



chapter organizing manual

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PREAMBLE TO THE CONSTITUTION

The National Lawyers Guild is an association dedicated to the need for basic change in the structure of our political and economic system. We seek to unite the lawyers, law students, legal workers, and jailhouse lawyers of America in an organization which shall function as an effective political and social force in the service of the people, to the end that human rights shall be regarded as more sacred than property interests.

Our aim is to bring together all those who regard adjustments to new conditions as more important than the veneration of precedent; who recognize the importance of safeguarding and extending the rights of workers, women, farmers, and minority groups upon whom the welfare of the entire nation depends; who seek actively to eliminate racism; who work to maintain and protect our civil rights and liberties in the face of persistent attacks upon them; and who look upon the law as an instrument for the protection of the people, rather than for their repression.

**Section I -
Starting or
Reactivating
a Chapter**

Chapter 1: Starting a Chapter

National Lawyers Guild members may be affiliated with a chapter – General or Student – or they may hold their membership At-Large.

Chapter affiliation is preferred.

Except for locally staffed chapters, (discussed in Chapter 4) the National Office is responsible for maintaining all membership records. It is also responsible for maintaining chapter information.

If a General chapter does not exist within a reasonable geographic area, a simple application for a chapter charter is all that it takes to establish one.

Article 2.2 Chapters, Law Student Chapters, and At-Large Membership

- a) Wherever a chapter exists, membership shall be through such chapter.
- b) Where there exist multiple, non-student chapters, in overlapping geographic regions, members may self-determine chapter affiliation.
- c) Where other relevant circumstances exist, a member of a non-student chapter may be permitted to self-determine chapter affiliation, including the option to be a member-at-large. If a member wishes to pursue this option, they must petition in front of the National Executive Committee, who will vote to approve or deny the member's request.
- d) Law students shall be concurrent members of their law student chapter and full voting members of their local non-student chapter.
- e) Where there is no organized chapter, membership shall be through direct affiliation with the national organization. Such persons shall be known as members-at-large. Jailhouse lawyers shall be members-at-large.

Charter Application Process

Article 3.1 Geographic Chapters

The normal unit of organization shall be the chapter consisting of the members in a reasonable geographic area or attending a particular law school. Disagreement about what constitutes a reasonable geographic area shall be resolved by the National Executive Committee (NEC).

An application for a charter can be made at the Annual Convention or the National Executive Committee (NEC) through the Regional Vice President (RVP.)

- Application must include the names of at **eight active NLG members** who are in support of chartering a new chapter as well as the boundaries of the geographic area of the proposed new chapter.

- **Proposed geographic area for new chartered chapter must not conflict with any existing chapter unless the boundaries of the existing chapter are regarded as unreasonable.**
- **Any disagreement about what constitutes a reasonable geographic area is resolved by the National Executive Committee (NEC).**

Article 3.3 Definition of Chapter

Eight or more members of the National Lawyers Guild in a reasonable geographic area will be considered to be a chapter for voting purposes under the delegate system. Chapters are bound to adhere to the Constitution and By-Laws of the national organization. Disagreement about what constitutes a chapter shall be resolved by the NEC.

Chapter 2: Reactivating a Chapter

Some NLG chapters reactivate in response to local events and/or issues such as police misconduct, ICE raids, prison abuses, political party conventions, or protests and rallies.



Other chapters reactivate as a result of NLG members reconnecting or law school students seeking to continue their involvement in Guild activities after graduation.

Whatever the impetus, reactivating a chapter takes only a few local NLG members who are committed to making it happen. Key actions to take:

- Agree to meet regularly, preferably at least once a month.
- Set up a listserv and telephone tree of interested members.
- Ask the Membership Coordinator at the National Office for a list of current and lapsed At-Large members in the chapter's geographic area.
- Expand the listserv and telephone tree with members' contact information from the National Office.
- Provide regular reminders of all meetings through the listserv and telephone calls.
- Encourage email meeting reminders to be distributed widely. Remind everyone to invite someone else to the meeting.

Creating a New Chapter? Or Reactivating?

When a chapter is inactive, the chapter portion of membership dues is retained by the National Office. Once the chapter becomes active again, the National Office will resume sending chapter dues after receiving results of chapter elections.

Although the NLG bylaws provide for dissolution of chapters, it rarely occurs. If uncertain, check with your Regional Vice President or the Membership Coordinator at the National Office.

Bylaw Section 2 – Dissolution of Chapters

If a chartered chapter's membership falls below eight members in good standing for a period of one year or more, the National Convention may withdraw the charter in accordance with the provisions of this section. Upon petition of three quarters of the members in good standing of a chapter or upon the petition of the National Executive Committee made to the convention that the chapter no longer is able or its members do not desire to function as a chapter because the chapter lacks sufficient membership, the Convention may determine that less than eight members in good standing desire to maintain the existence and functioning of the chapter. All members of the chapter shall become members-at-large.

- Create an atmosphere during your meetings that is both welcoming and

Making Guild Meetings more open, less exclusive.

- **Have meetings in public places.** It's a lot easier for a newcomer, a person who doesn't feel like s/he belongs to the "in" clique or someone who feels uncomfortable for any reason, to feel "entitled" to come to a meeting at a library, school, or community center, than at someone's house or even law office. The newcomer is less likely to feel like an intruder on someone's private space, and it's easier to feel like you are joining a public organization than crashing a private party. Also, it's more likely that a public library or community center will be handicapped accessible. Many houses and private law offices have difficult to manage steps and inaccessible bathrooms, for example. Does this make the Guild seem too formal, too dry, and less intimate and friendly? Remember the intimacy and warmth comes from the actual working relationships and friendships that develop, not the building we're in. To the extent that, we have experienced that warmth and sense of common purpose, don't we want to make it available to others?
- **Bring name tags and wear them at every single Guild meeting, forum, or social event.** Name tags are a big equalizer. You may feel like you "know everyone," but newcomers don't. It increases people's sense of isolation and not belonging if they feel like everyone knows everyone else, except for them. It feels weird at first to be wearing name tags, but we can get over it.
- **Have a sign-in list at every single Guild event.** Even if just one new person comes, we need to get their address and phone number. Don't lose these new members by failing to get them on the mailing list and plugged in.
- **Make a genuine effort to welcome newcomers.** It sounds simple-minded, but be friendly. We need to go out of our way to introduce ourselves, find out where they're from and what they're interested in, and whatever else they seem to want to talk about. It takes time -- and that's usually what we have least of -- but there is not a substitute for this. We've also talked about instituting a "buddy system" for newcomers, pairing them with veteran members. At 'a minimum, someone should be responsible, for calling up newcomers and warmly' inviting them' to the next meetings/events. Sometimes' it may be appropriate to ask if they need transportation. We need to show a genuine interest in the people as people by listening to them -- not just as warm bodies so we can count our get-together a success.
- **Watch out for jargon, and fill in the gaps when you hear someone else lapsing into 'in' talk.** We all do it. We talk in initials about the NEC, local coalitions and organizations we're working with, Guild committees. What is a newcomer to think of a conversation laced with NEC, RVP, CATF, APJC, THRF, TAHN, NGRA*?' She/he will probably feel out of it, either feeling stupid and blaming herself/himself or angry at such an elitist, insider group. Don't get caught up in guilt when you find yourself lapsing into the inevitable alphabet-soup --just pause to back up and explain. Be grateful to fellow members who pause to interrupt and translate. (*National Executive Committee, Regional Vice President, Central America Task Force, Austin Peace and Justice Coalition, Austin Latino/a Lesbian and-Gay Association, Texas Human Rights Foundation, Texas Alliance for Human Needs,. National Gay Rights Associates. This list could be taken from any recent Austin meeting; no doubt every chapter has its own local example).

Excerpted from "HOW TO MAKE THE GUILD MORE OPEN, LESS EXCLUSIVE by Virginia Raymond, Austin Tx

Chapter 3: Chapter Governance

NLG chapters have complete autonomy subject only to provisions of the NLG Constitution and Bylaws, [<http://nlg.org/membership/constitution.php>] referendums approved by the national membership and to the decisions of the National Convention or the NEC.

Article 3.5 Chapter Autonomy Subject to Constitution and Bylaws

Local chapters shall have complete autonomy, subject only to the provisions of the National Constitution and Bylaws, to the referendum decision of the national membership, and to the decisions of a National Convention, or the National Executive Committee. Notwithstanding any other provision of this constitution, each local chapter shall have complete autonomy concerning all matters as shall in its discretion be necessary to maintenance of its good standing with its respective integrated State Bar Association.

Local chapter bylaws govern how the chapter functions in its autonomy.

Why have bylaws? The simple answer is that although the NLG Constitution covers the primary principles of the organization, it does not prescribe specific procedures for operating local chapters. Chapter bylaws are needed to outline the procedures to be followed in order to conduct business in an orderly manner.

A more fundamental reason is that bylaws serve as preventive medicine for disputes over governance. Procedural nitpicking is often a screen for what is really at stake. When procedures for making chapter decisions are clearly spelled

Making Guild Meetings more open, less exclusive.

- **Have elections at the same time each year.** Give advance notice of what positions will be elected and when and where the elections will be. Perhaps those who held office last time around would be willing to write a short description of what the positions entailed, and what were the joys and frustrations of the jobs.
- **Keep minutes of your meetings.** Make them available for anyone to look at it at every meeting. Make it clear who has custody of the records. Although it seems corny, it really does help to read out loud the minutes of the last meeting at the beginning of each gathering. This can help newcomers and those who weren't present at the meeting "catch-up" more easily.
- **Have a clear structure of how to respond to events, and requests for endorsements.** Consider the situation of a long-time Guild member who knows his/her local chapter would certainly endorse a human rights day or march against intervention in El Salvador. When someone in another organization, who knows he/she is a Guild member, and asks him/her if the Guild will endorse the action, he/she should resist the urge to just say yes. Instead, they should go through whatever process the chapter has set up. If there isn't a clear process, set aside time at a regular meeting to come up with one. Not only is this fairer and provides for accountability, it's also better organizing. People who have taken part in the decision making about whether to endorse a march, for example, are going to feel more committed to the decision and are more likely to actually participate in the march. Additionally, when you respond, "sounds like a great idea to me, let me call our endorsement committee," or, "here are the names and phone numbers of people to whom we've delegated the responsibility to deal with endorsements," or "can you send someone to our next meeting, next Tuesday at the library at 7:00 to talk about this," you are letting the other person know that the Guild is a real organization, it's not just you. It feels, and is, a lot more powerful that way.

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out in the bylaws, focus is more likely to remain on the substance of the issues that the chapter membership may be grappling with. And, the chapter is more likely to feel open and welcoming to greater number of members.

At a minimum, bylaws should define chapter directors and officers, their duties, their terms of office, method of selection as well as removal from office, frequency of board meetings, meeting notice requirements, chapter membership eligibility and dues, chapter committees and selection of chairs, and the procedure required to amend the bylaws.



The most successful bylaws will adhere to the eight principals of good governance:

- 1) **Accountable**
- 2) **Transparent**
- 3) **Responsive**
- 4) **Equitable & Inclusive**
- 5) **Effective & Efficient**
- 6) **Follows the rule of law**
- 7) **Participatory**
- 8) **Consensus oriented**

When reactivating a chapter, a review of the existing bylaws should be one of the first orders of business. For examples of chapter bylaws, see Appendix ____.

After adopting new or affirming old bylaws, chapter leadership should be selected in accordance with the rules established in the bylaws. The results should be reported to the RVP and the NO Membership Coordinator and include the full contact information of the person(s) identified to be the Chapter Contact(s) on the official NLG website and to receive NO communications in behalf of the chapter.

Chapter 4: Record keeping: Membership, Finances & Banking

All chapters of the National Lawyers – whether staffed or unstaffed - have a responsibility for accurate record keeping.

Each local chapter, through its officers and directors is completely responsible for the funds they receive from members' dues and/ or donations, whether collected directly by the chapter or by a transfer by the National Office or NLG Foundation.

Chapter officers and directors are also completely responsible for ensuring the proper use of membership funds and for the solvency of the local organization.

The three major areas of chapter record keeping are membership records (including dues,) finances and banking.

Membership Reports

Membership reports are to be completed on a quarterly basis.

For unstaffed chapters or for staffed chapters who elect to have their members' dues collected by the National Office, the NLG Membership Coordinator is responsible for preparing reports of all membership dues payments received by National Office during the previous quarter and for sending the data to each chapter's contact person.

The key data elements of the NLG membership reports are 1) Member Name, 2) Telephone/Fax Numbers, 3) Email Address, 4) Mailing Address, 5) NLG Join Date,

Bylaw Section 1.2 - Two Chapter Categories

There shall be two categories of chapters: Staffed Chapters and Unstaffed Chapters. Chapters which have one or more staff members working in them who are members of any union representing employees of the National Lawyers Guild shall be designated Staffed Chapters. Chapters which have one or more staff members working in them, including work-study staff members, who are not eligible for membership in any union representing employees of the National Lawyers Guild may petition the National Executive Committee for designation as a Staffed Chapter as provided in these Bylaws. The National Executive Committee's decision on any such petitions shall be made in consultation with any union which represents National Lawyers Guild employees. The National Executive Committee shall not deny the Staffed Chapter designation in order to ensure receipt of the higher dues percentage which Unstaffed Chapters pay to the National Office. The National Executive Committee shall deny the Staffed Chapter designation to chapters which hire work-study staff

- a) on a temporary basis as defined by any collective bargaining agreement between the National Lawyers Guild and any union representing National Lawyers Guild employees; or
- b) in order to avoid paying the higher dues percentage which Unstaffed Chapters pay to the National Office; or
- c) for the purpose of avoiding the terms and conditions of any collective bargaining agreement between the National Lawyers Guild and any union representing National Lawyers Guild employees; or
- d) for another inappropriate purpose.

6) Expiration Date, 7) Membership Category, 8) Date of Dues Payment, and 9) Amount of Dues Payment.

The quarterly reports are to be used by the chapters to update their membership databases, including listservs, to ensure all members continue to receive notice of local events and developments.

Staffed chapters who elect to collect their own members' dues, local personnel are responsible for preparing quarterly reports of all membership dues payments received by their office during the previous quarter and for sending the data to the NLG Membership Coordinator. They are asked to provide the same membership information to the national office that the national office provides to chapters whose dues it collects.

Membership Dues

All NLG dues, whether established by the NEC or the local chapter, must be based on membership category and on ability to pay.

NLG bylaws prohibit dues for Jailhouse Lawyers, however a subscription fee of \$7.50 is charged to cover cost of Guild Notes.

The current dues schedule approved by the NEC for attorneys, legal workers and law school students is as follows:

Membership Category	Income	Dues
Jailhouse Lawyer	NA	\$00
Law Student	NA	\$15
New Attorney/Legal Worker	NA	\$50
Attorney/Legal Worker	< \$20k	\$45-75
Attorney/Legal Worker	\$20-25k	\$75-100
Attorney/Legal Worker	\$25-30k	\$100-165
Attorney/Legal Worker	\$30-40k	\$165-220
Attorney/Legal Worker	\$40-50k	\$220-275
Attorney/Legal Worker	\$50-65K	\$275-325
Attorney/Legal Worker	\$65-75k	\$325-375
Attorney/Legal Worker	\$75-100k	\$375-425
Attorney/Legal Worker	>\$100k	\$500

Bylaw Section 1.6 Progressive Dues Schedules - All Chapters, whether Staff or Unstaffed, shall, in the setting of their members' annual dues, employ a progressive dues schedule.

Bylaw Section 1.1 No Dues for Jailhouse Lawyers - There shall be no dues for jailhouse lawyer members, except that each jailhouse lawyer may be assessed an amount necessary to cover a subscription to Guild Notes.

Discounts: Firm and family memberships are discounted 25 % of the suggested membership dues for all members to join as individuals. Memberships are discounted 50% of the suggested for all members who are also current members of a minority bar.

Membership Dues Allocation

The allocation of membership dues between the National Office, the local chapter and the region is based on the dues collection method selected by the local chapter except for the dues of law school students, which are fully retained by the National Office.

For unstaffed chapters or for staffed chapters electing to have their members' dues collected by the National Office, the National Office retains 50% of non-student dues collected. The Region where the member is located receives 2% and the

chapter receives 48%, unless the chapter has agreed to different regional allocation.

Note – At-large members dues are split 50/50% between the National Office and the Region.

For unstaffed chapters electing to collect their own annual dues, the National Office receives 40% of the dues collected.

For staffed chapters electing to collect their own annual dues, the National Office receives 28% of the dues collected.

Membership Dues Payment Transfer

Membership dues splits are paid by the National Office on a quarterly basis after a request for the payment has been received by the National Office.

Chapters are notified of the amount of chapter dues available for payment. Chapters must request payment within

Bylaw Section 1.3 Dues Division with Chapters/Regions

The National Office shall retain fifty percent (50%) of the annual dues collected from members of unstaffed chapters and staffed chapters that elect to have the National Office collect their annual dues. The balance shall be remitted to the appropriate chapter and region pursuant to any agreement for division of dues between chapters and regions, except that no law student dues shall be remitted.

Bylaw Section 1.4 Division of Dues with National Office:

(a) Unstaffed Chapters that collect their own annual dues shall remit to the National Office forty percent (40%) of the dues collected.

(b) Staffed Chapters that collect their own annual dues shall remit to the National Office twenty eight percent (28%) of the dues collected.

Bylaw Section 1.5 Dues Remitted to NO Quarterly

Staffed and Unstaffed Chapters who collect their own dues from their members, shall remit the National Office's share of all dues collected to the National Office quarterly, along with a current mailing list of active chapter members; provided that no less than fifteen (15) days following the end of each quarter, all such chapters shall provide the National Office with a full accounting of the amount of dues they have collected in the quarter just ended, so that the National Office can compute the amount of dues owed by the chapter for the quarter just ended and bill the chapter accordingly.

Bylaw Section 1.9 Dues Escrow / Quarterly Payments to Chapters / Unclaimed Dues

All dues collected by the National Office shall be placed in an escrow account, separate from all other National Office accounts. Chapters shall receive quarterly reports on the chapter's membership dues payments. Chapter contacts shall be offered quarterly payment of the chapter portion of their members' dues received that quarter. Chapters offered their portion of their membership dues shall claim those dues by requesting payment from the National Office bookkeeper within 90 days of being offered. Dues unclaimed by a chapter contact within the time provided shall be considered a contribution to the National Office. Chapters shall keep the National Office advised of their designated chapter contact. If the National Office is not kept advised of the designated chapter contact, chapter quarterly membership dues payments shall be treated as are dues payments of at-large members.

90 days of notice or the chapter portion of the dues becomes a contribution to the national office.

Chapters are notified through their designated contact persons. Chapters must keep their contact information current, or the chapter's dues will be treated as are dues payments of at-large members and be made available to the chapter's region.

All dues payments must be deposited into a NLG checking account. Bank regulations require organizations to obtain an (EIN) issued by the Social Security Administration. An EIN is issued whether or not the organization ever intends to hire employees.

Obtaining an Employer Identification Number (EIN)

The application can be completed online at

<https://sa1.www4.irs.gov/mod/ein/individual/index.jsp>



Internal Revenue Service

United States Department of the Treasury

[Help](#) | [Apply for New EIN](#) | [Exit](#)

1. Click: **Apply for New EIN**
2. Select: **View Additional Types, Including Tax-Exempt and Governmental Organizations**
3. Select: [Other Non-Profit/Tax-Exempt Organizations](#)
4. Confirm: Selection of **Other Non-Profit/Tax-Exempt Organizations**.
5. Select: **Banking purposes** as the reason for applying for the EIN.
6. Select: **Individual** as the Responsible Party for the Non-Profit/Tax-Exempt Organization
7. Enter: First name, middle name/initial, last name. and SSN of Responsible Party
Then select: I am a responsible, duly authorized [member](#) or [officer](#) having knowledge of the organization's affairs.
8. Enter: Number, Street, City, State and Zip code where the Organization is physically located. If the chapter does not have a physical address, provide the information for the responsible party and indicate that mail should be specifically directed to that party. NOTE: The address must be in the U.S. and cannot be a post office box.
9. Enter: The **legal name** of the NLG chapter, (Ex: National Lawyers Guild – New York City Chapter, The National Lawyers Guild San Francisco Bay Area Chapter,) **county and state** where the chapter is located, and the **chapter's start date**. NOTE: If the chapter is being reactivated, use the date of the reactivation.
10. Enter **"NO" responses**: For more information about the Non-Profit/Tax Exempt Organization, its vehicles, gambling, requirement for quarterly tax filing, sales of alcohol, tobacco and/or firearms, and employees requiring W-2 in the next twelve months. NOTE: Before answering **YES** to any of these questions, check with your Regional Vice President or the National Office.
11. Select: **Other** as the category that best describes your business.
Then select: **Organization** as best describing your primary business activity:
Then enter: Under **"Other"** as the primary activity of your organization.
12. Choose **Receive letter online**. This option requires [Adobe Reader](#). You will be able to view, print, and save this letter immediately. It will not be mailed to you.

Keep the online letter in a safe place. It contains the EIN that has been assigned to your NLG chapter. This EIN is a permanent number and can be used for opening a bank account, applying for business licenses and/or filing for non-profit status with State, and completing the chapter's tax returns

In most cases a local chapter is unlikely to have enough profit - excess of income such as dues, interest, etc. over expenses during the course of the year - to be liable for corporate taxes. However, the government requires an annual filing even though no taxes are owed. It is the sole responsibility of the individual chapter to obtain an EIN and to file annual returns and all other required reports relevant to that account.

Maintaining a Chapter Checking Account



SAMPLE CHAPTER BYLAWS

NATIONAL LAWYERS GUILD SEATTLE CHAPTER

(As amended in 2003)

ARTICLE I

Section 1. There shall be the following officers: president, vice-president, co-student vice-presidents, secretary, and treasurer. A slate of officers shall be selected by the Executive Board prior to the May chapter meeting and presented to the chapter for its approval. In addition, candidates for any office may be nominated at the May chapter meeting. If additional nominations are made, contested positions shall be decided by majority vote of members present and voting. Officers shall serve one-year terms and shall have collective responsibility for the leadership of the chapter.

Section 2. The president shall have primary responsibility for developing and directing chapter work. The president shall also be responsible for coordinating chapter relations with other local chapters, the national organization, the progressive community, and other legal or bar organizations.

Section 3. The vice-president shall be responsible for the internal organizational life of the chapter, including the convening of regular chapter meetings and acting as liaison to active committees.

Section 4. Co-student vice-president shall be filled by the duly elected Student Coordinators of UW and SU law schools and be responsible for coordinating chapter activities involving local law schools and law students.

Section 5. The secretary shall be responsible for maintaining records of the decisions and proceedings of the officers and Executive Board. The secretary shall be responsible for notifying chapter membership of chapter meetings.

Section 6. The treasurer shall be responsible for maintaining financial records, including membership records.

Section 7. In addition, the officers shall allocate responsibilities for the following areas, among themselves or to designees: Continuing Legal Education programs; and Media and Public Relations.

ARTICLE II

Section 1. The Executive Board shall consist of the above officers plus up to five at-large members. At-large members shall be appointed by the officers in consideration of past service as a chapter officer, current participation in the work of any active chapter committee, and any other history of contributions to the chapter. All Executive Board members shall serve one-year terms.

Section 2. The Executive Board shall be responsible for deciding policy matters, and may in its discretion refer particular issues to the membership of the chapter. In other matters, the Executive Board shall act in an advisory capacity to the officers.

Section 3. The Executive Board shall meet whenever convened by the president or any four other Executive Board members, but shall in any case meet at least once in each quarter of the calendar year. A majority of the Executive Board shall constitute a quorum, and action shall be taken by a majority of members present.

Section 4. The president or the present's designee shall chair meetings of the Executive Board.

Section 5. Vacancies occurring among the officers or on the Executive Board shall be filled for the balance of the term affected by action of the Executive Board.

Section 6. An election to recall an officer or Executive Board member shall be held within three weeks after a request made by a majority of the Executive Board or by a petition signed by twenty-five or more members. Such an election shall be decided by a majority of chapter members voting.

ARTICLE III

Section 1. The dues structure, procedures for collecting dues, and other qualifications for regular membership shall be determined by the national organization.

ARTICLE IV

Section 1. An election on a proposed amendment to these by-laws shall be held within three weeks after a request made by a majority of the Executive Board or by a petition signed by twenty-five or more members. Such an election shall be decided by a majority of chapter members voting.