

Primer on Working Agreements

For Neighborhood Boards and
City Commissions in Eugene



Think



Special Thanks

Cogito would like to thank the Content Collaborators Committee, City of Eugene staff, and neighborhood and commission leaders for their commitment to improving democratic process in Eugene. The following individuals provided support and expertise to this document:

Mia Cariaga
Cindy Clarke
Paul Conte
Jerry Finigan
Lorna Flormoe
Randy Hledik
Kathi Jaworski
Holly Lemasurier
Rene Kane
Michael Kinnison
David Kolb
Melissa Mona
Keli Osborn
Raquel Wells
Randi Zimmer

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Elements of a Working Agreement	
Purpose of your organization	5
Roles of members	5
Representation	6
Meetings	7
Communication	9
Decision making	10

Introduction

Have you ever struggled to stay awake at a meeting that seems to drag on forever? Or felt like running out of the room when two meeting participants start arguing about a decision? This guide is designed to recommend basic group agreements to help your group function efficiently.

The first step to developing a set of working agreements is to understand the legal documents that govern your group. Working agreements are designed to support these important legal guides:

- Neighborhood Organizations in the City of Eugene are governed by:
- Their Charter, which identifies the mission of the group, membership, boundaries and basic elections policy.
 - The Neighborhood Organization Recognition Policy, which describes the mission, role and responsibility of all neighborhood organizations in the city.

- Commissions in the City of Eugene are governed by:
- The Eugene City Code, including the ordinance that established them. As is the case with neighborhood charters, it states their mission, roles and basic principles of appointing members.
 - Many commissions also have bylaws that provide additional guidance in the way they operate. Bylaws can serve the same purpose as a working agreement.

Each charter and ordinance is unique. Read your charter or ordinance, and look for the following elements. The City of Eugene has also developed a “model charter” for neighborhood organizations to strive toward.

Element	In the Model Charter?	In your Charter Ordinance, or Bylaws?	Do you want to include this element in a working agreement?
Mission	Yes	Yes	
Roles: Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Committees	Yes	Yes	
Elections processes	Yes	Yes	
Representation	No		
Meeting procedures	No		
Communication procedures	No		
Decision making	No		
Other items:			

What is a working agreement?

A working agreement is a document that outlines the expectations and guidelines for working together in a group. It is coauthored by group members, mutually agreed upon and used as a guiding document in the work of the group. It implies, through its structure and wording, the values, intentions and identity of a group. The bylaws developed by some commissions serve the same purpose as working agreements.

The working agreement should be:

- Consistent with your charter, ordinance, and any existing bylaws.
- Specific and clear – detailed where necessary.
- Coauthored by group members
- Reviewed and agreed upon by all members
- A living document that can be reviewed and changed as the needs, culture and work of the group evolve

A working agreement can include:

- The decision making process
- Rules for facilitation
- Rules for outside communication such as with the media
- Timelines or outcomes for the work of the group
- Refinement to elements of the charter or ordinance, including roles of members, record keeping, handling conflict, finances, committees, etc.

How is a working agreement used?

A working agreement should be a reference document that assists in helping the group function efficiently. Until the group is used to working together, members may need to refer to the agreement frequently. However, it will soon be a document that may be needed only when the group experiences conflict or as an aid for orienting new members to the style and process of the group.

What is included in a working agreement?

Each working agreement should be unique to the needs and culture of the group. The agreement may be short and sweet or extensive and formal but it should reflect the philosophy and process needs that are important to the effective functioning of the group and the identity of the group. The end product should be a document the group believes is representative of both who they are as a team and how they will work and interact as individuals on that team.

How is a working agreement different from a charter or ordinance?

- A working agreement is solely focused on process, or how group members agree to relate to each other, and other groups, while in partnership. A working agreement does not address in detail the activities of an organization, specific issues, how money is spent, etc.

- A working agreement should be readable and accessible, cutting out much of the unnecessary language of legal documents and consolidating all of the important process information in one place.
- A working agreement should be easier to use and to update as a living document than a legal document.
- Since a working agreement is authored and agreed upon by all the members of a group it can and should be more reflective of the philosophy and needs of the group at the moment.

Summary of Terms

Charter or Ordinance: Legal document of rules that govern a group

Bylaws: Rules that govern a group. Can be either a legal document or informal. This term is often interchangeable with "charter" or "working agreement".

Working Agreement: Informal rules that govern a group – not legally binding.

Elements of a Working Agreement

Described below are basic elements that are often included in a working agreement.

PURPOSE OF YOUR ORGANIZATION

While your charter or ordinance clearly states your purpose, highlighting it at the beginning of the agreement helps to reinforce the common goals of the group and also allows anyone who is not familiar with the group to begin with a review of the purpose of the group's work.

Neighborhood groups are guided by two basic elements: Their purpose as stated in their charter, and their official mission as stated in the Neighborhood Organization Recognition Policy. Both neighborhood boards and city commissions can also choose to prioritize specific elements of their mission in this section of a working agreement.

Reference: City of Eugene website - Neighborhood Association Toolkit, Boards and City Commissions Manual

ROLES OF MEMBERS

Defining roles as well as membership requirements and responsibilities can help hold members accountable to the group. The section can also be used to present clear guidelines for potential new members (board, committee, or general), highlighting what will be expected of them if they join the group.

Your charter or ordinance defines the following roles in very basic terms: Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. A working agreement can further define how individuals relate in a meeting. Example language for this section:

Chair:

- Facilitates the meeting and keeps order
- Makes decisions about group process, with input from the board
- During discussion, generally remains neutral, but can step out of the neutral role in order to offer their opinion on an issue. Does vote on issues just like all other board members.
- Leads the group in decision-making
- Communicates with City staff and elected officials

Vice Chair:

- Assists with facilitating and keeping order. May write on a flip chart if needed.
- Leads the group if the chair is absent.

Secretary:

- Takes notes at the meeting, summarizing both proposals and decisions.
- Sends draft minutes to the board one week before the next meetings with

clear directions on how to submit suggested changes to the draft minutes.
Publicly posts final minutes.

- Leads the group if the chair and vice chair are both absent.
- Note: Many city commissions are staffed by minutes recorders who take care of recording, distributing, and posting minutes.

Treasurer:

- Keeps track of all funds, receives and deposits money, and reports accurate information to the group on a regular basis.

All Board Members:

- Understand and commit to the vision, values and purpose of the group.
- Attend meetings on a regular basis and fully and honestly engage in group process.
- Commit to problem solving and decision-making.
- Represent the interests and needs of their organization and the populations they serve while simultaneously viewing the system as a whole.
- Engage in an ethical manner, follow all pertinent local, state and federal laws and act in best faith.

Although these roles may not be relevant for all boards and commissions, these responsibilities are useful to consider for all advisory groups.

REPRESENTATION

A section on representation can provide guidance to board members when recruiting new membership or soliciting opinions on a major issue. Board members commit to representing the community they serve.

Example language for this section:

Diversity and equity are core values of our group. We are committed to working with our community to make our neighborhood a safe, dynamic and livable place. As board members, we recognize our position of power and privilege and the influence of our actions on our community. It is our responsibility to ensure equitable outcomes in decision-making, policies, events, programs, and advocacy for everyone. To ensure these outcomes, we want to reflect the community we serve and operate in *culturally competent* ways.

Cultural competence refers to our ability to interact effectively with people, families, and communities of all cultures (i.e., race/ethnicity, disability, gender, socio-economic status, religion, age, or sexual identity). A key component of this ability is not assuming to already know how others would like to be treated. We are committed to the principle of treating all members of our community as *they* would like to be treated through listening and dialogue. *Note: The above two paragraphs were adapted from the draft City of Eugene Public Participation Framework.*

The board will consider the following questions when making a decision:

- Who will be most impacted by the decision(s)/project(s)?
- Whose support the group needs (or who could block the work)?
- Who has information the group needs?
- Whose skills or perspective would be valuable?
- Who serves as “connectors” (informal leaders) or “opinion makers” (formal leaders) in the community?
- Who are important decision-makers?
- Who has passion about the issue or work?
- Who is working on similar issues or have worked on similar issues in the past?
- Who would the group like to build relationships with?

Resources:

City of Eugene Public Participation Framework

Neighborhood Association Toolkit, Neighborhood Outreach and Engagement, p. 41-42.

MEETINGS

These guidelines are similar to “group norms” and are guidelines and expectations for how members behave in meetings.

Your charter or ordinance provides basic guidelines for meetings, such as how often the board meets, how many board members are needed to vote on an issue (this is called a “quorum”), how meetings are announced (or “noticed”), and how minutes are posted. Ordinances governing city commissions and most neighborhood charters have requirements related to meeting attendance. However, legal documents rarely include expectations on how people treat each other. Example language for this section:

Meetings will be announced at least one week ahead of time, and the agenda will be included with the meeting notice if at all possible. Meetings will be held in a location that is accessible and comfortable to a diversity of individuals. Community meeting rooms are much more likely to meet these guidelines than personal residences.

The group will commit to the following rules at each meeting:

1. Honor the agenda
2. Listen carefully to speakers
3. Focus on issues, not people
4. Be recognized before speaking
5. Monitor your speaking time to give others a chance to speak

6. Avoid side conversations

Missing a meeting: It is the responsibility of the member who misses a meeting to catch up through reading the meeting notes, discussing the meeting with members who were present and/or communicating with the facilitators. Members are not obligated to spend meeting time covering something that was missed.

Substitute representatives: The board does not accept substitute representatives unless agreed upon ahead of time.

Agendas: The Chair will accept suggestions for agenda items via phone or email, and based on the input, develop a draft agenda and send it out to the board one week before each meeting. Board members can suggest changes to the agenda anytime before the meeting, or even at the very beginning of the meeting. The Chair makes the final decision about the agenda. A suggested format for a Neighborhood Organization agenda follows:

Agenda Template

Meeting Name, Date, Location, and Time
Mission or vision statement for the meeting

1. Welcome and introductions (Chair) 7:00
 Include both group members and guests if time allows)
 Identify roles: notetaker, facilitator, flip chart scribe
2. Purpose of meeting and agenda review (Chair) 7:10
 Suggested changes to the agenda?
3. Public Comments (Chair) 7:15
 State expectations for length, tone
4. Meeting notes review and approval (Secretary) 7:30
5. Announcements and updates 7:35
 Treasurer report (Treasurer)
 Committee reports (Committee member) 7:40
6. Old Business (someone) 7:55
7. New Business (someone else) 8:15
8. Decision and tasks (Chair) 8:30
 Note on flip chart if possible
9. Next meeting: agenda, homework, date/time/location (Chair) 8:45

Suggested behavior expectations for large public meetings

This text can be added to the public agenda, posted on the wall, or shared verbally

All individuals are expected to observe respectful behavior during this public meeting. Please follow the time limits and refrain from personal attacks or profanity. Anyone acting in a disruptive or threatening manner will be asked to leave, and may be precluded from participating in future meetings. Please also turn all cell phones and pagers to silent mode. Thank you.

References:

Neighborhood Association Tool Kit - Successful Neighborhood Meetings
City of Eugene Respectful Workplace Policy

COMMUNICATION

Deciding in advance on standards and methods for formal communication will help insure the consistency of the group's message and make members feel more secure in the confidentiality level of the meetings.

Example language for this section:

Accountability - The board is accountable to: (list appropriate groups, the following is an example)

- The citizens of the neighborhood
- Elected officials
- City staff
- Other?

Board members will honor the following:

1. Communication will be open, honest, transparent, and reflect a "no surprises" philosophy.
2. Questions and issues arising about the process should be directed first to the group for resolution before involving individuals outside the group.
3. Email policy (choose "a" or "b"):
 - a. Email will be used sparingly for time-sensitive issues only. Every effort will be made to address substantive issues at the meetings. Special accommodations will be made for board members without email so they can fully participate in the group.
 - b. Email is a key method of communication and members accept that a significant amount of emails will be distributed to the group. The expectation is that board members will respond to emails within two days of receiving them. Special accommodations will be made for board members without email so they can fully participate in the group.

4. Communication with other key people: Other people who are important to the work of the board but do not attend regular meetings may be kept informed by receiving meeting notes, email communications or personal correspondence. All members of the board will be notified as to which individuals are included in correspondence.
5. The meetings are open to the public if a member of the public would like to attend. Any communications with other groups or the media should be approved ahead of time by the board. Guest who will be presenting at a board meeting should receive prior board approval.
6. Questions between meetings should be directed to the board chair.

DECISION MAKING

It is important that all members of the group are on the same page when making decisions. A clear process of making decisions lends legitimacy and protects the group from being challenged.

Example language for this section:

The group will choose their decision making style based on the importance of the decision. For instance, we may use super-majority vote for important decisions, majority vote for decisions of medium importance, and entrust the Chair with minor decisions.

Decision Making Styles

Style	Who decides	Description	Costs/Benefits	Importance of Decision*
Delegating	Delegate	A delegate (sometimes an expert) makes the decision without input from the group	Takes less time, efficient. Group may not understand or agree with who the expert is, or the decision.	Low priority decision
Telling	Leader	Leader shares reason for the final decision with the group	Takes less time, efficient. Helps group understand decision, but they might not agree with it.	Low priority decision
Consulting	Leader	Decision made by leader after group input	Input from group strengthens the decision. Group may not be committed to the decision.	Moderate decision
Voting	Majority or Super Majority	Majority: Requires 50% or more of the group to support the proposal Super Majority: A designated percentage, such as 75% of the group is necessary to support the proposal	Can create winners and losers. Minority opinion may not be valued or considered. May leave unresolved conflict and some disgruntled members.	Majority: Moderate decision Super Maj: Key decision
Consensus	All	The group makes a collective decision after effective communication. A consensus decision is one that every member of the group can live with and will support.	All perspectives are considered, good group support. Takes time, reduces involvement by people with little time. May "water down" a good decision.	Key decision

*Importance of decision and level of public input and support

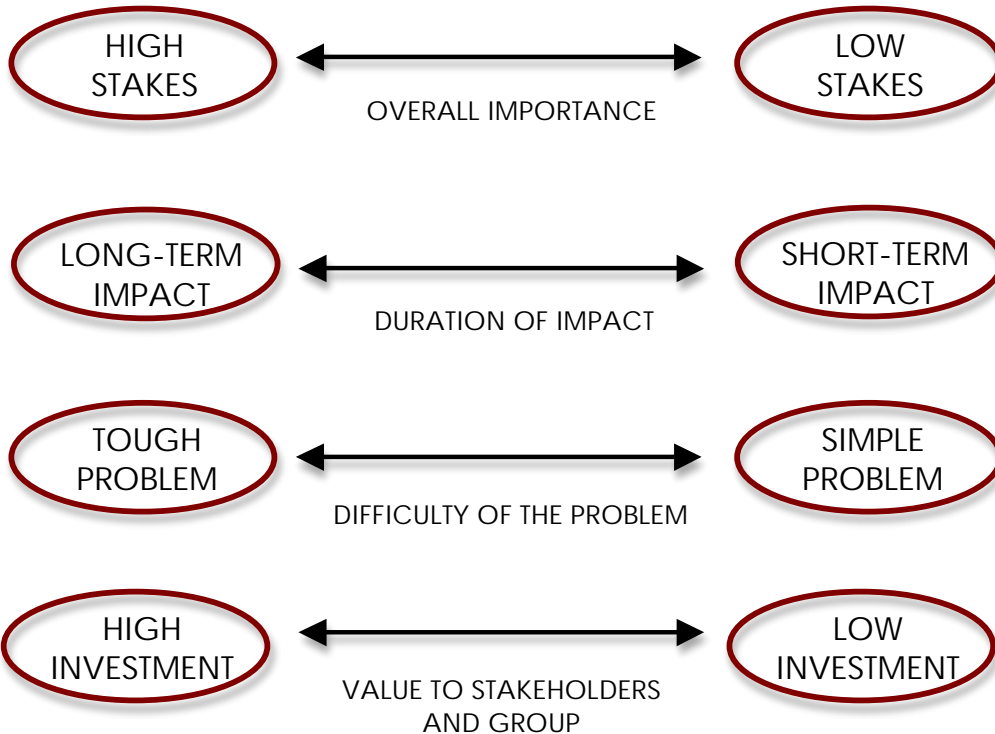
Principles:

- Leader decides how to decide
- Tell the truth about which style you are using
- Honor the followers roles of influence
- All styles are effective in different situations. Develop flexibility.
- All styles are participatory and are used to achieve empowerment.

What Level of Public Support and Input is Optimal?

Enthusiastic support is necessary when the issue involves:

Lukewarm support is good enough when the issue involves:



Decision Process

Decision styles describe how members participate in the final decision, but what process do you use to get to that point? How does the group decide to address an issue? How long does the group take to discuss before voting? Described below is a structure for moving through a decision with a group.

Basic principles

- Evaluate request for decisions in relation to the following criteria:
 - Alignment with the purpose of your group
 - Importance of the issue to the community
 - Resources needed to address the issue
- Send information and proposals to board members ahead of time so they can review the material before they are asked for their opinion.
- Identify who will make the call to close discussion and vote, and whether there is enough agreement to formalize the decision.
- Manage the time during meetings so all board members have a chance to learn, share opinions, and propose solutions.

A suggested process

Note that the timeframes below are based on integrating a decision of moderate importance into a typical two-hour board meeting that includes other agenda items, such as committee reports and planning community events.

1. The request: During public comment at a board meeting, a community member shares a concern and asks the board to take a stand on an issue. The Chair allows 5 minutes for the board to discuss the request and asks for each board member to share their opinion on the next step. Based on feedback from the board, the chair decides whether the issue is:
 - a. Key decision: The issue is aligned with your mission, has long-term impact on the community, and your group has the resources to address it. Community input is needed, and the board will plan a special meeting to address and decide on the issue.
 - b. Moderate decision: The issue is aligned with your mission, has moderate impact on the neighborhood, and the board should address it for 30 minutes at the next meeting.
 - c. Not a priority: The issue does not align with the mission of your group and should not be addressed at a meeting.
2. The information: If the majority of the board agrees that it is a moderate decision, the item is added to the next meeting agenda. The

- Chair asks the community member to send the proposal and summary of information and existing community input to the chair 2 weeks before the next meeting so that the chair can distribute it to the board. Anyone else who would like to research the issue is also welcome to send information to the chair.
3. The proposal: At the next board meeting, the community member takes 5 minutes to talk about the issue and present a proposal, which is summarized in writing on a flip chart.
 4. First weigh in: Board members discuss the proposal for 5 minutes and then the chair asks them to voice their opinion. Often called a “straw poll” or “weigh in”, members choose to vote in the following way:
 - 1 finger: Support the proposal
 - 2 fingers: Need more information
 - 3 fingers: Do not support
 5. Voicing concerns: Chair then asks the #2’s what information they need, and then the #3’s why they do not support. Vice-chair writes concerns on flip chart. 10 minutes.
 6. Alternate proposals: Chair then asks for suggested alternate proposals that address the issues voiced by the #2s and #3s. The vice-chair lists alternate proposals on a flip chart, and again the chair asks for discussion and then a vote. One of the alternate proposals can be to bring the issue back to the next meeting with more information, or call a special meeting to address the issue in more depth. 30 minutes.
 7. Final decision: Depending on the threshold of agreement that is set by the group, the decision is either formalized or the chair decides to discuss the issue at the next meeting. The board must then make a plan for how to communicate the final decision to others. Providing elected officials and city staff with background information and level of public input into the decision is critical.

A note on terminology

While many groups use familiar language when making decisions, some organizations choose to use a series of formal terms and rules. Robert’s Rules provides the highest level of structure for decision-making, and a more informal “Bob’s Rules” simplifies the language to about ten basic terms. Many consensus processes also have specific terminology. If your group uses unique terms, it is useful to distribute a hand-out to newcomers so they can understand and participate in the meeting.

Roberts Rules of Order

Robert’s Rules of Order is a popular manual of rules created by Henry Martyn Robert, engineering officer in the regular Army during the 19th century. Robert

was involved in various civil and church organizations in his time, and he developed a set of common parliamentary rules to make meetings more orderly. The entire set of rules runs several hundred pages, but here are a few links to get you started:

Basic online guide for Roberts: <http://www.robertsrules.org/>

Complex description of Robert's Rules details: <http://www.roberts-rules.com/>.

To order the official book, visit: <http://www.robertsrules.com/authority.html>

Bob's Rules

Robert's Rules can be intimidating to the uninitiated, so some groups distill the rules down to about 10 basic actions that members use during a meeting:

1. *Motion*: To take particular action on an issue, a motion must be made by a group member ("I move that..."). A motion must be supported by a second individual (called "a second") and is followed by a group discussion of the substantive issue. At the end of discussion the group will vote on the motion, which depending on the type of motion will require either a majority or three-fourths majority to pass.
2. *Postpone Indefinitely*: This motion is used to kill a motion. When passed, the motion cannot be reintroduced at the meeting in which the motion to postpone was made, but may be re-introduced at a later meeting. The motion is made by stating, "I move to postpone indefinitely...", and requires a second, followed by a majority vote to pass.
3. *Amend*: This motion is used to change the wording of a current motion under consideration. The motion is made by stating, "I move to amend the motion on the floor..." and requires a second. One vote is taken to accept the amendment to the original motion, and second vote is needed to then accept or reject the newly amended motion.
4. *Refer to Committee*: This motion refers an issue to a committee, requires a second, and a majority vote. At the next committee meeting, a report must be prepared on the motion committed. If an appropriate committee exists, the motion goes to that committee. If not, a new committee is established.
5. *Call the Question*: To end a debate immediately a motion is made to "call the question". The motion needs a second, however, no discussion is necessary. A vote is held immediately and two-thirds vote is required for passage. If the motion passes, the main motion on the floor must be voted on immediately.
6. *Table the Motion*: To table a discussion means to suspend discussion on an issue to later in the meeting or to another meeting date. A second, as well as a majority vote is required.
7. *Point of Order*: Is a request by a member that the rules be followed.
8. *Point of Information*: Allows a member to ask a questions about the motion.
9. *Adjourn*: This motion is to end a meeting. A second and a majority vote is required.

Consensus:

Methods of consensus vary greatly, and each method has a set of terms and processes that guide how to make decisions. Similar to Robert's Rules, the term "consensus" can refer to both a decision making style (an agreement that all members can support), and a decision process. Online resources:

Locally-based organization, the Co-Intelligence Institute: <http://www.co-intelligence.org/l-comparisonRR-CC-DF.html>.

A Short Guide to Consensus Building:

http://web.mit.edu/publicdisputes/practice/cbh_ch1.html