

# Student Organization Constitution Guide



## What is a constitution?

A student organization's constitution provides a foundation to govern the purpose and future actions of the organization. This document should be used to refer back to when discussing the operations of your organization, such as meeting structure, member recruitment, and elections. It allows a group and its members to be held accountable.

## Why is a constitution required for all organizations?

The process of writing a constitution serves as a guide to clarify the organization's purpose, create a basic structure, and build a foundation for an effective organization. It allows members to have a clearer, holistic understanding of the functions of the organization.

## What is the difference between a constitution and bylaws?

**Constitutions** contain the fundamental principles that govern an organization's operations.

**Bylaws** establish specific rules by which the group is to function. Bylaws detail the procedures a group must follow to conduct business and provide further definitions to articles in the constitution. Bylaws tend to be a more fluid document that can be adapted as needs change for the organization.

## Does my group need to have both a constitution and bylaws?

No. Each group is required to have a constitution. A separate bylaws document helps flesh out details if a group finds it necessary. If you do NOT have a separate bylaws document, be sure to incorporate the bylaws checklist into your constitution.

## What should be in a constitution?

This resource contains a checklist of what should be included in a basic constitution. The document should cover these areas in a clear and concise manner.

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## Constitution Checklist

### Cover page

- Name of organization
- Date of most recent revision
- Organization logo

### Article I – Name of Organization

- Name of the organization and any abbreviated name/acronym if used

### Article II – Purpose, Aims, Function, and Affiliation of the Organization

- Mission statement that is clear, precise, and definitive (generally 60 words or less). Anyone who reads the mission should understand generally what the organization is about.
- Philosophy, goals, and/or function of the organization
- Affiliation: if an organization is associated with a local, state, national, or international organization, this should be acknowledged here. *Note: the constitution should consider incorporating the umbrella organization's constitution if available.*

### Article III – Membership

- REQUIRED: Reference to abiding by the [University Policy 6.4, Prohibited Bias, Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual and Related Misconduct](#).**
- Membership eligibility
  - Who: undergrads, graduate, staff, faculty, alumni, community members, etc.
- Detailed description of membership expectations
  - Rights, duties, responsibilities of members
  - Voting rights should be included
  - Resignation and expulsion procedures
  - Trainings and workshops, if applicable
  - If necessary, include details for other membership types: honorary, associate, etc.
- Recruitment process
  - When recruitment happens, outlining how it takes place
- Withdrawal process
  - What are grounds for removal of a member
  - What is the process for removal of a member (votes required? By officers or members?)
  - Appeal process
- Process for reinstating member (if applicable)

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## Article IV – Executive Board of Officers

- A list of officers, including at minimum: President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer
- Comprehensive list of officer duties and responsibilities
  - Length of term (one semester or one year are most common)
  - When do they assume their role
- Selection of officers / Elections process
  - Timing of selection (fall or spring semester, and when in the semester)
  - Who is eligible and what is the nomination process? Are there self-nominations?
  - How are members selected? Applications, interviews, or elections?
  - Describe the process
  - How voting/decision-making is conducted
  - Order of elections/speeches
  - Voting
    - What happens in the event of a tie?
    - Explain the run-off process in the event of a tie or majority vote isn't made
    - Who is counting votes (ideally at least two officers who are not currently running for a position)
- Outlines process of removing an officer
- Outlines process of reinstating an officer
- Outlines procedure if an officer chooses to resign
- Describes procedure for handling officer vacancies

## Article V – Advisor

- Role/responsibilities of the staff or faculty advisor
- Process for appointing a new advisor
- Note: Work with your advisor on this section so you are on the same page about expectations!*

## Article VI – Meetings

- State how and by whom meetings can be called
- Frequency of meetings
- Format for meetings (ex. Robert's Rules of Order)
- Quorum requirements (minimum attendance) to officially conduct and approve business of the organization
- Process for voting on items in meetings

### A basic agenda to use under Article VI:

- Call to order
- Roll call
- Approval of minutes
- Executive committee report
- Committee reports
- Old business
- New business
- Announcements
- Adjournment

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## Article VII – Dues & Finance

- Membership dues, if any, including amount and frequency of payment
- Describes exemption from paying dues, if applicable (non-voting members, non-student members)
- Describe support or process in place if a member cannot pay their dues
- Methods of funding the organization utilize. Membership dues, fundraising, funding through various funding sources, etc.
- Which members have authority to spend organization monies

## Article VIII – Code of Conduct

- Must include reference to the [Cornell Bias Policy and the Cornell Discrimination Policy](#), policy 6.4, holding members accountable to this policy.
- Outline procedure for removing a member not abiding by policy

## Article IX – Amendments and Ratification

- Describe the process of changing or amending the constitution
- When will changes take effect

## Bylaws Checklist

If your organization has a separate bylaws section, the following areas should be covered. If your organization only has a constitution, this information should be included within the constitution.

- Detailed description of membership expectations
  - Rights, duties, responsibilities of members
  - Resignation and expulsion procedures
  - If necessary, include details for other membership types: honorary, associate, etc.
- Provisions for initiation fees and dues (including support if a member cannot pay dues or fails to pay dues for reasons not approved)
- Policies and procedures for officer elections
- Duties and authority of the officers
- The names and duties of standing committees, if any, and the method of choosing chairpersons and committee members.
- The number or proportion of the group that constitutes quorum
- A procedure to amend bylaws, usually by a majority vote when quorum is met