

How to Create a Constitution



UMBC organizations are all governed by constitutions that the members of the organizations create and vote into effect. When a new organization is created at UMBC, its members will need to develop a constitution and then submit it to the Office of Student Life. Existing organizations will have their constitution reviewed every three years by the Office of Graduate Student Life.

What is a Constitution?

The Constitution of an organization contains the fundamental principles that govern its operation. The By-Laws establish the specific rules of guidance by which the group is to function.

Why have a Constitution?

The process of writing a constitution will serve to clarify an organization's purpose, delineate basic structures and prove the cornerstone for building an effective group. It will also allow members and potential members to have a better understanding of what the organization is all about and how it functions. Finally, the constitution allows future members to reflect back on the history of the organization and its founding principles.

What should be covered in a Constitution?

Below is an outline of the standard information to be included in a Constitution. The objective is to draft a document that covers these topics in a simple, clear and concise manner.

- Article I. The name of the organization
- Article II. Affiliation with other groups (local, state, national, etc.)
- Article III. Preamble - Purpose, aims, functions of the organization
- Article IV. Membership requirements (how determined, who's eligible, etc.)
- Article V. Elections (when, how, who oversees)
- Article VI. Officers (title, terms of office, duties of office)
- Article VII. Advisor (term of service, how selected)
- Article VIII. Business transactions (quorum, voting rules)
- Article IX. Referendum and recall *(procedures and handling)
- Article X. Financial management
- Article XI. Meetings (how often)
- Article XII. Amendments (means of proposal, notice required, voting requirements)



How to Create By-Laws

The Constitution covers the fundamental principles but does not prescribe specific procedures for operating the organization. By-Laws set forth in detail the procedures the group must follow to conduct business in an orderly manner. They provide further definitions to the Articles of the Constitution and can be changed more easily as needs of the organization change.

What should be included in the By-Laws?

By-Laws should complement provisions stated in the Constitution. They generally contain specific information on the following topics:

- A. Membership (requirements, resignations, expulsion, rights and duties)
- B. Dues (amount and collection procedures, any special fees, when payable)
- C. Duties of Officers (powers, responsibilities, specific job descriptions, procedures for filling unexpired terms of office, removal from office)
- D. Executive Board (structure, composition, powers)
- E. Committees (standing, special, how formed, chairpersons, meetings, powers, duties)
- F. Order of Business (standard agenda for conducting meetings)
- G. Parliamentary Authority (provisions for rules of order, generally Robert Rules of Order-Newly Revised)
- H. Amendment Procedures (means of proposals, notice required, voting requirements)
- I. Other specific policies and procedures unique to your organization necessary for its operation.



Once the organization has documents - what do we do with them?

Remember the reasons for having a Constitution and By-Laws. They articulate the purpose of the organization and spell out the procedures to be followed for its orderly functions. Constitutions usually require a 2/3 vote of the membership for adoption. By-Laws only require a simple majority for passage. Remember, every three years GSA and OGSL will work with the organization to review these documents. The needs of the group will change over time and it's important that the Constitution and By-Laws are kept up to date to reflect the current state of affairs.

Make sure every new member of the organization has a copy of the organization's constitution. This will help to unify the membership 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 By-Laws should be a part of office training and transition.