

Leadersheet

Constitution and Bylaws

The Constitution of an organization contains the fundamental principles which govern its operation. The By-laws 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 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, functions of the organization
Article IV	Membership requirements and limitations
Article V	Officers (titles, term of office, how and when elected)
Article VI	Advisor (term of service, how selected)
Article VII	Meetings (frequency, special meetings and who calls them)
Article VIII	Quorum (number of members required to transact business)
Article IX	Referendum and Recall (procedures and handling)
Article X	Amendments (means of proposal, notice required, voting requirements)
Article XI	Ratification (requirements for adopting this constitution)

Why Have By-Laws?

The Constitution covers the fundamental principles but does not prescribe specific procedures for operating your organization. By-Laws 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 By-Laws?

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

- A. Membership (selection requirements, 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 Roberts 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

Once we have them - what do we do with them?

Remember the reasons for having a Constitution and By-Laws. They articulate the purpose of your organization and spell out the procedures to be followed for its orderly functioning. Constitutions usually require a **2/3 vote** of the membership for adoption. By-Laws only require a simple majority for passage. Once you have developed your Constitution and By-Laws review them often. The needs of your group will change over time and it's 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 of them. This will help to unify your members by informing them about the opportunities that exist for participation and the procedures they should follow to be an active, contributing member. A thorough study of the Constitution and By-Laws should be a part of officer training and transition.