



New Student Group **STARTER KIT**

Introduction

The New Group Starter Kit is a document intended to act as a road map to guide new groups along their journey to be recognized as Student Representative Associations. Starting a new group can be arduous, but it is our hope that, if you follow through the steps outlined in this guide, it will be a more efficient process.

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Checklist

Below, you will find a checklist that outlines everything a new group will need to complete prior to becoming a new student group.

- **Name**

What your organization will be called. Tip: Make sure you like the acronym, don't repeat the mistake of the Canadian Reform Alliance Party.

- **Mandate**

What the main purpose of your organization is. Tip: Answer the question: 'Why is my organization important?'

- **Constitution and Procedure Manual**

SU bylaw mandates that Student Representative Associations have both of these documents. For other organizations, only a constitution is required but it's just good practice to have a policy document.

- **Membership**

Who can be a part of your organization. Tip: SGS requires that all student groups have at least ten members.

- **Executive and Meeting (Governance) Structure**

The people who make decisions for your organization, and how they do it.

- **Financial Regulations**

Rules about how money will be handled.

- **Strategic Plan**

An outline of what your organization hopes to achieve over the next one and five years, as well as an outline of the tangible actions that will be taken to get there.

- **Complete SGS Registration**

Register your organization as a new student group on BearsDen

Constitutions

What is a Constitution?

A constitution is a written record of your organization's fundamental principles and established precedents. It is your group's most essential internal document. After the law, and University of Alberta and Students' Union policies and procedures, the constitution of a group takes precedence in matters of governance.

Why is it Important?

The constitution is used to define the rules and regulations that govern a student group's existence. Basically, you need a constitution so that if anything comes up during the year you know how to deal with it, and so that its overarching rules can work with any more detailed records your group has. This is to ensure the efficient and sustainable operation of your group.

Specifically for Student Representative Associations

Student Representative Association constitutions are under more stringent rules than regular student groups in that their constitutions must be compliant with SU Bylaws 8100 and 8200. Student Representative Associations are mandated to act on behalf of their constituency, they must:

- Represent their members to the relevant University body
- Represent their members to the Students' Union
- Provide services for students
- Promote student engagement and a sense of community

Things to Watch Out For

1. Be careful not to be too specific in the constitution. For example, don't outline exact dates or names in a constitution. Specific things that need to be outlined can go into the Policy Manual (see next page).
2. Under dissolution procedures, note that money and assets that the group has cannot be divided among the members if a group dissolves.
3. Structure the document so that each line can be referred to by a number or letter. Don't just use bullet points.

Use plain language so that anyone who reads the constitution can understand what each part means.

Constitution Requirement Checklist

Use the following checklist when you write or review your constitution to make sure that these crucial items are covered. Your constitution can address more than these specific areas, but this checklist is a good outline of the bare bones of a constitution. Since every group is different, your constitution may not be organized in the same way as this checklist.



Your constitution must include:

- **Name of group** is present, and matches registered name.
- **Mission/Vision/Values** are stated clearly.
 - There is a reference to the higher legal frameworks a group exists in – the University of Alberta, the SU, the GSA, etc.
- **Membership eligibility** is nondiscriminatory and clear.
 - Classes of membership are defined, and reference is made to the University of Alberta’s policies around student membership ratios where relevant.
- **Membership standing** is clarified.
 - Processes for membership expulsion or suspension are in place, along with definitions of when these measures would be appropriate.
- **Executive positions** are listed and accurately described.
 - At least two executive positions have **signing authority** for the group’s bank account.
 - For Student Representative Associations specifically: The rights, privileges, and responsibilities of **Departmental Associations or Associated Organizations**.
- **Elections** are very clearly outlined. This could include the following items:
 - Timeline (for nominations, voting, campaigning, and appeals);
 - Who supervises the elections and what their role is;
 - Candidates’ roles and responsibilities;
 - Voting eligibility and registration, where applicable;
 - Democratic procedure and method for voting;
 - Appeal, impeachment, and/or recounting processes;
 - By-election and vacancy processes.
- **Meeting procedures** are codified.
 - One Annual General Meeting per year is outlined
 - All other types of meetings are defined, along with the procedures for calling meetings, and who attends each meeting.
- **Quorum** for all meetings and elections is defined and consistent.
- **Financial practices** are addressed in sufficient detail, either under an executive’s portfolio or in a separate section.
- A process for **amending the constitution** is in place and requires the entire organization’s participation (not just the executive council).
- **Dissolution procedures** are included, with specific reference to what happens to a group’s **finances and resources** once a group shuts down.

Procedures Manuals

What is it?

The terms Policy Manual and Procedure Manual can be used interchangeably. A Policy Manual is a document that outlines specific details of the rules that an organization follows. It provides a day-to-day outline for the operations of the group.

It is different from a constitution in that it is more informal and can be more easily changed. For example, it can be changed by just the executives, and changes could be made at almost any time, with as much frequency as necessary. It may include details such as dates, contact organizations, and names.

What are the Requirements for a Policy Manual?

A policy manual must, above all, be consistent with the group's constitution or bylaws. It should be future-oriented, and align with the group's overall purpose and goals. The procedures outlined should be consistent with the actual practices that the group carries out.

Policy Manual Checklist

- Outline of group renewal each year
 - Registration
 - Reporting requirements
- Specific financial practices
 - How much money is kept on hand
 - Where is money to be stored
 - How does the group make payments
 - How are group members reimbursed (if at all)
 - What is the procedure for transferring signing authority
- Outline the transition of executive officers
 - What is the transition period
 - Does a document have to be produced
 - If so, what must be included in the document
- Outline the procedures for maintenance and upkeep of the group's office space.
- Outline the specifics of frequently held or annual events.
- Outline the procedures surrounding volunteers for the group.
- Outline the decision making process.

Meeting (Governance) Structure

What is a Meeting Structure and why is it also a Governance Structure?

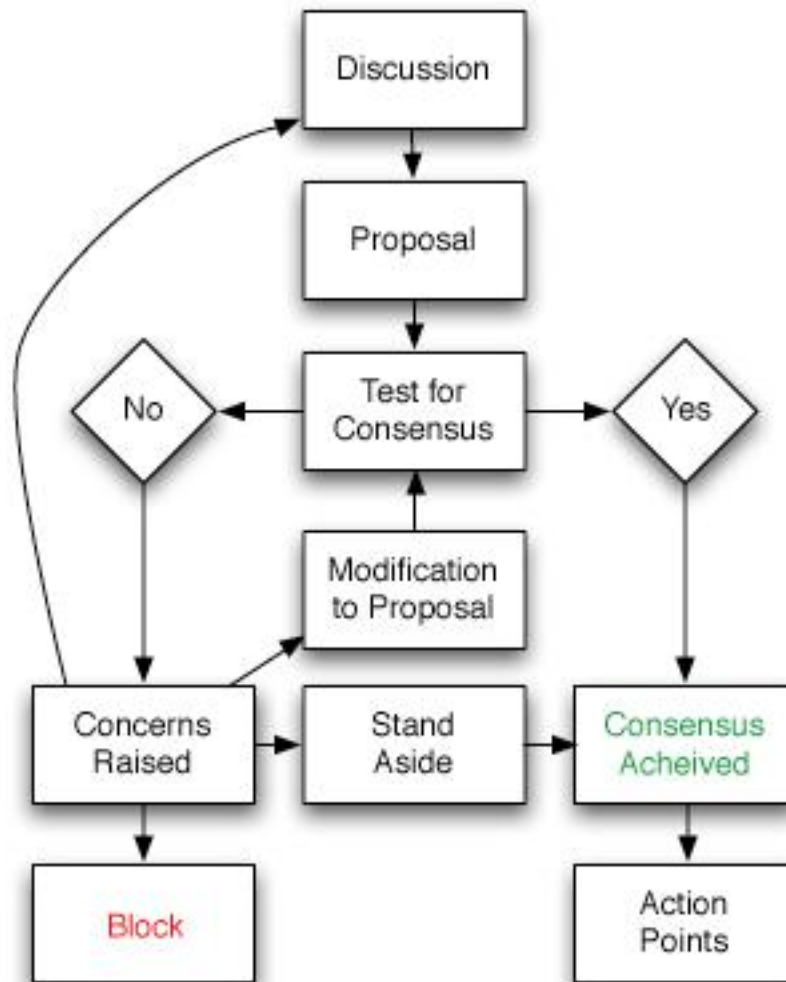
In short, a meeting structure is the way that an organization makes decisions. It can also be referred to as a governance structure because the way that an organization makes decisions inherently explains the way that the organization is structured.

Below, you will find listed three common governance structures. It is important that you choose a structure that matches the size of your organization as well as the way you would like it to operate.

Consensus Decision-Making Structure

In a Consensus Decision-Making Structure, there is no one person who has more power than the others. The executives make decisions for the organization collectively. In a meeting, each individual has the options of consenting, blocking, or standing aside on any given proposal.

Consent indicates approval of the proposal, standing aside can indicate neutrality, conflict of interest, or uncertainty, and blocking indicates disapproval. If all individuals consent, or if some consent and some stand aside, consensus is achieved. However, if even one individual blocks, then the proposal cannot be approved. Essentially, any decisions made for the organization are all or nothing.

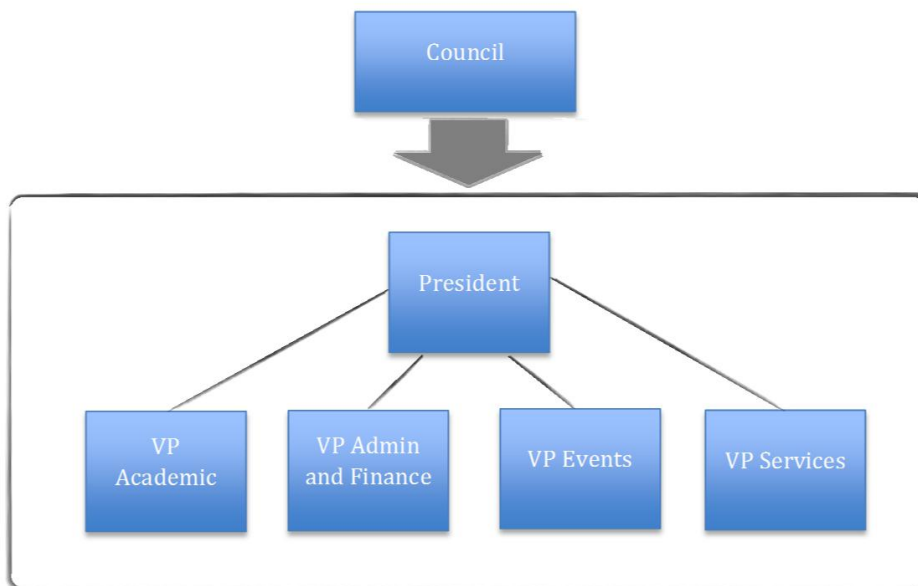


Hierarchical Structure

In a hierarchical decision-making structure a council is in place to determine the general direction of the organization as well as to approve expenditures, events, appointments, and the like. Council members should reflect the composition of the faculty as closely as possible. For example, it should have a distribution of first, second, third, fourth, and fifth years that is comparable to the distribution in the faculty itself. While the council may meet infrequently, an executive, including a President and specialized Vice-Presidents, which meets far more frequently, is also in place.

The executive is in charge of 'executing', that is, they implement the decisions and follow the overall direction that the council has given them on a day-to-day basis. They are the face of the organization and are responsible for all the legwork behind the advocacy and services provided for students.

This is ideal for a medium sized organization because there are a number of roles in varying levels of intensity and involvement. A student sitting on council may only have to come to meetings three or four times per semester, whereas a vice-president may be in charge of creating a budget or organizing an event. An executive may require between five and ten volunteers, and a council may require up to thirty-five volunteers.

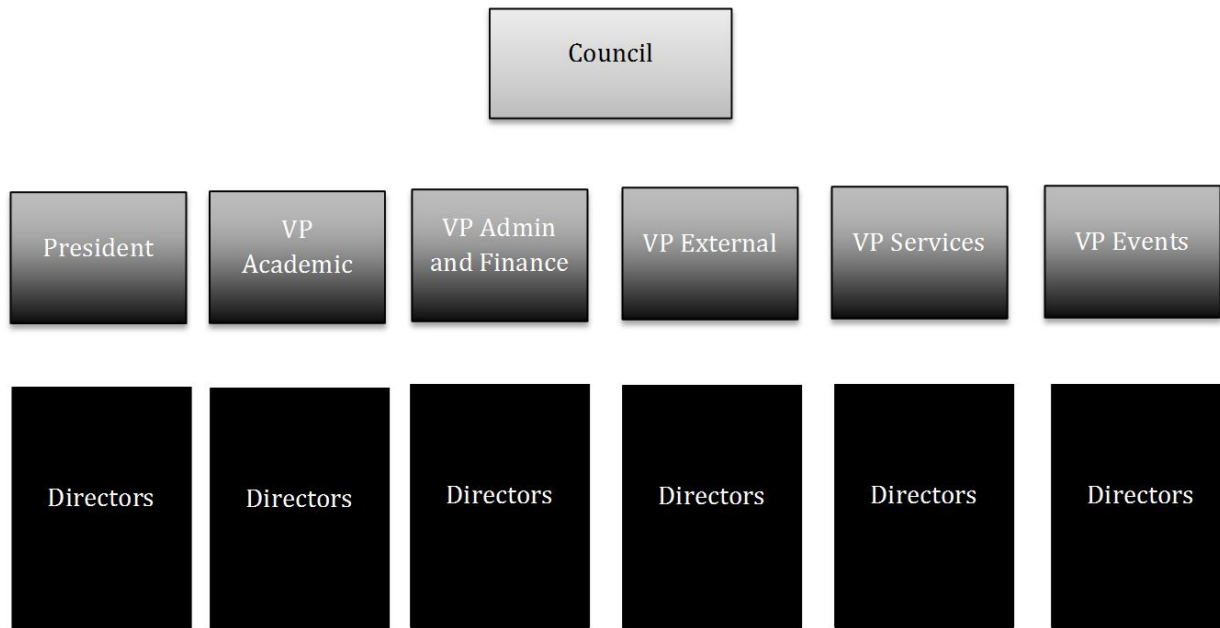


Committee Structure

In this model, like the hierarchical structure, the members of the council decide the direction of the organization, which includes new initiatives, events, networks, and more. Also like the aforementioned model, the executives are responsible for the execution of the decisions of council. However, in a large committee model, each member of the executive has help.

Each of the executives has the power to create committees that they oversee. Each committee may be responsible for a specific part of their portfolio. Each of the committees is chaired by a director that reports directly to the corresponding member of the executive. The directors are given specialized roles and are responsible for much of the groundwork needed to make progress on initiatives. This system is effective because tasks can be delegated to directors, and the member of the executive can get a lot done without being too overburdened.

A committee structure is only desirable for a large organization because of the amount of people it requires to run. There must be volunteers to sit on council and the executive, and then there may be as many as fifty directors.



Executives

The executives of any organization are the people who actually ensure that tasks vital to the organization are completed. In the case of a Student Representative Association, executives are in charge of ensuring that the organization is run in a proper and transparent manner, advocating for students to the relevant University body, and providing services to students.

Although different organizations have different titles for certain portfolios, for the most part, the duties of the executive are distributed similarly. Not all of the roles listed below must be present in a faculty or campus association.

President

The President's job is to organize the executives effectively so that overall initiatives and directives are met. Normally, the jobs of the President include oversight and reporting, but do not include things like organizing events or arranging services.

Vice-President Academic

The VP Academic oversees all initiatives and programming that the organization is responsible for pertaining to academics. This involves quality of learning and academic success. A standard initiative for a VP Academic is to organize peer tutoring.

Vice-President Internal/Communications

There may be a number of different titles to describe the position of the executive that is responsible for communicating information to members. For faculty and campus associations, membership automatically includes all students enrolled in the faculty. The VP Internal or Communications may be responsible for e---mail notifications or digital or hard---copy newsletters. They may also be responsible for maintaining the group's e---mail.

Vice-President External

The VP External portfolio is the one responsible for communicating with individuals or groups not directly involved in the organization. For example, a VP External on a Student Representative Association may be responsible for going to Council of Student Representative Association (COFA) meetings, or they may be the primary contact to the faculty.

President-Elect

The President-Elect is the person who will be President of the organization in the following year. In the meantime, they tag along with the current President and learn from them throughout the year, they could possibly take on some minor Presidential tasks. The reasoning behind having a President-Elect is two-fold: firstly the President gets some help, and secondly, when a new President starts, they already have a sense for what to do, and what needs to be done throughout the year.

Vice-President Marketing/Public Relations

Usually, marketing or advertising is done by VP Internal or VP Events, however, some associations may find it useful to separate it into its own portfolio. A VP Marketing would be responsible for advertising events, managing social media, or maintaining the association's website.

Finances

It goes without saying that finances are a very important part of any association's operations, however, it can be the trickiest part. Student Representative Associations are not intended to turn a profit, and it is imperative that the finances are done in a way that is both correct and transparent.

When you first begin:

Create the Legislation

The first thing your new association will need to do in terms of finance is create finance bylaws that outline (at least):

- Which positions in the associations will have signing authority (the power to sign cheques),
- What the fiscal year will be (most associations run from May 1 to April 30),
- How expenditures will be approved, and
- How money will be paid out (by cheque is heavily recommended).

Get a Bank Account

You will need to open a bank account for your organization. There are no rules about what bank you can use; it is recommended that you pick a branch with a convenient location. When you open a bank account, you will receive a debit card. It is important that the debit card be for DEPOSIT ONLY, meaning that purchases cannot be made with it. It is a simple matter for a bank to set up a card this way, you must simply ask for it. You should also ask to receive monthly statements so that you have a hard-copy of all transactions made in the name of the organization.

Income/Expenditures

Figure out where money for the organization will come from and where it will go. Many Student Representative Associations receive money from the faculty, fundraisers and events are great ways to get money for larger events, and some associations have mandatory membership fees, which are fees that come from each member as part of their tuition. Money in the organization should be used to further the mandate of the association, which must include advocacy, services, and student engagement. In doing this, your association will create the beginnings of a budget.

Manage income and expenditures

Every time a dollar flows through the organization, it must be recorded. A complete fiscal years' worth of tracked money flow is the actual budget. Microsoft Excel, Quickbooks, or other financial planning software should be used to digitally and efficiently track income and expenditure.

You will also need to find a safe place to keep petty cash as well as hard-copies of financial documents. Some associations use a safe, while others use a locked filing cabinet.

Things to do every year:

Create and pass a proposed budget

The VP Finance or equivalent will create a budget for the organization. The budget is a plan for the income and expenditure of the organization for the upcoming year that balances to zero or a small surplus. It should outline very specifically what each dollar of income will be spent on. The budget should not be deviated from, even though it is typically prepared by the VP Finance from the previous year.

Nearing the end of every fiscal year, the budget for the next year will have to be passed at a General Meeting, or a meeting open to all members. The VP Finance or equivalent will have to make a presentation, and the membership will vote to pass the budget.

Create a comparison budget

A comparison budget compares the proposed budget (passed at the General Meeting) to what was actually made and spent. Fiscal success of an association is achieved when real incomes and expenditures closely match the predicted incomes and expenditures.

Fulfill Students' Union financial reporting requirements

Each year, six months after the end of the fiscal year, all Student Representative Associations are required to submit a financial report to the SU that includes:

- A completed financial reporting form (available on the SU website)
- The minutes at which the proposed budget was passed
- The proposed budget
- A comparison budget from the previous year
- A report from a financial reviewer who is impartial and external

Finance Timeline

May 1: New executives begin in their roles, new fiscal year begins

July: A financial reviewer should be hired to review finances, VP Finance should begin working on the SU financial reporting form

January: VP Finance should begin creating a proposed budget for the next year

March: Hold a General Meeting and pass the proposed budget

April: VP Finance creates a comparison budget for the year, gives the proposed budget, comparison budget, and minutes from the General Meeting to their successor.

April 30: Fiscal year ends

Membership Fees

In order to generate a lot of income, associations may charge fees to their membership. Student Representative Associations may charge Student Representative Association Membership Fees (FAMF), and campus associations receive Campus Association Transfer Payments (CATP).

The procedure for initiating a FAMF is as follows:

1. Consulting with membership through a General Meeting,
2. Notifying the Students' Union of their intention no later than November 15th of the year before implementation,
3. Presenting the details of the allocation of funds to council, and
4. Passing the fee in a faculty---wide referendum

FAMFs must be renewed every 5 years.

For CATPs, a percentage of the Students' Union fees of students who attend other campuses are automatically transferred to the campus association. The percentage is based on the number of students attending the external campus.

For other types of student groups, membership dues may be set by the Executive in their annual budget and approved at a general meeting.

Student Group Services Approval

All Student Representative Associations are required to register as official student groups with Student Group Services (SGS). Registration is completed through BearsDen and requires the following information:

- General Information
 - Group name
 - Website/facebook/twitter addresses
 - Organizational description
 - Contact information
 - Address of office
- Events and Plans
 - A list of annual events
 - A list of new events
- Faculty Affiliation (if relevant) and Membership
 - Name and information of faculty advisor (if relevant)
 - How many members the organization represents
 - A list of sub-groups, clubs, department associations, or affiliated associations
- Executive Roster
 - The members of the executive and what positions they hold
- Financial Information
 - How large the budget is
 - Which bank is used
 - Who has signing authority
- Constitution
 - Upload the latest copy of your constitution
- Sign a liability agreement

Creating a Strategic Plan

What is Strategic Planning?

Strategic planning is an organizational process that plans out a common sense of what the organization is planning to do and how they are going to do it (typically over a period of time of a year or more). Strategic planning is beneficial for two main reasons:

- 1) It helps people deeply understand and articulate a shared vision for their organization, which ultimately strengthens the organization; and
- 2) When done well, a strategic plan can guide an organization over a much longer term than more informal, individualized visions.

There are many ways to go about developing a strategic plan, all with strengths and weakness. A strategic planning process and the resulting document can be very complex and comprehensive, or relatively swift and simple: anything from a continuous, many---year development process with a 30+ page document to a few months resulting in 5 pages or less. Deciding the character of your plan will be part of the planning process.

Below is a comprehensive summary of the most common components that would go into a strategic planning process. Some of these areas will require more time and energy than others, depending on the needs of your organization. Agree early on what you're going to focus on.

The Development Process

Getting Started

When getting started, keep these things in mind.

- Organizational carrying capacity
 - How likely is it that a 30+ page strategic document will be read, never mind implemented, from year to year?
 - Will a 5 page summary be enough, or will being so concise/vague cause the intent and meaning of the document to be lost as soon as the original writers are no longer with the organization?
 - How many hours of volunteer time can you reasonably expect to spend on this planning process? Are your goals for the process realistic from the perspective of how much time you can invest?
- Responsibility to your successors to strike a balance between planning and constraining. Planning helps, constraining hurts, especially in organizations with elected officers.
- How much consulting do you need to do? You need to do enough to ensure that the document has legitimacy and buy-in, but too much will encumber the process and cause frustration.

Getting the Team Together

While a strategic plan can and indeed must be managed by the Executive team of your organization, Executive members tend to be very busy with their other responsibilities, especially in volunteer organizations. They also represent a very narrow cross-section of members who will have a stake in the strategic planning process.

Many professional organizations hire a strategic planning consultant. These Professionals tend to be very expensive, and are likely outside of the budget for most FAs. Instead, look at having a Strategic Planning Committee with student volunteers. At the very least, have a volunteer strategic planning coordinator whose job includes drafting the document and recording meeting notes.

Timeline

Set deadlines for the different phases of planning and stick to them. Good strategic planning takes at least a couple of months, so plan for at least a semester of development from start to finish.

An Activity to get you started:

Use a whiteboard or a big piece of paper to make a chart like this:

	Easy to do	Hard to do
Must do		
Nice to do		

Next, get a pad of sticky notes and have everyone on the executive write down their organizational goals. Write one idea/goal for every sticky note. It can be adapted for shorter-term goals or longer-term goals, depending on what you need. After two-five minutes, stick all of the sticky notes onto the board outside of the grid. As a team, go through each goal one by one and decide whether it is something that you must do that is easy to do, something that your must do that is hard to do, something that is easy to do and nice to do, or something that is nice to do and hard to do.

When all the sticky notes have been placed, make a priority list. Things you must do that are easy to do go first, next, must do hard to do, next easy to do nice to do. Note that things in the nice to do hard to do category probably will not get done if this is only planning for a year or less.

From the priority list, you may develop a strategic planning document that includes with more detail how you will go about accomplishing the tasks that you laid out on the sticky notes.

What Now?

Plan meetings for the executive and council that are appropriate for the type of governance system that you have chosen. Follow good governance practice and stay within the constraints of your constitution when making organizational decisions.

Set up regular meetings with relevant University bodies and external organizations, and make sure to stay in touch with them. Consult with your membership so as to better understand their needs.

Hold events that are accessible and fun. Attempt to create a community through social or academic events. Make sure your office door (if relevant) is almost always open and that students know they can come in any time.

Who to Ask for Help

Discover Governance Manager

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