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Difference Between Bylaws & Standing Rules

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Organizations benefit from establishing formal rules to fairly and effectively manage operations. Two types of governing instruments, bylaws and standing rules, detail specific policies and procedures to be followed by decision-makers in the conduct of business. Despite having the same functional objective, however, these two instruments complement each other and are not interchangeable.

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Comparison

The key differences between bylaws and standing rule

The parliamentary procedure guide "Robert's Rules of Order" explains that bylaws "should include all the rules that are of such importance that they cannot be changed in any way without previous notice," while standing rules "should contain only such rules as may be adopted without previous notice by a majority vote at any business meeting." At the core, bylaws are designed to be overarching and procedural, while standing rules are specific and administrative.

In Practice

Bylaws usually are drafted at an organization's inception, while standing rules tend to be established as needed by committees or other subsets of management.

Bylaws govern the organization as a whole and can be amended only by providing notice and gaining a majority vote. Standing rules can be adopted at any meeting without notice and can pass upon a simple majority vote of people in attendance.

Bylaws and standing rules are interrelated; however, their relationship is strictly hierarchical. Provisions in the bylaws always supersede any standing rule that may be adopted.

Importance

While an organization can function with only a set of bylaws, establishing standing rules for administrative functions can make an organization more effective. Knowing the relationship between bylaws and standing rules and how functionality overlaps will ensure that business operations stay within authorized bounds.