



## Introduction

The most important part of an organisation is its **Statutes**, sometimes called the Constitution or Bylaws for the organisation, which means the formal written rules that the organisation needs to follow. They establish procedures for holding elections, organising meetings, quorum requirements, membership structure and other important parts of your organisation. The statutes are like your organisation's "guidebook."

The statutes are approved by the organisation's members at the General Assembly and are considered above the board or executive officers, guiding the full organisation. The operations, activities and services of the organisation are led by the statutes (rules). The statutes help the organisation focus on their goals and decide on what activities fit with their goals and what they want to accomplish. They also explain the roles and responsibilities of its leaders and help them function well in organisation work. With all this information written down on paper, your organisation can have things running smoothly, give answers to tough questions and save a lot of time when discussing an issue. Your organisation will keep focused on its purpose and carry out activities for that specific purpose.

Statutes are considered a formal and legal document and can be used when the organisation is challenged in court or there is a conflict. Many government agencies require an organisation to have statutes, constitution, or bylaws to apply for certification or official status.

## Writing your statutes

If your organisation is developing its statutes, think about the purpose of your organisation and how the legal document (statutes) will help your organisation follow its goals. You can gather examples of statutes for other similar organisations as that will help your group see different ideas and styles that you can use in your own statutes. You will also need to decide who will be writing the statutes. Oftentimes the board or executive committee write and make the decisions, but it is recommended to have a variety of people involved in this process. Invite those who will work with your organisation and benefit from the activities and services your organisation will provide. To speed up the process, you can divide up the writing tasks with two or more people writing specific sections. The first draft of your statutes can follow a template or outline with people writing different sections. You can leave blanks on specific things you are not sure about and the details can be discussed all together as a group.

This is also the time you should consider whether your statutes are fair and democratic. Do they distribute the power in your organisation in a fair way? Do they allow members enough of a voice in how the organisation is run? Does it take a gender and diversity perspective into account? If the whole membership must vote on the statutes, you need to figure out how that is going to happen, especially if the membership is large. You may find it easiest to send out a letter explaining who wrote them, what the process was, etc and provide an approve/disapprove form to send back. If you do it this way, there should be a last date to receive the votes, and tallies will be made based on either the whole membership or the number of votes received. Another option would be to designate a meeting at which the



statutes will be voted on and give the membership written notice about the meeting in advance.

Make all the agreed-upon changes to the statutes and meet again to go over the final draft. When everyone is satisfied that the changes have been made correctly and the statutes are as they should be, you should vote to approve the statutes. The date that the final draft was approved should appear at the bottom of the bylaws in all future copies.

All officers, members of your board, and committee chairs should be given copies of the statutes. Also, you should either give copies to all members, or make copies easily available to those who want them. You can also make a video explaining the statutes in sign language and have it available on your organisation's website for anyone to watch.

### **Contents of your statutes**

The first section of an organisation's statutes focusing on objectives and operations should have the following:

- Name of the Association / Organisation
- Address / Location of the Association / Organisation
- Logo
- Mission
- Vision
- Objectives
- Activities
- Languages
- Relationships

Clearly defining your group's purpose helps keep your focus. Will the primary purpose be service, social, political, or something else? Is the organisation focused on a single issue, a set of issues, a geographic area, or a specific population? Who is your target group? Answer these questions together and make sure they are clearly stated in your statutes.

In the second section, you focus on membership. Explain what rights they have, their limitations and requirements for membership. It should also clearly state any required fees, attendance requirements, and any reason which membership can be invalid. Include other types of membership and what they mean, such as honorary membership.

- Membership Categories
- Membership Procedures
- Duties, Benefits and Rights of Members
- Duties, Benefits and Rights of Affiliated Members
- Duties, Benefits and Rights of Youth Members



Next, your statutes should have information about the officers and decision making of your organisation. They may include details about the structure and system of the organisation, who reports to whom for governance. If your organisation has a Director, the statutes will

explain that the Director is hired and overseen by the Board. If there are other staff members, this information will not be in the statutes but are part of the day-to-day operation of the organisation.

Additional information in the statutes should explain the purpose, procedure and/or responsibilities for:

- The General Assembly
  - Delegates
  - Guidelines
  - Functions
  - Voting
- Extraordinary Meetings
- Meetings
- Functions of Meeting
  - Quorum
  - Minutes

Your statutes should clearly explain how decisions are to be made and how many members and/or officers are required for quorum (the minimum number of persons that must be present for official business to take place).

The fourth section focuses on administration and how the organisation is run by the Board. Statutes should explain about the official offices of the group:

- Titles
- Required duties
- Length of terms
- Voting procedure
- Appointment procedure
- How to remove someone from office

Additional information about the executive team or staff can also be added here. Other information that may be included in this section:

- Replacement of Board Members
- Meetings of Board
- Functions of Board Meeting
- Committees



Clearly list what, if any, standing committees there will be, how special committees will be formed, how committee chairs will be chosen, and how members will be appointed to those committees. **Standing committees** means they are ongoing and **special committees** are for short term to complete a specific task or project.

If you have additional groups involved with your organisation such as regional representatives, delegates, or a Youth Section, include information about them here.

It is very important for your organisation's statutes to have details about how finances are managed, how records are kept and what kind of monitoring/ tracking and auditing will happen, and by who.

Finally, include information about amendments and how changes to the statutes should be made. Usually, it requires previous notice and a two-thirds majority vote. It is recommended to tell your members at two consecutive meetings that a bylaw amendment will be voted on at the third meeting or sending out a notice to all members telling them that a bylaw amendment will be voted on and when.

## **Inclusive statutes**

Many members experience discrimination based on their background. It is important that your organisation is inclusive and welcomes everyone. When you create policies and representation, you should consider different questions to make sure that your organisation is inclusive. Do a wide range of people take part in your activities and meetings? If not, why not – maybe there are practical things that might stop certain people using your group and attending your meetings (such as the time of day of your meetings or the venue you meet in?). Could you make it easier for parents to come to your meetings by changing the time of day you hold them or having a play corner at the meeting? Can you change how you allocate tasks and roles, to make sure a range of people get their voices heard? For example, could you encourage more women to take on roles such as chairing meetings?

How will you make sure that everyone is aware of your code of conduct? Your board members, staff members and members should be aware discrimination is unacceptable. For example, you can include a paragraph about discrimination in your statutes. For instance, you can state that your organisation does not accept any discrimination against race, gender, sexuality, religion, or disability. Below, you can find more information on how to make genderised statutes.

## **Genderised statutes**

It is increasingly common for organisational statutes to set up quota systems to promote gender equality. For example, in many cultures and communities, boards tend to be male dominated, as few women have the freedom and courage to run for election. It can enhance women's participation when the organisational constitution establishes the essence of both genders being represented. Here is some examples how you can include gender perspectives:



## **Mission of the organisation**

The statutes should pursue the interests and agendas of both genders. It is important to genderise this, because the contributions of both men and women are required for an organisation to realise its full potential. This can only be achieved by pursuing the interests of both genders.

Example: “The national association of xxx promotes awareness and realisation of the full potential for equality, self-support, participation and influence of deaf men, women, boys, and girls.”

## **Membership**

How does the organisation encourage the participation of both genders?

Please consider:

- Does it need to take special steps to ensure the inclusion of different categories of members in terms of age, social position, geographical location?
- Should special bodies be established, such as youth or women’s wings? How will this affect, for instance, women’s opportunities for policy influence and agenda setting within the organisation?

*Example: “The organisation shall encourage the participation of both genders. The organisation shall ensure that members feel safe to participate the activities organised by the organisation.”*

## **Political leadership**

Political leadership is important to take account, because election rules may influence the chances of women being elected.

Please consider:

- Should the gender of the chairperson differ from that of the vice-chair?
- Should a quota system to be used to ensure an equal number of men and women on the board or the executive committee?
- Does the disadvantaged gender need any special training or education to be able to participate equally in the decision-making?

*Example: “The general meeting shall elect one man and one female member from each of the country’s four main regions.”*



## Genderised rules of procedure

Rules of procedure do not apply just to the board but can also describe other types of decision-making within the organisation, including committees, work groups. Procedures can favour one sex over another directly or indirectly, giving rise to gender imbalance in decision making or distribution of benefits. Explicitly genderised rules of procedure can support the equal participation of men and women. Active and effective participation requires proper groundwork. Adequate rules will ensure that men and women have the same chance of gathering information and preparing their arguments, thus gaining the same access to influence the course of the debate. Carefully considered rules for the conduct of meeting can avoid informal domination by male over female board members, especially in cultures where women have been less trained than men in imposing their views in discussions and decision-making.

Please consider:

- What is the best timing of meetings for male and female members?
- Who will prepare the agenda? What are possibilities of men and women for suggesting items for the agenda?
- Is there a need for training women or men in relation to the board's work? For example, raising awareness of gender issues?
- Are men and women equally represented in the organisation's structures and governing bodies, and what is done to ensure this?
- Is the organisation open to both male and female members?

*Example: "Both genders shall be represented in the organisation's structure and governing bodies."*

For more information, please see appendix 1: A model constitution of a national organisation of the deaf; appendix 2: A model agenda for an annual general meeting; and appendix 3: A model of minutes of a meeting.

## Using your statutes

Once your statutes are approved and in effect, be sure your organisation and its members use them! You can have someone who is an officer or consultant to help advise the leaders, staff, and members on proper procedures and generally makes sure that meetings are running smoothly and following your statutes. They can help remind people whenever the organisation, one of its staff members, a board member, or a regular member is doing something that is not following the statutes. It is recommended that:

- Your leaders make an effort to keep the statutes in mind when doing organisation work.
- There is a copy of the statutes at meetings.





- If there are any questions about how to do something, look in the statutes for the answer

If you have a situation that you did not think of when writing your statutes, you can consider adding that information to the statutes in the future.

It is recommended to get together as a group from time to time to go over your statutes and help your board, staff, and members remember what is in the statutes. It also will allow the members to make sure that the statutes show the right direction of the organisation or if changes or clarifications need to be made. Statute amendments can be suggested at any time, and you will decide if you want a group of members or the board to decide about which changes should be proposed at the General Assembly.

Statutes can be easy to write and even easier to change if you are well-organised and have a good plan in place for how to do it. Following a simple outline and having strong statutes in place will help lessen confusion and encourage everyone to agree on the organisation's goals and how it should be run.