



Constitution Writing Guide – Office of Student Activities

This Constitution Writing Guide assists student organizations at Syracuse University with writing or revising their constitution. Student organizations may govern and structure themselves in anyway deemed appropriate as long as it does not violate University policy. Articles may vary from this guide but should follow the same basic structure. Organizations will have varying requirements for membership, officer positions, and committees so these guidelines are intentionally general and may need to be adjusted for specific student organizations.

All asterisked statements must be included in the Constitution as written here.

Article I. Introduction This article is meant to provide an introduction and overview of the organization. It sets the context for which the rest of the Constitution is interpreted and read. This section of the Constitution is vital because it provides an understanding of what and who the organization is. The sections generally included in this article are name, mission statement, and objectives.

Section I: Name This section states the name of the organization, along with any acronyms and nicknames the organization uses to identify itself. Use of acronyms or nicknames are optional. If the organization wishes to refer to itself using an acronym or nickname throughout the Constitution for short, it must be stated here.

Example: “The name of this organization shall be (name of organization), hereinafter referred to as (shortened name of the organization).”

Point of Importance: A registered student organization may only use ‘Syracuse University’ at the end of the organization name in order to describe the location of the organization. For instance, an organization cannot use the name “Syracuse University Jumping Jack Club.” Rather, the group can use “Jumping Jack Club at Syracuse University.”

Section II: Mission Statement The mission statement should encompass the organization’s overarching purpose. This statement is used to make decisions related to what are appropriate (and inappropriate) spheres of activity for the organization to be engaged in. The statement should be broad enough to allow for flexibility within the organization in how it fulfills its mission, but specific enough to convey they uniqueness and purpose of the organization.

Example: “The mission of this organization shall be...”

Points of Consideration:

- What is the overarching purpose of the organization?
- What is the intended impact of the organization on the SU/ESF community?
- What services will the organization provide and to whom?

Section III: Objectives Objectives are specific concepts, ideas, or issues that provide tangible examples of what the organization does to achieve its mission. Objectives should be written as action statements (“to...”).

Example: “To provide excellent resources and support for constitutional writing and revision.”

Article II. Organizational Structure This article is a detailed description of the organizational structure. The description provides an opportunity to define responsibilities of the executive board/officers. This allows for current and future members to understand the roles of executive board positions and provides an ability to create a culture of accountability within the organization.

Section I: Executive Board This section details the executive board positions and their respective duties/responsibilities. When drafting this section, it can be either in bullet phrases/sentences (numbered or lettered) or in paragraph form. The different responsibilities should be general, yet specific enough to allow for understanding of the positions.

A. List of Executive Board Positions and General Responsibilities

Points of Consideration:

- Allow for flexibility for the person assuming the position to make it their own (i.e. do not state how a person should complete a responsibility because each person has their own methods that are most effective for them).
- According to the Office of Student Activities Registered Student Organization Handbook, “the Office of Student Activities **maintains** Student Association (SA) allocated funds, miscellaneous funds, gift accounts, and organization’s fundraising account.” Please keep this in mind when drafting the description of the Fiscal Agent/Treasurer’s responsibilities.

B. Qualifications of Becoming an Officer

Points of Consideration:

- Who is eligible to hold an E-Board position?
 - Only ESF/SU students can hold executive board positions.
 - GPA Requirement – 2.0 for Executive Board and 2.2 for President
- Are there specific skills and/or relevant experience desired or required to be eligible to hold an officer position?

C. Terms of Office

Points of Consideration:

- Specify time frame of holding a position (e.g. quarter, academic year, etc.)
- Officer Transitions: When are elections held? When does the officer transition or officer training occur? When do officers assume their positions?
 - Suggestion: Elect officers in March. Use the rest of the semester to train and transition new executive board members. Have the new board officially take office May 1. Having a period of overlap where the old board can help train/guide the new board will help with transition.
- Make sure terms of office are consistent with election/selection processes.

D. Procedure for Filling Vacated Offices

Points of Consideration:

- Are specific elections held?
- Does the current E-Board move up in positions?
- Are appointments to positions made or are interviews coordinated?

Section II: Committees This section should be used to describe committees within the organization. The description should provide an overview of what the role/purpose of each committee is within the organization. *Note: Committees will vary according to the purpose and activities of the organization. Not all organizations will have committees. Those listed below are meant to serve as a guideline.*

A. Types of Committees

Points of Consideration:

- State the names, purposes, and responsibilities of the various standing committees (i.e. executive board, publicity, fundraising, etc.)
- How are members selected for each committee?
- How is the head of the committee chosen?
 - Does an E-Board member oversee each committee? Can any organization member head a committee?

B. Temporary/Special Committees

Points of Consideration:

- How and when are such committees formed?
- What are the purposes and responsibilities of special committees?
- What is the duration of a temporary or special committee?

Section III: Advisor The advisor is a person who is selected by the organization to provide guidance and advice in the operations of the organization and acts as a resource for the organization. Advisors are educators outside of the classroom and serve a variety of roles within the organization (i.e. mentor, teacher, leader, and follower). The advice of the advisor to the organization should be welcomed and viewed as valuable, but the decision making and goal setting for the organization should remain in the hands of the student membership.

A. Selection of Advisor

Points of Consideration:

- How an advisor is selected (i.e. election, appointment, or selection)
- How is a pool of advisor candidates developed?

B. Qualifications

Point of Consideration:

- Are there any specific criteria for selecting an advisor?

C. Terms of Office

Points of Consideration:

- How long of a term does/can the advisor serve?
- Some organizations keep their advisors for long periods of time, while other organizations choose to change their advisor more regularly. Please consider when, if ever, the organization would want to review the advisor's status/role within the organization. Also consider what the process of finding a new advisor would be.

D. Roles and Duties of an Advisor

Points of Consideration:

- What are the responsibilities of the advisor?

- What is the organization's expectations for the involvement of the advisor?

Section IV: Organization Consultant All registered student organizations are assigned an organization consultant through the Office of Student Activities. The Office of Student Activities reserves the right to assign and change the organization's assigned organization consultant. The consultant will be a professional staff member out of the Office of Student Activities and will act as a resource and guide to the organization in the program planning process.

Point of Consideration:

- This section must be in the organization's completed Constitution.

Article III. Membership This article outlines the requirements and expectations for membership in the organization. It typically includes three levels of eligibility: general membership, committee membership, and executive board/office membership. These sections detail the initial requirements to be eligible for participation.

Section I: Membership Eligibility This section outlines who membership of the organization is open to (students, staff, faculty, community members, etc.) and the requirements/expectations for eligibility (GPA, major, etc.).

Points of Consideration:

- Who is eligible for membership?
- Are there any specific qualifications needed or criteria that must be met to be a member? (e.g. minimum GPA requirement, dues, etc.)
- Organizations may, at their discretion, also include in its membership other members of the Syracuse University and SUNY ESF community, including faculty, staff, and community members.
 - These individuals will be known as *associate members*.
 - Associate members may attend meetings, speak at meetings as members of the audience, and assist with program events under the supervision of an active member.
 - Associate members may not hold office, vote, or otherwise conduct official organizational business, nor solicit funds on behalf of the organization.

Section II: Executive Board Eligibility This section outlines who is able to hold an executive board position and the requirements/expectations to be eligible.

Section III: Committee Eligibility This section outlines who committee involvement is open to and the requirements/expectations to participate.

Section IV: Executive Board Resignation This section discusses the timeline and process for an executive board member to resign their position.

Article IV. Executive Board Election/Selection Process This article outlines and details the process and procedures for electing/selecting executive board positions. There are various methods to selecting officers or executive board positions, which can include: selection committee and interview, nomination and vote, or appointment. The elements contained within this article depend upon the method the organization decides to utilize. What should be stated in this section is: who oversees the process; requirements to enter the selection process; how the process operates; how a new officer/executive board member is affirmed or selected; and when their term begins and ends (recommended May 1 through May 1).

Section I: Time and Period When Selection Occurs

Points of Consideration:

- How often and what time of year is selection held?
- Are there any special elections?
- What is the training/transition process?

Section II: Nominations

Points of Consideration:

- How are nominations made?
- Are self-nominations allowed?
- Is an application process required for nomination?
- Does a nomination committee exist that monitors the nomination process?

Section III: Election Procedures

Points of Consideration:

- What is the specific procedure followed for elections?
- Who is eligible to vote?
- How are votes made – secret ballot, hand or verbal vote?
- What number or percentage of members or quorum is necessary for elections to be complete (e.g. 2/3rds of the member body, etc.)?
- How many members need to be present in order to hold elections and how many of those members must vote for someone in order for that person to be elected?
- What if the vote cannot take place (for instance if not enough members are present?)
- Can people vote by email or by proxy?

Section IV: Notification and Posting of Elections

Points of Consideration:

- What is the process for notifying others or posting information regarding elections (e.g. letters, flyers, announcements, etc.)?
- How long is the notification and posting period?

Article V. Meetings This article should detail any meeting the organization holds, which can vary from executive board meetings, general body meetings, committee meetings, and special meetings. The process of how and who can call a particular meeting, who runs the meeting, and the purpose of the meeting should be outlined. Each different type of meeting needs to have its own section so full understanding of the process and procedures can be conveyed.

Section I: Types of Meetings

Points of Consideration:

- Are there different types of meetings (e.g. business, regular, special, executive, etc.)?
- Who is required to attend each type of meeting?
- What happens if a meeting is missed?

Section II: Time and Occurrence of Meetings

Points of Consideration:

- How often meetings are held (e.g. weekly, monthly, etc.)?
- Is there a set date for meetings?

Section III: Special Meetings

Points of Consideration:

- What are the circumstances under which special meetings may be called?
- Who can call a special meeting?

Section IV: Quorum Quorum is the minimum number of members of an organization that must be present at any of its meetings to make the proceedings of that meeting valid. Quorum usually consists of the next whole number above one half of the active membership. However, the number should be determined according to the organization's need. For example, quorum could be defined by an individual organization as "two-thirds of the eligible voting membership."

Points of Consideration:

- Note that the purpose of the quorum is to ensure that enough members are present and expressing their opinions for the decisions made at this meeting to be considered valid and meaningful to the organization.
- State the percentage or number of members needed for quorum.
- What happens if quorum does not exist at a meeting?
- What if quorum is not reached over the course of several meetings?

Section V: Parliamentary Procedure

Point of Consideration:

- What rules shall govern the conduct of business for the organization (e.g. Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, General Consensus, etc.)?

Section VI: Voting This section should outline voting procedures and processes. This should also include and describe who votes, method in which voting occurs, any exceptions to voting procedures, and any other pertinent information about voting.

Point of Consideration:

- Only SU/ESF students can vote.

Section VII: Meeting Minutes and Records Meeting minutes and other records are vital for an organization's success. Attendance, election results, impeachment of an officer, removal of a member, approval of a budget or expense, and confirmation of an amendment approval are just some of the important items that meeting minutes are used to validate/verify.

Points of Consideration:

- Who is responsible for taking notes and/or meeting minutes?
- How are these records stored and who is responsible for them?
- How does the organization share the meeting minutes with the membership to solicit corrections to the minutes?

Article VI. Impeachment This section outlines the impeachment process, which empowers members the ability to recommend the removal of an executive board member or officer. This allows members to hold each other accountable for their responsibilities and actions. Within this article, grounds for removal, the procedure for impeachment, and the procedure for appeal of impeachment should be outlined.

Section I: Grounds for Removal This section outlines possible reasons to call for impeachment.

Points of Consideration:

- What are the grounds for removal of an executive board member (i.e. under what circumstances would/could this occur, votes required, etc.)?
- Who can initiate the removal of an executive board member?

Section II: Procedure for Impeachment This section details and describes the impeachment procedure. It should include how impeachment is called, how the hearing of the case is handled, who oversees the hearing process, and how impeachment is either confirmed or denied.

Points of Consideration:

- What is the process for removal of a member of the organization? (Outline due process, including charges, response to charges/argument, appeal, and removal/reinstatement process.)
 - This should be framed in the following way:
 - Charge or complaint brought against an individual
 - Evidence to support complaint presented
 - Individual given opportunity to argue a defense and offer counter evidence
 - Vote is taken (vote count must be specified in the Constitution)
- What type (secret ballot, voice vote, roll call vote, etc.) of vote is required for removal?

Section III: Procedure for Appeal of Impeachment This section outlines the person's right for appeal. It should include how an appeal is called, how the appeal hearing is handled, who oversees the appeal hearing process, and how the appeal is either confirmed or denied.

Points of Consideration:

- Is there a set time period to carry out an appeal?
- What steps are involved with the appeal?
- Who oversees the appeal process?

Article VII. Constitutional Amendments This article outlines the process and procedure to amend the Constitution. It should include an amendment and ratification section.

Section I: Amendment This section outlines who can propose a constitutional amendment, how the amendment is affirmed or denied, and any other steps in the process needed to confirm the proposed amendment.

Points of Consideration:

- Who can propose an amendment and what is the procedure (e.g. verbal, written, how much time must pass between an amendment being introduced and it being voted on, etc.)?
- When can an amendment be proposed?
- Is there any notice required in advance for amending the constitution?
- How many members must be present for adoption of the amendment?
- Who can vote on the amendment?
- How many votes are required for affirmation?

Section II: Ratification This section should outline how and when the newly amended Constitution goes into effect for the organization and its members. A Constitution needs to be affirmed by the members for it to be used as the governing document of the organization. Note: If an organization's Constitution is changed in any way, a new copy of the Constitution must be submitted to the Office of Student Activities and uploaded onto OrgSync.

Points of Consideration:

- How many votes are required for ratification?
- When does a newly ratified constitution go into effect? (i.e. upon ratification, the following semester, the following year, etc.)

The Articles below MUST be included in the organization's official constitution EXACTLY as they appear in order to represent a "valid" constitution. The entire document must then be submitted for approval.

Article VIII – Not-for-Profit Statement

This is not-for-profit organization.

ARTICLE IX – Financial Obligation

A majority of voting members of this organization may determine reasonable dues and fees assessed to each member at the beginning of each semester. A specific member or members, designated by this organization shall be responsible for payment in full of all debts accumulated by the organization not covered by funds on deposit.

ARTICLE X – Statement of Non-Discrimination

The University does not discriminate and prohibits harassment or discrimination related to any protected category including creed, ethnicity, citizenship, sexual orientation, national origin, sex, gender, pregnancy, disability, marital status, political or social affiliation, age, race, color, veteran status, military status, religion, sexual orientation, domestic violence status, genetic information, gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender¹.

ARTICLE XI – Statement of Non-Hazing

This organization will not conspire to engage in hazing, as defined by New York Penal Law 120.16 and New York Penal Law 120.17, or commit any act that causes or is likely to cause bodily danger, physical harm, or personal degradation or disgrace resulting in physical or mental harm to any fellow student or person attending the institution.

ARTICLE XII – Statement of Compliance with Campus Regulations

This organization shall comply with the *Syracuse University Code of Student Conduct*.