

How to Write a Constitution

This outline is provided as a framework from which to create a Constitution. The University requires that all recognized organizations have a constitution on file with the Office of Student Activities. Your constitution must include the name, purpose, type of officers, requirements for membership, meetings and parliamentary procedures for your organization. Several of the items in this outline may or may not be applicable to your organization and may be adjusted accordingly. ALL constitutions must be TYPED!

After completing your paper work, date the constitution and submit a copy with your application. Maintain a copy of your constitution. Organizations will not be considered for approval without a constitution. Suggested statements to assist with your constitution preparation appear in parentheses.

The Office of Student Activities is available to advise on the development of constitutions, Blackburn University Center, Suite 117 (202) 806-7000.

Guide to Developing a Constitution PREAMBLE (Optional)

ARTICLE I

➤ Name

✎ The official name of your organization should be one that reflects your scope and focus. (state any acronym to be used in lieu of formal title or name). Statement subordinating organization to University policies and procedures, rules and regulations.

✓ (The name of this organization will be. . .)

ARTICLE II

➤ Statement of Purpose

✎ This statement can be one sentence or several paragraphs, whichever is necessary. State your reason for existing.

✓ (The purpose of this organization will be . . .)

ARTICLE III

➤ History

✎ Be as detailed as possible. The Office of Student Activities refers to this information when completing yearbooks, forms and websites. Your history should include:

- What is the organization's founding date on the local and/or national level?
- Who are the campus charter members?
- Were there any major changes, (i.e. changes in name or structure)?
- Were there any milestones, awards and/or accomplishments?

ARTICLE IV

➤ Board of Directors or Executive Committee (Optional)

- Composition (Who constitutes membership: chairs – How are they chosen?)
- Powers and duties (purpose/function)
- Time of regular meetings and provision for special meetings; advanced written notice should be given
- Quorum requirement (minimum number of members needed to conduct business at a meeting)

ARTICLE V

➤ Officers

✎ Officers should be selected on their leadership abilities. Only create positions necessary to run your organization efficiently. Unnecessary positions will only cause problems.

- Who are the officers and what are the qualifications of the office?
✓ (The organization will have the following officers: President, Vice President, Treasurer, etc.)
- What are the duties of each officer?
✓ (It is the duty of the President to. . .)
- What procedure is to be followed in the event of a vacancy?
- Under what circumstances and in what process will an officer be removed?

ARTICLE VI

➤ Advisors

- ☛ All Student Organizations are required to have at least one on campus advisor. On campus advisors must be current members of Howard University's faculty or staff who agree to mentor student organizations on their purpose and operation throughout the school year. They serve as a liaison between the university and organization interpreting the university's policies and procedures. They are also an integral part of ensuring the organization's success and longevity on Howard University's campus. Securing advisors is the sole responsibility of the organization. The Director of Student Activities must be notified immediately whenever an on-campus or graduate advisor resigns at which time, Howard University's recognition will be suspended until a new on-campus and/or graduate advisor can be secured by the organization.

ARTICLE VII

➤ Membership

- ☛ Membership should be based on ones ability to effectively enhance the scope and focus of your organization.
 - Who is eligible for membership?
 - ✓ **(Membership is open . . .)**
 - Will there be different categories of membership? What are the rights of the members within the different categories?
 - How may one's membership be revoked?

ARTICLE VIII

➤ Committee (If Applicable)

- Types (standing, special)
- Duties (definition/purpose)
- Method of appointment of membership and chairperson

ARTICLE IX

➤ Elections

- ☛ Elections should be conducted at regular intervals and the process should be designated within your constitution. Elections should never be a popularity contest. Voting should occur prior to the last meeting of the academic year to select new officers for the upcoming academic year. Officers must be enrolled at Howard University and in good academic, financial and judicial standing with the university.
 - Method of elections?
 - How often will elections be held?
 - How will vacancies be filled?
 - Who is eligible to run for an office?
 - Term of office (specify from month to month)
 - By what means and how far in advance will elections be announced and/or members notified?

ARTICLE X

➤ Nominations

- What is the nomination process?
- By what means and how far in advance will nominations be announced and/or members notified?
- How will nominations be made?

ARTICLE XI

➤ Finances

- ☛ Assessed dues should be realistic for the scope and focus of your organization and based upon the feasibility of your members to pay. It is recommended that the amount be divided and assessed each semester to avoid complaints from students who are not members both semesters. A fee breakdown should be provided to members to see exactly where funds are applied. It is also **highly** recommended that a budget financial report is made available at meetings, as well as, a copy be given the advisor.
 - Are dues required, if so, how much, how often and to whom are they paid?
 - ✓ **(Dues in the amount of ____, must be paid to the Treasurer by . . .)**
 - Who is responsible for collection and disbursement of funds?
 - Who may authorize expenditures?

ARTICLE XII

➤ Meetings

- ☞ When selecting meeting dates, keep in mind the academic and personal schedules of your members, especially your officers.
 - How often will meetings be held? (**Meetings will be held twice a semester/once a month/etc.**)
 - ✓ (**Emergency meetings can be called . . .**)
 - How will organizational decisions be made?
 - Who is eligible to vote at meetings?
 - What constitutes a quorum at meetings? {a quorum is the absolute number/percentage of voting members required to be in attendance or to vote in order to conduct business}

ARTICLE XIII

➤ Amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws

- ☞ With any organization, change becomes necessary. What worked yesterday, may not necessarily work today. Your organization should have a process in place that allows for changes and updates on all or portions of your constitution.
 - By what procedure will amendments be proposed, etc?
 - How will such an amendment be incorporated into the Constitution? {If by vote, by what majority}
 - Suggestions: Two-thirds majority vote required
 - All revisions must be forwarded to the Office of Student Activities for final approval

ARTICLES XIV

➤ Parliamentary Procedures

- ☞ These procedures are necessary to keep order within your meeting. So that officers will know how to conduct meetings. Parliamentary Procedures ensure that members are familiar with the proper way to propose a motion.
 - What reference will be used in parliamentary instances not covered by the Constitution or Bylaws (**Robert's Rules of Order, Revised will govern in all matters not provided for in the Constitution and Bylaws.**)

ARTICLES XV

➤ Affiliations

- ☞ If your proposed organization has affiliations with a local, state, national or international governing body, that information should be included in your constitution. Also, a copy of the governing body's guidelines, rules, and/or regulations, as they pertain to undergraduate college chapters **MUST** be submitted with your application.
 - What is the affiliation, if any, with local, state, national or international organizations and what is the relationship of the organization to the affiliate?
 - What is the process for continued affiliation?

ARTICLES XVI

➤ Ratification

- ☞ Percentages for ratifications should be realistic and indicative of the number of members typically present at a meeting. Ex: Your Constitution's ratification will go into effect by 2/3 majority of membership when on average you only have 1/2 of your membership present at a general meeting. Your ratification percentage should be based on those actually voting, those who have a right to vote.
 - By what process will the Constitution go into effect?
 - ✓ (**The constitution will go into effect by 2/3 majority vote by members present.**)