

Constitution Guide

WILLIAM AND MARY

Office of Student Leadership Development

The following outline and questions are designed to help you write a constitution for your proposed organization. This guide does not need to be followed verbatim but provides basic language and format for you to work within. Your constitution should address all the suggested areas identified but may do so in the manner that best serves your organization needs. If you have questions, contact the Office of Student Leadership Development at leadership@wm.edu.

Helpful Tips:

- A properly formatted constitution should be outlined or bulleted, not narrative. Concise descriptions, paired with bullet/outline headings, are effective in providing introduction, context, and navigational cues for the document.
- The intention of the constitution is to provide long-term sustainability for the organization. Write for the future of the organization! The constitution should provide you with a guide to answer and resolve issues that the organization may face.
- The constitution you submit to the Office of Student Leadership Development should be as close to final form as possible.
- We suggest that, prior to submission you ask a third-party (someone who is not associated with your group) to proofread, review, and provide feedback about your proposed organization.
 - We find that oftentimes those who are writing the constitution become “too close” to the subject matter to be able to pull back to discern if it makes the most sense.
 - An objective third-party may also be more effective in identifying typos, grammatical errors, and issues with continuity throughout the document.
- There are some mandatory statements that are clearly stated in this guide and should be included as indicated.
- Helpful Link for Rules of Order and Tips for Holding Meetings/Elections, etc...:
http://diphi.web.unc.edu/files/2012/02/MSG-ROBERTS_RULES_CHEAT_SHEET.pdf
- Helpful Definitions:
 - Quorum: the minimum number of members that must be present in order to conduct organization business. In other words, if you don't meet this number, things like votes, discussions, and group decisions can't take place
 - Majority: more than half of the vote.
 - Simple majority – 50% +1
 - Super majority – A vote that requires a higher standard of affirmation than simple majority, i.e. 2/3 or 3/4 majority.
 - Plurality: the number of votes cast for a candidate or option who receives more than another other but does not receive a majority. For example, you are voting among three candidates and no candidate receives more than half of the votes; the candidate with the highest number of votes is the winner, even if it is less than half the votes.
 - Ratification: the first time the constitution is approved by the new organization
 - Amendment: specific changes to the constitution that are adopted by an organization) following mutual ratification. This is NOT the creation of an entirely new document.

[ORGANIZATION NAME]
Ratified OR Amended on: (Insert Date)

PREAMBLE:

This section should be a statement of the group's establishment. The preamble should identify that this document serves as the constitution and governing document for the organization. *Example: We the members of [name of organization], subscribing to the regulations and policies of William & Mary, establish this Constitution to govern the matters within our organization.*

Article I: NAME

State the full official name of the organization as well as any acronyms or other names used if applicable. *Example: The name of this organization will be known as the Student Leadership Development Club or SLD Club.*

- If the organization is affiliated with a national organization, indicate that in this section as well.

Mandatory:

When naming your organization, "William & Mary" or "W&M" **may not precede** the name of the organization. (You may use XYZ Organization at W&M.)

Article II: PURPOSE/MISSION

What is the purpose of the organization? This is the place to describe the mission and long term goals for the organization. These goals should be broad in scope and a reflection of what your organization (or national affiliation) values. (In the purpose/mission it is acceptable to write 3-5 sentences of narrative text.)

Article III: MEMBERSHIP

This section allows you to define the composition of membership as well as the privileges and responsibilities of membership in the organization.

- State that the membership of the organization must be comprised of currently enrolled W&M students (and faculty/staff of W&M if appropriate); individuals without official affiliation with W&M are not eligible for membership.
- Define what a student must do to become a member and maintain membership. How is a member differentiated from a non-member or supporter of your organization?
- Outline what rights, privileges, and responsibilities go along with membership. For example: Only active members may vote on matters (official or not) including amendments, elections, and other motions brought forth in meetings.
- Describe why and how membership privileges may be revoked or how an individual member pursues resignation. If different membership categories are appropriate for your organization. Outline what differentiates the categories of membership that exist, such as active, associate, honorary, etc.

Mandatory:

The constitution MUST include the following non-discrimination clause:

- The [insert organization name] affirms its commitment to conducting its activities in accordance with W&M's Policy on Discrimination, Harassment and Retaliation. Membership in this organization shall be open to all without regard to race, religion, creed, national origin, color, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, physical or mental disability (or perceived disability), personal appearance, political affiliation, source of income, citizenship status, age, marital status, family responsibilities, Veteran or military status (including disabled veteran, recently separated veteran, active duty wartime or campaign badge veteran, and Armed Forces Service Medal veteran), predisposing genetic characteristics, domestic violence victim status, height or weight.
- ***If you believe your organization is exempt from using the required clause above, please contact the Office of Student Leadership Development, leadership@wm.edu (i.e. single gender organizations, politically affiliated organizations, or religiously affiliated organizations).

Example:

- Section 1. The membership of the SLD Club will be comprised of currently enrolled W&M students and faculty/staff of William & Mary.*
- a. Active members will be currently enrolled students who participate in trainings monthly and attend at least 75% of meetings. Active members may participate in trainings and vote on organization business.*
 - b. Associate members will be faculty or staff members who attend at least 50% of meetings. Associate members may participate in trainings but are not eligible to vote on organization business.*
- Section 2. Termination of Membership:*
- a. Members may pursue resignation by contacting the secretary via email.*
 - b. Member privileges may be revoked by a unanimous decision of the Executive Board, based on but not limited to member's participation or behavior that..... Members may be nominated for privilege revocation by any member of the organization through:*
 - i. Unanimous voting*
 - ii. By vote of 2/3 member attendance*
- *Section 3. The SLD Club affirms its commitment to conducting its activities in accordance with W&M's Policy on Discrimination, Harassment and Retaliation. Membership in this organization shall be open to all without regard to irrelevant personal factors. Irrelevant personal factors include (without limitation) race or color, citizenship, national origin or ethnicity, ancestry, religion or creed, political affiliation or belief, age, sex or sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, physical or mental disability, marital status, pregnancy status, parental status, height, weight, military service, veteran status, caretaker status, or family medical or genetic information.*

Article IV: OFFICERS

This section describes the titles and duties of the officers.

- How many officers are there? What are their titles and duties? Which officers constitute the executive body? You may consider traditional officer roles (President, Vice President, Treasurer, etc.) BUT you are encouraged to structure differently to serve the needs of your organization. Co-Presidents (typically based on co-founders) are not recommended.

- Describe any minimum qualifications officer candidates must have, such as class standing, experience in the organization, minimum GPA, etc.
- Define the length of the officer's term and term limits, if any
- Describe why and how an officer may be removed from their duties. Since removing an officer is likely to be an emotionally charged process for your organization, make sure this process is fair to all parties.
- If the organization has an advisor/sponsor, it may be included here

Example:

- Section 1. The Executive Board of the SLD Club will be comprised of a President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer.*
- a. The **President** will be responsible for presiding over general body and Executive Board meetings. They will be the primary contact for the organization and serve as a representative for the organization. The President will have served as an active member for at least one academic year prior to taking office.*
 - b. The **Vice President** will be responsible for coordinating trainings and serving in the absence of the President. The Vice President will have served as a member for at least one academic semester prior to taking office.*
 - c. The **Secretary** will be responsible for taking attendance, maintaining membership eligibility records, recording and distributing meeting minutes, and handling membership resignation.*
 - d. The **Treasurer** will be responsible for collecting dues (if any), managing accounts, and providing monthly reports on the financial status.*
- Section 2. Officers will serve for a full academic year. There are no term limits.*
- Section 3. Officers may be removed from their duties by a 2/3 majority of the active membership. Officers may be nominated for removal by a petition to the President or an officer not in question signed by 1/3 of active members.*

Article V: ELECTIONS OR SELECTION OF NEW OFFICERS

This section describes the process by which officers are elected/selected/appointed.

- How are officers identified: by election, interview/selection, appointment, something else?
- Identify approximately when the elections/selection/appointment process will take place and when new officers take office following their selection.
- Explicitly describe the details of the nomination and selection process. Describe the method that will be used for voting and who will be responsible for counting votes. Identify what amount of votes is needed to elect a member (e.g., simple majority, 2/3 majority, plurality). Describe the procedure for runoff elections in the event of a tie or if a majority is not reached.
- Describe procedures for filling vacancies in current officer terms.

Example:

- Section 1. Elections will be held during a regularly scheduled meeting in April. The particular meeting will be determined by the President.*
- Section 2. Nominations will open two weeks prior to elections. Any active member will be eligible to be nominated. Nominations may be made by active members. Voting will take place at the election meeting. A simple majority vote is necessary to elect an officer. If a majority is not reached, a run-off election will be held with the two nominees receiving the most votes. In the event of a tie, the President will cast the deciding vote. Voting will be conducted via ballot, with an officer not seeking reelection and an active member counting the votes.*

Section 3. Should an officer resign or be removed from office, a vacancy will be filled by appointment from the Executive Board with approval from the membership of the appointment for the remainder of the term of office.

Article VI: MEETINGS

This article describes how your organization will meet and conduct the business of your organization.

- Share the intended format and frequency of meetings. What is the minimum expectation for the number of times your organization will meet over the course of the year? This can be regularly, weekly, monthly, once a semester, etc. This is not WHEN your organization meets. Be sure to include “while classes are in session,” as organizations may not meet while William & Mary is not in session.
- Include who presides at the meeting
- Outline the attendance policy, if any (only if not defined in other sections of the constitution)
- Define what the quorum is (usually a simple majority of the active membership including one officer)
- Describe whether the executive board has separate meetings and if so, how often

Example:

Section 1. The SLD Club will meet regularly while classes are in session. The President will preside at the meeting. Quorum will be defined as a two-thirds majority of the active membership, including one officer.

Section 2. The Executive Board will meet regularly separate from the general body to discuss forwarding long-term goals and any issues that require privacy.

Article VII: FINANCES

This article describes the financial procedures of the organization. How will your organization finance its operations and activities?

- If collecting dues, describe procedure for determining the amount of dues and when they should be collected. Many new groups are reluctant to mandate dues but the following example provides you with the flexibility AND a process to institute dues should they become necessary.
- If collecting dues, donations, or fundraising, detail the manner in which your treasury shall be managed. For example, who has signature authority for your accounts?
- Are there any other fees, like tickets for events or membership to a national organization? If so, what is the method of collection?

Example:

Section 1. The amount of dues and the method of collection will be decided by a majority vote of the Executive Board at the beginning of each school year.

Section 2. The funds of the SLD Club will be stored in an off-campus organization account. The President and the Treasurer will have signature authority, and all checks must be signed by both officers.

Section 3. Training fees will be set by majority vote of the Executive Board on a case-by-case basis and at minimum will cover the cost of the training.

Article VIII: POLICY COMPLIANCE

This section should be a statement of the group’s willingness to abide by established university policies, including, but not limited to the following: Alcohol Policy, Hazing Policy; Travel Policy and any other relevant policies contained in the Student Code of Conduct

Any Groups formed with an international focus must not have the presumption of travel (organized by/for the student organization) included their process.

Mandatory:

The constitution **MUST** include both of the following compliance statements.

- Section 1. [Insert name of Organization] will abide by all university policies including the Student Code of Conduct, the Campus Alcohol Policy, and requirements set by the Office of Student Leadership Development.
- Section 2. [Insert name of Organization] agrees that it will not initiate, support, or encourage any events or situations that endanger the mental or physical health or safety of a student for any purpose including but not limited to initiation or admission into or affiliation with this group or organization.
- Section 3. (If Applicable) Any international travel will not be affiliated with William & Mary or this organization and will occur strictly on an individual basis.

Article IX: RATIFICATION

This article outlines how the constitution will be ratified. It should include the date that the constitution was ratified. *Example: This constitution will take effect immediately upon its passage by a 2/3 majority of the members of the SLD Club.*

Ratified on: [Insert Date]

Article X: AMENDMENTS

All organizations must have provisions for amending their constitutions or bylaws. In this article, describe the procedure for proposing and approving amendments to the constitution.

- How are amendments to be proposed and by whom? When and how will amendments be voted on following proposal? How many votes in favor of the proposal must be reached to approve amendments?
- Following the approval of any amendments, you should include at the end of the document “Amended (insert date)”, with the most recent date of amendment on top of a running list of amendment dates. This will help you know that you are using the most recent version of your constitution.

Example: Amendments may be proposed in writing by any active member by emailing the Secretary. The Secretary will distribute a copy of the proposed amendments to all active members for discussion at the next regularly scheduled meeting. After initial discussion, the amendment may be voted on by a simple up-or-down vote. Amendments must be passed with a 2/3 majority vote.

Amended on: [Insert Date]

Mandatory:

File all updated constitutions with the Office of Student Leadership Development once they are amended by your organization. Send electronic copies to leadership@wm.edu.