

Essentials for Reviewing a League's Constitution and Bylaws

Constitution and Bylaws Review

Sam Ranck, League Development Manager, discusses the areas of your league's constitution and bylaws that should be reviewed on an annual basis.

When preparing to charter, every league should review its constitution and bylaws. These documents stipulate everything from the election of officers at the annual meeting to the selection method for all-star participants. Below are some key factors to keep in mind when reviewing each document.

The Difference Between the Constitution and the Bylaws

A league's constitution is its governing document. It covers big picture items such as membership, election, discipline, finances, etc. Once a constitution is adopted, it remains in force until it is amended.

A league's bylaws must be approved annually and deal with operational rules and policies for conducting day-to-day business. Common items that may be contained in a league's bylaws include tournament team selection method, local rules, age structure of each division, etc.

If your league currently has one document that covers both of these areas, that document should be amended to clearly separate the leagues bylaws from its constitution.

Reviewing the Constitution

An updated constitution is essential to smooth local league operations. During your league's annual review of its constitution, be sure to closely examine the following areas:

Membership

The constitution should clearly define who is automatically a member of the local league and the requirements that must be met by an individual who is interested in becoming a member. Be sure to clearly communicate this information to all parents and individuals involved in your Little League® program. Uncertainty about who is and is not a member and what is required to become a member is a common source of discord within a local Little League program.

Member Discipline

Any member of any class is subject to disciplinary action by the board of directors if their conduct is viewed as detrimental to the league. The board shall have the power by a two-thirds vote of those present at any regular or special meeting to discipline, suspend or

remove any member, director, officer or committee member of the league, subject to provisions of the constitution, which require due process.

Annual Meeting

The constitution should clearly define when your league's annual meeting and board elections will be held. Make sure that the following items are clearly addressed with respect to the annual meeting:

- Notice: What notice is the league required to provide to members in advance of the annual meeting? What methods are the league required to use when providing that notice? Failure to provide proper notice may invalidate the results of a meeting.
- Quorum: Is the quorum listed in the constitution attainable? If not, the league should review its membership requirements as well as the quorum requirement for possible changes. Make sure that you have an updated membership roll in advance of the annual meeting. Failure to obtain a quorum may invalidate the results of a meeting.
- Voting: Are voting rights for members clearly defined? Requirements may include that the member is in good standing, has volunteered for a set number of hours, etc. Members should be made aware of any requirements well in advance of the annual meeting.

Board Positions and Committees

The constitution should clearly define the board positions and associated responsibilities that will be filled by the league. When reviewing, make sure to note any positions that need to be added or removed and vacancies that need to be filled. In addition to board positions, the constitution should also clearly define the process for forming and disbanding committees to address operational and other needs the league may have.

Financial and Accounting

The constitution should clearly define the league's fiscal year as well as requirements related to maintaining league funds (what banking institution, etc.). It is strongly recommended that a league conducts an annual audit to ensure compliance with these requirements.

Amendments

The constitution should clearly define the procedure for proposing an amendment and the requirements for passage. Any changes to the constitution must be made according to the defined amendment procedure.

Updating the Constitution

Any changes that need to be made to the constitution must be made using the amendment process. Once changes are approved, please forward an updated copy of your league's constitution to your Regional Office.

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Reviewing the Bylaws

A league's bylaws pertain to local operational rules and policies, and the league needs to approve them on an annual basis. When reviewing bylaws for the upcoming season, consider addressing the following areas:

Local League Rules

Many leagues utilize local options, especially in the instructional divisions of play. Local rules such as limits on stealing, limits on advancing on overthrows, additional pitching restrictions, etc. should be detailed in the league's bylaws.

Division Age Structure

Little League's age guidelines allow for a wide range of options when structuring divisions of play. Your league's age structure should be clearly defined in your bylaws. Additionally, you should note if your Minor Division will use coach pitch, machine pitch, etc.

Tournament Team Selection: Your league's method of tournament team selection should be clearly outlined in your bylaws. It is essential to outline and communicate this information in advance of the season.

Approving the League's Bylaws

Your league's bylaws are approved by the sitting Board of Directors. Once approved, they should be distributed and made readily available to any individual involved in the league that requests them.