

Electronic Meeting Policy

An “Electronic Meeting” means a meeting at which some or all participants are joined electronically. It is preferred that each participant attend the meeting individually on a computer or device, rather than one being shared by multiple members.

1. Electronic meetings may be held by the Presbytery Big Picture Team, a Committee or Working Group of the Presbytery when:
 - business is time-sensitive and in need of action before the next in-person meeting
 - the cost of an in-person meeting is not justified for the business at hand
 - time and distance is a factor in members’ accessibility to an in-person meeting
 - weather-related circumstances
2. Electronic meetings of Presbytery may only be held under extraordinary circumstances that preclude the ability to meet in-person, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Electronic meetings are permissible when all active members have reasonable notice of the electronic meeting and the ability to discuss, deliberate, and discern the will of God and vote on business items.
4. Electronic meetings must provide for simultaneous aural communication among all participants in order to allow for discussion of the issue being considered. Video access is preferred but not required. Collaborative technologies, such as the web-based Zoom, Go To Meeting or Skype, and interactive video teleconferences fit the necessary requirements for maintaining the deliberative character of meetings held in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order.
5. The moderator/convener/chair shall give attention to ensuring that all persons are included in the discussion and have the capability to hear, understand and participate fully in the proceedings.
6. Only the Moderator of the Presbytery, the Convener of the Big Picture Team, a Chair of a Committee, or Convener of a Working Group may call an electronic meeting.
7. Reasonable notice of an electronic meeting shall be given by the moderator, convener or chair before the meeting and shall include the purpose or the agenda for the meeting. Instructions on how to participate shall accompany the call for the meeting. Reasonable care shall be taken to ensure participation in the selection of the date and time for the meeting.
8. Established quorums will be upheld for electronic meetings and shall be declared at the beginning of the meeting.
9. Just as in an in-person meeting, electronic meetings shall open and close with prayer.
10. The same rules regarding participation apply in electronic meetings as in in-person ones: the body may, but is not obligated to grant the privilege of the floor to a guest, who may not vote or speak to an issue once debate closes. A guest in an electronic meeting is someone who is not a member of the named committee, working group or Presbytery.
11. Minutes of the proceedings shall be recorded and added to the minute’s record.

12. Motions shall be processed in the same manner as in an in-person meeting. Each attendee is responsible for his or her connection to the internet and the meeting; no action shall be invalidated on the grounds that the loss of, or poor quality of, a member's individual connection prevented him or her from participating in the meeting, provided that at least a quorum of members was connected and adequately able to participate.

Rationale

There are times, on account of the timeliness of an action, distance, inclement weather or emergency, when the Presbytery, Big Picture Team, committee or working group of the Presbytery may be unable to meet face-to-face. Technology is available for real-time audio and/or video meetings to use in these circumstances. This policy clarifies that an electronic meeting does not include decisions made through a series of email communications which does not provide for simultaneous discussion of a motion. Moderators/Chairs/Conveners may contact the Communications Coordinator at communications@pbygenval.org to schedule a Zoom meeting.

For Additional Advice from the Office of the General Assembly see: *March 2020 Advisory Opinion – Church in an Emergency/Pandemic including this excerpt:*

Question: What happens to actions and decisions that are taken before the Electronic Meeting Policy is approved by the Presbytery at a duly called in-person meeting?

Answer: Although the meeting is not constitutional, in the case of an emergency, the Presbytery could meet by electronic means with reasonable notice of the electronic meeting, the required quorum, and stated purpose. The meeting must be presided by at least one Moderator and the Stated Clerk. Only urgent, time-sensitive actions necessary during the emergency or public health order may be taken. "Reasonable notice" may vary according to the emergency and the needs of the community. These decisions will need to be ratified at a later properly called meeting, regular or special. Robert's Rules states that, if, at a special meeting, action is taken relating to business not mentioned in the call, that action, to become valid, it must also be ratified at a regular meeting (or at another special meeting properly called for that purpose).

Motion to Adopt and Motion to Ratify

The motion to ratify (also called approve or confirm) is an incidental main motion that is used to confirm or make valid an action already taken that cannot become legally valid until approved by the assembly.

Cases where the procedure of ratification is applicable include:

- action improperly taken at a regular or properly called meeting at which no quorum was present;
- action taken at a special meeting with regard to business not mentioned in the call of that meeting;
- action taken by officers, committees, delegates, or subordinate bodies in excess of their instructions or authority; (RONR, p. 124).