

The draft constitution I saw at our last meeting had a lot of good material, but it also contained a lot of material that was not appropriate to our needs:

1. Some things (e.g. rules of conduct at meetings) **don't belong at the constitutional level**. We might agree with them, but we'd be better off putting them into simple motions or by-laws (which in a sense are simply a collection of motions), where they are easier to change and fine-tune as our needs require.
2. Some things (e.g. term limits and a nominating committee) **aren't appropriate for a group our size** — we just don't have the people to fill these positions, especially if term limits prevent willing volunteers from doing an important job. These things might be appropriate for groups with thousands of members, but our bench isn't deep enough.

Also note that — if I'm not mistaken — **constitutions are legally enforceable**. A disgruntled member could sue the organization for not following the constitution, so it is a very good idea not to have in your constitution procedures that you will not or cannot follow.

Constitutions are meant to be **basic documents**: they cover the bare outlines of how a group functions. They should essentially answer the following questions:

1. Who are we?
2. What is our purpose?
3. How do you join? (And, if necessary, how do you get kicked out?)
4. Who's in charge, what do they do, and how do we choose them? (And what do we do if they leave?)
5. How do we conduct our business? (Meetings, quorum, etc., on a basic level.)
6. How do we amend this document? (Should be harder than a simple motion.)

Everything else should be done at the level of motions, by-laws or standing orders.

I've taken the liberty of **taking some ideas from Edith's document** and combining them with ideas taken from other organizations' constitutions, and I've written it up using the language and structure I learned from three years editing regulations at the Department of Justice. The result is four pages long, and a copy should be around here somewhere, hopefully attached.

It's not a complete document, and **its contents are very much up for discussion**, and lots could be changed. Mostly it's an experiment in structure — this is how, I think, a constitution should *look*.

But there are a couple of big things that have been left deliberately incomplete:

1. **Membership**. Since members vote at meetings, we need to be clear about how we define a member. I'm not aware of what, if anything, has been decided on this subject.
2. **The role of the Board vs. the role of the membership**. What does the Board get to decide on its own? When does it meet? Does the membership ratify Board decisions, or are certain decision Board-only and others taken to the entire membership? In every organization small enough that the entire membership generally votes, rather than just the executive, this is something that needs to be addressed.

What do you think?