



# Speaking Up at Meetings

## Why speak up?

Members meetings are an important part of co-op life. They offer you a chance to have a say in how the co-op runs.

People who are used to meetings will find it easy to get their ideas across. If you are not used to meetings, you may find it hard to say what you think. However, your ideas and opinions are as valuable as those of anyone else.

You will find it easier to speak up if you know how meetings work.

## How meetings work

The Chair directs the meeting and makes sure that it runs smoothly — members deal with the issues on the agenda and follow the “rules of order.”

## How to get the members to talk about your issue

The agenda is a list of all the issues that the members will discuss at the meeting. If you would like to discuss an issue with other co-op members, you need to get it on the agenda.

- Between members’ meetings, contact the co-op president and ask about the best way to deal with the issue. The president may suggest that you start by talking with the board, a committee, or the staff. The president may decide to put the issue on the agenda for the next members’ meeting.
- At the meeting, you can add an issue to the agenda if it is urgent or if it can be dealt with quickly. When the Chair asks the members to approve the agenda, put your hand up. Say “I would like to add something to the agenda,” when the Chair calls on you. Suggest where the issue might fit on the agenda. There is usually a section for “Other Business” at the end of the agenda.

Note: Members can discuss an issue added to the agenda at the meeting, but they cannot make a decision on the issue. They can only make decisions on issues listed in the original agenda.

## How to find out if members agree with your idea

The Chair usually starts the discussion on an issue by asking for a "motion." A motion is simply a proposal on how to deal with the issue. The clearer the motion, the better. Every motion must be "moved" and "seconded" before discussion begins.

To make or "move" a motion, raise your hand when the Chair calls for a motion. When the Chair calls on you, say "I move that..."

The Chair must make sure that at least one other person supports or "seconds" the motion. The Chair will ask for someone to "second" the motion. If someone else has made a motion that you would like the members to discuss, you can second the motion. When the Chair asks for a seconder, say "I second the motion."

## How to give your opinion

After a motion has been moved and seconded, members can talk about the motion. The Chair will usually ask the person who made the motion to start the discussion. If you did not make the motion, but have an opinion, raise your hand. You can raise your hand even while other people are talking. Keep your hand up until the Chair notices you.

The Chair will be keeping a list of people who have something to say and will call on them one after another.

When the Chair calls on you, say what you think as clearly and as briefly as possible.

Remember, you must talk about the motion that the members are discussing. This is called "speaking to the motion". It helps to start with "I want to speak in favour of the motion because..." or "I want to speak against the motion because..."

## How to put off discussion

Raise your hand, and say "I move to defer the question to the next meeting." If members clearly do not want to deal with this issue in the near future, say "I want to table the motion."

## How to vote

Voting is usually a show of hands. When the Chair calls for a vote, you can

- vote yes when the Chair says "All in favour?"
- vote no when the Chair says "All against?"

If you do not want to vote, raise your hand when the Chair says "Abstentions?"

Sometimes, however, members do not vote because they do not understand the motion. It is better to ask for an explanation during the discussion. Do not be afraid to ask a "dumb question." If you are confused, other members are too.

## When you can speak out of turn

There are only three times when you can jump ahead of your turn to speak.

- If you have some important information that will save a lot of discussion, call out "point of information." Provide the information as briefly as possible. Make sure you really have information to provide. This is not a time to argue for or against the motion.
- If you cannot hear the Chair or if members will faint unless someone turns down the heat, call out "point of privilege." Say what you want to be done.
- If you think the Chair is not following proper meeting procedure, call out "point of order." Explain what you think is wrong.

## Finally

Remember, it is your meeting. The only way to be heard is to speak up.