

GENERAL ASSEMBLIES

WHAT THEY ARE, WHY
THEY'RE IMPORTANT AND
HOW TO PLAN ONE.





IMPORTANT TO KNOW

- A General Assembly (GA) is the highest form of student democracy.
- Every student association has different rules for calling a GA. Check out your MA or ASFA's by-laws on our website.
- The act respecting the accreditation and financing of students associations recognizes student unions as the legal representative body of students—just like labour unions.
- A student strike can only occur when members of a student association vote to cancel their classes in order to protest a given issue. The most common way to do this is through a GA.

What is a General Assembly (GA)?

A GA is a general meeting between members of an association planned and promoted by the executive team in order to **make any bylaw changes, review the budget and discuss issues important to the association's membership.**

Student unions have a **legal responsibility** to hold at least one general assembly per academic year. Additional GA's can be called any time, either by the association's executive team or through a petition by the members of an association.

In order for the GA to be legitimate, it needs to reach a 'quorum' of members. **Quorum is a minimum number of members who must be present in order to make decisions on behalf of an entire association.**

For example, ASFA GAs must have at least 30 members present— every MA is different.

Why are GAs important?

GAs create a community space which allows students to learn about their association's activities **and practice direct democracy by voting on collective positions on issues, endorse actions, make demands or go on strike.**



HOW TO PLAN A GENERAL ASSEMBLY

WHO CAN CALL A GA

- GAs are organized by the MA executive team and can be called either by the Exec Team or by a group of members through a petition;
- The number of signatures required to petition a GA varies by association, and is outlined in the association's bylaws or constitution.

6 WEEKS BEFORE

- Choose a date, time and location, decide if it will be in-person, online or hybrid. Start promoting the date ASA;
- Find a chair person and a minute keeper from outside your MA.
- Make a physical and digital posters including the date, time and location/link for your GA.

4 WEEKS BEFORE

- Prepare any motions to present to members and write your agenda, be sure to include executive reports, an overview of the budget, any bylaw changes, appointments, resignations;
- Send out the agenda to members as early as you can so they can come prepared and let you know if they want to add anything.

(If you don't have access to your membership list, ASFA can send this for you!)

1 WEEK BEFORE

- Promote, promote, promote!
- Make sure to promote both online and in-person. Class announcements are the best way to reach out to your members.

THE DAY OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

- Check in with the Chair and the Minute Keeper to make sure they have everything they need and understand the agenda.
- Sign in members as they join by asking for their student ID.
- If in person, provide food or other refreshments.
- Start with a land acknowledgement.

THE WEEK AFTER

- Clean up the minutes and email them to your membership.
- Add any changes to the official copy of the bylaws and add new positions to the Positions Book.
- Archive your minutes internally and send a copy to archivist@asfa.ca
- Start working on implementing the motions adopted by the Assembly!

Sample Agenda

- 1. Call to Order**
- 2. Approval of the Chairperson and Minute Keeper**
- 3. Presentation of the Budget**
- 4. Any Bylaw changes**
- 5. Any Nominations**
- 6. Presentations**
- 7. Other motions**
- 8. Varia**

[Find an agenda template here](#)

How to find a Chair

Your GA can be Chaired by any non-member of your MA who understands Roberts Rules of Order. Generally, Chairpersons receive a small honorarium for their time.

How to find a Minute Keeper

The Minute Keeper at your GA can be any trusted member of the association, or ideally– an external volunteer. Generally, Chairpersons receive a small honorarium for their time.

Ask ASFA for help if you're unable to fill these roles.



GET PEOPLE TO YOUR GA

- Hold the GA back-to-back with an event of some sort (a social, a guest speaker, etc);
- Hold the GA right after a popular class – volunteers can herd the students right from class to the GA;
- Offer prizes and/or food for attendees
- Announce the GA well in advance and take the time to promote the GA via class announcements;
- Figure out what quorum is and directly ask people one-on-one if they'll come to the meeting, and get their email / phone number. Text & email all of your yes and maybe responses on the day of the GA to pull them to the meeting.

At the GA

Tips for Effective Meetings

WHEN ONLINE

- Make sure that the meeting Chair is given access to the Zoom account before the meeting. Only the original meeting host can launch polls;
- Ask ASFA for access to our Zoom account if needed;
- Co-hosts of the meeting are unable to vote. If you make any exec members meeting hosts, remember to remove their host status temporarily during voting periods.
- Have attendees sign themselves in by sharing the sign-in sheet in the Zoom chat while people are showing up.

WHEN IN PERSON

- Choose a meeting room is accessible and clearly announced;
- Make sure the Chair and volunteers arrive at least 45 minutes early;
- Volunteers sign attendees in at the door;

HYBRID

- Have the Chair join online to ensure virtual participants can fully engage– this way its a virtual meeting with an in-person option, not a live stream of an in-person meeting;
- Have the Minute Keeper join in-person to count live votes;
- Try and have an estimate of how many members will join in-person and provide food;
- Choose a hybrid class-room or conference room for easy set up;
- Make sure someone show's up at least 1.5h in advance to ensure the tech is set up in time for the meeting. It's better to be too early than make the online participants wait;
- Provide a microphone for in-person participants;
- Do a practice run before the meeting to make sure everything runs smoothly.



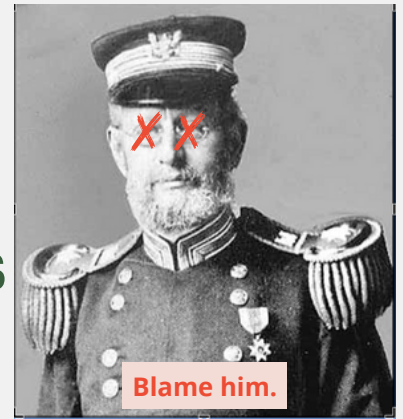


KEEP IN MIND

- Before a GA can start, Executives and Volunteers need to sign in members, taking their full name and student ID to that a sufficient quorum of members are present. Consider tracking this in Google Sheets.
- Any student enrolled in a major or minor in your department is a member of the association. This doesn't include exchange students—they're registered at their home university.

At the GA

Roberts Rules of Order



GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- Only one item is dealt with at a time.
- Debate is limited to the merits of the item being discussed.
- Ensure many voices are heard, not just the loudest voices.
- Mediate between opposing points of view.

HOW DECISIONS ARE MADE

- Decisions are made through motions, debates and amendments to those motions.
- Example:

MOTION

BE IT RESOLVED THAT everyone on this videoconference will show us their dog.

AMMENDMENT

BE IT RESOLVED THAT everyone on this videoconference will show us their pet or plant if they don't have one.

DEBATE

- Members raise their hand to be added to a speakers list list kept by chair
- Every new motion requires a new speakers list
- Mover speaks first to "motivate"
- 1st-time speakers are to be prioritized
- Speakers should start by identifying if they're for or against the motion
- All comments are directed at the chair, not one another
- Speakers can share comments for or against a motion, ask points of clarification, questions or propose amendments;



KEEP IN MIND

- If you have any vacant roles on your MA's Executive Team, the GA is where you can elect new Executives without needing to wait until the by-elections.
- GAs can be long—be respectful of one another's time.

At the GA

Roberts Rules of Order



TYPES OF MOTIONS

- **Point of Order**— Used to request that the chair enforce the rules of order to get the meeting back on track;
- **Request for Information**— Used to request specific information, like asking for "receipts";
- **Point of Inquiry**— Used to clarify the rules;
- **Appeal the chair's ruling**— Used when a member disagrees with a ruling by the chair or the facilitation style;
- **Point of Privilege**— Used to speak on something off topic—often used to call attention to a problem about the meeting, such as accessibility.
- **Nomination**— Used to appoint a Member at Large to serve in an Executive role;
- **Recess**— Used to call for a break in the meeting, generally before or after an agenda item that will take a long time
- **Adjourn**— Used to call the meeting to an end.

TIPS TO STAY ON TRACK:

- **Don't repeat points others have already made**, even if you're already on the speakers list. You can indicate visual support for a speaker by putting an ++ in the chat, snapping or waving your hands;
- **Ask questions using Point of Inquiry** if you don't understand what's going on;
- Stay on topic, share relevant **information**;
- Decide what you want to say before getting on the speakers list;
- Write out your motions in advance when possible;
- PARTICIPATE
- Be respectful & mindful of the space you take up. Who's voice hasn't been heard?



IMPORTANT TO KNOW

- Good minutes = concise records of decisions made and action items so they can be easily retrieved at a later date.
- To write the best minutes, so that somebody who was not present at the meeting and who does not know any of the people present will be able to understand what happened and what decisions were made, and act on them as required.

At the GA

Taking Good Meeting Minutes



DOCUMENT TITLE

- The document title is very important because it helps you easily find records at a later date! The title should include the Organization/committee name, the date in YYYY-MM-DD format, and the word "minutes."
- Ex: "BSA Executive Minutes - 2021-10-06"

HEADER

- Indicate which organization you're taking minutes for as your headline. Below the headline include the date, type of meeting (ex general assembly, executive meeting, etc.), and the type of document (meeting minutes)
Example:

Arts and Science Federation of Associations (ASFA)
Regular Council Meeting (March 15, 2022)
Meeting Minutes

ATTENDANCE

The people who were in attendance should be noted under the header, as should people who were supposed to be but were not (for example, MA Executives). There are three categories to list: **Present**, **Regrets**, and **Absent**. People who were not present at the meeting but were excused can be listed as having sent regrets, while unexcused absences go in the Absent category.

Use full names– not just first names or abbreviations. You might know your team members well, but people reading your minutes a few years later won't necessarily know who you mean if you just say that "Mahshid" was present!



KEEP IN MIND

- Good minutes are concise records of action items and decisions made.
- It can be helpful for members who are ESL, or neurodivergent if the minute keeper to allows participants view access to the minutes as they're being written so they can circle back if they're lost;
- Above all, it's important that a person who wasn't at the meeting will be able to easily understand what the final decision was- record your minutes with that perspective in mind.

At the GA

Taking Good Meeting Minutes



AGENDA RECAP

- When taking minutes it's helpful to have the different agenda points summarized on the first page in bullet points, so you won't have to skim through lots of pages to find out if the thing you're looking for is there;
- Use your agenda as a template to record everything you discussed- you can enter the minutes for each agenda item under the number/bullet for each agenda item so the reader will know which part of the meeting the notes relate to.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE RECORDED

- Your minutes do **NOT** need to be word-for-word accounts of what everybody said. Nobody types fast enough to do that, and it makes the minutes long and dense;
- **Best practice:** whenever voting on a decision, get the wording of the motion/item/decision recorded for the minutes before taking the vote. This will ensure that the records correctly reflect what was decided.

INFO TO RECORD FOR MOTIONS

- The title of the motion and what its about;
- The text of the motion;
- The full name and role of the person who put it forward;
- The full name of the person who seconded the motion;
- Any amendments to the motion. Including: who put them forward, who seconded them, whether or not they were approved, the vote count, any abstentions;
- The decision, including vote count and any abstentions;
- To best record amendments- put the FINAL text of the motion at the top of the section, then use the space below to record the amendments and discussion that led to the changes made.