

BY-LAWS for your NHS or NJHS CHAPTER

Some Guidelines for Development and Use

Prepared by the
NHS & NJHS National Office
As administered by the
NASSP Department of Student Activities
Revised: Fall 2009

www.nhs.us

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National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) www.principals.org
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Note: For the sake of simplicity, this handout is written using “NHS” only when referencing an Honor Society chapter. Unless noted otherwise, middle level chapters (NJHS) can easily substitute “NJHS” in the documents that follow.

1. National Constitution:

ARTICLE XVI: BYLAWS

Section 1. Each chapter shall write bylaws to amplify sections of this Constitution and to clarify operating procedures of the chapter. Bylaws do not need the approval of the National Council but must be consistent with this Constitution.

Section 2. The chapter bylaws shall contain information concerning the election and duties of officers, the schedule of meetings, member obligations, dues, and the like.

Source: NHS and NJHS National Constitutions, revised edition 2008. © NASSP.

See www.nhs.us/constitutions for the most recent editions of the national constitutions.

2. Excerpts from the National Handbook

Chapter Organization: Constitutions, Bylaws, and more

All chapters must adopt and follow the National Constitution. This obligation is outlined in the chartering agreement signed by every school with a chapter. The following discussion is designed to assist chapters in implementing the provisions of the Constitution when operating a chapter of the National Honor Society or National Junior Honor Society.

A. Governing Documents

- The National Constitution

The Constitution of the Honor Society is the primary source for policy information for all chapters. It has been approved by and can be amended only by motion from the National Council with final approval by the NASSP Board of Directors. The constitution has changed over the years. Though the basic tenets of the organization have remained constant, the society has evolved to reflect new thinking since 1921. The versions appearing on the national Web sites, www.nhs.us and www.njhs.us, are the most recent editions containing a variety of amendments approved since the last formal printing in 2005.

- Chapter Bylaws

Local chapters must adopt bylaws to the Constitution to establish local procedures. These bylaws should specify guidelines on such topics as the schedule of meetings; member obligations regarding meeting attendance, participation in projects, etc.; information on chapter officers (which positions exist for the local chapter, what the duties of office are, how officers are to be elected, etc.); dues requirements; a description of projects for the year; and scholarship nomination procedures. Chapters may add any other information and procedures pertinent to the chapter.

The chapter should regularly review the bylaws and change them to meet local needs. Though the bylaws are not approved by the National Council, they must be consistent with the Constitution and the policies established by the National Council.

All NHS and NJHS chapters function under a *single national constitution* (developed and monitored by the National Council, available in the national handbook and on the national Web site), and operate locally under a set of *bylaws*.

Bylaws for local Honor Society chapters are designed to implement and expand upon the National Constitution. They are written sets of rules for a group. The bylaws define the limits of authority for the organization and give a sense of both order and purpose.

Chapter bylaws should be stated in simple, easy-to-understand terms. They should include only essential items. Amendments should be simple and direct. Bylaws must be studied regularly and changed to stay vital, meaningful, and real.

Note: Just as the national constitutions are publicly available via the national Web site and handbooks, so should local chapter bylaws be readily available and widely distributed to all members of the chapter, and also available for review by faculty, parents, school board members, etc. upon request. Because of this, chapters are encouraged to write, review and edit all bylaws documents carefully to ensure that they represent the best expression possible for the chapter.

3. Creating Chapter Bylaws: A Suggested Process

Gather resources

Sample bylaws from the national office (see below)

Bylaws from other chapters in the school district or athletic conference school

Relevant school policies, handbooks, codes of conduct, etc.

Sample bylaws from other organizations on campus (e.g., student council, clubs, etc.)

Organize the Process

Determine who will write the bylaws (preferably a committee of students or faculty or a combination of the two), who will need to review and approve the content, and a general planning schedule (suggestions to follow).

Write and Obtain Approval

Step 1: Organize the first meeting of your Bylaws Committee

Review the resources collected.

Review the timeline for development

Create a first draft or make assignments for drafting sections of the new bylaws.

Set the draft aside for committee consideration; plan your next meeting (step 2)

Step 2: Review the first draft.

Suggest and discuss revisions.

Step 3: Share results with the chapter membership and Faculty Council, allowing a finite time for review and comment (up to 30 days).

Step 4: Review comments and suggestions.

Revise the bylaws.

Repeat Steps 3 and 4 as needed.

Prior to Step 5, it is recommended that a parent also be given the opportunity to read and review the content to assure clarity of expression for the layperson reading the bylaws.

Careful technical editing by a member of the English Department will also prove helpful.

Step 5: Submit to Chapter Membership for approval. If approval is not obtained, start over taking into consideration the need for new or alternate members of the committee.

Step 6: Submit to Faculty Council for approval. If the FC does not approve, they should provide direction to the committee regarding which specific sections they cannot accept and offer suggestions for consideration. In this case, return to *Step 4*.

Step 7: Submit to the Administration for approval. If the administration does not approve, they should provide direction to the committee regarding which specific sections they cannot accept and offer suggestions for consideration. In this case, return to *Step 4*.

Step 8: Upon formal approval by all three groups (Membership, Faculty Council, Administration), print and distribute the final, ratified version of the Chapter Bylaws for all parties involved.

Review

Advisers should carefully read and explain the bylaws to newly-elected chapter officers (or the full membership) each year. In addition, bylaws should be reviewed regularly, but no later than once every five (5) years to assure that they are accurate and up-to-date.

4. Sample Bylaws: Outline and Full Text

Note on terminology: The national office uses the term “constitution” to refer to the National Constitutions of NHS and NJHS, reserving the term “bylaws” for the operating procedures adopted by the local chapter. Some chapters refer to their bylaws as a “local constitution” which is allowable, but can lead to confusion as to whether the local or national document is being referenced.

A Suggested Outline for Honor Society Chapter Bylaws:

Article I	Name: Statement of the name of the organization
Article II	Purpose(s): The general purpose of the group [See Article I of the national constitution for reference.]
Article III	Powers: Powers vested in the organization; the final authority which rests with the principal (per V.1 of the national constitution)
Article IV	Membership: Definition of membership categories for the group
Article V	Selection of Members: Establishes the time, methods, and procedures for the nomination and selection of members. (Information in this section must be consistent with the national guidelines, developed by the Faculty Council, and is not subject to member approval as per Article IX, section 4 of the national constitution.)
Article VI	Obligations of Members. The duties and responsibilities of the organization, the officers, adviser, committees and committee chairs, and members. Reference to meeting attendance, project participation, and dues can be included in this section.
Article VII	Officers: Procedures for election of officers, removal from office, and filling vacancies.
Article VIII	Meetings: Frequency of meetings, and provisions for special sessions
Article IX	Activities: Overview of the regular activities of the chapter including chapter and individual service projects.
Article X	Discipline and Dismissal [Provisions herein should be based on Article X of the National Constitution. Information in this section must be consistent with the national guidelines, developed by the Faculty Council, and is not subject to member approval as per Article X of the national constitution.]
Article XI	Ratification/Approval: Method and procedure for formal approval (ratification) of the bylaws.
Article XII	Amendments: Provisions/methods for amending the bylaws

Additional local sections, as developed by the Faculty Council, Membership, or Administration, can be inserted. It is recommended that the Ratification and Amendments articles appear at the end of the bylaws followed by a) the date of approval and b) signatures of the chapter/school leadership in the year of approval. See Sample Bylaws below.

SAMPLE BY-LAWS TEXT: NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY*

(Updated 10.09)

**Note:* Provisions found within this sample have been compiled from a variety of by-laws submitted over the years to the national office. Local chapters should review their own needs, policies and procedures to amend this model to suit their local needs. Though by-laws are a constitutional mandate (Article XVI), the verbiage found in this sample is not. Underlined phrases indicate parts of the document where local variations are allowed.

Chapter Bylaws
Of the
_____ Chapter
Of the
National Honor Society
Adopted: [Enter date of approval to verify this as the most recent version.]

ARTICLE I: NAME

The name of this chapter shall be the _____ Chapter of the National Honor Society of _____ (name of school). [*Formatting note:* When there is only a single section within an article, it is not necessary to enumerate sections. Only when multiple sections exist (see Article III below) is it necessary to number the individual sections.]

ARTICLE II: PURPOSE

The purpose of this chapter shall be to create an enthusiasm for scholarship, to stimulate a desire to render service, to promote worthy leadership, and to encourage the development of character in students of _____ (name of school).

ARTICLE III: POWERS

Section 1: This chapter operates under the direction of and in full compliance with the National Constitution of NHS. See www.nhs.us/constitutions.

Section 2. The chapter adviser is given the authority to supervise the administration of chapter activities, as delegated by the school principal.

Section 3: Final authority on all activities and decisions of the chapter resides with the school principal. [For reference, see Article V, Section 1 of the National Constitution.]

Section 4: Non-discrimination. Our chapter of NHS maintains policies and practices that are designed to prevent discrimination against any qualified candidate or member on the basis of race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex (gender), and disability. This policy of nondiscrimination applies to all practices, including the chapter administration and the selection, discipline, and dismissal of members. [*Note:* Local advisers should confer with the principal and or school system representatives regarding the inclusion of the language from this section to be certain it conforms to existing local and state policies.]

ARTICLE IV: MEMBERSHIP

Section 1. Membership in this chapter is an honor bestowed upon deserving students by the faculty and shall be based on the criteria of Scholarship, Service, Leadership, and Character.

Section 2. Membership in this chapter shall be known as active, honorary, and graduate. Active members become graduate members at graduation. Graduate and honorary members have no voice or vote in chapter affairs.

Section 3. Eligibility:

- a. Candidates eligible for selection to this chapter must be members of the sophomore, junior, or senior class.
- b. To be eligible for selection to membership in this chapter, the candidate must have been enrolled for a period equivalent to one semester at _____.
- c. Candidates eligible for election to the chapter shall have a minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. [*Note: While the level of GPA performance can be raised by individual chapters, the standard must still remain as a cumulative GPA. Chapters are discouraged from allowing their GPA standard to change on an annual basis, but are encouraged to maintain and publicize this standard to assist students in setting goals for achieving this level of academic performance.*]
- d. Upon meeting the grade level, enrollment, and GPA standards, candidates shall then be considered based on their service, leadership, and character.

ARTICLE V: SELECTION OF MEMBERS [Note: While Selection Procedures must be published and available as required by Article IX, Section 4, it is not required for the Selection Procedure to be included in the local chapter bylaws. The Selection Procedure can exist as a separate document with a shorter, less detailed rendition included in this section.]

Section 1. The selection of members to this chapter shall be by a majority vote of the Faculty Council which consists of five faculty members appointed by the principal. The chapter adviser shall be the sixth, non-voting, ex-officio member of the Faculty Council.

Section 2. The selection of active members shall be held once a year during the second semester of the school year. [Note: Alternative or additional selection periods may be added.]

Section 3. Prior to the final selection, the following shall occur:

- a. Students' academic records shall be reviewed to determine scholastic eligibility.
- b. Students who are eligible scholastically (i.e., candidates) shall be notified and asked to complete and submit the Student Activity Information Form (a.k.a the "Candidate's Form") for further consideration. [Sample forms can be found in the National Handbook.]
- c. The faculty shall be requested to evaluate candidates determined to be scholastically eligible using the official evaluation form provided by the chapter adviser. [Sample forms can be found in the National Handbook.]
- d. The Faculty Council shall review the Student Activity Information Form, faculty evaluations and other relevant information to determine those who fully meet the selection criteria for membership. [Note: Additional steps such as essays, external recommendations or interviews can be included here as components of the local selection process. See the national handbook for discussion of these concepts.]

Section 4. Candidates become members when inducted at a special ceremony.

Section 5. An active member of the National Honor Society who transfers from this school will be given an official letter indicating the status of his/her membership.

Section 6. An active member of the National Honor Society who transfers to this school will be automatically accepted for membership in this chapter. The Faculty Council shall grant to the transferring member one semester to attain the membership requirements and, thereafter, this member must maintain those requirements for this chapter in order to retain his/her membership.

ARTICLE VI: OBLIGATIONS OF MEMBERS

Section 1. Annual dues for this chapter shall be _____. [Note: Dues cannot exceed \$20 per member per year as noted in the national constitution.] Dues will be payable to the chapter within 30 days of induction. [Note2: Dues are not a required function of the chapter.]

Section 2. Each member of this chapter who is in good standing with regard to the membership standards and member obligations shall be entitled to wear the emblem adopted by the National Honor Society.

Section 3. Any member who withdraws, resigns, or is dismissed from the chapter shall return the emblem to the chapter.

Section 4. Chapter members who are seniors in good standing shall be granted the privilege of wearing the honor cords [or other insignia adopted at the local level] at graduation.

[If additional member obligations exist for the local chapter, they should be delineated using additional sections of this article. A full accounting of all member obligations should be in place and can be replicated in student handbooks, candidate packets, or member handbooks as needed.]

ARTICLE VII: OFFICERS

Section 1. The officers of the chapter shall be president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer.

Section 2. Student officers shall be elected at the last meeting of each school year. All returning members in good standing with the chapter are eligible to run for a position as an officer. Any active member can nominate an eligible member as a candidate for office.

Section 3. Voting shall be by secret ballot. A majority vote shall be necessary to elect any officer of this chapter. If the first vote does not yield a majority, a second vote shall be taken of the two candidates receiving the highest number of votes.

Section 4. It shall be the duty of the president to preside at the meetings of the chapter, and serve as the official representative of the chapter at school and community functions.

Section 5. The vice-president shall preside in the absence of the president and shall also keep a record of members' contributions to leadership and service.

Section 6. The secretary shall keep the minutes and attendance records for meetings and be responsible for all official correspondence.

Section 7. The treasurer shall keep the record of business expenses, dues, and all other financial transactions of the chapter

NOTE: If additional or alternative officers or duties exist, their positions and duties of office should be detailed in this Article of the by-laws. Also consider adding components that would describe how to fill vacancies among officers, and when and how officers can be relieved of their duties (suspensions, etc.) in cases not involving dismissal from the chapter.

Section 8. Officers and the faculty adviser(s) shall collectively be known as the chapter's Executive Committee. The executive committee shall establish annual goals for the chapter and have general charge of the meetings and the business of the chapter, but any action by the executive committee is subject to the review of the chapter members.

ARTICLE VIII: MEETINGS

Section 1. Regular meetings of this chapter shall be _____ (e.g., monthly, weekly, etc.). Special meetings can be called by the president with approval of the adviser.

Section 2. This chapter shall conduct its meetings according to *Robert's Rules of Order*.

Section 3. Members are expected to attend all chapter meetings.

ARTICLE IX: ACTIVITIES

Section 1. The chapter shall determine one or more service projects for each year.

Section 2. All members shall regularly participate in these projects.

Section 3. These projects shall have the following characteristics: fulfill a need within the school or community, have the support of the administration and the faculty, be appropriate and educationally defensible, and be well-planned, organized, and executed.

Section 4. Each member shall have the responsibility for choosing and participating in an individual service project which reflects his or her particular talents and interests and as approved by the chapter adviser. This is in addition to the chapter projects to which all members contribute.

Section 5. The chapter shall publicize and promote its projects in a positive manner.

[Additional projects or activities that make up the annual program for the chapter can be delineated in this Article.]

ARTICLE X: DISCIPLINE and DISMISSAL of MEMBERS

Section 1. Any member who falls below the standards of scholarship, leadership, character, or service may be considered for discipline or dismissal from the _____ chapter of the National Honor Society. A member of the National Honor Society is expected to maintain his/her academic standing and take an active role in service and leadership to his/her school and community.

Section 2. If a member's cumulative grade point average falls below the standard in effect when he/she was selected (*fill in the minimum cumulative grade point average for your chapter selection*), he /she will be given a written warning and a reasonable time period for improvement. If the cumulative grade point average remains below standard at the end of the warning period the student will be subject to further disciplinary action by the Faculty Council that includes consideration of dismissal from the chapter.

Section 3. Violations of the law or school regulations can result in immediate consideration of the dismissal of a member (see Section 5 below). These violations include, but are not limited to DWI, stealing, destruction of property, cheating, truancy, or possession, selling, or being under the influence of drugs or alcohol at school or school-related activities or in the community.

Section 4. Offenders of the school conduct code (such as use of profanity, failure to comply, unexcused absences, excessive tardiness, etc.) will receive written warning notification. A conference may be requested by either party (Faculty Council or student/parent). If the member is involved in another violation of the school conduct code, the member may be considered for dismissal.

Section 5. Chapter officers, as representatives of the chapter, can be removed from their positions as a consequence of disciplinary action taken by the Faculty Council.

Section 6. In all cases of pending dismissal:

- a. The member will receive written notification from the adviser/Faculty Council indicating the reason for consideration of dismissal.
- b. The member will be given the opportunity to respond to the charge(s) against him/her at a hearing before the Faculty Council prior to any vote on dismissal (in accordance with due process identified in Article X of the National Constitution). The member has the opportunity to present his/her defense either in person or via a written statement presented in lieu of the face-to-face hearing. Following the hearing, the Faculty Council will then vote on whether to dismiss. A majority vote of the Faculty Council is needed to dismiss any member.
- c. The results of the Faculty Council vote will be presented to the principal for review, and then stated in a letter sent to the student and parents. Dismissed members must surrender any membership emblems to the adviser.
- d. The Faculty Council's decision may be appealed to the building principal and afterwards according to provisions of the school district discipline policies.
- e. A member who is dismissed or resigns, may never again be considered for membership in the National Honor Society.

Section 7. In lieu of dismissal, the Faculty Council may impose disciplinary sanctions upon a member as deemed appropriate.

ARTICLE XI: RATIFICATION, APPROVAL, and REVIEW.

Section 1: These bylaws will be approved upon receiving a two-thirds affirmative vote of all active members of the chapter, a majority affirmative vote of the Faculty Council, and approval by the administration.

Section 2: These bylaws shall be reviewed and if necessary, revised within five years from the date of approval noted on this document.

ARTICLE XII: AMENDMENTS

These by-laws may be amended by a 2/3rds vote of the chapter, provided notice of the proposed amendment has been given to members at least one month prior to the vote. The exceptions are Articles V and X, which are developed by the Faculty Council with the approval of the principal (selection and discipline).

[Note: It is recommended that the Ratification and Amendment articles be the final articles. Should the chapter wish to insert additional articles, that is permissible.]

Approved on [Insert date]: (Indicate date of last approved revisions)

Signatures/Names of the Chapter President, Secretary, Adviser, and Principal.

Sample Bylaws, 2009 edition.

5. Changing the Bylaws

Once the bylaws have been accepted by a vote of the chapter and approved by the Faculty Council and the administration, they become the ‘law’ or guiding principles of the organization. If this principle is adhered to, it will be necessary to change the bylaws only occasionally, due in large part to their specificity and detail.

Occasionally, the bylaws may have to be revised or completely rewritten. The revision is usually drafted by a specially-appointed Bylaws Revision Committee.

After a change has been proposed and a draft has been prepared, the members of the chapter should be informed and given copies so that they can review and discuss the issues before they come to a final vote. Proposed amendments or revisions most commonly require a two-thirds vote of the chapter for adoption. NOTE: Sections dealing with revisions to the procedures for selection, disciplining, and dismissal of members can be changed only by the Faculty Council, though input from the chapter is allowed and encouraged.

Some chapters are criticized for spending too much time amending their bylaws instead of dealing with other chapter concerns. However, there are times when an outdated set of bylaws is a real hindrance to the chapter. Some good reasons for amending bylaws are:

- statements no longer suit the chapter or school situation
- bylaws are arranged so poorly that essential information is hard to find (this situation sometimes occurs when an old document has been added to and amended over a period of years).
- bylaws contain elements that have caused long-standing disagreement
- bylaws violate individual rights or local/state policies
- bylaws prevent the chapter from adapting to change.

It is important that each time the bylaws are reviewed or changed, that the date of approval be updated and included on the new document. Old, now outdated copies should be destroyed except for those kept on file for historical purposes.

Copies of chapter bylaws, in addition to being available for use by chapter members, should be readily available for use by the principal. Some schools systems require that these organizational guidelines be approved by the local school board or be on file with central office. This is another reason for careful review and preparation of the text as a representative document of the chapter.

Other Chapter Records (excerpts from the National Handbook)

Each chapter should have file and available for review:

- The *National Handbook* including the National Constitution
- Local selection procedure description including all forms used in the selection process and lists of member obligations once selected
- Policies and procedures relating to the disciplining and dismissal of members
- Chapter bylaws
- Chapter membership lists (both present and past).

In addition, it is recommended that chapter files also contain the following:

- A copy of the charter of the chapter
- A history of the chapter (founding date, explanation of the chapter name, names of advisers and the years they served, etc.)
- Induction ceremony scripts
- Service project records detailing projects undertaken by the chapter in past years
- A copy of *The NHS & NJHS Store* containing the catalog of insignia items
- Copies of *Leadership for Student Activities* magazine for reference.

For assistance in creating the chapter filing system for all documents and records, please see the national handbook and then consider using the following list of topics for your files:

Adviser duties/job description
Affiliation with the national office
Attendance policies/charts
By-laws, Local
Calendar
Charter
Discipline policies
Dismissal procedures
Faculty Council duties/job description
Forms
Fundraising projects
Goals of the chapter
Induction ceremonies/scripts
Leadership for Student Activities magazine
Meeting agendas
Member responsibilities and obligations
Mentoring guidelines
NASSP Dept. of Student Programs (national office)
National Conference
National Constitution
NHS and NJHS Network/Other chapters nearby
Officer job descriptions
Projects: Character development
Projects: Citizenship development
Projects: Leadership promotion
Projects: Scholarship promotion
Projects: Service/chapter
Projects: Service/individual
Selection procedures
State NHS or NJHS association

Endnotes

Information for this handout has been obtained from the following resources:

NHS and NJHS Handbooks(2005 ed.)

Student Council Handbook (2006 edition)

Copies of these texts are available from the national sales office via e-commerce at www.nhs.us/store or by calling 866.647.7253.

For additional assistance, please reference the National Handbook (2005 edition; also available online at www.nhs.us/az) or the national Web site, www.nhs.us for more information about NHS or NJHS policies and procedures.

The national office trusts that the information presented in this handout proves helpful for chapters engaged in writing or reviewing their chapter bylaws. Questions or concerns can be sent to the national office staff via email, nhs@nhs.us , or by writing us at NHS & NJHS, 1904 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191.

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