

Northwestern University

Student Organization Constitution Writing Guide

All registered student organizations (RSOs) at Northwestern are required to have a constitution that is (1) approved by Campus Life/Student Organizations & Activities (SOA) and (2) viewable to netID users on Northwestern's Involvement Platform, 'Cats on Campus. This guide is intended as a resource to help RSOs write and amend their constitutions.

To be approved by SOA, a constitution must include every article in this guide. Some articles may be customized. The following articles must be included, verbatim, with the exact wording highlighted in yellow in this guide:

- Advisor
- Membership Eligibility
- Executive Board Eligibility and Qualifications
- Impeachment & Removal
- Procedure for Officer Impeachment
- Handling of Funds
- Student Organization Finance Office
- Dissolution of Organization
- Constitutional Review
- Statement of Non-Discrimination
- Anti-Hazing Statement
- Statement of Compliance with Campus Regulations

RSOs affiliated with local, national, or other external organizations (including fraternity and sorority organizations) are required to follow this guide's criteria; they may add non-conflicting bylaws from their local, national, or other external organization as an appendix to their constitutions.

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ARTICLE I – INTRODUCTION

This article provides an overview of the organization. It describes what and who the organization is. It must include the organization's name, purpose, and objective(s).

Section I – Name

The name must be distinct from any name used by another RSO and must reflect the nature and activities of the organization. Any abbreviations or acronyms by which the organization is known (formally or informally) and any affiliation with a local, national, or other external organization must be fully and accurately disclosed here. **The organization's name must not begin with "Northwestern," "Northwestern University," "NU," "Wildcats," or any other words that would lead a reasonable person to infer that the organization is authorized to act on or behalf of Northwestern University, unless the organization receives and provides documentation of express written permission from the NU licensing office.** Any change to the organization's name or affiliation with a local, national, or other external organization must be disclosed to SOA for review and approval.

Section II – Purpose & Objective(s)

The purpose statement should be brief, clear, broad enough to allow for flexibility of varying activities within the organization, and specific enough to convey the organization's uniqueness and originality. It should be written as an action statement, articulating the specific things the organization strives "to" do to fulfill its mission.

Questions to consider in drafting this section:

- What is the overarching purpose/mission of the organization?
- What is the intended impact of the organization on the Northwestern community?
- What services will be provided and for whom?
- Are these objectives achievable given available resources?
- How relevant are the objectives to the organization's purpose?

ARTICLE II – ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

This article must include a detailed description of the structure of the organization. The description should define the responsibilities of the executive board/officers with sufficient clarity so current and future members understand these roles and can be held accountable if they are assumed and not met.

Section I – Executive Board

- A. List of Executive Board Positions and General Responsibilities
 - a. Questions to Consider:
 - i. Does the role have specific, defined duties or does it allow flexibility for someone to make it their own?
- B. Qualifications of Becoming an Officer
 - a. Questions to Consider:
 - i. Who is eligible for office?
 - ii. Are there specific skills and/or relevant experience desired or required to be eligible to hold an officer position?
- C. Terms of Office
 - a. Questions to Consider:
 - i. What is the length of the term (e.g. quarter, academic year, etc.)?
 - ii. When do officers start and end their terms?
 - iii. Do specific election/selection processes define the timetable for serving a term in office?

D. Procedure for Filling Vacated Roles

a. Questions to Consider:

- i. Are special elections held?
- ii. Is ascending order used (moving up the rank order of officers to fill a position)?
- iii. What is the order of succession (the rank order of officers to be used in ascending order)?
- iv. Is the order of succession used for each position down the ladder, or can it stop along the way?
- v. Which individual or collective is responsible for appointing executive board roles? Are appointments made, is it put to a vote, and/or are interviews coordinated?

Section II – Committees

This section should describe committees within the organization (if applicable). The description(s) should provide an overview of the role/purpose of any/each committee within the organization. *Note: Committees vary according to the purpose and activities of the organization. Not all organizations have committees and they are not required. The questions below are designed to serve as a guide for those organizations with a committee structure.*

A. Committee Identification and Appointments

a. Questions to Consider

- i. What are the names, purposes, and responsibilities of the various standing committees (e.g. executive board, publicity, fundraising, etc.)?
- ii. How are members selected for each committee?
- iii. How is the head of the committee chosen?

B. Temporary/Special Committees

a. Questions to Consider:

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

Section III – Advisor

This RSO has an advisor. The advisor is a paid Northwestern staff member, faculty member, or graduate assistant and provides advisory support for the officers and members of the organization. In addition, our advisor completes required paperwork and may be expected to attend trainings or complete specific tasks as determined by SOA. Our advisor has reviewed available resources on the SOA website.

This RSO is responsible for promptly communicating a change of advisor to SOA. This Organization is expected to identify a new advisor within 30 business days or risk forfeiting its RSO status. The organization is also expected to update 'Cats on Campus with this information.

A. Roles and Duties of the Advisor

a. Questions to Consider

- i. What are the responsibilities of the advisor?
- ii. What are the group's expectations for the involvement of the advisor?

Section IV – Dissolution of Organization

This section should outline the requirements and procedures for dissolution of the organization.

Questions to Consider:

- What is the procedure for dissolution?
- Under what circumstances would dissolution of the organization be considered?

ARTICLE III – MEMBERSHIP

This article outlines the requirements and expectations for membership in the organization. It typically includes three levels of membership: general membership, committee membership, and executive board/officer membership. These sections detail the requirements to be eligible for these levels of membership.

Section I – Membership Eligibility

Members of this RSO are expected to meet minimum commitments as defined by the executive board. Members who fail to meet minimum commitments may receive written notice, potentially resulting in removal from future opportunities and ineligibility for returning to membership/executive board. Membership in this RSO is open to all enrolled undergraduate Northwestern students, except those exempted from Title IX compliance. Faculty, administrators, staff members, and alumni of Northwestern may also be invited to attend meetings and events at the discretion of the RSO leadership or advisor. Only enrolled students who are members may vote on decisions related to member positions (e.g., who should be the next President). For more information regarding policies pertaining to non-enrolled students seeking RSO involvement, please refer to the Non-Enrolled Students section in the [Student Handbook](#).

Questions to Consider:

- Are members required to attend a minimum number of meetings?

Section II – Executive Board Eligibility and Qualifications

Executive members in this RSO are full-time, degree-seeking students paying the student activity fee at Northwestern (unless otherwise approved by the Executive Director of Campus Life).

Questions to Consider:

- Are there criteria for a member to be eligible to run for an executive board position?
- What are the requirements/expectations to be eligible?
- How do soon-to-be outgoing leadership communicate the opening of executive board opportunities?

Sections III – Committee Eligibility

Questions to Consider:

- Who is eligible to serve on a committees?
- What are the requirements/expectations to be eligible?

ARTICLE IV – EXECUTIVE BOARD ELECTION PROCESS

This article outlines and details the process and procedures for electing executive board positions. There are various methods for selecting officers or executive board positions, which can be done by selection committee and interview, nomination and vote, or appointment. SOA recommends using a democratic voting process. The elements contained within this section depend on the method the organization decides to utilize. What should be included 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. SOA recommends transition of leadership roles should occur no later than Spring Term, Week 5 of the academic year.

Section I – Selection Timing

Questions to Consider:

- How often and what time of year is selection held?
- Are there any special elections?

Section II – Nominations

Questions to Consider:

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

Section III – Election and Voting Procedures

Questions to Consider:

- What is the specific procedure followed for elections?
- What is the voting method (paper, electronic, etc.)?
- What number or percentage of members of quorum is necessary for elections to be complete?
- 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 if not enough members are present? Can people vote by email or by proxy?
- Who is eligible to vote?

Section IV – Notification and Posting of Elections

Questions to Consider:

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

Section V – Impeachment & Removal

Impeachment in this RSO is defined as removing a student from their executive board or officer duties.

Impeachment from an executive board position does not remove a student from an organization altogether.

Removal denies the opportunity for a student to be a member of the organization.

Impeachment of an executive board member in this RSO must pertain specifically to the student's inability to meet the duties of their role as outlined in this RSO's constitution and may be initiated only after a direct conversation with the student(s) and an opportunity for them to correct the mistake or behavior. Examples of this may include failure to meet attendance expectations, task deadlines, or communicate in a productive manner. Identifying these expectations as explicitly and clearly as possible in the RSO's constitution is critical.

General members whose roles may be loosely defined may not be impeached. However, failure for a general member to fulfill participation expectations may be considered in decisions related to appointing or electing board members.

This RSO may not invoke removal of an individual member when behavior of concern is not outlined in the constitution. This RSO's members are encouraged to report concerns that might implicate policies within the [Student Handbook](#) to the [Office of Community Standards](#) or [Office of Civil Rights & Title IX Compliance](#) accordingly.

Section VI – Procedure for Officer Impeachment

If this RSO seeks to impeach a member from their specific role, the appropriate representative of the RSO must communicate this intention via email to:

- A full-time SOA staff representative (studentorgs@northwestern.edu);

- This RSO's Advisor

ARTICLE V – MEETINGS

This article should detail any meetings the organization holds, which can vary from executive board meetings, committee meetings, general body 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.

Section I – Types and Occurrence of Meetings

Questions to Consider:

- 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?
- How often are meetings held (e.g. weekly, monthly, etc.)?
- Is there a set day/date for meetings?
- Is the expectation that all meetings take place in person versus online? Who has the authority to make that decision?

Section II – Special Meetings

Questions to Consider:

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

Section III – Quorum

Questions to Consider:

- What is the purpose of the quorum?
- What is the percentage of number of members needed for quorum?
- What happens if quorum does not exist at a meeting? What if quorum is not reached for a few meetings?

Section IV – Parliamentary Procedure

Questions to Consider:

- What rules govern the business of the organization?
- Revised, Consensus, etc.?

Section V – Meeting Minutes and Records

Questions to Consider:

- 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 – HANDLING OF FUNDS

This article outlines procedures for the handling of organizational funds. This RSO abides by Northwestern rules regarding handling of funds and may not function as a for-profit enterprise.

Section I – Student Organization Finance Office

All funds collected will be deposited in our student organization's Student Organization Finance Office (SOFO) account. For organizations with an active SOFO account, SOFO serves as the chief authority for all University policies, procedures, and practices impacting the management of RSO funds. Questions related to RSO

accounting practices, reporting, fundraising, and/or any other financial activity should be directed to SOFO. Any RSO funds collected by Northwestern will be deposited in the RSO's SOFO account.

Section II – Dissolution of Organization

All RSOs must clearly articulate how any remaining funds and/or outstanding debts will be managed if the RSO is dissolved. The RSO's plan must align with Northwestern's financial guidelines. After one year of inactivity, a SOFO account will be deactivated with any remaining funds no longer available to the RSO.

Article VII – CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

This article outlines the procedures for amending the RSO's constitution.

Section I – Amendment

Questions to Consider:

- Who is eligible to 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?
- How many or what minimum percentage of members must be present for consideration of the amendment?
- Who is eligible to vote on the amendment?
- How many votes or what percentage of eligible voters are required to ratify the amendment?
- When does a newly ratified constitution take effect?

Any amendments to a constitution previously approved by SOA **must be submitted to and approved by SOA**. Any amendments must include the date they were ratified and/or enacted by the RSO.

ARTICLE VIII – ANNUAL REVIEW

This RSO will review its constitution annually during its leadership transition process.

ARTICLE IX – STATEMENT OF NON-DISCRIMINATION

This RSO prohibits discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, creed, national origin, ethnicity, caste, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, parental status, marital status, age, disability, citizenship status, veteran status, genetic information, reproductive health decision making, height, weight, or any other classification protected by law (referred to as "protected statuses or protected characteristics"). Prohibited discrimination based on sex includes sexual misconduct, including but not limited to, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, stalking, and dating or domestic violence. Such conduct violates Northwestern's values and disrupts the living, learning, and working environment for students, faculty, staff, and other community members.

Notwithstanding the above, an RSO may petition to restrict its membership where permitted under applicable law or guidance, as determined in the discretion of the University, based on (a) sex (e.g. fraternity and sorority membership, all-male or all-female performance groups, etc.), or (b) ability to perform core activities related to the organization's mission (e.g., competitive teams or performance-based groups). Petitions must be submitted in writing to the Office of Campus Life and will be considered based on both the RSO's constitution and its actual practices.

ARTICLE X – ANTI-HAZING STATEMENT

It is the responsibility of all students/student organizations to encourage an atmosphere of learning, social responsibility, and respect for human dignity and to provide positive influences and constructive development for members and aspiring members. Hazing leads to dysfunction within the organization and is ineffective at creating

teamwork, respect, and unity, and it is an unproductive and hazardous custom that is forbidden by the University. It is the responsibility of organizational leaders to familiarize themselves with Northwestern's definition of hazing, prevent and/or stop hazing from occurring within the organization, and report it when it does occur. Students can find additional information, including the policy, report form, and resources at the [Northwestern Hazing Prevention website](#).

ARTICLE XI – STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH CAMPUS REGULATIONS

This organization shall comply with all Northwestern University policies and procedures, including but not limited to, those policies set forth in the [Northwestern University Student Handbook](#), as well as local, state, and federal laws. This organization acknowledges that the University has the authority to investigate reports of discrimination, harassment, sexual misconduct, and student code of conduct violations made by University students against members of the student organization or the student organization, and to determine appropriate sanctions, which may include suspension or dissolution of the organization, restrictions on the rights of the organization to use University funds and/or facilities, and access to University services and resources. The organization's members' failure to comply with the University's policies may result in the University severing all ties with the student organization.