

# How to Write a Constitution for your Softball Association

As the leaders of a Softball Association, you need to understand the importance of a constitution. A constitution is simply a set of written rules or an agreement governing the aims of your organization, how it will run and how the members will work together.

A constitution is important for your Softball Association to have because:

- without a written understanding, people may become confused and things may not get done;
- it will act as a point of reference and help resolve any problems or controversy that may arise;
- it reassures the public and funding bodies that your Association is properly run and that money is effectively managed;
- it illustrates that your Association is democratic and accountable, with clear methods by which decisions are made.

The following outlines the list of things that should be addressed in your Softball Association's Constitution:

## Article 1: Association Name

State the official name of the organization.

- The name of your organization should reflect what your Association is all about and is a very important factor. You need to bear in mind that every member of your organization should identify with the name of your Association. Also, do you want the subject or the main interest of your Association to come first, or the area in which you are based? How might the name appear on any literature? Could it be misleading or offensive to people?
- Most importantly, is there already a Association with the same name located locally?

## Article 2: Purpose

Clearly state the objectives, purpose or mission of your organization.

- To put it another way, why has your Association come together? What is it hoping to accomplish? Your objectives should cover not only what you aim to achieve at this point in time, but what you may wish to do in the future. Do not simply list various activities, but keep your aims as wide as possible to enable you to change your activity without amending your constitution, giving you flexibility as you develop. Do not simply state that you want to create a youth club at a particular address, but talk about integrating people in a wider area. The objectives section is the most difficult to change and, therefore, requires a lot of thought and consideration!

## Article 3: Membership

Define who are considered members of your organization

- **Section 1: Eligibility**  
State who is eligible for membership in the organization. All Associations are made up of members who wish to be involved in an organization. Members essentially own and control the organization, so it is important to determine who membership will be open to. Eligibility requirements can include age restrictions, residency requirements, etc.

- **Section 2: Classes or Types of Membership**

If there are different types of membership, describe them here. Each class should be described in a separate paragraph. Organizations are not required to have different classes or types of membership, however some choose to include separate categories for players, coaches and board members.

- **Section 3: Revoking Membership**

If members can lose their status as members, describe such circumstances here. For example, a player may lose their membership status for failure to adhere to the organization's code of conduct. Typically a disciplinary hearing must be undertaken, with a Committee determining the status of the player's membership according to the Association's discipline policy.

#### **Article 4: Offices**

It is common for committees to have named individuals known as officers, to carry out various tasks on behalf of your Association.

- These may include a president, chairperson, secretary or treasurer. You also need to come to an agreement on how officers will be chosen, whether they will be elected at your annual general meeting or appointed by your committee, and how long they will be in place (for a limited or unlimited period).
- How will the officers be removed where this is required? How will their vacancies be filled? Also, what will their powers and responsibilities be?

- **Section 1: Officer Responsibilities**

List the officers included in the governance of the organization and give description of their duties and responsibilities.

- **Section 2: Term of Office**

State the length of term of the offices. If offices are filled for different term lengths, be sure to differentiate. In addition, be specific as to the beginning and end of the term.

- **Section 3: Nominations and Elections**

If officers are elected, include a sentence stating that they are elected.

- *Paragraph 1: Eligibility*  
Describe specific officer eligibility here. Are only players able to be an officer? Can the parent or guardian of a player become an officer? Are Coaches eligible to become officers?
- *Paragraph 2: Nomination Procedures*  
Describe how candidates for offices are nominated. For example, candidates may be nominated by the executive council, a nominating committee, "from the floor" by the general membership, or by some combination of these.
- *Paragraph 3: Election Procedures*  
Describe how elections will be conducted and the margin of ballots cast in order to be elected.
  - Elections may be conducted at a general meeting of the membership or by casting ballots during a pre-established time. Votes may be cast by a show of

hands or by secret ballot. Margins required for election can range from a majority of members present to 2/3 of the votes cast during a regularly scheduled meeting or the organization.

- **Section 4: Vacancies**

Include a general statement regarding office vacancies.

- *Paragraph 1: Resignations*

Describe what is required of an officer in order to resign from an office.

- *Paragraph 2: Removal*

Describe what circumstances may result in the removal of an officer from office as well as the procedure for such removal.

- *Paragraph 2: Filling Vacancies*

Describe the procedure for filling vacancies in offices. When vacancies occur, the president or the officers may appoint replacements or they may be elected by the officers or the general membership.

## **Article 5: Committees**

If standing or ad hoc committees are to be included in the governance and operation of the organization, describe them here.

- If both standing and ad hoc committees are part of the organizational structure, describe each in a separate section. Describe how committee members and chairs will be chosen. If ad hoc committees are used, describe how these committees will be established. For example, ad hoc committees may be established at the will of the president or as projects arise from organization business.

## **Article 6: Finance**

If your organization requires funds to operate, their source, oversight, maintenance, and disbursement should be described here.

- **Section 1: Oversight**

Typically, the treasurer is charged with the oversight of organizational funds. If so, be sure that such responsibilities are described in Article 4: Offices Section 1: Officer Responsibilities

- **Section 2: Source of Funding**

Indicate how funds will be accumulated. For example, most Softball Associations charge a yearly registration or membership fee. Others may rely upon fundraising efforts. Some rely on both. If membership or registration fees are to be collected, state the amount and frequency here. Organizations may also wish to make provisions for members who join at different time during the year - for example, some Associations offer a discounted "Early Bird" registration fee, encouraging players to sign up early.

- **Section 3: Maintenance of Funds**

Indicate where monies raised by the organization will be maintained. For example:

- "All monies belonging to this organization shall be deposited and disbursed through a bank account established for this organization by the Board of Directors."

- **Section 4: Disbursement of Funds**

Indicate who has signing authority for cheques from the Association's bank account. For example:

- "The Officers of Softball Ontario and the Executive Director will have signing authority for all financial transactions conducted in the name of Softball Ontario. Transactions under \$500 will require one signature, while transactions \$500 or over will require two signatures."

## **Article 7: Rules of Procedure**

Rules and regulations peculiar to the conduction of organization business should be stated here.

- **Section 1: Meetings**

Indicate frequency, and, if appropriate, occurrences of meeting here. Organizations may meet monthly, semi-monthly [bi-monthly is once every 2 months], weekly, etc. Some organizations state that meetings will occur on specific days of the month, week, etc.

- **Section 2: Attendance**

State specific attendance requirements/expectations here. If specific attendance requirements exist, be sure that record maintenance associated with attendance has been assigned in Article 4: Offices; Section 1: Officer Responsibilities.

- **Section 3: Quorum**

A quorum is the minimum number of members required to be present at a meeting in order to conduct the business of the organization. It may be stated as a specific number [NOT RECOMMENDED] or a fraction or percentage of the active membership.

- **Section 4: Minutes**

State any requirements for maintaining meeting minutes. It is recommended that all organizations make provisions for maintaining meeting minutes. If so stated, be sure that an associated responsibility/duty has been assigned in Article 4: Offices; Section 1: Officer Responsibilities.

## **Article 8: Amendments**

Describe how this constitution may be amended. Indicate who may propose amendments, how such proposed amendments are reviewed, and how they are decided. Be sure to state the minimum voting requirements for passing a constitutional amendment.

## **Article 9: Dissolution**

If for any reason you need to wind up your Association, you must adopt rules similar to those you have put in place to make changes to your constitution. This may occur if your Association is simply lacking in support or resources, or if your activities have been transferred to another organization.

- Not only will you need to include details on how you will call a special meeting and how many members should be present before you can dissolve your organization, but you will need to include information regarding what will happen to any remaining assets or money. Usually when an Association ceases to exist, debts are repaid and the surplus assets or finances are then distributed or donated to similar Associations or local charities. This is basically to reassure the public and any funding bodies that the money is being utilized properly and not just being split between members.

## Get started!

If you feel you are able to answer the above questions and have the necessary information, you can begin writing your constitution!

Get together with the rest of your Association to draw up your constitution and make sure everyone has a say in deciding the objectives of your organization and how it is going to be run. Begin with a clear, simple draft that will allow you to elaborate and expand as you go along and keep in mind that the language you use doesn't have to be complex. It should be written in a way so that everyone can understand the manner in which your Association is run and what you are aiming to achieve.

When writing your constitution, as well as considering the day-to-day running of your Association, try to plan for unexpected events or circumstances such as resignations, disagreements between members, or even the winding up of your Association.

To formally adopt your constitution you must call a special public meeting to finalize the rules and obtain the agreement of the members. As your constitution is the governing document for your Association, you need to ask all the committee members to sign and date the constitution (including the location where the agreement was reached) and ensure that the decision is recorded by the Secretary in the minutes of the meeting. All committee members should be given a copy of your constitution when they join to ensure they fully understand the rules of your Association.

Don't forget that once you have written your constitution you must abide by it, so don't be afraid to keep writing draft versions until all your members are totally happy with it.

## References:

Ten Steps to Writing a Constitution. 14 June 2010. GRANTfinder Ltd.  
<<http://www.grantnet.org.uk/grantnet3/HelpfulReports/writingaconstitution.pdf>>.

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