



# ASTRONOMICAL LEAGUE

## **A FEDERATION OF ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETIES A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION**

- ★ *To promote the science of astronomy;*
- ★ *By fostering astronomical education;*
- ★ *By providing incentives for astronomical observation and research;*
- ★ *By assisting communication among amateur astronomical societies.*

## ASTRO NOTES

Produced by the Astronomical League

### **Note 6: Club Constitution or Bylaws**

Every organization needs a written document which spells out its reason for being and the rules by which it operates. This document is called the constitution or bylaws of the organization. (While there are strict differences between the two terms, "constitution" and "bylaws" are usually used interchangeably in hobby clubs.)

There are usually at least six sections to a club's bylaws:

1. Name and objective of the organization
2. Qualifications for membership and categories of membership
3. Officers, their duties and method of election
4. Meetings and activities
5. Dues and financial controls
6. Method of amending

While these seem simple and straightforward, a few comments follow on each of the sections.

#### **Name and Objective**

Both the name and the objective should be simply stated and reflect the desires of the intended members. Objectives range from merely sharing common interests in astronomy to providing public education and outreach for an observatory or planetarium. Some clubs organize specifically to promote deep-sky or planetary or meteor observing. You are encouraged to keep the purpose as general as possible.

#### **Membership**

What does an individual need to do to become a member? Certainly have an interest in your objectives as stated above. What else? Do you plan on different classes of members? Some examples of membership categories are family, student, honorary, regular, or charter. It is not necessary to differentiate members, but some clubs find it convenient to do so. It all depends on your intent. After all, it's **your** club.

## **Officers**

The usual officers are president, vice president, secretary and treasurer. The duties for such officers can be found in standard references like *Robert's Rule of Order*. Smaller clubs often combine the office of secretary and treasurer; larger clubs keep them separate. Similarly, larger clubs may include additional officers: membership secretary, observatory director, etc.

Whatever officers you have, your bylaws should also specify how they are to be elected and what are the terms of office. Elections can be by mail ballot or by the members present at a specified club meeting. Terms can be for single or multiple years. If you decide on multiple year terms, you may wish to stagger the terms so that all of the officers are not elected at the same time.

Some positions with the organization are left to appointment rather than election. As chief executive of the club, the president usually appoints chairs such as librarian, programs, nominations and other standing and *ad hoc* committees.

## **Meetings**

When and how often does your club intend to meet? If you are just organizing a club, you may only wish to specify infrequent meetings, such as quarterly. Remember, it is OK to meet more often than the bylaws require, but if you require too frequent meetings, e.g., weekly, members may "burn out." Some clubs meet monthly except for the three summer months when members may be away on vacation.

Whatever frequency you decide, at least one meeting each year should be designated a business meeting. At that meeting you can elect officers, decide on the next year's budget and conduct any other business of a non-urgent nature. While urgent business can be carried out at any meeting (if your bylaws so specify!), having a specified time will leave general meetings free for members' benefit and promotion of your organization's objectives.

## **Dues and Financial**

If the dues amount(s) is not specified, the manner in which the amount is set should be specified. Many clubs leave the question of dues to the discussion of the budget and only require that the dues be such that each year's budget be balanced.

You may also wish to specify how finances are to be controlled: spending limits for any one officer; more than one check signer; more than one signature required for each check; etc. You may wish to discuss some of these controls with the bank where your club keeps its account(s).

## **Amendment**

You need some provision for changing your bylaws. As your club grows you may wish to include new provisions or modify old ones. As with electing officers, amendments can be ratified either by mail ballot or the membership at a specified meeting. But do not make amending too easy. Changes should not be made lightly. Two thirds of the members are usually required and sufficient notice of any meeting should be specified so all members can make their thoughts known.