

Quick Guide for Drafting Your Club Constitution and Bylaws

Whether you've inherited leadership of a student organization, are already a student leader in a chartered club, or want to start your own group, it's important to know exactly what you want out of your club and how your club wants to organize itself. That's why it is important to have the rules your group will run itself by written down so that everyone involved knows what to do and can take part in the life of the group.

Here are the basic expectations:

- I. **Every club at Wake Forest, to help ensure that they are governed smoothly and effectively, must have on file with the Office of Student Engagement up-to-date copies of:**
 - a. **A club constitution, and**
 - b. **Club bylaws**
- II. **Changes to your club constitution MUST be approved by the Office of Student Engagement.**
- III. **Changes to your club bylaws should be discussed with your faculty advisor, and you should let the Office of Student Engagement know about your changes as well.**
- IV. **Both of these documents should be kept in writing, and copies should be made publicly available for club members.**

But what's the difference between these two documents?

1. **Your club constitution forms the basic identity of your student group, and contains the most core and essential rules that shape your organization and define how it functions.**

If your club were a small business, the constitution would be like its articles of incorporation. Your constitution contains the core parts of your club's identity and defines what it does. As such, it should be more difficult to change than other documents related to governing your group—you wouldn't want to have your club change purposes every single year on a whim. You will need to discuss proposed changes to your club constitution with the Office of Student Engagement prior to implementing them, and it's probably a good idea to consult with your faculty advisor as well.

For examples, a club constitution might include the following:

- a. Identifying the name of your club or group.
- b. A statement of purpose identifying what your club does or what interests it seeks to promote.
- c. A statement identifying other clubs or organizations it maintains an affiliation with. (For example, if you want to form a student group that's part of a larger network of similar groups from other schools, you would put that here.)
- d. A basic outline of your group's officers and core leadership structure, including:
 - i. A list of any essential officer positions.

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- ii. Any hard limits you may want to place on the power of club officers.
 - iii. Rules for replacing essential officers if a position becomes vacant.
 - iv. Any rules for impeaching or removing an officer who isn't adequately performing his or her duties, including what constitutes adequate cause for proposing the removal of an officer.
 - e. Rules defining how someone becomes a club member and maintains their membership.
 - f. Rules defining how someone can change club rules, including:
 - i. Rules for how members and officers can propose amendments or changes to your club bylaws (more on this later).
 - ii. Rules for how members and officers can propose changes to your club constitution (pending OSE approval).
 - iii. Rules defining who can approve of changes to the bylaws. (For example, can officers independently change some things, or does everything have to be put to a club-wide vote?)
 - g. Any other parts that might be required by the Office of Student Engagement or other rules implemented by Wake Forest University.
2. **Your bylaws contain those operating rules that enable your officers and members to go about the day-to-day business of the group.**

The rules contained in your bylaws put into action the principles and guidelines outlined in the club's constitution. Again, this is comparable to what your bylaws would do if your club was a small business. Bylaws can be a bit more fluid and change more easily—after all, how you run things may need to change from time to time based on the people available, immediate goals, or the resources you have available.

However, just because they are more flexible doesn't mean that your bylaws are less important. They should still be in writing, and they should be approved by whatever rules you set up in your constitution so that everyone is on the same page. Additionally, you should still consult with your faculty advisor when a change is proposed, as they will help you think through what consequences the change might have and what other administrative issues you might need to address as a result of that change.

For example, you may want to include the following kinds of elements in your bylaws:

- a. Rules defining club meetings, including:
 - i. What happens at meetings,
 - ii. How frequently they should occur,
 - iii. How attendance is taken for meetings (if attendance is required or suggested as a part of group membership),
 - iv. How long meetings should be, and
 - v. Anything else you may feel is important.
- b. Rules defining the roles and powers of the essential club officers (within the limits set by your constitution).

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- c. Rules creating other temporary or nonessential officer positions, and describing their responsibilities and powers (within the limits set by your constitution for all officers).
- d. Rules defining how someone might want to impeach or remove officers if those officers aren't doing their jobs.
- e. Rules outlining any major events the group may want to host, and breaking down expectations for those events.
- f. Rules governing how to manage and conduct club elections or votes, including:
 - i. How someone can propose a vote on a particular issue.
 - ii. How to conduct the vote (online, in-person voting, paper vote, etc.).
 - iii. How to verify and count the results.
- g. Identifying your Faculty Advisor.

Remember: these guidelines are meant to give you an idea of how to get started. Your own club may have different needs that aren't fully represented here. If that's the case, you are welcome to vary your own constitution and bylaws within these rules to make your own group's rules work for you!

Drafting Tips and Guidelines:

1. **Use a structure that makes sense to you and your group!** So long as it is clearly organized and understandable to an outside reader, there is some flexibility in how you can format your constitution and bylaws.
2. **Be clear and precise with language!** Using vague or imprecise wording won't make your constitution and bylaws useful for anyone in the future.
3. **ALWAYS define things in terms of officers' titles, not actual peoples' names.** Constitutions and bylaws are meant to last beyond the life of any individual person; therefore, always refer to responsibilities, powers, and tasks in terms of the officer position that the task may be related to.
4. **It's better to be over-inclusive than under-inclusive.** There are a LOT of things that can happen in the life of a student group, and it never hurts to be prepared by having rules in place for a lot of contingencies. When you are drafting your constitution and bylaws, be sure to think through things that reasonably could come up, and craft bylaws or provisions in your club constitution that address those issues.
5. **Don't cripple future leadership with overly burdensome rules.** While it is important to make rules that adequately cover possible issues, it's not good to over-regulate and create a huge bureaucracy either. You want your group to be able to thrive, and finding the right balance between healthy rules and the freedom to operate.
6. **If you're not sure where something should go, ask for help!** Your faculty advisor and the staff in the Office of Student Engagement are both here to help you walk through this process, and you should feel comfortable reaching out to them if you need the support!