

The constitution of an organization contains the fundamental principles which govern its operation. The bylaws establish the specific rules of guidance by which the group is to function. All but the most informal groups should have their basic structure and methods of operation in writing.

## **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 will serve to clarify your purpose, delineate your basic structure and provide the cornerstone for building an effective group. It will also allow members and potential members to have a better understanding of what the organization is all about and how it functions. If you keep in mind the value of having a written document that clearly describes the basic framework of your organization, the drafting of the constitution will be a much easier and more rewarding experience.

## **WHAT SHOULD BE COVERED BY 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 basic topics in a clear and concise manner.

## **WHY HAVE BYLAWS?**

The constitution covers the fundamental principles but does not prescribe specific procedures for operating your organization. Bylaws set forth in detail the procedures your group must follow to conduct business in an orderly manner. They provide further definition to the articles of the constitution and can be changed more easily as the needs of the organization change.

## **WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE BYLAWS?**

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

- A. Membership (selection requirement, resignations, expulsion, rights and duties)
- B. Dues (amount and collection procedures, any special fees, when payable)
- C. Duties of officers (powers, responsibilities, specific job descriptions, procedures for filling unexpired terms of office, removal from office)
- D. Executive Board (structure, composition, powers)
- E. Committees (standing, special, how formed, chairpersons, meetings, powers, duties)
- F. Order of Business (standard agenda for conducting meetings)
- G. Parliamentary Authority (provisions for rules of order, generally Robert’s Rules of Order-Newly Revised)
- H. Amendment Procedures (means of proposals, notice required, voting requirements)
- I. Other specific policies and procedures unique to your organization necessary for its operation.

## SAMPLE CONSTITUTIONAL OUTLINE

Title of Document:

Constitution of "Organization's Name," University of Southern Indiana.

Preamble: A one paragraph statement of the mission of the organizations, telling why it was created.

Article I. NAME  
The name of this organization shall be.....

Article II. PURPOSE

Article III: MEMBERSHIP  
Non-Discrimination Statement: This organization shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, disability, and status as a veteran. (As exempted by Federal law, social Greek organization may omit "gender").

Article IV: ORGANIZATION  
Section I: Structure (Branches Executive, etc.)  
Section II: Officers  
Section III: Elections and Appointments  
Section IV: Terms of Office  
Section V: Powers  
Section VI: Governing Rules

Article V: MEETINGS

Article VI: QUORUM

Article VII:  
Section I: Adoption and Ratification *(What is the procedure)*  
Section II: Amending the constitution  
*(What is the procedure?)*

Article VIII: GENERAL PROVISIONS

# SAMPLE BYLAWS OUTLINE

## CHAPTER 1 STRUCTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION

### 1.0 Executive Officers

#### A. Values Statement of the Executive Officers (what are they responsible for)

*The officers of an organization are responsible for the every day details that result in the smooth operation of the organization.*

#### B. Meetings (how often should each they meet)

#### C. Training (what training is required by Executive Officers)

#### D. Duties and Responsibilities of Executive Officers

##### 1. The following duties shall be the responsibility of the President:

*A President should not only be pleasant and firm as a presiding officer, but should also set the pace in getting the work done. S/he is non-partisan when president, seeing that the members are equal, regard- less of the question of the debate. It is the responsibility of the president to:*

- *Know the constitution and by-laws of the organization*
- *Study the objectives and procedures of the organization*
- *Appoint, instruct and, when possible, serve as ex-officio member of committees. Determine, with the aid of other officers and members, the objectives, meetings and action plans of the group*
- *Analyze membership problems and help plan a vigorous membership campaign*
- *See that other organization leaders, committees, members and the advisor are informed about problems and policies under consideration*
- *Encourage the cooperation and promote harmony within campus ranks.*
- *Schedule and preside over regular meetings of the executive board*
- *Preside at organization meetings*
- *Work closely with the organization's advisor*

##### 2. The following duties shall be the responsibility of the Vice President:

*The vice president should work closely with the president to ensure smooth transition should it be necessary for him/her to take over the position. In this role the vice president should:*

- *Assist the president, but not substitute for him/her*
- *Become acquainted with the president's plans for the year and be prepared to assume his/her duties and responsibilities*
- *Gather ideas from members*
- *Be host at meetings: check room arrangements, proper lighting, ventilation, etc.; greet newcomers and see that new members get acquainted; see that guest speakers are properly recognized, introduced and entertained.*
- *Know what is going on; be familiar with information materials sent to the president.*

##### 3. The following shall be duties of the Secretary:

(NOTE): Some large organizations divide the secretarial responsibilities between a recording secretary and a corresponding secretary. A capable secretary is usually characterized by good organizational skills, word processing skills, accuracy, and promptness. The secretary's most important job is interpreting what goes on in the organization. Getting at the heart of a discussion calls for alertness and good reporting. Ability to state clearly the proceedings of a meeting is essential.

*The record is the source of all official statements of definite action, motions, directives, and assignments. Accurate minutes often become the umpire in debates concerning what was agreed upon. The president may rely on the secretary to remind him/her of things to be done. Committee chairs may need to be notified of their assignments. The secretary is expected to:*

- *Keep accurate account of organization and executive committee proceedings and produce minutes for each meeting.*
- *Provide officers and committees with all necessary papers and materials.*
- *Keep a systematic method of filing letters received, copies of letters sent, committee reports, treasurers reports, membership rosters, lists committees, etc.*
- *Attend to official correspondence*
- *Mail and post notices of organization and executive committee meetings*
- *Prepare with the president, in advance, the order of business for each meeting*
- *Cooperate with the treasurer in keeping an accurate listing of membership status.*
- *Read minutes of meetings and call the president's attention to unfinished business*
- *Have on hand at each meeting an agenda, minutes of the previous meeting, lists of committees and committee reports, a copy of the constitution and bylaws.*

4. The following shall be duties of the Treasurer:

Some organizations assign the treasurer as chair of the finance committee. *The treasurer is expected to:*

- *Obtain records of all financial documents from the previous treasurer and go over these records with him/her if possible*
- *Maintain a simple set of books and record all items of income and expenses as they occur*  
*Meet with the advisor to prepare the annual budget for the upcoming year*
- *Prepare requisitions for prompt payments of all invoices, deposit all money collected, and use the proper account number on all paperwork*
- *Collect dues and bank all organization funds*
- *Pay out funds on orders signed by the treasurer, the president, and the secretary unless otherwise provided*
- *Make reports at meetings as necessary*
- *Cooperate with the secretary in keeping accurate membership records including names, addresses, dates paid, and funds received.*

1.2 Next Branch or area defined by the constitution's structure. In many organizations, the next level may be their chairpersons.

- A. Values Statement
- B. Meetings
- C. Training
- D. Duties and Responsibilities of each leader that falls into this category.

## CHAPTER II: COMMITTEES

### 2.0 STANDING COMMITTEES/SPECIAL COMMITTEES/AD-HOC COMMITTEES

*Much of the important work of an organization is done through committees. Try to retain at least one person from the previous year's committee to insure continuity. Be sure each committee has a chair and a secretary. Try to keep the number of standing committees to a minimum, filing any gaps with ad hoc committees which are created for a specific project and are then dissolved. Examples of committees include the executive committee (made up of the officers), the membership committee (responsible for encouraging and maintaining new membership), the program committee (which arranges the organization's yearly schedule of events), and the publicity committee (which interprets and publicizes the policies and plans of the organization).*

Areas to be addressed in this section of the bylaws include:

- A. Purpose of Committees
- B. Provisions for Creation
- C. Selection/Placement of members
- D. Dissolution

## CHAPTER III: MEETINGS

### 3.0 GENERAL MEETINGS

\*How often held? When?

- 3.2 QUORUM
  - \*What constitutes quorum?
- 3.4 VOTING
  - \*Who gets to vote?
  - \*What percentage of votes need to be cast in favor, to pass a motion?
- 3.6 SPECIAL MEETINGS
  - \*Who can call them?
  - \*How much notice must be given?
  - \*How will the meeting be conducted?
- 3.8 MINUTES
  - A. Includes: kind of meeting (regular, special, emergency)
  - B. Distribution (to whom)
  - C. Recording Amendments to the constitution, bylaws, or Standing Rules
- 3.10 ATTENDANCE
  - \*What is the attendance policy?
  - A. Excused/Unexcused absence
  - B. Sanctions

#### CHAPTER IV: BUSINESS/FINANCIAL

- 4.0 ANNUAL BUDGET
  - A. Define fiscal year
  - B. Fiscal policies (how will books be kept?)
  - C. Expenditures
    - 1. what can be incurred?
    - 2. how to approve expenditures
  - D. Preparing Budget (timeline)
  - E. Approval (how is budget approved?)
  - F. Reporting of Expenditures
    - \*time limits
    - \*penalties
    - \*responsibilities

#### CHAPTER V: ELECTIONS

- 5.0 GENERAL RULES
  - \*who can become a candidate?
  - \*eligibility
  - \*qualifications (grades, hours, academic standing, previous experience)
  - \*when are elections held?
  - \*how are ballots cast?
  - \*how is the winner decided?
- 5.2 INAUGURATION
  - \*when
  - \*oath of office
- 5.4 VACANCIES
  - \*how to fill a vacancy

#### CHAPTER 6.0 DISCIPLINE AND IMPEACHMENT

- 6.0 DEFINED
  - A. Grievance - a complaint filed by another member
  - B. Warning - a verbal or written admonishment given to the recipient of a grievance
  - C. Censure - a public (in meeting) admonishment

D. Impeachment - a charge which results in removal of office if found guilty

CHAPTER VII: ADVISORS

\*Who qualifies?

\*What are their duties/expectations for the role of advisor?

CHAPTER VIII: AMENDING THE BYLAWS

\*What is the process that the organization will go through to amend the bylaws? Bylaws can be