegates** about procedures, increasing empowerment and participation.

# **Governing Documents for ACA**

- **Articles of Incorporation & Bylaws & Principles in ACA 12 Concepts**
- **OPPM, mainly Chapter XIV (WSO Events: ABC and AWC) and Appendix X (ABC Voting Rules)**
- **Customary Practices**
- **Robert's Rules/Principles of Common Parliamentary Law are advisory to fill in the gaps when no established rule applies**

# Procedural Considerations in the 12 Concepts

*Substantial Unanimity, Concept 12:* The WSC will reach all important decisions by discussion, vote, and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity.

Substantial Unanimity is usually determined to be a two-thirds (2/3) vote

*Right of Petition/Minority Opinion, Concept 5:* The traditional “Right of Petition” ought to prevail, so that minority opinion may be heard. The minority opinion can be raised after a preliminary decision following established procedures in the OPPM.

# Establishing Custom

- **It is the obligation of the presiding officer to use established customs in conducting the meeting**
- **Written rules (12 Concepts, OPPM) override custom when they come into conflict**
- **If a delegate believes that established custom is not being followed, the member may raise a point of order, which the presiding officer will address**
- **If the member is not satisfied with the Chair's response, the member appeals and the conference debates and determines the custom, which then becomes a written rule for the future**

# Purpose of Procedural Rules I

Tensions underlying typical parliamentary rules:

- efficiency v. education (through debate)
- majority rule v. minority rights
- chair v. assembly
- flexibility v. finality
- intensity (of consideration of a matter) v. immediacy (interruptability)

The rules surrounding the motions—required vote, amendability, debatability, interruptability, reconsiderability—and requirements for recognition and decorum in debate balance these tensions.

# Purpose of Procedural Rules II

“Whether these forms be in all cases the most rational or not is really not of so great importance. It is much more material that there should be a rule to go by, than what the rule is; that there may be an uniformity of proceeding in business, not subject to the caprice of the Speaker, or captiousness of the members.” Thomas Jefferson, *Manual of Parliamentary Practice* § 1 (1801).

“The great purpose of all rules and forms is to subserve the will of the assembly rather than to restrain it; to facilitate, and not to obstruct, the expression of their deliberative sense.” Henry M. Robert, *Robert’s Rules of Order Revised* 242 (4th ed. 1915); Luther Stearns Cushing, *Manual of Parliamentary Practice* ¶ 315 at p. 160 (1844).

# Before the Conference

- Discussions with the Conference presiding officers and Board leadership about issues likely to come up at the meeting
- Advises on alternative methods of handling likely scenarios fairly and respectfully to all participants
- Supports presiding officers in meeting planning and at the meeting to ensure efficiency at the meetings and to allow maximum freedom to explore alternatives

# During the Conference

- Sit beside the chair, virtually connected or in person
- Gives quiet advice,
- Helps prevent or correct procedural errors



# After the Conference

- Review procedures,
- Offer feedback for improvements
- Can be available throughout the year as needed

**Any Questions?**

# Role of the Delegate

- The delegate serves as the **voice and representative** of their local group, Intergroup, or Region at the annual **ACA World Service Conference (ABC/QDM)**.
- They carry the **group conscience** of their area and are tasked with voting on issues that affect ACA as a whole, helping to shape the direction of the fellowship.

# The Conference Chair & Parliamentarian

The parliamentarian is responsible for advising that no procedural details are overlooked, for anticipating procedural strategy, and for making sure the chair is aware of parliamentary requirements to be observed.

# Point of Order

Delegate raises possible rules violation. The Point of Order Coordinator advises the Parliamentarian and Presiding Officers, who confer and provide a response.

# Point of Safety/Question of Privilege

- Delegate raises possible concerns about safety, health, integrity, or protection of person or property to the Point of Safety Coordinator, who advises the Parliamentarian and Presiding Officers.
- This is the means to raise Concept V “Right of Petition” for redress of a concern involving conduct at a meeting.
- The parliamentary terminology for this procedure is “to raise a question of privilege.”

# Point of Information/Request for Information

- Delegate requests procedural information or relevant information on the topic being discussed through the Point of Information Coordinator, who confers with the Presiding Officers.
- This is the way to ask a question to someone who has information needed for debate. It is not a method to add information to the debate.
- The parliamentary terminology for this procedure is “Request for Information.”

## **Point of WSO Information/ Request for WSO Information**

- The WSO Point of Information may be raised to the WSO Point of Information Coordinator if delegates are missing relevant information or clarification is required during the discussion.
- The WSO Point of Information Coordinator will respond directly if the answer is straightforward or coordinate a response through the Parliamentarian and the Presiding Officers.



# Resources

## Reading Materials, Parliamentary Guides

### Parliamentary Guides:

AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS, *STANDARD CODE OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE* (2d ed. 2023)

GEORGE DEMETER, *DEMETER'S MANUAL OF PARLIAMENTARY LAW AND PROCEDURE*  
(Little, Brown & Co. Blue Book ed. 1969)

RAY E. KEESEY, *MODERN PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE* (American Psychological Assn. 2d ed. 2018)

PAUL MASON, *MASON'S MANUAL OF LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURE*  
(National Conference of State Legislatures/West Publishing 11th ed. 2020)

HOWARD L. OLECK & CAMI GREEN, *PARLIAMENTARY LAW AND PRACTICE FOR NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS* (American Law Institute-American Bar Association 2d ed. 1991)

HENRY M. ROBERT, *ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER NEWLY REVISED*  
(Perseus Publishing 12th ed. 2020)

ROBBIE SABEL, *RULES OF PROCEDURE AT THE UN AND AT INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCES* (Cambridge University Press 3d ed. 2018)

# Resources

## Articles & Summaries

### Parliamentary Summaries:

HENRY M. ROBERT, III, ET AL. *ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER NEWLY REVISED IN BRIEF* (Perseus Publishing 3d ed. 2020)

JIM SLAUGHTER, *ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER, FAST-TRACK* (DK 2022)

### Articles:

Michael Malamut, *Musings on General or Common Parliamentary Law*, 49 (3) *Parliamentary Journal* 101 (July 2008), <http://www.michaelmalamut.com/articles/musings%20on%20common%20parliamentary%20law.pdf>

Opinion 2012-588, *Use of Custom under AIPSC*, 55 (2) *AIP Parliamentary Journal* (P.J.) 60 (April 2014); Opinion 2012-589, *Establishing a Customary Rule under AIPSC*, 55 (2) *P.J.* 62 (April 2014)

# Resources

## Organizational Resources

### *Organizational Resources:*

American College of Parliamentary Lawyers,  
<http://www.parliamentarylawyers.org>

American Institute of Parliamentarians, <http://www.aipparl.org>

National Association of Parliamentarians,  
<http://www.parliamentarians.org>

Robert's Rules Association, <http://www.robertsrules.com>

***Any Questions?***