
Council Bylaws

Bylaws are not a required council document. However, every council, whether formally or informally, should identify and document their purpose (mission), meeting frequency, and leadership changes in their meeting minutes. Below is a **sample** outline for councils wishing to write bylaws. This is simply a guide.

Article One - Name: The name of the organization shall be the (name of the home), (Resident or Family) Council, in (City), (State), (Zip Code).

Article Two - Purpose: The purpose of the council is to work to improve the quality of nursing home care, social welfare and the quality of life for residents. The council shall provide an opportunity to share ideas, plan activities, gain valuable long-term care information, and to be a proactive group that works with nursing home staff to resolve issues and concerns.

Article Three - Leaders: List the names of your council's leader(s) and their title(s) or role(s). If the leader is absent, the co-facilitator or vice chair shall preside. A secretary shall record and maintain the minutes of each council meeting. All financial business shall be the responsibility of an elected Treasurer. Committees may be set up and established as necessary and will always include members who wish to serve. The election and appointment of leaders shall be held every year. Nominations are accepted and voted on at the same council meeting.

Article Four - Membership: Every council meeting attendee becomes a member of the (resident or family) council. Nursing home staff may attend meetings by invitation only. This includes the council advisor. Nursing home staff or employees may not be members of the council.

Article Five - Meetings: Meetings will be held every month on the (day of the month; e.g. third Tuesday), at (state the time). Additional meetings may be called by the council at any time with a majority vote.

Article Six - Amendments: Amendments may be made to the bylaws at any regular or specially called meeting of the council members, by a two-thirds vote, provided the suggested changes are discussed and read prior to voting. Amendments go into effect immediately unless there is an approved motion stating a specific date.

Bylaws are not required for council success.

Robert's Rules of Order

Robert's Rules of Order is a set of rules which helps a group to run meetings without confusion, without waste of time, and with due regard to everyone's opinion.

Basic idea behind the rules:

1. All persons in the group are equal; all are entitled to the same rights.
2. Minority must be heard and majority must prevail.
3. Consider one topic at a time.

How Do I Make a Motion?

Business is conducted by acting on motions. Once a main motion has been acknowledged by the chair, nothing else should be taken up until it has been seconded, and voted upon.

EXAMPLE:

1. **Member rises and addresses the chair:**
"Madame Chair."
2. **Chair recognizes the member:**
"Walter."
3. **Member makes the motion:**
"I move that we give \$25 to United Way and a letter of support."
4. **Another member seconds the motion** (Without waiting to be recognized):
"I second the motion."
5. **Chair states the motion and calls for discussion** (If debatable):
"It has been moved and seconded that 'we give \$25 to United Way and a letter of support.' Is there any discussion?"
6. **After discussion, chair takes the vote:**
"If there is nothing new to be added to the discussion, we are ready to vote. All those in favor of giving \$25 to UW say 'yes.' Those opposed say 'no.'"
7. **Chair counts the votes and states the results:**
"The majority has voted in favor, and the motion that 'we give \$25 to United Way and a letter of support,' has passed."

How do I Amend the Motion?

Amendments are used when a person intends to change, add or omit words in the main motion. A member should follow the same steps as above.

EXAMPLE:

1. **Main motion:**
"I move that we give \$25 and a letter of support to United Way."
2. **Amend by adding words:**
"I move to amend the motion by adding the words 'in support of programs for the elderly.'"

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3. **Amend by dropping words:**
"I move to amend the motion by dropping the words 'and a letter of support' so that the motion states, 'I move that we will give \$25 to United Way'."
4. **Amend by substituting new words for some of the original words:**
"I move to amend the motion by substituting '\$10' for '\$25'."

Can I Amend the Amendment?

This is used to change, add, or omit words in the first amendment. Only two amendments may be offered as motions before one of them must be voted upon. Only one motion at a time may be discussed, and they are voted upon in order, beginning with the last motion made.

EXAMPLE:

1. Main motion:
"I move that we have a staff appreciation program at our meeting."
2. 1st amendment:
"I move to amend the motion by adding 'at our October meeting'."
3. 2nd amendment:
"I move to amend the amendment by substituting 'November meeting' for 'October meeting'."

The second amendment is discussed and voted upon first; if it is passed, the first amendment will be changed to read: *"I move that we amend the motion by adding 'at November meeting'."* If the second amendment does not pass, the first amendment is ready to be discussed and voted on in its original form.

The first amendment is then discussed and voted upon. If it is passed and the second amendment was also passed, the main motion will read: *"I move that we have a staff appreciation program at our November meeting."* If the amendments did not pass, the main motion is ready to be voted on in its original form.

After both amendments have been voted upon, the chairman states the main motion (as amended if either amendment passed) and asks for discussion. *"The motion before us is that we have a staff appreciation program at our November meeting. Is there any discussion?"* The motion may be amended further at this time if the members wish.

Can I Withdraw a Motion?

A person can withdraw a motion in order to take back a motion, keep it off the record, or stop action.

- Member:** *"I ask permission to withdraw my motion."*
Chair: *"... wishes to withdraw the motion; are there any objections?"*
If none, the motion is withdrawn.

Council Meeting Agenda

Date: _____

- I. Open meeting and review council purpose.
- II. Welcome and introductions of new members and guests.
- III. Read minutes of last meeting.
- IV. Old business: (i.e. reports, action form responses, project progress).
 - ▶
 - ▶
 - ▶
 - ▶
- V. New business: (i.e. announcements, new information, and address care concerns, if applicable).
 - ▶
 - ▶
 - ▶
- VI. Education topic and discussion.
- VII. Next meeting date and agenda.
- VIII. Adjourn

Meeting Minutes

Minutes are a council's record of what transpired at past meetings, particularly major discussions and decisions. Minutes include such information as:

- ▶ Date, time, and place of the meeting
- ▶ Who led the meeting, and the number of members in attendance
- ▶ Main topics discussed
- ▶ Motions made (verbatim) and results of votes taken
- ▶ Who will do what between meetings (such as who will follow up on decisions and what committees will meet)
- ▶ Who recorded the minutes
- ▶ The date, time, and location of the next meeting

Minutes are saved as a permanent record of council business.

What is the Purpose of Minutes?

Minutes give council members a clear understanding of what occurs at meetings. This is important to members who are absent, but also helpful to those who are present. During a meeting, vital information and decisions can be lost amidst informal comments and less important discussion. Members may leave the meeting unsure of what was decided. Reading the minutes can bring the important points of the meeting into focus.

As time passes, the clarifying function of minutes may be even more important. Council leaders and members change. Members may disagree on what they decided at past meetings and may bring up the same topics again. Referring to minutes helps a council be more efficient and stay focused on their purpose.

How are Minutes Compiled?

Minutes are usually the responsibility of the council's secretary, who takes careful notes during the meeting and later transcribes them into formal minutes. Minutes can be typed or handwritten. The secretary distributes the minutes to members, either before the next meeting, or reads them aloud at the next meeting. When members suggest changes or corrections to the last meeting's minutes, the council members vote to accept the changes. When approved, the minutes become the official record of the meeting.

If the council cannot find a member willing to be responsible for the minutes, consider sharing or rotating the job. Also consider whether members are unwilling because the minutes are too long or the process is too time-consuming. This task can be assigned to your council advisor.

Suggestions for Effective Minutes

1. The Secretary should attend each meeting or ask another member to take minutes in his or her absence.
2. Avoid relaying the details of discussion or comments unrelated to meeting business. Minutes should be brief and clear. Remember the purpose of minutes — to provide a clear understanding of what occurred at the meeting. One way to limit the length of the minutes is to edit them before the final typing. As the secretary rereads the notes, he or she should ask, "*Should we save this item of information for future reference?*" If the answer is "*No,*" omit the item from the minutes.
3. Underscore all important decisions. Record all motions, verbatim, and indicate the results of all votes. Before a vote, read each motion to the group to assure correct wording.
4. Be accurate and objective. The leaders should not use the minutes to promote their own view points.
5. Distribute minutes as extensively as possible, so members, who are unable to attend, also know what is happening at the council meetings. Some councils post the minutes on a council bulletin board or publish them in the home's or council's newsletter. This is a very good way to interest others in the council.

Taking Action to Resolve Care Concerns

Once your council has identified a concern, and before you complete a **Council Action Form**, (example and form found on the following pages) answer these questions regarding your concerns:

- ▶ Do you, as a council, want to pursue this concern? Is it a systemic (shared by many) concern? Is it an isolated concern that should be pursued by the individual family member with staff?
- ▶ Is each concern based on direct experiences collected from council members?
- ▶ Can you describe the concern using specific, factual examples?
- ▶ Do you need more information before presenting the concern to staff? More information from the nursing home staff? From someone outside the home?
- ▶ Are there suggestions/ideas for resolving the concern?
- ▶ See the reverse side for a sample of documenting specific concerns and recommendations for a solution on the **Council Action Form**.

TIP SHEET

Council Action Form (sample)

Date: June 17, 2005 **From:** Resident Council **Family Council**

To: Jane Smith

Circle one

Concern: Residents' needs are not being met because the nursing home is understaffed.

Each example identified by the council is based on the personal observation of family council members, and is believed to be a facility-wide concern.

1. Nurse aides are working alone on the floors (in some instances, for as long as 45 minutes: Tue. 5/10, Wed. 5/11, Sat 5/28).
2. Call lights aren't answered for long periods of time (family members have documented wait times of 17 to 34 minutes; in most cases, residents were requesting assistance with toileting).
3. Staff does not make sure residents have access to their call lights.

Recommendation/Solution: The family council recommends that management play a more active role as follows: 1) provide more intensive training to new staff, 2) supervise new staff more closely to ensure they are following through, 3) reinstate a staff development program with ongoing inservice classes, and 4) have more regular contact with the aides and residents (the administrator and managers should be visible on the units observing and coaching).

Please return to the Council by: **Date:** 7/14/05 **Name:** John Doe

This requests a written response to the concern identified above by a specific date.

Staff Response: (Use an additional piece of paper if necessary.)

Implementation Date: _____

Staff Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

This identifies who prepared the response.

Note: A photocopy of this Action Form should be obtained before submitting to the appropriate staff person to ensure accountability and follow-up

Thank you.
Council Members

Council Action Form

Date: _____ **From:** Resident Council Family Council

To: _____ Circle one

Concern: _____

Recommendation/Solution: _____

Please return to the Council by: **Date:** _____ **Name:** _____

Staff Response: (Use an additional piece of paper if necessary.)

Implementation Date: _____

Staff Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

**Thank you.
Council Members**

Note: A photocopy of this Action Form should be obtained before submitting to the appropriate staff person to ensure accountability and follow-up

Models of Leadership

Traditional Model

This includes a Chairperson/President, Vice-chairperson/Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer. The Chairperson presides over council meetings. The Vice-chairperson fills in for the Chairperson along with other delegated duties. The Secretary records the minutes of council meetings. The Treasurer handles the council's funds and financial records.

Co-Chair Model

This model is structured so two council members share the responsibility of facilitating meetings, communicating with the administration, and other duties requested of them by the council. Sometimes council members are hesitant to volunteer to assume an "officer" role, but may be willing to share it with another council member. Having co-chairs, co-facilitators, or alternating leadership can help all members build leadership skills.

Committee Model

This model is structured so that several council members share responsibilities in creative ways and distribute work more widely. Many councils choose this model. This model helps councils to overcome the obstacle of recruiting officers, because members fear that too much work will be involved in a leadership position.

It is important, however, for family and resident councils to communicate with each other's leaders. Members might agree to invite the other council members to their meetings on a regular basis, or have a liaison member to meet with their council. This allows for the exchange of ideas and concerns and keeps each council informed about the actions of the other. Some family councils collaborate regularly and successfully with resident councils on special events or fundraising projects. This strengthens the voice of both councils.

(Information adapted from website of National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform)

Assignment of Council Tasks

During the start-up phase of a resident or family council, most tasks or duties are completed by the council advisor and/or self-motivated individuals. However, once your council conducts its first meeting, it's important to understand and be aware of the council tasks requiring attention **during** and **between** meetings.

The leadership model your council chooses will determine how these duties are divided.

Traditional model generally has a Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer (if applicable).

Co-Chair model is structured so two or more council-appointed members share the responsibility of leading the group. This shared role allows more members to build skills and utilize their respective strengths.

Coordinator and Committee model is set up so several members share responsibilities in creative ways, and the tasks are distributed more evenly. Committees can be added as your council evolves and grows.

Review the two lists of tasks on the following page. As a council, decide who should be responsible for what tasks. Some tasks may not be required for your group and would not be assigned. Keep in mind when reading over the list that additional tasks could arise based on the council's goals and activities.

TIP SHEET

Council Tasks

DURING MEETINGS

- ▶ Lead meetings according to agenda
- ▶ Facilitate meeting discussion
- ▶ Follow council procedures
- ▶ Recognize the efforts of others
- ▶ Take notes or tape the meetings
- ▶ Read previous meeting minutes
- ▶ Report on any important news
- ▶ Provide legislative updates
- ▶ Distribute important printed information
- ▶ Report on upcoming speakers and guests in attendance
- ▶ Present concerns from members not present at the meeting
- ▶ Provide updates from Council Action Forms returned
- ▶ Introduce and welcome new members
- ▶ Report on welcoming efforts

BETWEEN MEETINGS

- ▶ Plan the next meeting's agenda
- ▶ Communicate with administration
- ▶ Coordinate the work of members
- ▶ Track assigned tasks of members
- ▶ Write minutes from notes or tape
- ▶ Handle council correspondence
- ▶ Post or distribute meeting minutes
- ▶ Post and/or mail meeting notices
- ▶ Maintain the bulletin board and/or newsletter column
- ▶ Arrange for speakers, films, or staff to attend
- ▶ Coordinate efforts to increase membership
- ▶ Respond to anyone who wants council information
- ▶ Obtain new family information from administration
- ▶ Invite potential members to meetings