



# How to Run An Effective Meeting: Creating a Constitution for Your Organization

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Whether you are forming a new organization or are part of an existing association, a written constitution should be part of your strategy for holding effective meetings.

Effective meetings require a plan, good communication and practice. A well-written constitution is part of that plan because it provides consistent instructions for how a group operates.

Most often, a constitution begins by stating a group's purpose, and includes officer duties, how elections or voting take place, when meetings happen and who must be there, dues requirements, changes and amendments to the constitution and bylaws, etc.

The organizational framework can guide current and future leaders through membership disputes and help answer questions, which is why they are important for any organization or group to have in place.

If your group does not currently have a constitution, use the worksheet included in this fact sheet to start the process. Another solution is to contact an organization similar to yours and ask for a copy of their constitution.

Once your group has adopted this document, bring them with you to every meeting and help other members become familiar with what's in it so your future meetings go as smoothly as possible.

## Worksheets Inside:

- Draft Your Constitution

## What is an Organization's Constitution?

**Constitution:** Identifies the organization name, mission, purpose, and basic structure. The Constitution provides the basic structure of an organization.

A group's constitution usually includes:

- The name
- Purpose
- Membership
- Organization
- Meetings
- Quorum
- Amendment Process
- Dates of past amendments

**Use the following pages as a guide to develop your own constitution.**

# Draft a CONSTITUTION

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Use the prompts below to help create your organization's constitution.

This exercise would be best to do as a group rather than as an individual so that the charter members have buy in to the organization.

**Before You Start:**

Each separate and distinct part of the document is called an "Article." Articles are usually labeled using Roman numerals.

Label each segment underneath an Article as a numbered "Section."

You can include as many Articles and Sections as you want in your group's bylaws. You decide the order and the names used for labels.

**Title the document.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Constitution of "Example Organization"*

**ARTICLE I.  
NAME**

The name of this organization shall be \_\_\_\_\_.  
*Enter name of organization*

This organization shall be known as \_\_\_\_\_.  
*Enter name of organization or choose informal name, such as association*

**ARTICLE II.  
PURPOSE**

This Article includes the organization's purpose or mission, which can be a one paragraph statement telling why it was created and the purpose it serves. You could also choose to have multiple sections if you prefer to specify separate and distinct purposes.

**EXAMPLE:**

The purposes of the Association shall be:

Section 1. To promote professional improvement, standards, and performance of its members by: improving communication among members, with administration and other organizations and provide opportunity for liaison with all disciplines.

Section 2. To secure benefits that may not be obtained through individual efforts.

Section 3. To promote esprit de corps among members and throughout the organization.

**Your Turn — Purpose **

1. What is your organization's purpose?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## ARTICLE III. MEMBERSHIP

This Article explains who can be members of your organization as well as the requirements to join. Use this space to explain different levels of membership, who is eligible to vote, and how long memberships are valid. For example, does membership roll over at the end of a calendar year? Consider listing requirements in Sections. Flesh out the details below if applicable for your organization.

The membership of the \_\_\_\_\_ shall be comprised of  
*Enter name of organization*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Enter your requirements here*

- Section 1. Membership composition
- Section 2. Eligibility to be a member
- Section 3. Selection requirements
- Section 4. Membership terms
- Section 5. Membership types/status and affiliation

### Your Turn — Membership

1. Describe who can be a member of your organization:

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2. What will the requirements be to join your organization?

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3. What will membership renewal look like, or length of membership be?

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4. Do you have different levels of membership? If so, what are they?

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## ARTICLE IV. ORGANIZATION

This Article describes the administrative side of the organization. This Article describes the different levels of an organization's leadership, such as: who is eligible, when the positions are elected or appointed, and how long members may fill the roles. (Some organizations limit how many terms a person can serve as an officer.)

**Keep in mind: You can break up this information into multiple Articles, such as Executive Committee, Board of Directors and Committees. Depending on size, some groups may have several vice presidents (First Vice President, Second Vice President), while others have basic officers: president, vice president, secretary and treasurer.**

**Flesh out the details below if applicable for your organization.**

Section 1. Structure (Board of Directors (who makes up the board), Advisory Council (who makes up the council), Executive branches, etc.)

Section 2: Officers (Titles of officers, officer responsibilities).

Section 3. Elections and Appointments (process and time-frame of election, length of service for positions, appointed positions (un-elected))

### Your Turn — Organization

1. Describe the structure your organization will use:

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2. Describe the length of terms for each office:

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3. Will your organization allow members to be re-elected indefinitely?

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## Article V. MEETINGS

**This Article describes how often meetings take place, who is required to attend, how will special meetings be called, who can call a meeting, and any advanced notice membership must receive.**

EXAMPLE:

Section 1. The Association will meet annually and this meeting shall be known as the annual meeting.

Section 2. The Executive Committee shall set the time and place of the annual meeting of \_\_\_\_\_.  
*Enter name of organization*

meetings at least 60 days in advance.

Section 3. Special meetings must be called by the Executive Committee within five (5) days upon delivery of a petition to the president or vice-president signed by at least 25 percent of the membership. Notice of a called meeting shall be provided two weeks before such called meeting.

### Your Turn — Meetings

1. What standing meetings will your organization have and when will they occur?

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## Article VI. QUORUM

This Article states the minimum number of members in attendance required to conduct official business and have items voted on during meetings. If the minimum number of members are not present, no official business can be conducted.

Knowing this, think about your quorum carefully. Some groups use a simple majority in determining their quorum, while others set a specific percentage or a fixed number. Base your quorum on a realistic number of members so you do not handicap your group from taking action. Once the quorum is included in the Constitution, it can only be changed through your amendment process.

**Keep in mind:** You can make quorum a standalone Article or include the information in previous Articles on the makeup and structure of Board of Directors, Officers and Committees.

EXAMPLE:

Section 1. A quorum for annual meetings for the Association shall consist of the current members present provided the membership has been properly notified.

Section 2. A quorum for special meetings for the Association shall consist of the current members present provided the membership has been properly notified.

### Your Turn — Quorum

1. What will your organization's quorum be?

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## ARTICLE VII. AMENDMENT PROCESS

This Article describes how your organization's constitution can be changed in the future – who can request the change, the process used to respond to a requested amendment, the number of votes required to pass amendments, any advanced notice membership must receive, and the time frame for when approved amendments take effect.

**Keep in mind:** Keep track of when your constitution was changed. List every date an amendment was adopted – month, day, year – on the last page of your document. These dates will help members determine whether they have the newest version of the constitution, and help signal the end of the constitution document.

Section 1. Amending the constitution (What is the procedure?)

Section 2. Adoption and ratification (What is the procedure?)

Section 3. Time frame for amendment going into effect (Immediately? 30 days?)

Example:

Adopted Jan. 1, 2010

Amended July 11, 2012

Amended April 2, 2015

Amended June 21, 2017

Amended Nov. 8, 2019

### Your Turn — Amendment Process

1. Describe your organization's process to amend its Constitution:

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2. What will the timeframe be for amendments to take effect?

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## Additional Resources

Prykucki, B. (2017). Ways to Change Your Bylaws Or Constitution. Michigan State University Extension. Retrieved from [https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/ways\\_to\\_change\\_your\\_bylaws\\_or\\_constitution](https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/ways_to_change_your_bylaws_or_constitution)

Creating a Constitution and Bylaws. University of California – Davis Campus. Retrieved from [https://csi.ucdavis.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/creating\\_a\\_constitution\\_and\\_bylaws.pdf](https://csi.ucdavis.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/creating_a_constitution_and_bylaws.pdf)

University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Arkansas Leadership Webpage  
<https://www.uaex.uada.edu/business-communities/leadership/>

## Related Fact Sheets

- How To Run An Effective Meeting: Parliamentary Procedure Basics FSPPC317  
<https://www.uaex.uada.edu/publications/pdf/FSPPC317.pdf>
- How to Run An Effective Meeting: How a Constitution and Bylaws Benefit Your Organization FSPPC322  
<https://www.uaex.uada.edu/publications/pdf/FSPPC322.pdf>
- How to Run An Effective Meeting: How to Draft Bylaws for Your Organization FSPPC324  
<https://www.uaex.uada.edu/publications/pdf/FSPPC324.pdf>

### This fact sheet was adapted from:

How To Write A Constitution and Bylaws. University of Southern Indiana. Retrieved from [https://www.usi.edu/media/959699/how\\_to\\_create\\_your\\_constitution\\_and\\_by-laws.pdf](https://www.usi.edu/media/959699/how_to_create_your_constitution_and_by-laws.pdf)

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The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture's Public Policy Center provides timely, credible, unbiased research, analyses and education on current and emerging public issues. This fact sheet is part of a series – How to Run an Effective Meeting – prepared by Dr. Julie Robinson, associate professor in the Community, Professional & Economic Development unit, and Kristin Higgins, program associate in the Public Policy Center, at the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

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