

CONSTITUTION, BY-LAWS AND STANDING RULES

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What is the difference between your Constitution, Bylaws and Standing Rules.

The Constitution is the fundamental principles of our organization which determines the responsibilities and rights of its officers and members. Bylaws are the detailed procedures and working guidelines of our organization. Standing Rules are more specific than the Bylaws. They should provide details about provisions in the Bylaws. These should be items specific/unique to your unit.

Bylaws and Standing Rules are similar. The key differences between Bylaws and Standing Rules relate to scope and effect. The parliamentary procedure guide "Robert's Rules of Order" explains that Bylaws "should include all the rules that are of such importance that they cannot be changed in any way without previous notice," while Standing Rules "should contain only such rules as may be adopted without previous notice by a majority vote at any business meeting." At the core, Bylaws are designed to be overarching and procedural, while Standing Rules are specific and administrative.

Bylaws usually are drafted at an organization's inception, while Standing Rules tend to be established as needed. Bylaws govern the organization as a whole and can be amended only by providing notice and gaining a majority vote. Standing Rules can be adopted at any meeting without notice and can pass upon a simple majority vote of people in attendance. Establishing Standing Rules for administrative functions can make an organization more effective.

The Constitution should contain articles that are rarely changed. An example of what not to have in your constitution is the amount of your annual dues. This belongs in the Bylaws or Standing Rules.

Using the example of dues, if in the Bylaws, it would be correct to say your unit dues would always be \$5 more than the amount due to department and national, because this would naturally change if national or department changes their dues. If you stated that your unit dues are \$30, this should be in Standing Rules because you would need to vote on the change of the exact amount of unit dues.

Don't let reviewing your governing documents stress you out. If you haven't updated them for a while, it can be a bit of a job to clean them up, but once you have them current it doesn't take much to keep them that way. Every unit member should have a copy of your governing documents. These are the documents that let each of your members know what you do, how you do it and why you do it.