

How to Write a Student Organization Constitution

What is a Constitution?

A constitution contains the fundamental principles that outline the purpose, structure, and limits of an organization. Essentially, the constitution provides a foundation and a set of rules that will help to ensure the smooth operation of your organization.

Why should we have a Constitution?

Every recognized student organization at Davidson County Community College is required to file a current copy of their constitution with the Student Life Director. An updated copy should be filed promptly if the document changes during the year. Your constitution serves an important purpose for your organization. The process of writing a constitution should help to:

- Clarify your purpose
- Outline your basic structure
- Provide the cornerstone for building an effective group
- Allow members and potential members to have a better understanding of what the organization is all about and how it functions.

Constitutions may seem like a burden to create, but they are really not that hard. If you keep in mind the value of having a written document that clearly describes the basic framework of your organization, the drafting of a constitution will be a much easier and more rewarding experience.

What should we include in our Constitution?

A constitution should provide the structure for an organization, describe its purpose, and define the duties and responsibilities of the officers. The following is a list of items that *must* be included in your constitution as well as sample wording you may use.

- 1. Name of Organization:** The name of this organization shall be . . .
- 2. Purpose:** The most important part of any constitution is its purpose statement. Why does the organization exist? The purpose statement can also serve as a mission statement that can guide the work of your members.
- 3. Membership Requirements:** These are the specific requirements and responsibilities that are necessary for one to be eligible to join the organization.

Some questions to consider:

Who is eligible for membership?

Will there be different categories of membership?

What are the rights of the different members?

How can a member be removed (GPA, non-attendance, etc)?

Example:

Article III - Membership

Membership in this organization is open to all DCCC students and will not be restricted

on the basis of age, disability, ethnicity, gender, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation or political affiliation. Students in good standing with the College (at least a 2.0 cumulative GPA and no disciplinary issues) are eligible for membership after attending or participating in an organization event/meeting.

As a member, one is required to attend organization meetings regularly, pay dues if required, and actively support organization projects. Membership will be revoked by $\frac{1}{2}$ votes of officers plus $\frac{3}{4}$ votes from the general membership if actions are deemed inappropriate by the membership.

- 4. Officers:** All officers must be currently enrolled students at Davidson County Community College and registered for at least six credits. The constitution should state how to become an officer, the various titles to be held, the selection process for these positions and a specific listing of each officer's duties.

Some questions to consider:

Who are the officers and who may qualify for each office?

What are the duties of each officer?

What procedure is to be followed in the event of a vacancy?

How may an officer be removed?

Example:

Article IV- Officers

Election of officers will require a majority vote from the general membership. If a candidate fails to receive a majority of votes, a run-off election will be held within the top two candidates that received the most votes. Members interested in becoming an officer must meet the following academic requirement: 2.0 cumulative G.P.A. The term of office will be one full year. The Executive Board of this organization is comprised of all recognized officers. The Executive Board shall meet in addition to regular organization meetings. The Executive Board shall appoint committees if they are needed to carry out organization goals.

Officers may be removed from office by $\frac{1}{2}$ votes of the other officers and $\frac{3}{4}$ of the general membership if actions are deemed inappropriate by membership. The officer is permitted to speak before the Executive Board and the general membership about the charges made concerning his or her performance. The officer is not permitted to participate in the deliberation of the Executive Board regarding the charges.

- 5. Elections/Voting:** Every organization must have a standardized procedure for voting and elections in order to ensure continuity from year to year. Include eligibility, nomination and election process, and process for impeachment and replacement of officers in the procedure. The constitution should state how various decisions are made in the group and what type of vote is required to enact decisions. For example, *Decisions of the club shall be enacted by a majority vote, consisting of 50% of the voting membership. A vote of member impeachment will be enacted by a 2/3 majority vote of the voting membership.*

Some questions to consider:

How often are elections to be held?

How are nominations to be made?

Who is eligible to run for an office?

How is an election to be determined?

By what means and how far in advance will nominations and/or elections be announced and/or members notified?

Example:

Article V-Elections

Elections are held once a year, one month prior to the conclusion of the academic year. Nominations are to precede Elections by two weeks. Any member that has been active with the organization for one or more semesters can run for office. Through a majority vote, a person can be elected into office. Members must be notified at least six weeks prior to the nomination period to prepare.

6. **Meeting Procedure:** The constitution should state when regular meetings are held and how to call special meetings. In order to conduct orderly meetings where all pertinent business within your organization gets addressed a procedure for conducting business should be established. Be sure to establish a quorum number for indicating the number of members required to be present prior to being able to conduct business.

Some questions to consider:

How often will meetings be held?

How will members be notified of such meetings?

How will organizational decisions be made?

Who is eligible to vote at meetings?

What constitutes a quorum at meetings (or elections)? (A quorum is the absolute number of members or the percentage of members, usually voting members, required to be in attendance or to vote in order to conduct business)

Example:

Article VI – Meetings

The organization shall hold regular meetings during the academic term except when holidays, examination periods or other events make meetings impractical. Organization meeting day / time will be determined in the beginning of each semester by a $\frac{3}{4}$ vote of the general membership. Attendance at organization meetings is expected. If a member must miss a meeting, correspondence with the secretary is appreciated. A quorum shall consist of a simple majority of the membership plus one officer. Robert's Rules of Order shall govern all meetings.

7. **Finances:**

Some questions to consider for this section include:

Will dues be required and if so, how much, how often, and to who are they paid?

Who is responsible for collection and disbursement of funds?

Who may authorize expenditures?

Example:

Article VI I- Finances

The organization may establish reasonable dues that must be paid by all members. The amount of the dues will be determined in the beginning of the academic year by the Executive Committee and presented to the general membership for a $\frac{3}{4}$ vote. Dues must be paid by (enter week in semester). The treasurer shall maintain all financial records and shall co-sign with the president and advisor for all organization transactions. All financial accounts shall be established through the Business Office.

- 8. Committees (Optional):** Most organizations work through a committee system. In this article the standing and ad hoc committees should be described and their functions outlined. If you don't know which committees you will have, then via an article, grant the authority to develop them.
- 9. Advisor (Optional):**
Some questions to consider for this section:
What is her/his role in the organization?
How is she/he selected?

Example:

Article IX - Advisor

The advisor shall be a full-time or part-time faculty or staff member at Davidson County Community College. The advisor will assume the responsibilities outlined in this constitution. The advisor will be selected by a $\frac{1}{2}$ vote of the Executive Board and then presented to the general membership for a $\frac{3}{4}$ vote. Advisors not fulfilling responsibilities or not abiding by the organization's purpose may be removed from the position by a $\frac{1}{2}$ vote of the Executive Board.

- 10. Authority/Supremacy:** All student organizations are subject to the policies and procedures of Davidson County Community College. Your constitution needs to include a statement about your group's responsibility to operate in accordance with these policies.
- 11. Amendments:** As your organization evolves, certain parts of your constitution will need to change and evolve with it. That is why a procedure for amendment needs to be included in every constitution.
Some questions to consider:
By what procedure will amendments be proposed, discussed, etc.?
How will such an amendment be incorporated into the Constitution? If by a vote, by what majority?

Example:

Article XI- Amendments

Amendments to this constitution must be submitted in writing at a regular meeting of the organization. Said amendments will be voted on at a subsequent meeting. In order to adopt the amendment, a vote of $\frac{3}{4}$ of the general membership is required.

12. Ratification: Before a constitution can be fully utilized by an organization, it must have the support of the full membership. Thus, the membership must vote on passage of the constitution. The constitution must include the date it was ratified (adopted by the organization).

A question to consider: By what process will the Constitution go into effect?

Example:

Article XII - Ratification

This constitution shall become effective upon approval by a $\frac{3}{4}$ vote of the membership on this day September 30, 2010.

Adapted from:

** Guidelines for Student Organizations, 1996-1997. The Center for Student Involvement and Leadership, Appalachian State University.*

**How to Write a Student Organization Constitution, 2009. Southern New Hampshire University*