

## Developing Constitution and By-Laws to Govern your Club

Every club should write a set of guidelines on how they are going to operate and function. You may know these as the Polices and Procedures, Rules of Governance, or Constitution and By-laws. Most 4-H clubs choose to develop constitution and by-laws. It does not really matter what you call the document, but it is important that your members create and your club adopts the policies.

A constitution provides the foundation and framework that defines the club and helps provide equality and fairness to all club members. The constitution should be a document with lasting value, therefore seldom changing. The by-laws provide additional information and complement the constitution by outlining more details on how the club operates. By-laws should change to reflect members' needs.

Constitution and by-laws do not have to be complicated or lengthy. Rather, strive for simplicity for easy reading and understanding. Writing your constitution is one of the most important tasks to complete the first year the club forms. Annually, a committee should review the by-laws and make suggestions to the club for changes. What a great opportunity for members to develop leadership, citizenship, and decision making skills.

### How to Get Started?

A small committee of four to five members directed by an adult 4-H volunteer is a good way to begin in designing your club polices and procedures. The adult should serve in an advisory/support role and allow the members to work through the process. This not only allows the members to build new skills, but it helps build a feeling of ownership of the club by the members.

**Step I.** Share a sample outline of a club constitution and by-laws with the members. Have them review the document and make notes on the items they feel are important for their club. (Found at: <http://advisorshandbook.ohio4h.org/clubmanagement/files/Sample Club Constitution and By-Laws.pdf>).

**Step II.** Start with their first idea from the sample outline. The PURPOSE of the club is often a good beginning point. Write this on top of a piece of poster board, flip chart or dry erase board. Have members outline their major ideas for the club's purpose. Allow about 10 minutes or more of discussion and move on to their second priority. Follow the same process. Focus on getting the main thoughts and ideas down on paper. Later you can divide the various ideas between members and have them work on sentence and paragraph form for the documents.

**Step III.** At your second committee meeting, use the "Approve & Review Club Rules and Procedures" checklist with each article. Work through each section and challenge one another on each point in the checklist. Make changes as necessary. (Found at: <http://advisorshandbook.ohio4h.org/clubmanagement/files/Club Constitution and By-Laws Review Checklist.pdf>).

**Step IV.** Once the first draft is completed, make copies to provide all members for review prior to the next club meeting. At the club meeting, work through one Article at a time and give the entire membership the opportunity to provide suggestions. The committee members should take notes and begin the process of writing a second draft.

**Step V.** After writing the second draft, again copy and distribute to all members prior to the next club meeting. Hold a special Club meeting that focuses entirely on the review and approval of the Club Constitution and By-Laws. Once again, work through each article and hold a vote of approval for each section.

**Step VI.** After adopting your club's Constitution and By-law documents, make a final copy and distribute to each member and your county Extension office. Celebrate your club's accomplishment!

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