

call to order

Voting

—J. Michael Blaska, Parliamentarian & Chief of Staff,
Wisconsin Counties Association



There are many methods of voting including *voice vote*, *rising* (members are asked to stand), *show of hands*, *ballot*, *roll call* or *electronic voting systems*.

The *voice vote* is the most popular form for voting on motions as long as a super majority vote is not required. Remember, once the vote is announced, members may ask for a *Division of the Assembly* if members are not in agreement with the outcome as announced by the chair. According to *Robert's Rules of Order* whenever a *Division of the Assembly* is requested it must be resolved with a *rising vote* unless otherwise specified.

A *rising vote* is often used when a voice vote is inconclusive, or for voting on motions that require a supermajority. The chair may ask for a *rising vote* if the vote is expected to be close. A *rising vote* is the preferred method in large assemblies when the vote is expected to be close.

A *show of hands* is the common voting method in small boards and committees. It is sometimes used to verify inconclusive voice votes. Voting by a *show of hands* should be limited to very small meetings where members can very clearly see all the other members. It is sometimes difficult to get accurate counts when used in larger assemblies. Members often lower their hands before the count is complete because of the time it takes to complete the count.

Voting by ballot is used when the secrecy of members' vote is desired. A ballot can be a simple piece of paper or can be prepared in advance if the exact question is known. Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law does not allow governmental bodies the use of secret ballots except for the elections of officers.

I was recently at an annual business meeting of an organization where five candidates were vying for three positions on a board of directors. The members were given directions to vote for three candidates or their ballots would be disqualified. Members must be allowed to vote for one, two or three candidates. If a member actively supports one candidate or does not care about the rest and want to make sure the candidate is elected, the member should vote for one candidate. If the member votes for more than one, it is actually a vote against the member's chosen candidate. The directions at this annual business meeting were quickly corrected to allow the members to vote for one, two or three candidates. Ballots with more than three votes would then be disqualified.

Roll call votes are generally used in governmental bodies when the vote may be close and when it is desirable to have each member's vote recorded. When a *voice vote* is inconclusive a *roll call vote* is often used to resolve the question. The roll is called in alphabetical order except that the presiding officer's name is called last. *Robert's Rules of Order* suggests that the presiding officer's name should not be called if their vote will not affect the result; however, all elected officials should vote. *Roll call votes* should be taken in rotating alphabetical order per meeting. In the absence of a rule, a motion is required, with a majority vote, to order a *roll call vote*. All governmental units should allow any member to request a *roll call vote* whether for an inconclusive *voice vote* or to get a member's vote on record. Even if it is clear that a motion will pass by a huge majority on a *voice vote*, a member should be allowed to request a *roll call vote* if for no other purpose than to get a member's

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vote on the record. It is too late to resume debate once a member has responded to a *roll call vote*. If a member is not ready to vote when their name is called, they can “pass” and then be called upon when everyone else has voted.

Many governmental bodies are installing *electronic voting systems*, which negates the need for the options reviewed.

Most organizations specify the method of voting in their rules or bylaws. If not specified, then any member can make a motion to determine the method of voting.

Source: Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, 11th Edition