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**Snippet #106**  
**Governance Documents Hierarchy**

Type	Source	Description
Outside mandate: Imposed by government action	<b>Federal, state, local laws</b>	Federal law is the highest governing document, followed by state and then local laws. The most common example of state laws that affect some associations are the sunshine, or open meeting, laws. In general these laws are designed to bring transparency to the association's activities.
Outside control: Customized content, with approval and revision subject to statutory requirements	<b>Articles of incorporation</b>	The articles of incorporation (also called the charter) is the legal document that gives an association its name and legal status. The statutes of the state of incorporation mandate the content and method of amendment for the articles.
Internal control: Structure and flow of authority, with approval and revision by members.	<b>Bylaws</b>	This member-owned document describes the structure and flow of authority of an association. The members decide by a provision in the bylaws how the document can be changed. Rules in the bylaws cannot be suspended, unless the conditions under which they can be suspended are specifically included in the bylaws. Bylaws should be reviewed at least every five years to ensure they reflect current governance.
Internal control: customized rules to supersede the parliamentary authority in specific cases, approved and revised by members.	<b>Special rules of order</b>	In cases where the members want to conduct business in a way that differs from the adopted parliamentary authority, special rules of order are adopted. For example, <i>Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised</i> (RONR) allows each person to speak for ten minutes when recognized. A special rule of order can be adopted to limit debate time to two minutes.
Internal mandate: published procedural rules specified in the bylaws to provide fundamental structure, revised by the authors	<b>Parliamentary authority</b>	A parliamentary authority is a book of procedural rules that can serve an association in conducting business during meetings. Adopting a parliamentary authority allows an association to function under generally accepted procedures that ensure fairness. The most widely used parliamentary authority is <i>Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised</i> , currently in the eleventh edition.
Internal control: rules created and revised by members.	<b>Standing rules</b>	In general, standing rules are the rules regarding the administration of an association, rather than its decision-making process. However, board standing rules are a document that often contains both procedural rules for the board and administrative rules.
Internal control: rules created and revised by members	<b>Policies</b>	Policy is a common term not found in RONR, and the definition is dependent on the setting. A policy might be an ideal: "We do not tolerate harassment in any form." A policy might set forth a rule: "It is our policy to prosecute shoplifters." Or, a policy might define how a rule will be carried out. Because of the multiple meanings and confusion over interpretation, we recommend using the term only when a clear definition is provided.
Internal control: rules created and revised by members	<b>Procedures</b>	Procedures are the administrative tasks that must be performed in order to carry out or enforce a rule. Boards that get very involved in procedures are often called micromanaging boards. It is usually considered good practice to set the project boundaries and let those responsible for the project carry it out in their own way.