

How to Submit an Overture/Concurrence

A. Overview:

The guidelines for presenting overtures are found in the Manual of the General Assembly, Standing Rule A.3. The key provisions are:

- Overtures must be approved by a presbytery or a synod and shall request the General Assembly to take a particular action or approve or endorse a particular statement or resolution.
- Overtures must be timely submitted to the Office of the General Assembly (see G. below).
- The originating presbytery or synod may appoint an overture advocate (see section E. below).

B. Researching the Overture:

Standing Rule A.3.b. and A.3.c.(5) require that the stated clerk of a presbytery or synod considering an overture to the General Assembly shall:

- Examine the most recently published *Minutes* of the General Assembly to determine if a similar overture has already been passed;
- Consult with the Office of the General Assembly to determine whether the desired action has been voted on by any previous General Assembly;
- Consult with the Office of the General Assembly to determine whether a similar overture has already been proposed for the current year. If so, the presbytery or synod will be encouraged to concur with that overture.
- Presbyteries or synods submitting overtures with a recommendation(s) that affects the work or budget of a General Assembly entity(ies) shall submit evidence that the affected entity(ies) has (have) been consulted. If such evidence is not submitted, the Stated Clerk shall recommend that the overture be received and referred to a future session of the General Assembly so that consultation may take place.

These procedures are designed to ensure better communication in conceiving and writing recommendations considered at the assembly. The consultation may take place by fax, phone, mail, or personal conversation.

C. Format of the Overture:

Recommendation Section:

“The Presbytery [or Synod] of _____ overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) to”

The recommendation section should be worded with specific, concise directives so that the General Assembly can make a clear, informed decision, and so that financial implications, if any, can be accurately assessed.

Rationale Section:

The rationale section should be as concise as possible, and provide insight into the reasons for the recommendation. Material included in the rationale is for information only and is not a part of the action of the assembly. Tell the reader, in short paragraphs, what is the problem, what is the harm, why the current rule or program is not adequate, what is needed.

D. Submitting the Overture:

The overture may be submitted electronically, preferably in Word, to kay.moore@pcusa.org. Please do not submit PDFs as OGA staff must edit and format the overture. Submitting the overture electronically eliminates the necessity of OGA staff rekeying the overture. If electronic submission is not feasible, a fax copy is acceptable. Please fax to 502-569-8642.

Remember that the receipt of all overtures in OGA will be acknowledged by letter. If an acknowledging letter is not received within a few weeks after submission, please check with Kay Moore at kay.moore@pcusa.org or 888-728-7228, extension 5418, to ensure that the overture has been received.

E. Overture Advocate:

Each presbytery or synod submitting an overture may name one overture advocate. The overture advocate must be able to be available at the General Assembly to provide information on the background and intent of the overture to the assembly committee to which the overture is referred (Standing Rule A.3.e.; see also Standing Rule E.2.e. “Privilege of the Floor”). Be aware that naming a commissioner as an overture advocate will most certainly require that the commissioner will be taken away from their assigned assembly committee business to go to another assembly committee to advocate for the overture.

In the letter acknowledging receipt of the overture, the OGA will request overture advocate information. Please provide the name of an overture advocate as soon as possible. Several weeks before the convening of the General Assembly, the OGA will correspond with all overture advocates. The overture advocates receive information identifying the item number and title of the overture they will be advocating, the assembly committee to which the overture is referred and the location of the meeting room in the convention center, and the names of the leadership of the assembly committee. The OGA provides orientation for overture advocates at the General Assembly before the assembly committees meet.

F. Concurrences

The 220th General Assembly (2012) approved a recommendation from the Committee to Review Biennial Committees (*Minutes*, 2012, 72, 241) that requested amendment to the *Book of Order* (G-3.0302). The amendment required that overtures referred to the General Assembly have a concurrence from at least one other presbytery. Overtures not receiving a timely concurrence will not be referred to the General Assembly.

G. FAQs on Overtures/Concurrences

What do the *Standing Rules* say about concurrences?

Section A.3.c.(6) of the *Standing Rules* defines a concurring overture as one “similar to one already proposed (excluding rationale)”, and gives instructions for how the Stated Clerk is to respond. This section also makes it clear that concurrences must meet **the same deadlines for submission** (120 days before the assembly for constitutional matters, 45 days before the assembly for all other business) that all overtures must meet.

What has changed about concurrences?

The 220th General Assembly (2012) added a requirement that all overtures from Presbyteries will require at least one concurrence in order to be considered. The following language was added to the responsibilities of presbyteries in the *Book of Order* “... proposing to General Assembly overtures that have received a concurrence from at least one other presbytery ...” (G-3.0302d).

Must a concurrence have exactly the same words?

For constitutional amendments it is expected that the effected constitutional language be exactly the same. For other business it is encouraged that the language be the same or analogous enough to be judged “similar” by the Stated Clerk.

Do the rationales have to be the same?

The rationale does not need to be the same, and many presbyteries use a concurrence to offer additional rationale for an item of business. The rationales for all concurrences are included with the overture when presented to the assembly

Who is responsible for ensuring that an overture has concurrences?

The Office of the General Assembly will not solicit concurrences. Presbyteries are encouraged to contact other presbyteries to consider concurring with their overtures. Also upon receipt of the regular update of overtures from the Office of the General Assembly, presbyteries may identify overtures for possible concurrence.

Why don't overtures from synods need a concurrence?

The rationale for the original action requiring concurrences explained that an overture from a synod contains, by definition, the support of several presbyteries whose commissioners to the synod adopted the overture.

Who brings an overture to a presbytery for concurrence?

Every presbytery has a different process for bringing business before the council. Concurrences would be treated as a normal item of business.

May a presbytery simply vote “to concur” with a particular overture, or must they vote on the overture itself?

A vote to concur is an acceptable way for a presbytery to offer a concurrence and is reported to the Stated Clerk as “At its (date of meeting) the Presbytery of (blank) voted to concur with overture (number and name of overture)”. Any additional rationale may be attached.

If our presbytery concurs with another presbytery's overture, do we name an overture advocate?

A presbytery or synod that concurs with an overture from another presbytery or synod may send one overture advocate to assist in presenting the matter to the assembly committee.

H. Deadlines for General Assemblies are as follows:

- 180-day deadline: Names of commissioners and young adult advisory delegates from presbyteries.
- 120-day deadline: Overtures requesting amendment to or interpretation of the *Book of Order*. These overtures are then automatically referred to the Advisory Committee on the Constitution for advice to the General Assembly (see G-6.04).
- 60-day deadline: Overtures having financial implications for current or future budgets.
- 45-day deadline: All other overtures.

Overtures not timely received will be returned to the originating council.

222nd GA (2016): June 18-25, 2016 (Portland, OR)

180-day Deadline: December 21, 2015 (commissioners/YAADs)

120-day Deadline: February 19, 2016 (amendment to/interpretation of *Book of Order*)

60-day Deadline: April 19, 2016 (financial implications)
45-day Deadline: May 4, 2016 (all other overtures)

223rd GA (2018): June 16-23, 2018 (St. Louis, MO):

180-day Deadline: December 17, 2017 (commissioners/YAADs)
120-day Deadline: February 16, 2018 (amendment to/interpretation of *Book of Order*)
60-day Deadline: April 17, 2018 (financial implications)
45-day Deadline: May 2, 2018 (all other overtures, comments)

224th GA (2020): June 20-27, 2020 (Baltimore, MD)

180-day Deadline: December 23, 2019 (commissioners/YAADs)
120-day Deadline: February 21, 2020 (amendment to/interpretation of *Book of Order*)
60-day Deadline: April 21, 2020 (financial implications)
45-day Deadline: May 6, 2020 (all other overtures, comments)