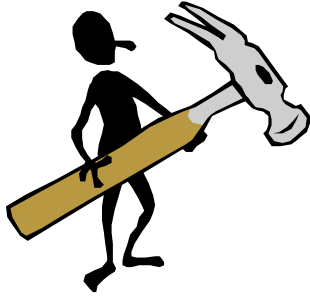


Building & Rebuilding your Constitution



Whether you are developing a student council for the first time or using a defunct 1970's constitution, found in the dark recesses of some filing cabinet, your constitution needs attention. The constitution is the most important document a student council will ever create; it establishes, defines, organizes and guides the council's activities. When creating it for the first time or giving it an overhaul, serious and considered thought is required. The primary and most important step involves "organization introspection."

STEP ONE: Think, Think, Think

All schools have many factors that determine the school's character. The student council must consider these factors when writing its constitution so that the constitution (and the student council itself) reflects the school's overall character. To this end, the council should discuss the questions below – and generate more to answer – to gain a better perspective of how they fit into the school's overall scheme.



1. What are the needs and desires of the student body? What powers do you possess to address these? How can you regularly monitor these needs and desires?
2. What potential in the student body is not being tapped? What opportunities can you create to allow this potential to flourish?
3. What is the best way to represent the student body? How can we maintain communication with our constituents? How will we liaison with the staff and administration?

As the group discusses these topics allow it to wander into associated topics that will allow the group to ultimately obtain a better understanding of what student council does and needs to do. Discussion from these types of questions should lead to a clearer vision of the student council's scope of abilities. Take notes – lots of notes. Once you can envision the form of the council you are ready to write your constitution.



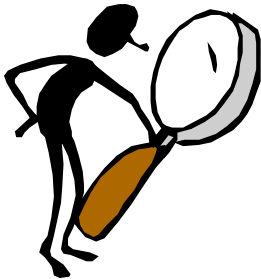
STEP TWO: Get Help, Get Organized, Get Ready...

1. Get Help: Write to a dozen schools requesting copies of their constitution. This will give you a better idea of how the end product

should look and the language used in a constitution. Use it as a guide, but don't copy it; YOUR constitution must reflect YOUR school.

2. Get Organized: Gather your notes from Step One and sort them into logical categories (i.e. Purposes of the student council).
3. Get Ready: Organize an "ad hoc Constitution Committee" and plan some time to write, discuss, and re-write. The actual writing could take days to months depending how frequently you can meet, so plan accordingly.

At this stage, read your constitution with a critical eye. Keep in mind that the overall purpose is to create a constitution that will reflect the school and give your student council a firm document from which to work.



As you read your current constitution take notes on parts you:

- disagree/agree with
- think need to be better written
- want to add/remove
- think your other notes will fit in
- think are missing
- and so on....

STEP THREE: GO!

The following is a brief description of each section of a typical constitution. Review these and the sample constitutions you have obtained. The sample constitution will most likely have sub-sections that give greater detail and make it more specific to that school/council. Collect your notes from your previous group discussion and from your constitution reading. Organize them into piles that correspond to the articles listed below. You can add sub-sections where you feel they are necessary. As you write, be critical about the language, wording, and clarity.

ARTICLES OF THE CONSTITUTION:

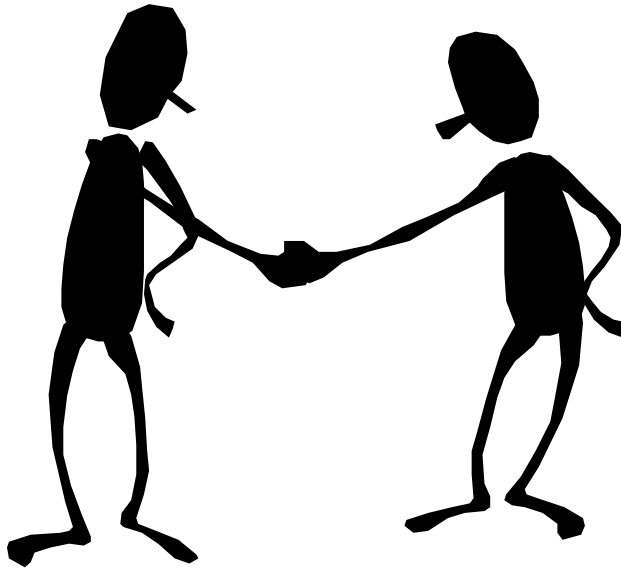
- Preamble: Paragraph statement establishing the student council
Article I: General purposes of the student council
Article II: Election procedures (including procedures for filling vacated office mid-year)
Article III: Powers of the student council
Article IV: Student council membership
Article V: Duties and responsibilities of the members and faculty adviser
Article VI: Ratification of the constitution and amendment procedures.

Bylaws are similar to the constitution, yet only pertain to the inner workings of the student council and should allow for easy change by the council from year to year. For example, the committees you set up for one year may not apply to the following school year. Similarly, you should have the following topics and any other applicable procedures in your bylaws.



BYLAWS:

- Article I: Establishment of a quorum
- Article II: Rules of order (how you run your meetings)
- Article III: Frequency of meetings
- Article IV: Establishment of committees
- Article V: Bylaw amendment procedures



STEP FOUR: Maintenance

For the constitution to continue to reflect the needs of the school it requires regular revision and updating when and if necessary. Sometimes it is necessary to begin at step one again and give it a complete overhaul. Other times you simply need to review it for minor working changes. Regardless of the reason, the constitution needs your regular attention. Treat it well and it will serve you well.

The above information is from an article by Clint Calzini, "Leadership Magazine", May, 1997