

How Robert's Rules Changed for Virtual Meetings

A 3-minute briefing for chairs and boards

Same principles, clearer procedures

What stayed the same

Majority rule, protection of minority rights, one speaker at a time, and the chair recognizing the floor.

What had to change

In-person cues (hands, standing votes, counting heads) became platform features (queues, polls, participant lists).

Practical takeaway

- Adopt rules that define how to be recognized, make motions, and vote online.
- Make verification (quorum, vote counts, access) explicit instead of informal.

Electronic meetings must be authorized

In many organizations, the bylaws (or special rules) must explicitly allow virtual meetings.

What electronic-meeting rules usually specify:

- Who can meet electronically (board, committee, full membership).
- How notice is given and how members authenticate/enter the meeting.
- What counts as “present” and how quorum is verified.
- What tech features are required (real-time audio, ability to seek recognition, etc.).

Recognition, motions, and debate go digital

Recognition

Replace “stand / raise hand” with a platform method: raise-hand button, queue, or chat request. The chair still recognizes the floor.

Motions & seconds

Motions are stated and restated by the chair as usual. Seconds can be spoken or acknowledged via chat—then confirmed on the record.

Chair tip: keep it visible

- Restate every motion clearly and display it (screen share or chat pin) before debate and before voting.
- Use a consistent speaking order to avoid “who said that?” moments.

Voting + quorum need verifiable methods

Common virtual-meeting approaches:

- Quorum: confirm via participant list or roll call before business.
- Voting: polls for counted votes; roll call for high-stakes or when verification matters.
- Challenges: define how votes are verified (re-poll, roll call, or audit trail).
- Tech disruptions: specify what happens if someone drops during a vote or cannot be heard.

Bottom line

Robert's Rules didn't change its goals—virtual meetings changed what must be spelled out.

30-second chair checklist

- Confirm authorization and required platform features.
- Explain recognition (raise-hand/queue) and how to make motions.
- Verify quorum and announce the voting method before business.
- State how tech issues and vote challenges will be handled.

Reference: Sample Rules for Electronic Meetings (Robert's Rules Association)