

# The *Constitution* and bylaws



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**A**s a member of the Committee of Laws, on a regular basis I find myself assisting branches and state associations with various provisions of their bylaws. As the committee chair, I have the duty of making the initial assessment of submissions prior to passing my recommendations on to the other two members: our director of the Mutual Benefit Association, James Yates, and our director of safety and health, Manny Peralta. I make myself available because there are usually common errors that could be avoided, which would make the process easier for both the committee and the members who engage in the arduous task of updating or amending their by-

laws. I have written and advised in the past about using the *Constitution for the Government of Subordinate and Federal Branches (CGSFB)* or the *Constitution for the Government of State Associations (CGSA)* as a guideline. I have also assisted branches by providing a template for those who ask.

Although I have written about it in the past, it is apparent that I need to be more descriptive in how to utilize the *Constitution* as a guide in creating or amending bylaws. One could literally use those two constitutions, verbatim, with personalization for their respective branch or state association that would not conflict with the *Constitution*. It is the “personalization” part that some have missed in using the *Constitution* as a guide. We have seen some submissions that leave out key components that would provide the necessary information, which the *Constitution* intends to be filled in with the appropriate bylaws. This includes provisions where the *Constitution* leaves a blank that needs to be filled in by the branch or state association. Although that is the intention, we have received some submissions with the “blank” intact. There are also other provisions that indicate information that should be provided, yet the submission just copies that provision without the suggested information.

For example: Article 3, Section 1 of the *CGSFB* states:

The regular meeting of the branch shall be held not less than once a month, at such time and place as may be designated in the branch by laws. Each branch, with prior approval of its membership, shall have the option of only ten (10) times per year.

And Article 3, Section 4 states:

The Branch shall be called to order at the time prescribed in the by-laws if a quorum be present.

If those two provisions are copied word for word, and no other information provided related to that content, it would be in conflict because it has not provided a day (i.e., first Tuesday of the month) and a time for the meetings. It also does not indicate if there are any meetings skipped, up to two months, if that is the intention of the branch. Likewise, we have seen a similar mistake with Article 5, Sections 4 and 5, which should indicate which meeting or “time” the election or nominations of officers will take place. That information needs to be provided by the branch, otherwise it tells you nothing more than what should take place. Sometimes just referring to certain provisions, such as Article 6, Duties of Officers for the branch officers in the *CGSFB*, is a convenient catch-all. But keep in mind that if there is compensation for those duties, it should be spelled out somewhere in your bylaws, much like it is in the *CGSA*.

All of this may seem obvious to some, but it is not to everyone. There is no shame in not knowing; none of us had special courses in writing bylaws before coming to the Postal Service—we are all just letter carriers. That’s why I make myself available to assist. I intend to go over this, and how to use the portal in the Members Only section of our website at the national convention in Los Angeles. So, if you are in the process of amending or creating bylaws, I hope to see you there; or you can always give me a call or send me an email!

## CBTU honors

On May 4, the Chicago chapter of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists honored me with the Robert T. Simpson Award, named after the longtime chapter president and a Chicago labor legend. He was responsible for getting me involved with the constituency groups as well as encouraging our involvement with the Chicago Federation of Labor, where letter carriers now have a presence and a seat on board. Special thanks to all who came out to support the recognition and contribution of city letter carriers in the Chicago labor movement!

