

International Students' Association

A short guide to creating a proposal for a new association

Members of the international community at the U of A have only a couple weeks to submit proposals for what their new student association could look like. Proposals should adhere to the following mandate:

To present a united voice for the international student community, while enhancing communications, sparking collaboration, and building relationships between cultural student groups.

Due to the short timeline, you aren't expected to create every aspect of what the organization will look like. Standard details that are kept roughly the same in most student associations, such as financial practices, can be figured out once the organization has been started.

So what details should you include in your proposal for a new International Students' Association?

The following items are key in deciding what a new organization will look like, and how it will function:

1. Organizational Structure
2. Executive Structure
3. Decision-making process

You may include any details you want in your proposal, but in order for your proposal to be successful, it must outline at minimum those three points. Further, the association structure you propose must adhere to and promote the mandate mentioned above.

If you have any questions about how to write your proposal, what to put in it, or how different association structures and processes work, you can contact Rebecca Taylor from Discover Governance for advice and guidance.

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1. Organizational Structure

First, you will have to decide how big or small your association is, and what the power structure looks like. How many people will govern the association, who will those people be, how do they get into governing positions, and what are some checks and balances on executive power?

Here are a few examples of organizational structures that you can consider. You may use one of these in your proposal, find ways to combine them, or come up with something completely different.

Council only	Council and Executive	Executive only
<p>The current ALES Faculty Student Association has a structure like this. Each program association sends a delegate to sit as the association's executive, and executive duties like managing finances or planning events is delegated to particular executives, or shared between a few of them.</p> <p>If you adopt this structure, you will have to figure out how executive duties will be delegated, and how to represent groups and minorities that do not currently have a student association.</p>	<p>Many Faculty Associations have this structure. A council made up of students at large, or delegates from other associations, oversees an executive that is directly elected by students. The executive handles the everyday operations of the association, and the council oversees the rules of the association, sets the direction for the executive, and holds the executive accountable to student interests.</p> <p>If you use this structure, you will have to figure out the same things as you would for a Council only structure.</p>	<p>Some Faculty Associations and most student groups have this structure. An executive that's directly elected by the membership handles all operations of the association.</p> <p>If you decide to use this structure, you will have to figure out how cultural student associations will be represented and consulted, how minorities and cultural groups without associations will be represented and consulted, and how the executive can be held accountable to their membership.</p>

2. Executive Structure

What kinds of executive duties will have to be handled by the association, and what positions will be created to handle those duties? There are a number of possible executive positions to choose from below. You do not have to include all of these, and you can come up with your own executive positions as well. Keep in mind that all student groups are required to have a President (or equivalent) and a Treasurer (or equivalent) in order to be approved as an official U of A student group.

<p>President Organizes executives so that overall initiatives and directives are met. Provides oversight and direction, and may chair meetings.</p>	<p>VP Academic Oversees initiatives and programming pertaining to academics, including quality of learning and academic success, and may undertake advocacy-related activities.</p>
<p>VP Communications Communicates information to members and liaises with the general membership. This might include e-mail newsletters, keeping social media up to date, or even advertising.</p>	<p>Association/Club Coordinator Manages communication and collaboration with all relevant associations or stakeholder groups, facilitates collaboration between these groups, and ensures they have the support they need to be successful.</p>
<p>VP Student Life Creates a positive social environment for members and organizes events.</p>	<p>Volunteer Coordinator Recruits and manages volunteers to help with events or other association operations.</p>
<p>VP Marketing Handles marketing and advertisement, and may also be responsible for managing social media or the Association's website.</p>	<p>VP Administration Handles tasks such as taking minutes and setting meetings to ensure the smooth operation of the organization.</p>
<p>VP Finance Oversees all financial matters of the association, creating and managing the budget, ensuring transparent and accountable financial practices are followed, and acting as the main signing authority and contact with the Association's financial institution.</p>	<p>President Elect Will be president of the association in the following year. They support the President and learn from them, and may undertake some minor Presidential tasks. This ensures that the President is always someone experienced.</p>
<p>VP External Communicates with individuals or groups not directly involved in the organization, such as the Students' Union and University administrators.</p>	

In addition to deciding what executive roles the Association will need, you will have to decide how the executives are organized. Is it a hierarchical structure, with some executive members like the President having greater voting or decision-making power, does the President's vote only count when it's needed to break a tie, or will it be a flat-board structure where all executives have equal say?

3. Decision-making Process

How your association makes decisions will depend largely on what your organizational and executive structures are, and what makes sense for them. For example, Roberts' Rules of Order is most commonly used in associations with a large Council, and flat-board structures usually use consensus-based decision-making. There are two things you need to consider in the decision-making process: how discussion is mediated and how the group comes to a decision.

There are a number of discussion mediating tactics available. Robert's Rules of Order is a good way to keep discussion formal and polite, and to ensure that everyone has a fair chance at a speaking turn, but the rules can be difficult and intimidating to learn at first. Consensus-based discussion is much less formal, can take longer, and can sometimes lead to more forward or opinionated members dominating the discussion, but it has fewer rules, is easier to navigate, and can ensure that a decision gets all the discussion it needs before moving forward. There are many other discussion models out there you can consider when thinking about how you want your association to discuss issues.

As for actually making decisions and taking action, two main methods that are commonly used by most student groups at the U of A include democratic majority decision-making and consensus-based decision-making. You don't have to use one of these in your proposal if you have another idea of how your group can make decisions; they're just here as an example to get you started.

In a democratic majority model, discussion takes place for a set amount of time or number of speaking turns and, at the end of that time, everyone votes and the majority wins. You may choose different levels of what's considered a majority, such as 50% + 1 or 2/3 majority. This is simple, quick, and effective, but it can lead to situations where decisions are made that might be harmful or highly objectionable to a minority, who were not numerous enough to outvote the decision and prevent it from taking effect.

In a consensus-based decision-making model, a decision is only accepted by the group when no one raises objections to it. This doesn't necessarily mean that everyone is perfectly happy with the decision being made, but that no one has serious enough objections to justify blocking the decision from going ahead. This decision-making model helps you reach a decision that everyone can live with, rather than having a minority ruled by a majority. However, this often takes much longer than a simple democratic majority model, as it tends to involve more discussion to reach a point where no one disagrees. It is also highly reliant on members speaking out when they have a problem with a decision being made, which may be difficult for more reserved members.