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Responsibilities of Elected Officers

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So You Are Newly Elected, What To Do Now?

Success of meetings will depend largely on how well officers understand and carry out their responsibilities.

The duties and privileges of officers will vary greatly in different organizations and therefore an organization's bylaws should clearly define the duties involved. If the bylaws are silent in this regard, the duties will be limited to presiding at organizational meetings.

The following outlines basic suggestions for carrying out the successful role of an organization's newly elected presiding officer or officers.

1. Become knowledgeable of your organization's bylaws.

- Typical bylaws will contain an organization's correct name and the reason for its existence. It will outline the membership's rights and limitations and what parliamentary authority the organization follows.
- For members, it will clarify rules of attendance, membership dues, honorary memberships and qualifications.
- For officers, details regarding procedures for nominations, voting, officer terms, executive and standing committees, quorum determination, annual meeting requirements and voting criteria will be addressed.
- A periodic review of the purpose of your organization will help focus the group from running adrift and into side issues. It will also help to determine if something is outmoded and adjustments are necessary.

2. Establish a shared vision and values.

For an elected officer's success, the membership must share in the organization's mission and purpose. Often it is assumed that everyone knows **why** a group exists (after all, it has been around for years). However, a timely review for old and new members alike can help refocus a membership.

- 3. Develop a working knowledge of parliamentary procedure.** A good presiding officer is familiar with basic parliamentary procedure. In small groups it is usually a mistake to insist on exact procedure, as long as no one is being defrauded rights and the will of the group is being carried out. In larger groups, a parliamentarian can assist with the technical aspects of parliamentary law.

The Role of Elected Officers

General parliamentary law requires only two officers: a presiding officer (president or chairman) and a recording officer, typically known as the secretary. Most organizations will also have a treasurer and many will have standing committees.

The **presiding officer**, unless other duties are specified in the bylaws, is responsible for:

- seeing that business of the group is transacted in a proper and expedient manner
- ensure that all members observe the rules of debate
- assure that order and decorum is always maintained
- authenticate by signature the actions of the assembly

Vice-president: Assume responsibilities of the presiding officer in his or her absence.

Secretary: Records the minutes of an organization's meeting. The minutes contain what was accomplished at the meeting and not what was said by the members.

Content of the minutes should include: the kind of meeting held (regular, special, etc.); the organization's name; the meeting date, time, location, the names of the presiding officer, secretary in attendance, and note whether the minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved as read, or corrected.

The body of the minutes should contain a separate paragraph for each subject matter covered. The last paragraph should state the time of adjournment. Minutes should be signed by the name and title of the recording secretary, and a copy of the minutes should be prepared and given to the presiding officer well in advance of the next meeting.

Minutes are the legal record of an organization and should not be destroyed.

Treasurer: Duties of this office will vary greatly between groups. The treasurer usually is the primary custodian of trust funds for the organization. A treasurer may pay bills as directed by the organization. The authority to do so will widely vary. An organization's bylaws should leave no doubt as to what approval is required to disburse funds by the treasurer. A treasurer's report should include:

- Receipts and disbursements
- Assets of the organization and amounts due the organization
- Liabilities of the organization
- Balance on hand from the beginning and close of the period the report is made.

(Annual reports must contain disclosure of all receipts and expenditures for the entire year.)



Getting Off to a Good Start as the Presiding Officer

1. **Review the rules of your organization and its purpose**
2. **Review your role as a presiding officer.** (You were selected to lead based on your qualifications, knowledge and dedication.)
3. **Review the Rules** of parliamentary procedure and consider selecting a parliamentarian who is willing to become well informed on the bylaws, standing rules and other guidelines of the organization.
4. **Plan ahead!**
 - Review the previous years' records and prepare a calendar of activities with the membership.
 - Schedule an orientation/goal setting session at the beginning of your term. Review the bylaws and purpose of the organization with others.
 - Plan for the next meeting as soon as the current meeting is completed. Confer with the secretary about any unfinished business; discuss with officers and committee chairs about items that should be prepared and presented at the next meeting.
 - Prepare and distribute an agenda (include printed minutes, and treasurer's report).
 - Prepare support materials for items on the agenda.
 - Consider meeting room arrangements to maximize member participation, comfort and inclusive atmosphere.
 - Consider "what if this happens...." with the parliamentarian and other officers, committee chairs.
5. **Set up the meeting area and greet members as they arrive.** Consider assigning this responsibility to others.
6. **Be considerate of members' rights and responsibilities** as you keep to the established agenda. Encourage debate and exercise consideration for others and courtesy to all. Use general consent to expedite business.
7. **Strive to seek the best interest of everyone.** This means ensuring that **all members** and not just a few share in the benefits of the group. It involves taking into account the **interests of the public at large** rather than the vested interest of only a few. When presiding it is important to use active listening in order to repeat motions that have been made and interpret the consensus of the group.
8. **Being an elected officer means more than presiding over meetings.** It involves exercising good leadership that is inclusive. For more information on leading see [Transformational \(Full Range\) Leadership, NebGuide G00-1406](#).

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