



*Delegate*

# ***How Convention Works***

***A Delegate's Guide  
to Convention***

**CUPE** / Canadian Union  
of Public Employees



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# Introduction

CUPE's national convention is the union's supreme decision-making body. Convention is held every two years. As a delegate to convention, you have been chosen to participate fully in setting the union's priorities, deciding its policies and electing its leaders.

This guide is intended to help you understand and participate effectively in proceedings at convention.

At convention, delegates from local unions and other chartered organizations debate and vote on resolutions which establish policy for the union, and on proposed amendments to the CUPE constitution.

Delegates also elect the national officers and all members of the National Executive Board.

As a delegate, you have the privilege of representing the members of your chartered organization. You have a responsibility to represent your members by attending all convention sessions, including regional caucus meetings.

Convention proceedings are governed by the Rules of Order contained in Appendix "A" of the Constitution. The purpose of these rules is to ensure that the proceedings are conducted effectively and democratically, permitting an opportunity for all delegates to participate in debate. *Bourinot's Rules of Order* apply to any matter not dealt with in Appendix "A".

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## Debate

The consideration of a resolution or constitutional amendment begins when a member of the committee reads the proposal to convention.

The committee member tells convention whether or not the committee supports passing the resolution.

Once the resolution has been moved and seconded, delegates have the opportunity to debate the resolution.

The Chairperson recognizes speakers, in order of their appearance at designated microphones, ensuring that speakers alternate between those speaking in favour of and those speaking against the resolution.

Except for the mover of the motion, speeches are limited to three (3) minutes in order to give the largest number of delegates the opportunity to participate in the debate. Although Rule A.4 permits the mover of a motion to speak for five (5) minutes, the member of the committee moving the recommendation normally provides only a brief explanation of the reasons for the committee's recommendation.

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# Committee Structure

To assist delegates at convention in dealing with numerous proposed resolutions and constitutional amendments, the National Executive Committee is empowered to appoint committees to deal with credentials, resolutions, and constitutional amendments. These committees meet before the opening of convention to ensure that the proceedings run efficiently.

The Credentials Committee oversees the registration of delegates and is responsible for ensuring that all registered delegates have proper credentials.

The Resolutions Committee considers resolutions submitted by chartered organizations. It has the power to combine resolutions related to the same topic and makes recommendations to convention delegates on each resolution presented to convention.

The Constitution Committee considers proposals for amendments to CUPE's Constitution. It has the power to combine proposed amendments dealing with the same subject and makes recommendations to convention delegates on each resolution presented to convention.

These committees have the opportunity to consider and debate resolutions and constitutional amendments in meetings held prior to convention. They perform an important service to convention.

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A delegate is not permitted to speak more than once to a motion until all other delegates who wish to speak have had an opportunity to do so.

## Ceasing Debate

When all delegates who wish to speak to a resolution have had the opportunity to do so, the Chairperson will call for a vote on the resolution.

Debate can also cease if a delegate at a microphone moves the “previous question”. The Chairperson then conducts a vote of delegates on the question of whether to cease debate. If the motion to cease debate is supported by a majority of delegates, the Chairperson will call a vote on the resolution without further debate. If the motion is defeated, debate on the resolution will continue.

Sometimes delegates simply call out “question” without going to a microphone to make a formal motion. In this situation, the Chair has the discretion to put the question of ceasing debate to a vote.

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## Motion to Refer

A delegate who is not satisfied with the resolution can move to refer the matter back to the committee for further consideration. However, a delegate is not permitted to move referral if the delegate has already spoken to the issue.

A motion to refer is not debatable. If it is properly seconded, it is immediately put to a vote.

If the motion to refer is supported by a majority of delegates, debate on the resolution ceases, and the matter is referred back to the committee for further consideration. The committee is expected to consider the debate that has taken place on the resolution, but it is not required to change the resolution.

If the motion to refer is defeated, debate continues on the resolution.



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# Voting on a Resolution and a Constitutional Amendment

When debate has ceased, a vote is taken on the resolution.

A constitutional amendment requires the support of two-thirds of the delegates voting.

Other decisions of convention are generally decided by majority vote.

## Voting Procedure

Most often a vote is taken by a show of hands.

Where a matter is particularly contentious or it is difficult to determine whether a resolution has the required level of support, a standing vote may be ordered. During a standing vote, delegates who support the resolution are asked to rise and are counted individually. Then, delegates opposed to the resolution are asked to rise and are also counted individually.

A roll call vote may be held only when the request to do so is supported by two-thirds of delegates. In a roll call vote, each delegate must be identified and individually state support for or opposition to the resolution.

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# Chairing the Convention

The convention is chaired by the national president or one of the vice-presidents. The Chairperson is responsible to maintain order and to ensure that the Rules of Order are followed.

If a delegate believes that the Chairperson has failed to follow proper procedure, the delegate is entitled to raise a point of order.

A delegate raising a point of order should proceed to a microphone and raise his/her hand to signal that a point of order is being raised. The Chairperson will recognize the delegate raising a point of order at the first opportunity. A delegate rising on a point of order should state the point clearly and concisely. The Chairperson will either accept or reject the point of order.

A delegate who is not satisfied with the ruling of the Chairperson may challenge the Chairperson's ruling. If the challenge is supported by another delegate, there will be a vote on the question "shall the decision of the Chairperson be sustained?" This question is not debatable, but the Chairperson is permitted to explain the ruling made.

If a majority of delegates vote in favour of the Chairperson's decision, convention will continue in accordance with the ruling. If the decision of the Chairperson is not sustained, proceedings will continue as required by this decision.

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## Election of Officers

At each national convention, the national officers and all other members of the National Executive Board are elected by secret ballot.

A candidate must receive a majority of votes cast to be elected. Where no candidate obtains a majority, a run-off ballot will be conducted with the removal of the candidate receiving the fewest number of votes in the previous ballot. This procedure is continued until a candidate receives majority support.

Where two or more positions are to be filled by a single ballot, a delegate must vote for the full number of offices to be filled or the delegate's ballot will be declared spoiled.

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## Conclusion

We hope that this guide to convention will help you to understand and participate effectively in the proceedings of convention. Please refer to the Rules of Order contained in Appendix “A” of the Constitution for any matters not covered by this guide or any specific questions you may have.