

CREATING A CONSTITUTION

FOR REGISTERED STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS



Leadership and Service Center

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

WHAT IS A CONSTITUTION?



A constitution is a governing document that contains the rules and regulations for an organization. It details exactly how the organization is to be run and how it is structured. A well-written and thought-out constitution is the basis for a functioning organization, and it is strongly encouraged by the Leadership and Service Center for Registered Student Organizations.

This guide has been provided by the Leadership and Service Center to assist student organizations in creating a constitution that meets the standards for recognized student organizations at the University of South Carolina. It is organized like a constitution and student organizations are encouraged to adapt this sample constitution to the unique needs and purposes of their organization while retaining the required elements.

IMPORTANT NOTES

As you navigate the information below, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Any text in GARNET MUST BE in your constitution word for word.
- Any text in GREEN MUST BE included in your constitution, but the organization defines it.
- Any articles/sections in BLUE MUST BE included in your constitution. You can reorder and reword them, but the content within those sections must be present within the constitution.
- Any articles/sections in BLACK are not required, but we encourage you to use them in your constitution if it applies to the organization as well as examples of text you may want to consider using in your constitution.

SAMPLE CONSTITUTION OUTLINE

**Below is a sample outline of a constitution.
The following pages will include specific requirements for each section.**

Article I - Name & Purpose

- [Section 1. Name](#)
- [Section 2. Purpose](#)
- [Section 3. Affiliations](#)

Article II - Membership

- [Section 1. Eligibility/Becoming a Member](#)
- [Section 2. Active Member Definition](#)
- [Section 3. Member Removal Process](#)

Article III - Organizational Structure

- [Section 1. Executive Board](#)
 - i. Qualifications
 - ii. Election Process
 - iii. Duties
 - iv. Resignation/Impeachment
- [Section 2. Committees](#)
 - i. Committee Chair Qualifications
 - ii. Election/Selection of Committee Chairs
 - iii. Duties of Committees
 - iv. Resignation/Impeachment

Article IV - Meetings

- [Section 1. Types and Occurrence of Meetings](#)
- [Section 2. Quorum](#)
- [Section 3. Basic Meeting Agenda/Procedures](#)

Article V - Funding

- [Section 1. Dues/Funding Resources](#)

Article VI - Amendments

- [Section 1. Amendment Proposal](#)

Article VII - Ratification

- [Section 1. Ratification Process](#)

SAMPLE CONSTITUTION TEMPLATE

Article I - Name and Purpose

Section 1. Name

This section should describe the name of the organization and any other acronyms or names you go by. Here's an example:

- The name of this organization shall be [organization name], a Registered Student Organization located at the University of South Carolina, hereinafter referred to as [acronym/short name].

NOTE: If the organization will not use an acronym, you do not need to include the "hereinafter" phrase.

Section 2. Purpose

In this section, you should list the organization's objectives, purpose, mission, vision, and values. In other words, this section should encompass what the organization is about and what you'll do. Here's an example:

- The purpose of [organization name] shall be to [list what you intend to do, your mission, etc.]. Our [mission/goal] is to [list mission/goal].

Section 3. Affiliations

If the organization is affiliated with a national or international organization, you can use this section to detail that affiliation and any requirements you must meet in order to keep this affiliation. Here's an example:

- [organization name] is affiliated with the [national/international] organization [list affiliated organization's full name]. As part of this affiliation, our student organization agrees to abide by all [list affiliated organization's full name] by-laws and [list any other requirements here].

Article II - Membership

Section 1. Eligibility/Becoming a Member

In this section, the organization is required to include the following phrases word-for-word.

- Membership in [organization name] shall be limited to persons officially connected with the University of South Carolina-Columbia as faculty, staff, or students. Students enrolled in the spring semester under the above conditions who have pre-registered for the fall semester, as well as students enrolled in summer classes, are eligible for summer membership.
- [organization name], as a registered student organization at the University of South Carolina, agrees to abide by the university's nondiscrimination policy.
- [organization name], as a registered student organization at the University of South Carolina, will not engage in any activities that are classified as hazing under the university's hazing policy.
- To view updated University Policies, refer to the [Policies and Procedures Manual](#) on the USC website.

The organization should also use this section to describe who is eligible to become a member of the organization and describe the process of how new members join the organization. Here are some examples:

- Membership in [organization name] shall be open to all students who have a 3.0 GPA and have submitted the new member application. Active membership shall be granted upon approval of their application and after attending a new member meeting.
- To become a member of [organization name] you must attend a meeting and pay dues.
- To express interest in joining [organization name], students must attend a new member meeting and attend tryouts. Upon the completion of tryouts, membership will be extended to selected individuals based on the number of spots available for this year. Eligible students must accept membership via a signed statement that says they accept membership and will complete all active member requirements.

Section 2. Active Member Definition

The organization should use this section to describe and define an active member. At a minimum, what are your members required to do to stay members? Is it someone who pays dues? Someone who attends a certain percentage of meetings/events? Both? Other?

The required wording is: **To maintain active membership within [organization name], members must, in addition to the above requirements, [list the requirements for membership here].**

Here are some examples of an active membership clause:

- To maintain active membership within [organization name], members must, in addition to the above requirements, attend 50% of practices each semester and pay annual dues.
- To maintain active membership within [organization name], members must, in addition to the above requirements, attend 60% of regularly scheduled meetings and serve on at least one committee.
- To maintain active membership within [organization name], members must, in addition to the above requirements:
 - maintain a 3.0 GPA
 - attend 40% of meetings
 - attend at least 1 social/service program each semester
 - pay semester chapter and national dues

Section 3. Member Removal Process

This section is necessary and should explain when membership ends and what the grounds are for taking disciplinary action and removing a member from membership, outline the process, who administers the process, and the possible results of disciplinary action. Here's an example:

- If an active member fails to meet active membership requirements or graduates from the university, their membership with the organization will automatically end. An active member can also be removed from the organization for [list reasons here, reasons could be breaking university policies, malfeasance, etc.].

- To remove a member from the organization, a written request stating the reasons for dismissal signed by at least three (3) active members must be submitted at a regularly scheduled meeting. Before the next regularly scheduled meeting, written notification of the request and the reasons for dismissal must have been given to the offending member, who should come to that regular meeting prepared to address the accusations. A two-thirds (2/3) affirmative vote of all active members present is required to remove the member from the organization.

Article III - Organizational Structure

Section 1. Executive Board

This section should describe the structure of the executive board, requirements, elections, etc. Everything and anything related to your executive board should be here. Please remember that all organizations are required to have at least two officers.

To start off the section we recommend using this space to describe the structure/hierarchy of the organization and all the leaders within the executive board. Here's an example:

- The elected leaders of [organization name] shall consist of [position 1], [position 2], [position 3] and [position 4]. Collectively they will be known as the Executive Board.

i. Qualifications

In this portion, the organization is required to include the following phrase word for word:

- Any student seeking to hold or holding a position in a student organization must maintain the cumulative GPA requirement for graduation, maintain at least part-time enrollment status, and remain in good standing in their respective college.

Here you should also list any other qualifications required to be part of the executive board. Here are some examples:

- All members seeking to be part of the Executive Board of [organization name] must have a 3.0 GPA and have been part of the organization as an active member for at least one semester.
- All members seeking to be part of the Executive Board of [organization name] must have been a part of the organization as an active member for at least one semester. If applying for [insert specific role here, an example could be President], you must have served in another leadership role within the organization for at least one term.

ii. Election Process

In this section, the organization is required to describe the process for electing its executive board. This process should be as detailed and clear as possible to ensure consistency within your election process from year to year. The election process must involve active members and be democratic in nature. Here are some examples:

- The Executive Board shall be elected on the 1st week of April and serve one-year terms. Candidates for a position must be nominated by another active member during the meeting before elections occur. Quorum shall be reached for all meetings where officer nominations or elections take place. Only active members in attendance are eligible to vote. All officers shall be elected by a majority of the votes cast. If no candidate for an office receives a majority of the votes cast, then only the top two candidates will be placed on a second ballot for that office until a majority is reached.
- All elections shall be conducted by secret ballot. The ballots shall be tabulated by any two current Executive Board members not running for a position (if no Executive Board members meet this criteria, a non-candidate member may tabulate the votes).

- The Executive Board shall be elected at the second meeting of the spring semester. Candidates must be nominated for a position either by another member or themselves at the meeting before elections or via email to the Vice President. Nominated candidates must accept their nomination at least two days before the election. During the election meeting, each candidate will have five minutes to speak and explain their platform and why they should be elected to the role. Active members will then have three to five minutes to ask each candidate questions related to their platform and eligibility for the role. After each candidate has spoken, voting will be opened online and active members have 48 hours after the meeting to vote. The candidate with the most votes for each position wins. In the case of a tie, the current President will cast the tie-breaking vote.

iii. Duties

Use this segment to describe the duties of all leaders of the executive board and then the duties of each position/leadership role. The organization should also detail how long their term is (is it 1 semester, a year, etc.). Here is an example:

- All leaders of the executive board will serve one-year terms. During their term, all executive board leaders must [examples of duties could include: attend all executive board meetings and general meetings unless excused by the executive board, maintain a certain GPA throughout their term in office, attend all organization events unless excused by the executive board, etc.].

Here's an example of what this could look like for some frequently listed positions in constitutions:

- Each executive board leader must also complete the duties of their roles listed below:
 - The [leader role] shall [list all duties of role].
 - The [second leader role] shall [list all duties of role]

iv. Resignation/Impeachment

In this portion, the organization should detail what happens if a leader on the executive board needs to resign or be removed from office. Sample language includes:

- If an Executive Board leader wishes to resign from their position, they must submit a written statement to the President resigning from their role and include the effective date.
- An Executive Board leader whose dereliction of duty adversely affects the operations of the organization shall be subject to disciplinary action or removal from office.
- A written request stating the reasons for dismissal, signed by at least three (3) active members of the organization must be submitted at a regularly scheduled meeting. Before the next regularly scheduled meeting, written notification of the request and the reasons for dismissal must have been given to the offending Executive Board leader, who should come to that regular meeting prepared to speak. A two-thirds (2/3) affirmative vote of all active members present is required to remove the executive board member from office.

Sample language for filling any vacancies that arise:

- Should any vacancies in the Executive Board arise, the President will assume the duties of that role until the end of their term. If the President position becomes vacant, the Vice President will assume the role until the end of their term.
- Should any vacancies in the Executive Board arise, a special emergency election following our organization's election process will be held to fill that position.

Section 2. Committees

If your organization has committees, please include the following section. In this section, list committees, their functions, how chairpersons for each committee are selected, and how members are designated to serve on a committee. If committees are not part of the organization, you do not need to include this section.

Here is an example of some introductory text to this section: [organization name] will have [number] committees to include [list committees, some common examples include membership, programming, service, social, fundraising, marketing, etc. committees]. All members will be assigned to serve on a committee based on interest and availability.

i. Committee Chair Qualifications

Committees could be chaired by executive board members or by appointed chair positions. If you have chairs of committees that are not the executive board, you should include the following language in this section: Any student seeking to hold or holding a position in a student organization must maintain the cumulative GPA requirement for graduation and remain in good standing in their respective college. Any other qualifications required to head a committee should also be included.

For example: To serve as committee chair you must have served as a member of that committee for at least 1 semester.

ii. Election/Selection Process of Committee Chairs

Unlike Executive Board leaders, chairs and other leaders of the organization do not need to be elected. However, we still recommend you design a fair and democratic process to create buy-in for your members. Please detail that process here. Make sure to include the who, what, where, when, and how.

iii. Duties of Committees and Committee Chairs

In this portion, list what each committee is in charge of and detail what the duties of each chairperson are.

iv. Resignation/Impeachment

In this portion, the organization should detail what happens if a chair needs to resign or be removed from office. We recommend something similar to the executive board removal process.

Article IV - Meetings

Section 1. Types and Occurrence of Meetings

This section should describe what types of meetings you have, when and how meetings occur, notification of meetings, etc. Here are some examples:

- Regular meetings shall be held [weekly, bi-weekly, at least once a month] during the school year at a time set by the organization at the start of each semester. The first meeting of the semester shall be held within two weeks after classes start.
- General meetings shall be held [weekly, bi-weekly, at least once a month] with additional meetings (i.e. special meetings) called by the Executive Board as needed. The first meeting of each semester will be held during the second week of classes. Written notification for all meetings will be given to active members at least one week in advance.

Section 2. Quorum

All constitutions should have a statement that defines quorum for the organization. The required wording is: **Action on any business, old or new, requires a quorum of [percent/fraction] of the active membership of the organization.** Some examples of a quorum clause could be:

- Action on any business, old or new, requires a quorum of 2/3 of the active membership of the organization.
- Action on any business, old or new, requires a quorum of a majority (50% + 1) of the active membership of the organization and 2/3 of the Executive Board.

NOTE: Quorum must consist of at least your active members and be at least half or greater.

Section 3. Basic Meeting Agenda/Procedures

This section should detail a sample meeting agenda and your general procedures for meetings. It's not required to include this in the constitution, but it is highly encouraged. Here's an example:

- The meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the revised edition of Robert's Rules of Order. The basic agenda at regular meetings shall be as follows:
 - A. Call to order
 - B. Roll call
 - C. Approval of minutes
 - D. Executive committee report
 - E. Officer reports
 - F. Committee reports
 - G. Old business
 - H. New business
 - I. Announcements
 - J. Adjournment

Article V - Funding

Section 1. Dues/Funding Resources

Within this section, the organization should detail how it will fund itself. Will it collect dues, fundraise, apply for funding?

If dues will be charged, an example phrase could be:

- Dues shall be charged for membership in [organization name] on a [semesterly/yearly/quarterly] basis. The amount of dues charged for each [semester/year/quarter] shall be determined at the first meeting of the fall semester. Membership dues can be paid during any semester and shall be collected by the [position who receives dues]. The [position who receives dues] must receive payment of dues within one month of the first day of class of each [semester/academic year/quarter] to be an active member of [organization name].

If the organization plans to fundraise, here's an example:

- [organization name] shall, as it deems necessary, undertake fundraisers for its own purposes. All fundraising shall be conducted in accordance with university policies.

If you plan to request Student Activity Fee Funding from Student Government, here's an example:

- [organization name] may finance its activities by applying for Student Activity Fee funds from Student Government (or their designee) after [organization name] has been recognized as a student organization by the Leadership and Service Center.

Article VI - Amendments

Section 1. Amendment Proposal

In this section, you should detail who can propose an amendment to the constitution and how. Here are some examples:

- This constitution is binding to all members of [organization name] but is not binding unto itself. Amendments to the constitution must be proposed in writing by any active member of [organization name] at any regular meeting at which two-thirds (2/3) of the active members are present.
- This constitution is binding to all members of [organization name] but is not binding unto itself. Amendments to the constitution may be proposed to the Executive Board in writing and must be backed by at least three active members.

Article VII - Ratification

Section 1. Ratification Process

This section should detail how an amendment is ratified. Active membership must be involved in this process (it cannot just be your executive board). Here are some examples:

- Proposed amendments shall be voted upon after two regular meetings following the introduction of the proposal. Proposed amendments will become effective following a three-fourths (3/4) affirmative vote of the active members.
- The Executive Board will present the proposed amendment at the next regularly scheduled meeting. The amendment will be read aloud to the organization and debated. To pass an amendment to this constitution, it must be approved by a two-thirds vote of active members present.

The constitution must include the following ratification clause word for word:

- [organization name], as a registered student organization at the University of South Carolina, agrees to abide by the guidelines set forth in this constitution, all university policies as well as local, state, and federal law.

Signature: _____

Ratification Date: _____

Note: you can add more than one signature. You can have your Executive Board, all your members, etc. sign it if you would like. However, there must be at least one signature as well as the ratification date.

Congratulations on the organization's new constitution! Here are a few final notes:

- Remember that you may add more to your constitution than what is listed in this guide. This sample mainly focuses on the minimum pieces required for a constitution, but you may include more as the organization deems fit for your purpose.
- Also remember that if you're having trouble writing the organization's constitution, we recommend setting up a meeting with a staff member from the Leadership and Service Center to read and review your proposed constitution.
- Visit the Leadership and Service Center website: sc.edu/lsc to connect with staff for assistance.