Guide for Writing a Constitution

A constitution is the basic framework of an organization. It should state the general operating procedures and policies of a group, which are not subject to change frequently. Detailed methods of doing business and specific rules should be included in the by-laws, not the constitution.

Responsibilities of Applicants in Making a Constitutional Presentation

Applicant organizations wishing to be recognized are required to submit documents that include: a finished copy of a proposed constitution, a brief assessment of student interest in the organization and the organization’s contribution to the school, contact information for two organization members, and appointment of a faculty/staff advisor.

Organization members will meet with a designated Student Life representative for consultation, which includes a detailed review of the constitution draft. Following the required consultation, the organization members must make all required changes noted and provide a final draft before the Student Activities Committee meeting.

No additional changes can be made that are not approved during the consultation.

The entire responsibility of producing a constitution in acceptable form rests with the applicant organizations. This means the constitution, before the Committee will consider it, must embody the provisions established by the Committee. The constitution should be in an acceptable form, embody principles outlined below and should be free of grammatical, spelling and typographical errors.

Provisions required in the constitution:
(Items in italics are intended as explanations)

1. Statement of the purpose.
   What are the core values of your group and what will it do?

2. Provision for choosing an adviser.
   When and how will your advisor be selected. Are there special provisions or requirements that s/he must have?

3. Qualifications for membership.
   Membership should be open to all qualified students with no exclusion due to race, creed or national origin. Any academic major or G.P.A. qualifications should be included in this section.

4. Titles and duties of officers.
   This should be limited to definitions and enumerations of authority, not day-to-day operations which should be handled in the bylaws.
5. Elections.
The election of officers must be free, open, democratic, and periodic. In addition, there must be a provision for filling interim vacancies of offices. Aside from these, are there any special requirements your elections have?

The constitution must provide for a clear and distinct delegation of financial responsibility to one or more stipulated officers of the organization. When dues are to be assessed, the constitution must provide for the manner of assessment. The constitution must include a statement that all accounts, financial records and transactions of the organization are subject to audit or review by the Student Activities Committee at their discretion.

7. Meetings.
The constitution must provide for a minimum number of meetings annually for the membership. The constitution must provide suitable guarantees that the members will be given advance notice as to the time and place for conducting general meetings. The constitution must provide a means for calling special meetings when the situation warrants and for notifying the members thereof. Beyond this, are there any special requirements for your meetings?

8. Quorum requirements for conducting business.
What is the minimum number of people required for your organization to conduct business? Typically it is a simple majority of the membership.

Bylaws govern daily operating procedures while a constitution provides the outline of how an organization does business. For help in understanding the difference, see the Student Government Association’s constitution. In any case, you must determine how bylaws are passed. The bylaws themselves should not be included with the submitted constitution.

10. Committees.
Are there any permanent committees? What are their functions, scope of authority, and responsibilities? How are they appointed? How are ad hoc committees selected?

11. Amendments of the constitution.
See the above discussion on bylaws. Typically, constitutions are harder to amend than bylaws and usually requires a 2/3 majority vote. The constitution must include a statement that any substantive amendments passed must also be approved by the Student Life Committee.