How to Start a New Student Organization at Radford University

**



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## Introduction

Getting involved in a student organization is a great way to enhance your college experience. Being involved can help you gain new skills, build your resume, allow you to make new friends, and give you memories to last a lifetime. The office of Student Organization Assistance & Resources (SOAR) is here to help you accomplish your goals and this handbook will guide you through the steps you need to take to start a new student organization or reactivate an old one.

Please note: In order to be recognized, all student organizations at Radford University must be student-initiated. Faculty/staff involvement in an advising capacity is encouraged, but the Department of Student Activities supports the learning opportunities inherent in student-led initiatives.

## A Brief Overview of the Steps to Start a New Organization

1. Meet with the Assistant Director for Student Involvement or designee to initiate the recognition process and file an application to start a new organization.
2. Once the application is on file, schedule interest meetings to recruit new members for the organization – you’ll need at least seven other students to start an organization.
3. Find a Radford University faculty/staff advisor for the organization. The advisor must be someone who works as full-time or adjunct faculty/staff at RU.
4. Write a constitution for the organization. There are guidelines in the pages that follow.

Submit the constitution to the Assistant Director for Student Involvement for review.

1. Make a presentation to the Committee on Clubs and Organizations (COCO) about the organization. The committee will vote whether or not to recognize your new organization.
2. If your organization is recognized by COCO, you will be invited to meet with the Coordinator for Student Organizations to set up a page for your new organization on RUInvolved.
3. Congratulations! Once your organization has been approved by COCO and you have created a page on RU*Involved*, you will be a founding member of a new officially-recognized student organization at Radford University!

## Step One: Meet with the Assistant Director for Student Involvement and Submit the Application for Recognition

To schedule a meeting with the Assistant Director for Student Involvement, send an email requesting a meeting to [jcleonar@radford.edu](mailto:jcleonar@radford.edu). In the message, include a basic description of the organization you are hoping to start.

During the meeting, the assistant director will discuss the *Application for Recognition*. The blank application can be found on the next page of this document. If you have all the required information already, you may complete the application prior to the meeting. On the application there are spaces for advisor information. It is acceptable to start the recognition process without a faculty/staff advisor secured, but you must have an advisor before you can proceed through the final steps of recognition.

### New Student Organization Application for Recognition

Complete the form below and submit it to the Assistant Director for Student Involvement in Bonnie Hurlburt Student Center room 226 or to SOAR in Bonnie 235 or by email to [jcleonar@radford.edu](mailto:jcleonar@radford.edu).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Proposed Organization Name: | |
| Description of Organization: | |
| Name of Primary Student Contact: | E-mail Address: |
| Local Address: | Phone Number: |
| Name of Secondary Student Contact: | E-mail Address: |
| Name of RU Faculty/Staff Advisor: | E-mail Address: |
| Department and RU PO Box : | Phone number: |
|  | |

## Step Two: Hold Interest Meetings and Recruit New Members

Once you have filed the *Application for Recognition* with the assistant director, you will be authorized to schedule three interest meetings and to reserve a table in the lobby or plaza of the Bonnie Hurlburt Student Center three times in order to promote your new organization and recruit new members. Go the Information and Event Planning Office on the first floor of the Bonnie to reserve rooms and tables. You may also email [skcox@radford.edu](mailto:skcox@radford.edu) or call 540-831-5420 to make reservations.

After you have reserved rooms, go to SOAR (Student Organization Assistance & Resources) in Bonnie 235 to make flyers promoting your meetings to post on bulletin boards on campus. Be sure to include this information on your flyers:

* The name of the organization
* The purpose of the organization
* Time and place of interest meetings
* A phone number and/or email address interested students may contact for more information about your organization

People who attend the meetings will want to hear why the new group is forming and learn about its mission and how they can become part of it.

Some suggestions for interest meetings:

* Provide a variety of times. Do not hold all three meetings on Wednesday at 2 p.m.
* Keep the meetings short, approximately 30 minutes to an hour.
* Allow time for those attending to get to know each other.
* The main speakers during the meeting should be the student contacts with supportive comments from the RU faculty/staff sponsor.
* Allow time for suggestions and questions from the audience.
* Provide information, in writing, to those attending on how to become involved, when the next interest meeting is to be held, and whom to contact for questions. You can go to SOAR to make these handouts.

Be sure to collect the names and contact information of students who are interested in joining the organization. You will need at least eight committed student members to become fully recognized as a new student organization.

## Step Three: Find an Advisor for the Organization

Every registered student organization at Radford University is required to have an active on- campus advisor who is a full-time or adjunct faculty/staff member at RU. Advising a student organization can be challenging, rewarding, and provide lifelong lessons for both advisors and organizations. Keep in mind that at RU, student organizations should be student-initiated and student-led; Advisors should serve in an advising capacity for the organization, but the operation and course-setting for the organization should be driven by students.

The following represent duties for which an organization advisor might be responsible:

* Attend most organization meetings and events (for major events, such as those funded by Radford After Dark, advisors are required to attend).
* Meet regularly with the organization's president and executive board
* Ensure the organization registers each year and follows all steps to maintain recognized status.
* Encourage and motivate members of the organization.
* Review funding requests for accuracy.
* Keep the executive board informed on institutional matters.
* Audit finances with the organization’s treasurer.
* Attend trips to conferences, business meetings, etc., and advise student delegations during these events.
* Provide developmental activities to the executive board to assist in developing group cohesiveness.
* Assist the organization with election concerns.
* Respect and encourage all organizational function.
* Provide a background history and insight to the organization over time.
* Hold goal-setting meetings with the executive board.
* Mediate conflicts within the organization.
* Assist with risk management decisions.

For more information, Student Organization Assistance and Resources (SOAR) offers a Leadership Library featuring books, CDs, and other supplies to assist advisors and student leaders in learning about organizational behavior, leadership and management styles, and guides for maximizing the potential of student organizations and their members. These resources may be checked out from the Leadership Library in SOAR (Bonnie 235) at no charge to registered student organizations.

## Step Four: Write a Constitution for the Organization

Using the guidelines in the appendix of this manual, create a constitution for the organization. After you have completed the document, submit it to the Assistant Director for Student Involvement for review by emailing it to [jcleonar@radford.edu](mailto:jcleonar@radford.edu).

The constitution is the most important document for your organization, so take the time and effort to craft it carefully. It gives the group purpose, direction, and guidance, as well as a strong foundation to help the organization survive the tests of time. The language should be clear and concise, leaving little room for interpretation, both now and in the future. Depending on the complexity of the organization, a constitution can be a simple two-page document or can expand to more than twenty pages. The goal is not to answer every possible issue, but to provide a framework so that members can address any issue that may arise. Whether an organization is framing or revising a constitution, several issues should be considered by the organization's leaders.

The following issues are vital aspects to be considered, as recommended by Advising Student Groups and Organizations, written by Norbert Dunkel and John Schun, 1998:

1. The constitution should include all the elements required by the campus office that registers student organizations.

2. If the organization is the custodian of a foundation account, scholarship, or fellowship funds, there should be information about how funds will be distributed if the organization is dissolved.

3. A constitutional committee should be identified by the organization's president to review the document periodically.

4. The advisor should meet with the committee to provide historical perspective and advice on legal or financial matters, and to listen to discussion. The advisor should have a copy of the constitution and should review it at least annually to stay informed as to its contents.

5. Finally, the constitution approval process should be reviewed by the committee to gain an understanding of the time involved for constitutional approval. In most cases, the constitution is approved by a com­mittee, presented to the membership, and adopted by a two-thirds vote of the membership. The constitution then begins the approval process directed by the university.

## Step Five: Make a presentation to the Committee on Clubs and Organizations (COCO) about the organization

Once all the other steps are in place, you will be invited to attend a meeting of the Committee on Clubs and Organizations (COCO) to make a presentation about the organization, its purpose, and the types of activities the organization will do. Prior to appearing before COCO, you must submit the application for recognition, a list of members (including names and email addresses), and the constitution.

Your presentation can take whatever format you like – from formal with multi-media components to simply talking about the organization. However, you should be prepared to thoroughly describe the organization and answer any questions the committee members may have about the organization and the materials you have submitted. The checklist COCO members will use in reviewing your application materials is at the end of this guide; you may wish to review it to make sure you are ready for your COCO appearance.

After you have answered questions from the committee, you will leave and the committee will vote to grant recognition or not. Generally, the committee will make one of three decisions:

1. Grant full recognition to the organization.
2. Grant recognition pending revisions to the constitution.
3. Denial of the application for recognition. If you have followed all of the steps suggested in this handbook, this outcome is unlikely.

Within 48 hours of the COCO meeting, you will receive an email with the committee’s decision and instructions to set up a meeting with the Coordinator of Student Organizations to discuss any necessary constitution revisions and/or to make the final step in becoming recognized.

## Step Six: Meet with the Coordinator of Student Organizations to Establish a Page for the Organization on RUInvolved

The coordinator will review the benefits of being a recognized organization at RU and set up a page for your organization on RU*Involved*. In order to maintain recognition, it is crucial that the organization keep the organization’s roster on RU*Involved* current.

RU*Involved* enables you and your organization to:

* Communicate with members of your organization.
* Promote the activities and programs of your organization.
* Manage membership and participation within your organization.
* Hold online elections of new officers.
* Store files and documents, such as meeting minutes, your constitution, and photos.
* Create a student involvement transcript.

## Step Seven: After Your Organization Has Been Recognized…

Now that your new organization is officially recognized, here are a few suggestions to keep the momentum going and to become more visible and involved on campus as an organization:

* Schedule regular organization meetings through the Information and Event Planning Office on the first floor of the Bonnie by emailing [skcox@radford.edu](mailto:skcox@radford.edu) or calling 540-831-5420.
* Continue to recruit new members to grow your organization.
* Participate in Club Fair (only recognized organizations are allowed this privilege).
* Attend campus events, conferences, and workshops (especially the Ignite Student Leadership Conference).
* Bring a speaker related to your organization’s mission to campus – as a recognized organization, you may apply for funding assistance through the Club Programming Committee.
* Co-sponsor events on campus with other organizations.
* Attend RU Athletics and/or R-SPaCE events as a group.
* Regularly update your organization’s RU*Involved* profile with photos and announcements to keep the RU community informed of your activities.
* Host a Radford After Dark event.

Remember, as a recognized student organization, you have responsibilities and privileges available to help your organization enhance the college experience of students within your organization as well as the larger RU community. Visit RU*Involved*, SOAR, and the Student Activities Website ([www.radford.edu/stuact](http://www.radford.edu/stuact)) to stay informed and learn more about resources available to you. The staff of the Department of Student Activities is here to help you, so if you have any questions or need more information, please contact us.

## Appendix

### Constitution Guidelines

All constitutions (and bylaws) must address specific topics. While they do not have to follow this outline exactly, the following format is used by a majority of student organizations.

However, please note there are some required statements indicated below that must be included in all constitutions for recognized student organizations at Radford University.

**Article I: Name of Organization**

Name of organization and national affiliate (if applicable): If the organization has a national affiliate, copies of the national affiliate’s bylaws and constitution must be presented for review and be added to your group's folder in Student Organization Assistance and Resources (SOAR).

**Article II: Purpose**

The purpose should state why the organization exists and specifically state the objectives (without listing specific activities) of the organization. The activities of the organization must relate to this purpose.

**Article III: Membership**

**Section 1. General Requirements**

A statement defining who is eligible for membership must be included. Membership can be open to all RU students, faculty, and staff; however the organization is free to decide for themselves what they believe and who may be a part of their organization (i.e. Democrats need not include Republicans, vegans can exclude meat eaters, Christian groups can exclude non-Christians or those of different faiths, etc.).

As Radford University carries out its mission to prepare students to live and work in a pluralistic society, it is our hope that all student organizations will recognize the valuable learning experience which is offered through club participation. If this club sponsors a public event in RU facilities (e.g., an all-campus dance) or receives university funding for an event, it must permit equal and open access to that event by all members of the Radford University community.

***An example of Article III, Section 1:*** Membership in this organization is open to all Radford University students, faculty, and staff, regardless of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, veteran status, national origin, religion, or political affiliation. Members must belong to both the national and local organizations through the payment of dues.

**Section 2. Categories of Membership**

The types of membership (active, inactive, alumni, honorary, etc.) in use must be listed. Voting membership of recognized campus organizations shall consist only of matriculated students, faculty, and staff of this institution. A majority of the voting members must be students.

Clearly state what makes one an “active member” of the organization – payment of dues, attendance at a minimum number of meetings, enrollment status, grade point average, etc.

Non­voting membership, if any, must be comprised of the following categories:

1. Inactive members - persons who have been but no longer are, voting members of the organization, for reason as defined by the organization's constitution and/or bylaws.
2. Alumni of the organization who are no longer enrolled at Radford University.
3. Special members -a limited number of persons (who may not be affiliated with the University) who qualify for membership according to specifically stated criteria established for special membership. Criteria for special membership must be sufficiently specific and appropriate to meet with the approval of the Committee on Clubs and Organizations (COCO).

**Section 3. Qualification and Privileges**

The qualifications and privileges (e.g., voting and non-voting) of each membership category must be included. A statement must be included that says the majority of voting members must be students.

***An example of Article III, Section 3:***Active membership carries voting privileges. Privileges include participation in activities and programs sponsored by the organization.

Voting qualifications are as follows:

1. Members must be currently enrolled at Radford University

2. Membership must be in good standing as defined by the current Executive Board

(*Define what qualifies as good standing for your organization here*.)

3. Members must have paid their dues to the national and local organization.

**Section 4. Selection Process**

How does someone become a member of the organization? The selection process must be listed for each type of membership.

**Section 5. Removal Procedures**

Describe the reasons and process for removing someone from membership in the organization.

***An example of Article III, Section 5:*** Members of (organization name) may be removed from membership only for just cause and by a vote of ¾ of the entire active voting membership. Any such removal must be approved by the organization advisor.

**Article IV: Meetings**

**Section 1.** The number of meetings (e.g., per month/semester/year) should be listed.

**Section 2.** The specific guide to parliamentary procedure (e.g., *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*) must be listed.

**Section 3.** Quorum defined - A quorum is the minimum number of members who have to be at a meeting for the group’s business to be legally conducted. A quorum is generally either the average attendance at the meetings or the largest number of members who can be depended upon to attend to regular meetings.

**Section 4.**Majority defined - For most organizations, decisions are brought to the membership for a vote. Before a vote can be taken, a quorum must be met. Once the quorum is met, most groups use a simple majority (50% + 1) to declare a decision valid.

***An example of Article IV:***

Section 1. Meetings will be held twice a month during the academic year and special meetings may be called if necessary.

Section 2. Business will be conducted according to *Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised*. In case of voting tie, the president will cast the deciding vote.

Section 3. A quorum is two-thirds (2/3) of the active members.

Section 4. A simple majority, (50%, plus one) rules.

**Article V: Dues**

**Section 1.** How dues will be decided and who will be involved in the decision. It is best not to specify the exact amount of dues, but rather to explain how the dues will be calculated.

**Section 2.** When dues will be collected, who will collect the dues, and the checks and balances system? If the organization has rolling membership (meaning that the organization accepts new members year round), what will be the basis for charging of dues?

***An example of Article V:***

Section 1. Dues shall be a combination of national and local chapter dues to be paid one month prior to initiation of members. Chapter dues shall be set yearly at the first meeting held in the fall semester of each academic year. National dues are set by the National Executive Committee.

Section 2. Dues shall be collected by the treasurer within 60 days of the first meeting of the semester. The president and advisor will review dues collection on a monthly basis.

**Article VI: Officers**

**Section l.** List of the officers (President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, etc.) must be listed and their specific duties and responsibilities must be stated.

**Section 2.** All qualifications for holding an office must be stated, including the statement "Only full-time students (12 semester hours) may serve as officers."

**Section 3.** Duties of each officer explained. This is not an exhaustive list, but does list the main responsibilities.

**Section 4.** A specific method of election must be explained. Include the term/year of election, length of service, and month of officer transition. Transition is recommended for mid-semester which allows the new and old officers an opportunity to work together for a brief period of time.

**Section 5.** A statement explaining the reasons for removal of an officer and the specific procedure must be included.

***An example of Article VI:***

Section 1. The (name of organization) officers shall be: President, Vice President, Recorder, and Treasurer. The Executive Board shall be: President, Vice President, Recorder, Treasurer, and Advisor.

Section 2. Qualification for Officers - Only full-time students enrolled in at least twelve credit hours may serve as officers. In addition, they must be in members in good financial standing with the organization.

Section 3. Duties of the officers are as follows:

1. President - Provides leadership and overall direction for the organization. Prepares and maintains a calendar of scheduled events and oversees organization meetings.
2. Vice-President - Assists the President in the management of organization affairs; fills in for the President in his/her absence; appoints member(s) to serve as coordinator of committee chairs as needed.
3. Recorder - Maintains membership records, conducts correspondence with the members and relevant others, issues announcements at all meetings, prepares and maintains the minutes of all meetings, and maintains historical records of the organization.
4. Treasurer- Receives and disburses funds and manages the financial affairs of the organization, keeps a voucher system to account for all expenses and serves as chairman of the fundraising committee.

Section 4. A majority vote of the active membership will determine the election of officers. Elections will be held in the middle of the spring semester for the following academic year. Officers will serve a term of one full academic year.

Section 5. Officers can be recommended for removal by the Executive Board for just cause or if they fail to meet membership qualifications, fail to execute the duties of the office, or fail to satisfactorily attend the general and executive board meetings, unless excused by the president or advisor(s). Approval by a majority vote of the active membership is necessary.

In case of resignation or dismissal, the outgoing officer must notify the Executive Board which consists of the officers and advisor(s). The unoccupied position will be filled by appointment by the Executive Board unless the unfinished term of the officer is longer than a month before the annual spring elections, in which case an election will be held to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the term.

**Article VII: Advisor**

**Section 1.** A statement requiring the designation of a faculty or staff advisor(s) from Radford University must be included. Note: The advisor must be a current full-time or adjunct faculty or staff member at RU, not an hourly employee of a contracted service provider.

**Section 2.** The advisor’s duties must be stated. The following statement must be included in the constitution: “The advisor(s) shall work closely with the organization in coordinating activities to ensure that they are conducted in compliance with Radford University policies and the laws of the United States, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the City of Radford.”

**Section 3.** A specific method of election must be explained.

**Section 4.** A statement explaining the reasons for removal of an advisor and the specific procedure must be explained.

***Example of Article VII:***

Section 1. A current full-time or adjunct faculty or staff member of Radford University will be eligible to be the campus chapter advisor.

Section 2. The advisor(s) shall work closely with the organization in coordinating activities to ensure they are conducted in compliance with Radford University policies, and the laws of the United States, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the City of Radford.

Section 3. The advisor(s) will be recommended by the Executive Board and elected by a majority vote of the active membership. The purpose of the advisor(s) is to help give members guidance in policies and procedures concerning this organization.

Section 4. The advisor(s) will be removed for just cause at the recommendation of the Executive Board and removed by a majority vote of the active membership.

**Article VIII: Committees** (This is an optional section for the constitution)

**Section 1. Executive Committee**

Some organizations require meetings of officers, and advisor(s), and certain representatives for executive sessions. If this is applicable, the membership, a quorum, and specific responsibilities must be listed.

**Section 2. Standing Committees**

Many organizations establish regular standing committees to handle needs such as membership, publicity, and social events. These committees are led by one executive board member and consist of active members. If this section is applicable, each committee should be listed individually. Items such as the formation procedure and the function of each committee can be addressed, too.

**Section 3. Special Events Committees**

These committees are formed and dissolved as a specific need is addressed. For example, the group may co-sponsor a community clean-up project with another organization on campus. The executive board would ask one board member and a handful of active members to organize the group’s efforts. Once the project is complete the Special Events Committee is dissolved.

***Example of Article VIII:***

Section 1. Executive Committee

The Executive Committee consists of the executive board and committee chairs. On a monthly basis, the executive board will meet to discuss issues pertaining to the organization. All board members and committee chairs are required to attend these meetings.

Section 2. Standing Committees   
A. (Organization name) will have the following standing committees:

1. Fundraising Committee

2. Programs Committee

3. Promotion Committee

4. Membership Committee

5. Publications Committee

6. Service Committee.

B. Members sign up for committees in which they have an interest. A designated executive board member serves as chairman for each committee. In case of a voting tie, the chairperson will cast the deciding vote.

Section 3. Special Event Committees will be set up as needed by the organization. The committee chair will report committee activities at each general meeting as appropriate.

**Article IX: Responsibilities**

The following statement must be included in all constitutions for organizations at Radford University: The organization will adhere to University policies, the Constitution and laws of the United States of America, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the City of Radford.

***Example of Article IX:***

The organization will adhere to University policies, the Constitution and laws of the United States of America, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the City of Radford.

**Article X: Amendments**

**Section 1.** A statement listing the specified proposal requirements for amendments must be listed. Be sure to list the exact steps for amendment presentation and the number of votes needed for a proposal to be considered.

**Section 2.** This statement must be included: “Any revisions to the constitution and/or bylaws must be approved by the Assistant Director of Student Activities – Student Involvement.”

***Example of Article IX:***

Section 1. Proposed amendments to the constitution of (name of organization) must be brought forth during a regular business meeting. The amendment must then be presented to a quorum of the organization at the next regular business meeting. All active members must be notified in writing of the proposed amendment. A two-thirds vote of the active membership shall be required for adoption.

Section 2. Any revision of the constitution must be reviewed and approved by the Assistant Director of Student Activities – Student Involvement.

### Constitution Review Checklist

This is the constitution review checklist used by members of COCO.

This checklist can help you ensure that all major aspects of the constitution are included.

**Name of Club/Organization: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Type of review:**

\_\_\_\_ New club or organization

\_\_\_\_ Reactivation of a former club or organization

**List of organization members submitted**

\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_ No

**Is organization unique – does it offer something other recognized organizations do not already offer?**

\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_ No

**Purpose of the organization**

\_\_\_\_ Included

\_\_\_\_ Not included

**Membership**

\_\_\_\_ General requirements (including faculty/staff)

\_\_\_\_ Categories of membership listed

\_\_\_\_ Qualifications

\_\_\_\_ Privileges

\_\_\_\_ State the majority of voting members must be students

\_\_\_\_ Statement of membership eligibility

\_\_\_\_ Selection procedures

\_\_\_\_ Removal procedures

**Dues, who determines (if applicable)**

**Number/frequency of meetings**

**Quorum defined**

**Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised or other parliamentary guides**

**Officers**

\_\_\_\_ List of officers

\_\_\_\_ State qualifications (must be a full time student

\_\_\_\_ Explain duties (including who is responsible for finances)

\_\_\_\_ Selection process

\_\_\_\_ Removal procedures

**Advisor**

\_\_\_\_ Must be a full-time or adjunct member of RU faculty/staff

\_\_\_\_ State responsibilities

\_\_\_\_ Selection procedures

\_\_\_\_ Removal procedures

**Committees (optional)**

\_\_\_\_ Membership requirements

\_\_\_\_ Membership responsibilities

\_\_\_\_ Quorum defined

**Responsibility Statement**

\_\_\_\_ Included

\_\_\_\_ Not included

**Amendments**

\_\_\_\_ Proposal and approval procedures

\_\_\_\_ Percentage vote required for approval

\_\_\_\_ Reviewed by the Assistant Director of Student Activities – Student Involvement

**Required Constitutional Review Statements**

Advisor: “…shall work closely with the organization in coordinating activities to ensure that they are conducted in compliance with the RU policies and the laws of the USA, the Commonwealth of VA, and the City of Radford.”

Responsibilities: “The club will adhere to Radford University policies, the constitution and laws of the USA, the Commonwealth of VA, and the City of Radford.”



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