



Writing a Constitution for Your Organization



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What is a constitution?

- While a mission statement tells WHY you exist, a constitution explains HOW
- It provides a 'roadmap'
- Guidelines
- Consistency

Why should you have a constitution?

- It should:
 - Provide the purpose of the organization
 - Help guide you in decision making
 - Outline
 - Membership
 - Leadership positions
 - How to managing conflict
 - Elections
 - Impeachment

What are by-laws?

- While a constitution creates the 'groundwork' for your organization, bylaws are what help you 'refine' it
- By-laws help to control the actions of the members in an organization
- They define the more minute details of the organization

What's the difference?

- Constitutions are difficult to change and require input from the majority of the body involved
 - Constitutions maintain the ideas of the founders
- Bylaws are easier to change and can be altered by the leadership of an organization
 - Bylaws can evolve based on the personality of the current leadership

Suggested Format

- Article I - Name of organization
- Article II - Purpose
- Article III - Non-discrimination clause
- Article IV - Membership
- Article V - Officers/executive board
- Article VI - Elections
- Article VII - Amendments

Article I - Name of organization

Article II - Purpose

- Mission statement
- List objectives/goals of your organization
- Define who your organization serves
- Consider your organization's values

Article III - Non-discrimination clause

- Pull from RSO Manual
- “... shall not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of race, age, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, veteran status, or disability.”
- Consider adding a commitment to diversity/inclusivity statement

Article IV - Membership

- Who is eligible for membership?
- Who makes up your membership
- Do you allow non-students to be members?
- Are dues required to maintain membership?
- What defines active vs inactive membership?
- Are there different levels of membership?
- Academic standards for membership?

Article V - Officers/executive board

- What are the formal leadership roles?
- What are responsibilities of each role?
- Qualifications to hold office
- Procedures to remove an officer

Article VI - Elections

- Timeline for elections
- Format of elections
- Terms of positions
- What happens if a position goes vacant?

Article VII - Amendments

- How are changes to this document made?
- How many people required to vote on an amendment (quorum)
- How many needed to affirm an amendment (51%, $\frac{2}{3}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, etc.)
- Remember that constitutions should not be easily changed
- How will members be notified of amendments?

Next Steps

- Complete the worksheet with your fellow e-board members
- Create a working first draft
- Work with your e-board to refine and create final version
- Vote to approve as per the guidelines in your constitution

We're here to help!

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