

How to Write a Motion for a Board Meeting

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Writing a motion for a board meeting isn't difficult, but it does take some forethought. Perhaps you've been to a board meeting where someone filed a motion and so many amendments followed it that the final version didn't remotely resemble the original wording. A well-written motion is specific, unique, and concise. By writing a clear motion, you will reduce time spent in discussion and in making amendments. More importantly, you can be sure that your motion will be carried out exactly as you intended.

If you're not familiar with writing motions, it helps to better understand what kind of motion you want to make. There are [four basic kinds of motions](#):

1. Main Motions

A [main motion](#) is an item that you want to introduce to the membership to consider and vote on. You cannot [introduce a main motion](#) when any other motion is on the floor. [Main motions](#) yield to privileged, subsidiary, and incidental motions.

2. Subsidiary Motions

The purpose of a [subsidiary motion](#) is to change or affect how a main motion is handled. The membership votes on the subsidiary motion before they vote on the main motion.

Example: A main motion to take a specific action is filed and seconded. Another member moves to refer the action to a committee (subsidiary motion) and it is seconded. The members vote on the [subsidiary motion](#) first.

3. Privileged Motions

The purpose of a [privileged motion](#) is to bring up items that are urgent about special or important matters that are unrelated to pending business.

Example: A [privileged motion](#) is to delay a motion until after a recess. The chair addresses this motion before the main motion.

4. Incidental Motions

The purpose of an [incidental motion](#) is to question or clarify the procedure relative to other motions. [Incidental motions](#) must be considered before the motion that it questions. [Robert's Rules](#) lists incidental motions that cover almost any issue that surfaces.

Example: A member files a broad or vague motion and another member seconds it. Another member files a motion to table the main motion and requests additional information. The incidental motion is seconded. The chair addresses the incidental motion before the main motion.

Writing a Clear, Concise Board Meeting Motion

Now that you know what kind of motion you are writing and the hierarchy that it takes, you can begin writing your motion. Remember that it should be clearly and concisely worded.

Think through your motion carefully and determine exactly what it is you want to accomplish with it. Include details and support it. Anticipate questions and objections and answer them in your motion. Address any legal concerns in your summary.

If there is a fiscal component, include how the action will be funded. Main motions that require funding may require two main motions—one to pass the action and one to fund it.

Review your motion to see if it asks for a clear action to be taken. State a timeframe when applicable.

Rely on your chair and fellow board members for assistance. Ask one or more of them to review your motion and offer feedback.

Let's take a look at a couple of examples. A homeowner's association has been discussing that the roofs of six buildings need to be replaced. The discussion has trended towards replacing the existing shake-shingle roofs with asphalt roofs due to the decreased cost. Homeowners concur with the decision and the village has just changed its ordinance to allow the asphalt roofs in that neighborhood. It's time to make a motion to replace the roofs.

Example of a poorly written board meeting motion:

"I move to replace the wood shingles on three of the buildings with asphalt shingles."

Example of a well-written board meeting motion:

"I move to replace the wood shingles on buildings 1, 2, and 3 with asphalt shingles in May, 2017. The ordinance has been changed to allow for asphalt shingles. The second phase of replacing the roofs will occur in July, 2017 for the remaining buildings 4, 5, and 6, so that they will all match by the end of the summer. The roof replacements for both phases will be funded from the association budget at a cost of \$10,000 per roof."

In looking at the examples, it's easy to see why the first example invites questions about the change in material, which buildings are being repaired, when the remaining roofs will be repaired, how costs will be managed, and when the work will be completed. This type of motion is likely to be subject to subsidiary or incidental motions.

The second example concisely spells out all of the details, not leaving anything to chance. Your fellow board members will appreciate a well-planned motion.

One of the negatives in writing vague, unclear motions is that your motion will be subjected to being amended many times. Moreover, you risk losing the substance of your original intent. Writing motions that are specific, concise, and unique keep the meeting moving along fluidly. By understanding the type of motion you are making, taking time to think it through, and addressing potential objections, you can write a clear motion that will help members make an informed vote.

Helpful tips for writing a board meeting motion:

Be specific, unique and concise

Understand the different motion types

Address potential objections

Rely on your [board chair](#) and board members for assistance



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