

CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS

A group's constitution is an important document that governs its purpose and future actions. Anticipate the future and ensure that your constitution does not limit the organization's options for growth and change.

Constitution vs. Bylaws?

The constitution of an organization contains the fundamental operating principles that govern its operation. The bylaws establish specific rules by which the group is to function. All registered student organizations must have their basic structure and methods of operation in writing. The constitution is the essence of the overall purpose of the organization and is not changed unless the purpose changes. Bylaws detail the procedures a group must follow to conduct business in an orderly manner. They provide further definitions to the articles of the constitution and can be changed more easily as the needs of the organization change.

Why Have a Constitution?

By definition, an organization is a "body of persons organized for some specific purpose as a club union or society." The process of writing a constitution should serve to clarify the organization's purpose, delineate basic structure and provide the cornerstone for building an effective organization. It will also allow members and potential members to have a better understanding of what the organization is all about and how it functions.

What should be Included in a Constitution?

The following is an outline of the standard information to be included in a constitution. The objective is to draft a document that covers these topics in a simple, clear, and concise manner.

Article I. The name of the organization

Article II. Affiliation with other groups (local, state, national, etc.)

Article III. Purpose, aims, and functions of the organization

Article IV. Membership requirements (how determined, who's eligible, etc.)

Article V. Officers (titles, term of office, how and when elected, responsibilities, removal process).

Article VI. Standing Committees

Article VII. Meetings (frequency, special meetings and who calls them)

Article VII. Quorum (how many votes needed to pass something)

Article IX. Advisor (term of service, how selected, removal process)

Article X. Amendments (means of proposal, notice required, voting requirements)

What Should Be Included in the Bylaws?

By-Laws must not contradict provisions in the constitution. They generally contain specific information on the following topics:

- Membership (requirements, resignations, expulsion, rights, and duties)
- Dues (amount and collection procedures, any special fees, when payable)
- Budget (procedure for approving, reviewing, amending, etc.)
- Duties of Officers (powers, responsibilities, specific job descriptions, procedures for filling unexpired terms of office, removal from office)
- Executive Board (structure, composition, powers)
- Committees (standing, special, how formed, chairpersons, meetings, powers, duties)
- Order of Business (standard agenda for conducting meetings)
- Parliamentary Authority
- Amendment Procedures (means of proposals, notice required, voting requirements)
- Other specific policies and procedures unique to your organization necessary for its operation

Once We Have Them – What Do We Do With Them?

The documents should be referred to when questions arise, reviewed annually, and utilized in the training of new officers. The needs of a group will change over time and it is important that the constitution and by-laws are kept up to date to reflect the current state of affairs. Make sure every new member of the organization has a copy. This will help to unify members by informing them about the opportunities that exist for participation and the procedures they should follow to be an active, contributing member.