

Northland College Student Association

HOW TO WRITE A CONSTITUTION

The purpose of a constitution and by-laws is to facilitate the will of the majority with a maximum of efficiency and a minimum of misunderstanding. Every organization should have basic principles and rules or procedure and the constitution merely states these in writing. A constitution has particular value for most student organizations because of the rapid turnover of student officers; the constitution serves as one form of continuity for the organization.

An organization needs a date for elections, a method for filling vacancies, and a limit of the power of the president. The pattern given below is merely a guide for a well-organized constitution and its by-laws. The constitution contains the basic rules of the groups and the by-laws are concerned with procedure rather than basic principles.

Standing rules may be adopted with cover details of a less fundamental sort than the basic principles of the constitution or by-laws. Information concerning the location and the hour of regular meetings are possible examples of a standing rule.

The fundamental requirements of all constitutions are as follows:

CONSTITUTION

Preamble

(states the purposes and aims of the group – one or two paragraphs is adequate)

Article I. Name

(states the name of the organization)

Article II. Membership

(states the requirements and size limitation if any)

Article III. Officers

(contains the list of officers, qualifications for office, responsibilities, method, and time of elections, and their term of office in the group)

Article IV. Executive Committee

(states the make-up of the executive committee (board or council), the method of their selection, and their term of office – provision for vacancies of officers or other executive members may be included in a section under this article)

Article V. Meetings

(states the regular meeting time and provisions for calling special meetings. If meetings cannot be held regularly, authority to call meetings may be stated here)

Article VI. Finance

(states fact that the organization's funds will be handled in a responsible manner – also makes provision for membership dues (if no by-laws) and states procedure for the disbursement of funds and property in the event of dissolution of the organization)

Article VII. Amendment

(requires previous notification, also a two-thirds or three-fourths affirmative vote of those present and voting or those present for its adoption – constitutions should be relatively difficult to amend in order to provide stability (dates or revisions through amendments should be inserted in the section amended))

Article VIII. Advisor

(all student organizations must have a faculty or staff advisor – the procedure for naming her or him should be included here)

Article IX. Ratification

(may or may not be necessary – if more than a majority of those present is desired for ratification, a special article should be included here)

By-Laws

Sections of the by-laws deal with the following:

1. Detailed material concerning members. That is, rights, duties, resignation, and expulsion procedures.
2. Provision for initiation fee, if any. Dues and assessments should be covered here, and details regarding delinquencies.
3. Details of date and method of election officers and duties of the officers. Spring election of officers is recommended because it provides carryover for the following year.
4. Duties, authority, and the responsibilities of the executive committee.
5. The names of the standing committees and the method of choosing chairpersons and committee members. The duties of the committees should also be stated.
6. A provision for some accepted rules of order such as Robert's Rules of Order.
7. The number constituting quorum. Quorum is the percentage of members who must be present in order to conduct business. Fifty percent plus one is common.
8. Provision for honorary members or honorary officers, if the group so desires.
9. A method to amend the by-laws, usually a majority vote. Amending the constitution should not be too simple a process for the sake of stability; it should be possible to amend the by-laws with greater ease. The constitution should always carry the date it was last revised.
10. Definition of "majority" is more than one-half of the total membership or legal votes cast or present.