

FAQs about Bylaws Template

Will each unit have to convert their current bylaws to the new template?

Yes. Standardization will be required for all sets of bylaws.

Why do we have to do this?

Adopting a standardized format for bylaws has several benefits:

1. Provides a means for the University to give units guidance on best practices of what should be in the bylaws and in some cases language that must be in the bylaws in a user-friendly manner.

2. Shortens the learning curve for new chairs, deans, and directors by giving them a place to start with knowledge on what language is fixed based on the CBA, faculty handbook, and other guidance documents and an outline of what information needs to be in the document.

3. Simplifies the process of updating the bylaws by standardizing where to look to find the items that need to be updated.

4. Facilitates the review of bylaws to ensure they follow CBA, faculty handbook, and other guidance documents.

5. Still provides flexibility for unit faculty to determine specifics (e.g., criteria for promotion and tenure).

Minor point: Makes it easier for others at the University to find information in event they need to for various processes, accreditation, etc.

What is the deadline for converting bylaws to the new template?

Units should have their bylaws converted to the standardized format by the end of the Spring 2022 semester. This is the deadline for getting the bylaws to the next level reviewer (e.g., dean's office for departments). The goal is to have all bylaws in the standardized format and approved all the way through the OFDA by the start of the 2022-23 academic year.

We are a center/institute/unit that has never been asked to create bylaws before. Do we now have to create them?

No, not necessarily. The adoption of a standardized format for bylaws over the coming academic year is aimed at units that have existing bylaws that have been approved up through the OFDA level. Check here to see if your unit has approved bylaws (<https://fda.fsu.edu/quicklinks/college-and-department-bylaws>). The OFDA has determined that any unit that hires faculty or appoints faculty (even if the faculty member is shared with another unit at FSU) should have bylaws and use the new template. If you think your unit should have bylaws but does not, please discuss this with the person who serves as the authority for the unit to determine how to proceed (e.g., a center within a college would go to the dean about this issue).

This sounds like a lot of work for units, what is involved in converting to the standardized format?

The templates were designed with ease of use in mind. The template for your specific type of unit outlines what information is required and provides fixed language wherever possible that will not require approval at the unit level. The information from a unit's existing bylaws would be copied and pasted into the relevant area of the template. Information in the unit's bylaws that falls outside of the sections covered in the template can be placed into appendices. Units that make no substantive additions or reductions to their bylaws when converting them to the standardized form do not need to vote on the finished product: it is sent to the next authority level (e.g., dean's office for department) for review to ensure everything is in place. The OFDA will also review them for completeness and send their approval. Once that is received, the newly formatted bylaws can be placed on the unit's web site.

If a unit makes substantive changes to their bylaws when converting to the standardized format, then the normal procedure for making bylaws revisions should be followed, which would entail a vote by the faculty on the final product and subsequent full reviews of the content by the higher authority levels.

Our bylaws were approved through OFDA level last year, and we aren't making any content changes in the coming year. Can we just convert our existing bylaws to the standardized format and re-post them on our website?

Please go through the normal levels of administrative approval before posting your reformatted bylaws to your website. Reformatting your bylaws to the standardized template is a reorganization of your existing content, not a content revision. As such, your faculty should be made aware of the reformatting of the bylaws, but there is no requirement that they vote on them again if no changes to the content were made.

Can we make the template fit the style of our current bylaws in terms of font, line spacing, etc.?

Yes, but please do not re-order, re-number, or change the language in the template items. You can retain organizational elements from your existing bylaws, but do not change the numbering of the elements in the template. For instance, if your current bylaws contain a list of committees and that list has them numbered, then you can paste in the entire list to the relevant section of the template with their existing numbers. Template items marked "optional" can be deleted if they are not used.

One of the items in the template doesn't apply to our unit, or I cannot find content in our current bylaws on the topic. What do I do?

The templates contain the required elements for bylaws at FSU, but some units may not need to have content for each one either by design or by mistake. For instance, a unit with no specialized faculty probably won't have developed promotion criteria for such faculty. In that case, the omission is by design, and you can write "Not applicable –

no specialized faculty in this department/college/unit” for that item. Doing so will help avoid questions about whether you need to have content. If, in this example, your unit does have specialized faculty but the unit bylaws say nothing about promotion criteria for them, then that will need to be addressed through your bylaws revision process and added.

The template does not include all of the items that we think are critical to have in bylaws, can we add items?

Please do NOT add items to the template. The template serves as the “main body” of the standardized format and reflects what is required by each type of unit (department, college, etc.). In completing a template item, such as the one on Committees, you may add subheadings and numbering for the content, but do not change the format of the template’s outline. If your bylaws have additional content not covered in a template item, then it may be added in the form of appendices as indicated at the end of the template document.

Our bylaws already have existing appendices that cover things that are in the template (e.g., criteria for promotion and tenure). Do I have to undo our existing structure and get rid of those appendices?

If you have content in an appendix that is called for in a template item (e.g., criteria for promotion of specialized faculty), then you can paste the content from your existing appendix into the template and it will become part of the “main body” of the bylaws. It would NOT be included as an appendix anymore, so please do not put the content in more than one place (the “main body” and in an appendix). Alternatively, you can leave the content in the appendix and refer the reader to it with a simple statement in the “main body” of the bylaws. That appendix will need to be included at the end as indicated in the template document. Be sure to cross check the “main body” references to appendices and the actual appendix titles to ensure accuracy.

Can/should content go into the template and in an appendix?

No, there is no reason to include the same content in multiple places in the bylaws and such a practice actually has several disadvantages (e.g., susceptibility to inconsistencies; added burden when reviewing). If you have content in an appendix that is called for in a template item (e.g., criteria for promotion of specialized faculty), then you can paste the content from your existing appendix into the template and it will become part of the “main body” of the bylaws. It would NOT be included as an appendix anymore, so please do not put the content in more than one place (the “main body” and in an appendix). Alternatively, you can leave the content in the appendix and refer the reader to it with a simple statement in the “main body” of the bylaws.

Can we cut out items from the template that do not apply to our unit?

You may only delete items in the template that are marked “optional.” Otherwise, please do not alter the content of the template items. Instead, if you are certain that a template item does not apply to your unit (e.g., items regarding specialized faculty do not apply because your unit has never had specialized faculty), then please address the template item with a simple statement on why it is not applicable to your unit. This will facilitate review of your bylaws and ensure that elements are not accidentally missing. Also, if that element becomes relevant to your unit in the future, then you can easily update it. Please do not leave a template item blank or it will raise questions during review about whether that was intentionally or accidentally unaddressed.

Our unit is planning to revise its bylaws in the coming year. Do we need to convert our existing bylaws to the new standardized format and get that approved before we start revising?

No, units have until the end of the Spring 2022 semester to adopt the standardized format. This date was selected to allow units ample time to work through revisions, if necessary/desired, and send the bylaws for review and approval with both the revisions and format change in place. Note that simply changing your existing bylaws to the standardized format does NOT constitute a revision and does NOT require a faculty vote if the content of your existing bylaws is not altered during the re-formatting.

Do faculty have to vote on the bylaws after they have been reformatted using the template?

No, if the content of your existing bylaws is not altered in the conversion to the standardized format, then no vote is required by your faculty. It is highly advisable to notify your faculty that your unit is required to convert your bylaws to a standardized format and to share the re-formatted bylaws with your faculty. There is nothing that prevents you from having your faculty vote on the re-formatted bylaws if that is what you/they prefer. The re-formatted bylaws do need to be approved up through the OFDA level, but the unit faculty do not need to vote and approve them unless content was altered during the re-formatting.