Creating a Constitution & Bylaws

Constitution – the fundamental principles that govern the operation of a group; typically require a two-thirds vote of the membership for adoption

Bylaws – the specific rules of guidance by which the group is to function; typically require a simple majority for passage

What should be covered by a Constitution?
Below is an outline of the standard information required for a Constitution:

- Article I – Organization Name & Purpose
- Article II – Membership Eligibility & Selection
- Article III – Officers (titles, terms of office, how and when elected/selected)
- Article IV – Meetings (frequency, special meetings, procedures, etc...)
- Article V – Finances (dues, payments, accounts, etc...)
- Article VI – Amendment Process (means of proposal, notice required, etc...)
- In addition, you may add articles for the areas listed below:
  - Affiliation with other groups (local, state, national, international)
  - Advisor (term of office, method of selection, position description)
  - Quorum (number of members required to conduct business)

Why should we have Bylaws?

- The Constitution covers the fundamental principles, but does not prescribe specific procedures for operating your organization. Bylaws set forth, in detail, the procedures your group must follow to conduct business in an orderly manner.
- Bylaws provide further definition to the Constitution, and can be changed more easily as the needs of your organization change.

What should be included in the Bylaws?
Bylaws must not contradict the Constitution, and they generally contain specific information on the topics listed below:

- Membership – selection requirement, resignations, expulsions, rights & duties
- Dues – amount and collection procedures, special fees, due date of payments
- Officer Duties – powers, responsibilities, specific officer descriptions, removal from office, procedures for filling open officer positions
- Executive Board – structure, composition, powers
- Committees – standing, special, formation of committees, committee chairpersons, committee meetings, committee powers, committee duties
- Order of Business – standard agenda for conducting meetings
- Parliamentary Authority – provisions for rules of order, generally the most recent version of Roberts Rules of Order
- Amendment Procedures – means of proposal, notice required, voting requirements
- Other specific policies and procedures that are unique to your organization and necessary for its operation

Now what?

- Once you have developed your Constitution and Bylaws, review them annually; we suggest once per academic or calendar year, depending on your officer cycle. The needs of your group will change over time, so it’s important that both the Constitution and Bylaws are updated to reflect the current state of the group.
- Make sure that each member has a copy, either digitally or in paper, of the Constitution and Bylaws. A thorough review of both the Constitution and Bylaws should be a part of officer training and transitions.