

Resolution R-3

Best Practices for Virtual and Hybrid Proceedings by Vestries and Congregations

Whereas, Resolution R-1 of the 226th Annual Convention established the Virtual Governance Task Force to address virtual governance and related issues of accountability, transparency, diversity and inclusion in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges such proceedings posed for our collective governance; and

Whereas, the Virtual Governance Task Force consulted widely about best practices for the fair, successful, and transparent conduct of virtual proceedings, consultations including interviews with the Ecclesiastical Authority, key Diocesan staff, the Chancellor, the Office of the General Convention of The Episcopal Church, and the conduct of surveys and interviews of lay and clergy leaders in this Diocese,

Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, by the 227th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Virginia, that:

1. We gratefully acknowledge and celebrate the hard work, resourcefulness, ingenuity, and resilience of our clergy and lay leaders since February 2020 in successfully conducting virtual vestry meetings, vestry elections, congregational meetings, and in some cases, congregational votes on property matters, in the context of a deadly pandemic, while observing appropriate safety measures; and
2. We adopt the attached best practice recommendations of the Virtual Governance Task Force to guide future virtual, hybrid, and in-person congregational and vestry proceedings while reliably assuring accountability and transparency in these future proceedings and promoting wider inclusion and greater diversity in these future proceedings.

Respectfully submitted,

Russell V. Randle
Lay Delegate, Christ Church, Alexandria
Chair, Virtual Governance Task Force
On behalf of the Virtual Governance Task Force

**Best Practices for Digital and Hybrid Vestry and Congregational Meetings
Recommended by Virtual Governance Task Force
for Virginia Episcopal Congregations
September 2021**

The R-1 Task Force recommends that the practices below guide congregations and vestries in arranging, publicizing, conducting and reporting the results of their meetings. These are guidelines; they must not be interpreted to override any contrary requirements that are found in the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church, the Constitution and Canons of the Diocese of Virginia or any written congregational by-law. (In general, for historic legal reasons, congregations in Virginia are unincorporated associations. They may adopt by-laws, but are not obliged to do so.)

I. Prior to Meetings

a. Notice

Prior advance notice of the meeting is required under the Canons, preferably several weeks. For special meetings, *at least* three days advance notice is required of the time, place, and object of the meeting. Canon 11, Section 13.

For congregational meetings, best practice is to give advance notice to all members, which may be by e-mail and orally, as well as in regular congregational publications.

The congregation should also be informed in advance of both regular and special vestry meetings, including virtual and hybrid meetings, with provision made for the members to be able to watch or listen to the proceedings. The presumption is that vestry meetings are open for members of the congregation to attend.

b. Technology

Choose a technology that allows people to attend electronically, for example Zoom, Skype, or a conference call system.

Transmit an electronic link to join the meeting one week prior to meeting by e-mail or other social media platform, with due regard to security against outside disruption.

Include information on how the participants can access the meeting electronically and provide a contact for troubleshooting technical difficulties.

Share notice of the meetings on social media platforms of choice (web site, parish calendar, Facebook, email, text message). Appropriate security steps should be taken to prevent outside parties from interfering or disrupting proceedings (e.g. ZOOM bombing).

Send out electronic/US-Mail/e-mail copy of all documents required for the meeting at least one week prior to regularly scheduled meetings.

Send out any changes or additional information at least three days prior to the meeting

Request recipients to sign in fifteen minutes prior to meeting to ensure connectivity.

c. Rehearse.

Best practice is to conduct a dry run in advance of the meeting to assure that the technology works, that people can be heard, documents shared, and votes can be taken by whatever means has been chosen in advance.

d. Captioning and Interpretation.

At least ten days before the meeting, survey the attendees to assess those who are differently abled or for whom English is not the dominant language. Include questions to ascertain whether individuals with impairments have their own technology, i.e., text to speech, speech to text and other accommodation software. We note that ZOOM does have a captioning feature for those who are hard of hearing and that it can accommodate interpretation into different languages.

II. Quorum

All Vestry meetings, whether in person, hybrid, or virtual, require a quorum comprised a majority of the vestry. Canon 11, Section 10. A pending canonical change will clarify that virtual attendance is to be counted in establishing a quorum, provide the virtual participant can hear and be heard, and can see the text of any resolutions or other written action being debated or to be voted upon.

All congregational meetings, whether in person, hybrid, or virtual, require a quorum comprised of at least ten percent of the confirmed adult communicants. Canon 11, Sections 5, 13.

III. Start of Meeting

Assign an experienced administrator(s) to monitor chat/participation features. This person should not be the minute taker.

Assign a well-qualified person to take the minutes of the meeting and arrange for the distribution and posting of the minutes after the meeting, subject to the rules for approving such minutes.

If possible, mute participants, or ask them to mute their microphones unless invited to speak. To take questions, make sure the chat feature is enabled.

Advise participants that meeting is being recorded (if applicable). If the meeting is recorded, determine in advance whether and how the recording is to be retained as part of congregational records.

Confirm that members can hear each other and any exterior participants

Have participants post their names if participating virtually

Encourage virtual participants to keep their cameras on so people can see each other

Note where materials for meeting are available to ensure participants have access.

Provide hard copies of materials for those attending in person.

Where members of the congregation are in attendance, introduce vestry members, staff members, and members of the congregation who may be making presentations.

State that meeting will be conducted in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order and canonical requirements.

Cover "ground rules" for participation, such as:

Speakers must state their name before each presentation, comment, or question.

Time limits for statements (if applicable)

All participants must be recognized by the Chair before speaking.

Start with a prayer

IV. Technical Difficulties

If serious technical difficulties arise, such that it would be unfair to debate or vote upon measures, the meeting should be temporarily suspended (i.e. recess) until issues are resolved.

If technical difficulties cannot be speedily resolved so that the meeting cannot be held in compliance with Rules of Order and Canonical requirements, postpone meeting to a date, time, and place when technical issues are resolved.

Keep accurate minutes noting any disconnections and reconnections of members.

V. Conclusion and After the Meeting

Close in prayer

End hybrid or virtual meeting when the public body formally adjourns.

Post the minutes.