

# Governance document hierarchy



## The constitution or rules

The purpose of the constitution is to provide a framework for why the organisation exists and broadly, the processes for how it is to operate. If you are an incorporated association in Queensland, your club's constitution must be written in a way that is consistent with the *Associations Incorporation Act 1981*.

As the primary governing document, the constitution typically provides a guide for the organisation's governance and management but does not go into great detail about the organisation's day-to-day operations. That level of detail is usually addressed in the more operational documents of the organisation.

## Bylaws

Constitutions usually provide authority for the board to set bylaws. This doesn't mean that you have to have them; it just means that you can establish them if the need arises. The bylaws are a set of rules that are established by an organisation that relate to the internal management or operation of that organisation. While they are subordinate to the constitution, members are still required to adhere to the provisions set out in the bylaws. Amendments to the bylaws can usually be made at a committee meeting, but the specific process should be outlined in your constitution or rules.

Bylaws can provide more information about the day-to-day running of the organisation. They may also include more information about eligibility requirements for particular classes of membership, position descriptions for committee members and other roles, and meeting rules (e.g. standing orders).

## Policies

In addition to bylaws, organisations can have policies that are created to guide their day-to-day operations. Policies are similar to bylaws but are typically more specific in scope and are intended to address a particular issue or set of circumstances. They provide guidelines on how decisions should be made and actions that should be taken within the organisation.

It is the management committee's responsibility to ensure that policies are in line with legal and ethical standards and the sport's state and national bodies, and to ensure that they are followed. While the management committee sets the policies, all volunteers and any staff members are responsible for implementing and following them.

Examples of potential policies include a social media policy to guide an organisation's online presence, a code of conduct for management committee members, volunteers and any staff, or an event management policy to ensure the smooth running of events.

It's best to include operational detail in the bylaws and policies for several reasons, including:

**Flexibility:** Detailed guidelines need frequent updating, which is easier if they are in bylaws or policies.

**Ease of Amendment:** Changing the constitution requires a high level of agreement among members.

**Simplicity:** The constitution should be clear and focused on core principles and Act requirements.

**Relevance:** Detailed procedures may not be necessary for all members, and those needing more detail can refer to bylaws or policy documents.

A helpful metaphor here is to think of the constitution as a new house. Sure, it has a floor, walls, windows, doors and a ceiling, but it isn't furnished and doesn't yet have everything that it needs to be a 'home'. The finishing touches, like floor and window coverings, landscaping and a letterbox, furniture and decorations are all added by the bylaws or policies. It is these subordinate documents that give the home more of its character and help visitors understand more about the owners.

