

Bylaws



[SWIFAMILIES.ORG/SELF-ADVOCACY-SOLUTIONS](https://www.swifamilies.org/self-advocacy-solutions)

Bylaws: Setting the rules

Your bylaws are what brings your group together. Think of it as like your Constitution. Just like the United States Constitution brings our country together, your bylaws are what brings together your self advocacy group.



Bylaws are the rules a group uses to operate. They let members know how things are done in the group. Bylaws are important to any self advocacy group. If you decide to file for 501(c)3 status, bylaws must be included in your application.

Each group may have different bylaws, but they are pretty much must include the same type of information.

Bylaws sections must include:

- **self advocacy group description**
- **Board of Directors**
- **organization of meetings**
- **conflict of interests**

Self advocacy group description

The self advocacy group description portion of the bylaws let's members know who you are and what you do. It should include your official name as a self advocacy group. It should also include a description of your self advocacy group. It does not have to be a very long description with lots of details. It can be a short description about why you are forming as a self advocacy group. You may include your mission statement as part of your description.



Board of Directors

Your bylaws should include information on how the board is set up and operates. This includes a list of the board member positions and their job description. Having a job description in the bylaws is important because it lets members know what they can and can't do. Part of the job description should also include term limits. This is information on how long they will be in that position until they are up for reelection.

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Because board leadership is voted on by its members, your bylaws should also include a description of the voting process. This lets members know how the group decides who will be in office. The voting process should be fair and open to all members who meet the job requirement.

Organization of Meetings

Bylaws also need to include information about how often your self advocacy group will meet. Some self advocacy groups choose to meet once or twice a month. These are the official meetings of the group where decisions are made by the members. Having a meeting schedule in the bylaws let's members know when they need to be at the meetings to vote on any decisions being made.



Some self advocacy groups choose to include a certain number of members that need to be present in order to make it an official meeting. This is known as a quorum. If the minimum number of members are not present at the meeting, it will not count as an official meeting and decisions cannot be made. Each group can choose their own number of members needed to make meetings official.



Because members may need to vote on decisions at meetings, your bylaws must include a description of how members will vote in the meetings. Self advocacy groups can choose different ways of voting including by simple majority yes or no. They can also choose to go with secret ballot if it is something that members believe is personal.

Conflict of Interest

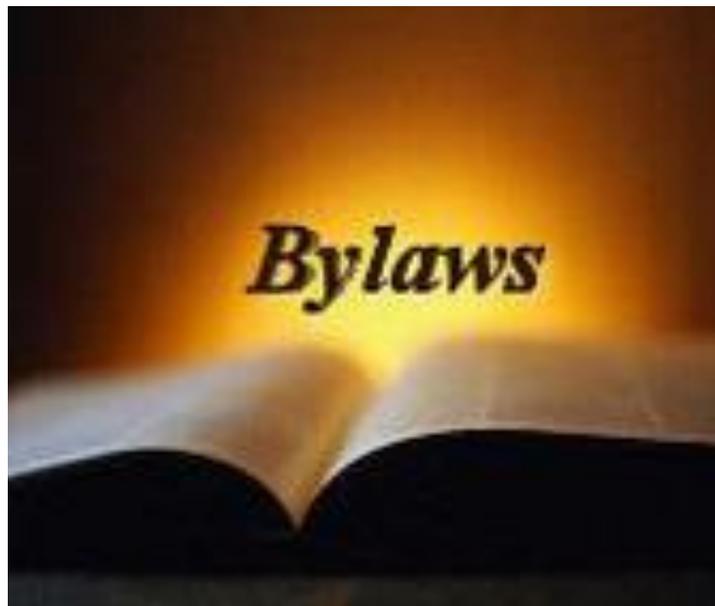
Sometimes members may need to vote on an issue where the decision made by the group can directly benefit them. For example, the self advocacy group may vote on whether or not to fund the program that is run by a member of the group. The decision made by the self advocacy group will have a direct affect on that member. That is known as a conflict of interest.



Because conflict of interest sometimes happen, it is important that the self advocacy groups include a statement in their bylaws on how they will deal with such situation when it happens. In most cases, self advocacy groups will include in their bylaws that members must not be allowed to vote on any issues that can be a conflict of interest.

Sample bylaws

Writing bylaws can be a bit of a long process. To make things easier, you can search on the Internet for sample bylaws. You will still need to read the bylaws and change them so that they meet the needs of your self advocacy group.



Many nonprofit organizations may be willing to help you when writing your bylaws. Talk to organizations that you may know about how they wrote their bylaws. You may even ask for a copy of their bylaws to help you get started.