

## **What is a Constitution?**

A constitution contains the fundamental principles that outline the purpose, structure, and limits of an organization. Essentially, the constitution provides a foundation upon which an organization operates.

Why should I have a Constitution?

Every recognized student organization at NSU is required to file a current copy of their constitution and bylaws with the Office of Student Affairs each year at recognition. An updated copy should be filed promptly should the document change during the year.

Your constitution serves an important purpose for your organization. The process of writing a constitution should help to:

- Clarify your purpose
- Outline your basic structure
- Provide the cornerstone for building an effective group
- 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 a constitution will be a much easier and more rewarding experience.

What should I include in my Constitution?

A constitution should provide the structure for an organization, describe its purpose, and define the duties and responsibilities of the officers and members. The objective is to draft a document that covers these topics in a simple, clear, and concise manner.

What follows is an outline of the standard information to be included in a constitution. Since your constitution should be tailored to the needs of your organization, you may wish to include additional articles or use a different organizational structure. However, the basic information outlined below must be included in the constitution you submit at recognition.

### ***Guidelines for Writing a Constitution***

#### **Article I Name**

State the name of the organization—for example, “The name of this organization shall be (insert name of organization here).”

#### **Article II Purpose & Goals**

Provide a general statement about the purpose and goals of the organization, as well as the type and scope of the organization’s activities. This is also an appropriate place to mention the organization’s affiliation with other groups, if any (for example, if the group is a chapter of a national organization).

### **Article III Membership**

Provide a general statement about membership eligibility, standards, and requirements. For example, "Membership shall be open to all students at Northeastern State University." The membership selection process, types of membership, and procedures for disciplining and/or removing members should also be outlined here if not already appearing in the bylaws.

NOTE: Recognized student organizations at Northeastern State University are required to be non-discriminatory in membership unless otherwise permitted by applicable federal law (for example, Title IX). As such, you should review your constitution to ensure that it does not contain discriminatory language or provisions.

### **Article IV Officers**

In sections under this article; list the titles of offices to be established, qualifications for each office, the method, time, and process of selection, and the term of office. The duties, powers, and responsibilities of each officer as well as procedures for removal from office and filling vacancies should also be outlined here if not already appearing in the bylaws.

At a minimum, each student organization is expected to designate one officer as the chief student leader (usually titled "president") and one officer authorized to deal with the organization's finances (usually titled "treasurer").

The titles of these positions may vary according to the needs of the organization, but the two separate job functions must be provided for in this article.

NOTE: All recognized student organizations at NSU must include the following statement (or its equivalent) in their constitution:

"The officers of this organization must meet the following requirements:

(a) Have a minimum grade point average (GPA) as stated below and meet that minimum GPA in the semester immediately prior to the election/appointment, the semester of election/appointment and semesters during the term of office.

For undergraduate students, the minimum GPA is 2.0.(b) Be in good standing with the university and (c) officers must be enrolled full-time. For graduate students, the minimum GPA is 3.0. (b) Be in good standing with the university and (c) Be enrolled full-time.

The wording of the above statement may be made specific to the student organization, but no student organization may enact eligibility requirements for officers less stringent than those appearing above. Student organizations may enact requirements more stringent than those provided by the university. This article is also the appropriate place to outline the selection process, qualifications, responsibilities, and the term of office for the organization's official university Campus Sponsor(s).

### **Article V. Finances**

Provide a general statement about the manner in which the finances of the organization should be handled, including what should happen to the organization's funds if the organization is dissolved.

Detailed financial procedures including the amount and collection procedures for dues, if any, should also be outlined here if not already appearing in the bylaws.

## **Article VI. Amendments & Ratification**

This article should explain how constitutional amendments may be made, as well as the procedure for adopting this constitution and any future amendments. At a minimum, your constitution must be voted on and approved by the general membership of your organization.

This article should also include a statement requiring prompt submission of an updated constitution and bylaws to the Director of Student Activities and Organizations should the document be amended following recognition.

To be valid, the constitution must be signed by at least the organization's chief student officer and Campus Sponsor, and approved by the Director of Student Activities and Organizations. *You will want to provide a space for these individuals to sign and date the document.*

## **What are Bylaws?**

Bylaws are secondary principles that govern the internal affairs of an organization. Bylaws are essentially an expansion of the articles or sections of the constitution. They describe in detail the procedures and steps the organization must follow in order to conduct business effectively and efficiently.

## **Why should I have Bylaws?**

Student organizations are not required to have bylaws, but may find them helpful to the organization's operations.

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

## **What should I include in my Bylaws?**

Bylaws must not contradict provisions in the constitution. They generally contain, as needed, more specific information on the topics outlined below. If your organization has chosen not to develop bylaws, this information may be included in the appropriate sections of your constitution. The following are some standard articles that commonly appear in organization bylaws:

**Membership**—Sections under this article should discuss and detail the various aspects of membership that may be applicable: membership selection process, types of membership, and procedures for disciplining and/or removing members.

**Officers**—Sections under this article should discuss the officer selection process, duties, powers, and responsibilities of each officer, and procedures for removal from office and filling vacant officer positions.

**Committees**—Sections under this article should discuss and detail standing and special committees

(formation, selection, powers, and duties) and the executive committee (membership, powers, and duties), along with the roles and responsibilities of committee chairs.

**Meetings**—Sections under this article should discuss types of meetings, how and when they are to occur, requirements for notice, attendance, and quorum (number of members needed present to transact business), meeting format, and parliamentary rules of order (usually Robert’s Rules of Order).

**Financial Procedures**—Sections under this article should discuss and detail (if applicable) dues, initiation fees, and fines, collection procedures, and other financial procedures (budgets, expenditures, etc.).

**Amendment Procedures**—Sections under this article should discuss the procedure for amending the bylaws (means of proposals, notice required, voting requirements).

Other specific policies and procedures unique to your organization that may be necessary for its operation.

## **How can I use my Constitution & Bylaws?**

Remember the reasons for having a constitution and bylaws. 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. Bylaws only require a simple majority for passage. Once you have developed your constitution and bylaws, review them often. The needs of your group will change over time and it is important that the constitution and bylaws are kept up to date to reflect the current state of affairs.

Make sure every new member of the organization has a copy of your governing documents. 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 bylaws should be a part of officer training and transition. You should also provide your Campus Sponsor(s) with a copy of your constitution and bylaws.