

An overview of the two different types of decision-making for the service bodies that make up the Georgia Region of Narcotics Anonymous.

This document was created by the Chair and RCM at the request of GSRs at the Marietta ASC in Jan. 2021. It must be said that the intention of this document is to provide a general overview of the two types of decision-making processes currently used in the Georgia Region of Narcotics Anonymous and does not provide a comprehensive overview. Moreover, it is not meant to advocate for a particular method of decision-making, rather its intention is to simply provide historical context. The two types of decision making that this document will cover is Parliamentary Procedure commonly referred to as Roberts Rules of Order (RRoO) versus Consensus Based Decision Making (CBDM).

•Please Note – The method of decision-making should not be confused with policy. At the top of our decision-making “hierarchy” are the 12 Traditions and 12 Concepts. Below that is the policy approved by the home groups in our area. Below that is our decision-making method. However, if the MASCNA changed from RRoO over to CBDM, it would have to be written into the existing MASCNA policy.

Parliamentary Procedure (PP) (also referred to as “Robert’s Rules of Order”)

• **History**

- It was actually adapted from the proceedings of Congress in 1876 by an Army Officer named Henry Robert (thus, “Robert’s Rules of Order”). It is used by the boards of businesses and nonprofits, as well as many other organizations.
- When NA service bodies began, they borrowed some of the structure of AA, including their use of Robert’s Rules in service
- Marietta NA has used RRoO at least since the late-1980s

• **Purpose**

- The purpose of RRoO is to provide an organized method of making decisions for organizations.
- The process is standardized and efficient. One of the reasons why it is so widely used is its effectiveness in streamlining meetings which allows business to be accomplished. This is one of the reasons that many organizations have smaller parts (like subcommittees, for instance) so that less-formal work can be accomplished in those settings. A large group of people talking, without “rules” can get off track, lose order and become very lengthy.
- RRoO also puts into place the proper or expected roles of the meeting participants. Some have a “voice on the floor,” meaning they have the right to take part in a debate. A smaller number have a right to vote. When a vote happens, votes are taken in favor of the motion, against the motion or some will choose to abstain from voting altogether.
- Most of the time, decisions are made on a “50% plus one” basis (often referred to as a simple majority) – meaning half of the voting body plus at least one. Some motions require a larger threshold of 2/3 or ¾ of voting participants as dictated by policy.

• **Process**

- 1) A motion is brought to the floor and someone typically is needed to provide a “second” (meaning there is agreement by others to have a discussion with the service body).
- 2) Discussion happens for and against – usually there are three “pro” speakers and three “con,” although the chair has the leeway to allow additional debate.

- 3) An idea to change or improve the motion can be made with an amendment that is seconded by a voting member and then voted on before the motion is finalized.
- 4) A vote is eventually taken on the motion, which is approved or not.
- 5) There are other types of motions which can be made that accomplish certain goals, such as deviating from the established order of items (the agenda), suspending the rules in emergencies to ignore certain policies set forth by home groups (for instance, waving clean time requirements for a nominee), etc.

- **Identified Problems**

- It is purely majority rules. One home group can tip the vote from yea to nay (or vis a versa).
- It is somewhat complex, requiring knowledge of the process. The chairperson or presiding officer needs to be familiar with the process for it to run smoothly.

- **Identified Benefits**

- Provides the most efficient, least time-consuming method for conducting business.
- The process itself protects the rights of participants to utilize the process to be heard. This ensures that minority viewpoints can at least propose changes and receive a vote.
- It is widely used and established. There are many websites (as well as books) that outline how RRoO works.

Consensus-Based Decision Making (CBDM)

- **History**

- In the mid-1990s, the Georgia Region of NA began investigating alternative methods of decision-making. This was in line with a re-evaluation of our service structure brought about by WSC approval of *The Guide to Local Service*. A “Transition Group” was put together to study this question and after almost two years helped to create a new policy and decision-making process for the Region that began in 1999.
- The original policy (not to be confused with what we now call CBDM) was totally focused on making decisions based on unanimity – *everyone* had to come into agreement for a decision to be made. The idea was to create a more spiritual way of making decisions than majority rules. It protected the rights and input of the minority. It was also based on “vigorous discussion” – meaning that only through continued communication could a decision be reached.
- The shift to consensus was also accompanied by a move away from subcommittees to the concept of task panels and some other fundamental changes.
- After the first couple of years, the Region changed their policy back to majority rules, brought subcommittees back, and did away with some other changes – keeping some of the decision-making structures in place.
- Several other areas in Georgia, at the urging of the Region, adopted CBDM.

- **Purpose**

- Like PP, CBDM is meant to provide a method for a service body to make decisions.

- **Process**

- 1) A topic is introduced for discussion (which is essentially a motion)
- 2) Questions are then asked by participants to clarify the topic.
- 3) A request for concerns or clarifications is then announced. This allows participants to express their perspectives on issues. It has been the case that if you disagree with the topic, then you must present an alternative solution.

- 4) The topic can be altered during this process, but it depends on the Facilitator (similar to chair) discerning whether there is support for changes to the topic.
- 5) The Facilitator then asks for “consensus” and participants (Regional Committee Members (RCMs) in this case) can take one of four stances (similar to voting):
 - a. Assent (you agree with the topic)
 - b. Assent with Reservations (you still agree but have some reservations)
 - c. Stand Aside (you have grave reservations, so you don’t support the motion but won’t stop it from moving forward)
 - d. Block (this is a more traditional “no” – but you are required to state how the topic violates a tradition or concept. If there is agreement the topic violates a tradition or concept, then the topic is dropped)
- 6) If 80% of the RCMs vote Assent or Assent with Reservations, then the topic is passed.

• **Identified Problems**

- CBDM does not protect the voice of the minority. There is no structure to force the body to deal with ideas that are not popular with the majority (unlike forcing votes on Amendments, Challenging the Chair, etc.). Although it ensures greater agreement amongst participants (80% versus 51% on most issues), it is still majority-rules.
- CBD starts from an assumption that a topic should be passed, and the body needs to identify what is wrong with the topic and garner support against it. As a result, structural change is very difficult.
- The Facilitator wields much more power under CBD than a Chair. It is up to them to help the participants reach an agreement, tease out nuances in discussion, and sense the direction of the body. As a result, it takes much more training, knowledge, and ability to be removed from the outcome of the proceedings than it does for a Chairperson. (RRoO protects the body by providing motions to overrule a Chair)
- Discussion is not limited and, in order for it to work most effectively, participants need to be committed to sustained, engaged discussion. The Region takes place over a weekend, allowing them to begin discussion on Saturday, continue informal, individual discussions Sat. night, and then conducting business on Sunday.

• **Identified Benefits**

- Requires less knowledge of how decision-making works. RRoO includes many types of motions and structures, CBDM does away with this structure and everything is a topic.
- Good decisions can often be made by engaged discussion, so it provides a much-more informal structure for participants to simply talk through issues.