

Points of Order

- by Cory Ollikka

I am writing this article to open a discussion about resolutions. I am not writing it to be an authority piece on the subject of resolutions. Resolutions serve a role in the democratic process; and if discussion and debate are central to democracy, then who am I to implicitly or explicitly claim to be a central authority on the subject? Hence, I submit the following for your consideration:

Resolutions guide an organization, the NFU in our case. The NFU is guided by resolutions of the Board and Executive committees on matters concerning operational detail. On the highest level, the NFU is guided by policy resolutions. And policies are set by the membership through democratically debated resolutions.

Sounds pretty straightforward so far, but what, you ask, makes for a good quality resolution?



Here is a short list:

- 1) **The “Be it Resolved...” portion of the resolution must be clear, succinct, give concrete direction for specific action and stand alone.** Practice writing resolutions without “Whereas” statements. Many people confuse the arguments put forth in “whereas” statements for the point of the resolution. This is wrong. The point of a resolution is to guide the actions of the organization, not to make good arguments as to why we need to take those actions. Arguments can be made at the microphone. Resolutions must stand on the merits of what they are asking the organization to do. You might say that resolutions provide the “what”, while the debaters on convention floor argue the “why”.
- 2) **The “Be it Resolved” portion of your resolution must answer every question except “why?” To guide the action of the organization, “what, where, when and how” must be answered to the greatest extent possible.** To be sure, there is risk here, as it’s usually enough to guide the organization with “what” we want it to do. And, certainly, the leadership and administration must be given some flexibility in “how” they carry out our democratic wishes. Certainly. However, there is nothing wrong with giving the best possible directions, and that is the spirit behind including as much “where, when and how” as possible in a resolution.
- 3) **The resolution MUST give direction to the organization, not state lofty actions on behalf of other bodies (this is the “who” part for those smarties who have already surmised that I missed one of the “W’s”).** In other words, it is outright wrong for an NFU resolution to state: “Be it Resolved that the Government of Canada jump off the nearest bridge.” No matter how nice it may sound, that is plainly wrong. We cannot resolve that someone else do something. Rather, a legitimate NFU resolution should read more like: “Be it Resolved that the NFU write letters to the Prime Minister and all Cabinet Ministers strongly suggesting that the Government of Canada jump off the nearest bridge.” *Remember, elections and lobbying move governments, but NFU resolutions only guide the NFU.*
- 4) **The last point I’ll make here is avoid redundancy.** This one is difficult for new and long-time members, alike. The NFU has a great deal of detailed and exceptionally comprehensive policy. Sometimes these policies must change, but if your intention OR your result is to re-state policy that already exists, I suggest you don’t waste anyone’s time. To put a finer point on that blunt one, it’s far better that you use your resolution-writing talents to find new strategies and actions for the organization to carry our policies forward in new circumstances rather than regurgitating what highly-capable members and conventions of the past have already done.

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Now that I re-read the list, it strikes me that I have written it in the reverse-order. So, I suggest that as you prepare your resolutions for upcoming conventions, you just start at the bottom of the list and work your way up.

First, take your burning issue and see what the NFU policy manual says about it already. If the issue needs new policy, then write accordingly. If the NFU policy is already in place, then consider new direction/strategy/actions.

Second, make sure your resolution gives direction to the NFU and no one else.

Third, make sure it has all of the “what, where, when and how” that you want in it.

Lastly, as an “acid test”, remove all “Whereas...” statements to see if the resolution can stand on its own merits. This will leave the “why” to the debaters on the floor and you will be doubly sure that you have written a great resolution. *(Note: you can add the “whereas...” statements back in if you like, but try to keep them short and few. They don’t really impress anyone, anyway.)*

There is much more to be said about resolutions that I will leave to grammarians and parliamentarians of higher calibre. The NFU certainly has a wealth of knowledge and skilled members who can shed further light on this subject.

Good luck to all in your future resolution writing and thanks for your efforts in learning how to steer this great organization from the grassroots!

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