

What Are Consent Agendas?

A consent agenda (also known by Roberts Rules of Order as a “consent calendar”) groups routine meeting discussion points into a single agenda item. In so doing, the grouped items can be approved in one action, rather than through the filing of multiple motions.

The Rules for Using a Consent Agenda

If you believe a consent agenda may enable more efficient administrative meetings in your local government, you will need to follow these essential use rules:

- All documentation associated with consent items must be provided to meeting participants in advance so that they can still make an informed vote on all grouped items. Team members *must* review the documentation before the meeting to ensure that they are informed of the issues that are to be passed as part of the consent group.
- Meeting members must be given an opportunity to ask associated questions—and have them answered—before the vote. Questions and answers should be shared with all meeting participants. Simple questions, clarifications, or short amounts of dialogue relative to a consent item may be discussed after the motion, but before approval. What is important is not to remove consent items entirely from the consent agenda for the sole purpose of answering a simple question, as this would undermine the efficiency of the consent agenda process.
- On meeting day, include the consent agenda as part of the meeting agenda, or as a separate agenda document.
- At the start of the meeting, the meeting chair should ask meeting attendees if anyone wants to discuss any of the items listed on the consent agenda.

- If it is determined that an item on the consent agenda requires discussion it must be removed from the consent portion and addressed individually. For future meetings in which there is no question or concern over the item, it may be placed back into the consent portion of the agenda.
- An item from the consent agenda must be moved at the request of any team member if the individual wants to vote against the specific item—as the item no longer has the consolidated approval of the team. This discussion step is critical, as consent agendas may not be used to force the approval of items through the use of a process that eliminates their individual review.
- The meeting chair must read aloud the remaining consent items and may move to adopt the consent agenda as a whole. It is not necessary for a vote to be taken on the consent agenda. Instead, the items may be approved, pending the absence of any objections.
- The clerk must include in the meeting minutes the full text of all resolutions and reports that were approved as part of the consent group, even though they were not reviewed at the meeting, but instead, before it by individual.

What Types of Items Should be Included in the Consent Portion of the Agenda?

For greatest efficiency, include the following types of items in the consent portion of your meeting agendas:

- Topics of a routine/recurring nature
- Procedural decisions
- Non-controversial issues that do not require debate or deliberation
- Items previously discussed for which the team has come to a consensus, but that still need an official vote

The following items are typically best suited as consent items:

- The previous meetings' minutes
- Financial reports or any other reports that are informational only and that do not require debate
- The mayor/county executive's report
- Individual program/department reports
- Committee appointments
- Staff appointments that require confirmation

Conclusion

It is important for all team members to bear in mind that local governments should not sacrifice transparency and accountability for the sake of expeditious time management. With the use of a consent agenda, you can ask clarifying questions before the meeting, request discussion when necessary, and pull items that one feels can't approve. There are efficiencies to be gained from consent agendas as they can be used as a tool to free up meeting time for discussion on valuable, impactful topics, but only when used correctly and when proper attention is still paid to each included item.