

NUGW Constitution and Bylaws

Article 1: Mission Statement

Section 1. Northwestern University Graduate Workers (NUGW) is an antiracist, feminist labor union fighting for better working and living conditions for all graduate workers. We understand that the material conditions of our academic lives, and the right to a collective voice in decisions that affect these conditions, are inherently issues of racial, gender, and decolonial justice. We are dedicated to building a diverse and democratic union that centers the needs of historically excluded and underrepresented graduate students, particularly Black, Indigenous, POC, queer, trans, undocumented, low-income, first-generation, parenting students and students living with disabilities or chronic illnesses.

We are united in the goal of achieving formal recognition from Northwestern's administration so we can collectively bargain for an inclusive, collaborative workplace in which all graduate students flourish. Specifically, we advocate for:

- A democratic union that empowers students to advance their interests as equal participants in the university's decision making process and holds the university accountable to its core mission of research and education.
- The needs of our diverse student body, especially the needs of historically excluded and underrepresented groups. We strongly oppose discrimination and harassment in all forms.
- Safe, reasonable, and comfortable working conditions.
- The financial security necessary to enable academic success, including adequate healthcare, childcare, and a living wage.
- The intellectual and academic freedom of graduate students to teach and research topics of legitimate scholarly interest without fear of reprisal.

NUGW exists to preserve and expand our rights as employees, graduate students, and members of Northwestern's academic community. We stand in solidarity with workers and students everywhere organizing for a just and equitable system of higher education.

Article 2: Membership

Section 1. Membership is open to all Northwestern University (NU) graduate and postdoctoral student workers, including those students temporarily on fellowship, first-year students, and those on leave. The only requirement for membership status is the signing of an NUGW membership card.

Section 2. Members are granted voting rights in NUGW decisions. Members may initiate referendum proceedings, issue grievances, and file amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws with the Co-Chairs.

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Section 3. Members may join any and all Standing Committees and Working Groups. Any member can be nominated or self-nominated to stand for election as Coordinator of a Standing Committee.

Article 3: Meetings

Section 1. There are four types of meetings: 1) General membership meetings, 2) Standing Committee and Working Group meetings, 3) Organizing Committee (OC) meetings, and 4) Coordinating Committee (CC) meetings. At the start of each General meeting, OC meeting, and CC meeting, the Co-Chairs will assign a notetaker. The notetaker shall send the meeting minutes to the Co-Chairs within a week of the meeting.

*Section 2. **General Membership (GMM) meetings:*** General meetings occur at a minimum on a quarterly basis during the academic year and the Co-Chairs shall announce the date and location to the NUGW membership at least two weeks in advance. The Co-Chairs shall send an agenda to the membership prior to each general meeting, including a list of planned decisions. General meetings are open to all NU graduate workers and to other individuals by invitation. The quorum for decision-making at general meetings is 5% of membership. Meetings may still occur without a quorum, although decisions made therein will be considered non-binding.

*Section 3. **Standing Committee and Working Group meetings.*** Standing Committee and Working Group meetings occur on an as-needed basis, as decided by the participants in each committee and working group. Committee Coordinators shall announce the meeting times and places to the NUGW membership. Committee Coordinators (see *Article 4, Section 3*) are responsible for calling meetings for their respective committees, and will do so at least 5 days in advance of each meeting date. Asynchronous meetings must remain open to all working group or committee members.

*Section 4. **Organizing Committee (OC) meetings.*** The OC meets in person on a standing basis, with additional meetings scheduled as needed by the Co-Chairs. The OC is open to all NUGW members without exceptions and all members may sign up for the OC mailing list or join NUGW's Slack. The Co-Chairs shall send an OC meeting announcement and agenda prior to every meeting and minutes after every meeting. Non-members may only attend by invitation of the OC.

*Section 5. **Coordinating Committee (CC) meetings.*** The CC shall meet at least once annually in the Spring Quarter and on an as-needed basis. Any CC member may call a meeting. All CC meetings, except those convened to address grievances, are open to all NUGW members, and are closed to non-members. The Co-Chairs send a CC meeting announcement and agenda prior to every meeting and minutes after every meeting.

Article 4: NUGW Roles

*Section 1. **Members.*** NUGW members can attend all meetings, participate in all working groups and standing committees, become Department Organizers, and have voting rights in all decisions as provided for in Article 2.

*Section 2. **Department Organizers.*** Department Organizers are NUGW members who organize their departments, report to the Internal Affairs Committee, and coordinate between NUGW and their departments. Department organizers are expected to maintain NUGW membership lists, assessments, and contact information for their departments, and to communicate NUGW information to their departments. To preserve flexibility in organizing approaches, departments can decide whether or not they would like to select their own department organizers in order to streamline organizing efforts within their department. When possible, department organizers serve one year terms. Larger departments are encouraged to have multiple organizers.

*Section 3. **Committee Coordinators.*** NUGW Committee Coordinators and Co-Chairs are elected annually and schedule Standing Committee meetings. They are responsible for helping to recruit committee members, identifying new coordinators, and transition-planning at the end of their term. Coordinators are required to attend OC, CC, and General meetings. One Coordinator is elected to each Standing Committee.

*Section 4. **Co-Chairs.*** NUGW Co-Chairs are elected annually and schedule all OC, CC, and General meetings. Co-Chairs are responsible for maintaining communication between NUGW and the NU Administration, in substantive consultation with the OC. The Co-Chairs solicit agenda items in advance of all OC, CC, and General meetings and designate a facilitator and a notetaker prior to each meeting.

Article 5: NUGW Organizing Committee

Section 1. The OC is a group of NUGW members actively coordinating NUGW's union recognition and issue campaigns. The OC organizes events and actions, and makes decisions about short- and long-term campaign strategy in all of its dimensions, including membership growth goals, the development and escalation of issue campaigns, coalition and solidarity work with other organizations, and the eventual calling of a union election. The OC is also responsible for approving annual budgets and major expenses. As the large decision-making body, membership is open to those who have signed an NUGW membership card.

Section 2. OC members are responsible for consulting the broader NUGW membership regarding campaign proceedings through the following avenues:

- A. OC members may informally consult the NUGW membership, through individual or one-to-one conversations.

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- B. OC members may poll NUGW members or seek their input at general, standing committee, and/or working group meetings.
- C. OC members may call for an advisory referendum.

Section 3. In the case that a member believes that the OC has failed to consult the NUGW membership on a significant issue, or that the OC has chosen a course of action that is not supported by a majority of the membership, an advisory referendum may be called in accordance with the referendum procedure below. Although the result of such a referendum is non-binding, it will be expected that the OC will act to faithfully represent the result in future decisions and, if necessary, revisit past decisions and correct them.

Article 6: NUGW Committee and Working Group Structure

Section 1. Committee membership is set by the following criteria:

- A. Every Standing Committee and Working Group, with the exception of the CC, is open to all members. Standing Committees and Working Groups are closed to non-members.
- B. Members may self-select to join or leave these bodies at any time, with the exception of the elected Committee Coordinators and Co-Chairs. Membership in the CC is comprised of elected officers.
- C. New Standing Committees may be formed via the amendment process, and new Working Groups may be formed in consultation with the OC, CC, or with majority approval at general meetings.

Section 2. Every Standing Committee and Working Group is convened by a Coordinator with the following roles and responsibilities.

- A. The Coordinator is responsible for convening the designated committee or group, and for liaising with the OC and CC.
- B. The Coordinators of the Standing Committees sit on the CC.
- C. Members may only serve as Coordinator of one Standing Committee at a time.
- D. Serving as a Working Group Committee Coordinator is a voluntary, unelected position.

Section 3. Coordinating Committee. The Coordinating Committee (CC) exists permanently to fulfill organizational and deliberative functions beyond the domain of the OC, while the scope of its responsibilities remains primarily logistical. The CC is a group of NUGW standing elected Coordinators and Co-Chairs who help administer the organization, facilitate amendments to bylaws, coordinate officer elections, address grievances, and articulate any necessary tasks not accomplished or delimited in other meetings. At the beginning of each academic year, the CC must, in collaboration with the budget committee, prepare a yearly budget to be approved by the OC. The CC also exists as a democratic organ of the broader membership, faithfully carrying out its decisions and acting on its behalf. As with the other committees, CC meeting places and times are announced publicly to the NUGW membership and attendance is open to all, but only CC members may vote.

Section 4. NUGW will convene the following Standing Committees:

A. Membership

The Membership Committee maintains NUGW's membership infrastructure. The Committee will maintain the NUGW and OC membership lists and information systems, as well as manage permissions for access to data and ensure its distribution to members. In addition, the Membership Committee is in charge of internal communication to NUGW membership in coordination with the Communications and Internal Affairs committees, including but not limited to communication with new members and reports to the Organizing Committee.

B. Internal Affairs

The Internal Affairs Committee maintains NUGW's organizational infrastructure at the department level. It is responsible for recruiting, training, and supporting NUGW Department Organizers in their efforts to organize their departments. The Internal Affairs Committee serves as a liaison between the OC and department level organizers. With the assistance of Department Organizers it is responsible for maintaining up-to-date department lists, and it is also responsible for running organizer trainings on a regular basis. Internal Affairs regularly coordinates with Department Organizers, to ensure that NUGW has accurate data and is responsive to the needs of the larger membership.

C. Communications

The Communications Committee will manage media campaigns to foster support for NUGW among the Northwestern community and beyond. This involves fielding media requests, developing strategic partnerships, and generating informational and promotional content.. This includes administering the NUGW website, social media pages, and designated communication platforms.

D. Unity

The Unity Committee will build camaraderie among NUGW members and solidarity between NUGW and other unions and marginalized communities. The Committee's work includes hosting social events for NUGW members, planning solidarity actions, and ensuring that issues of marginalization, disunity, and distrust among NUGW members, and among NUGW and administration, faculty, and other external powers, are addressed directly by the membership.

E. Research

The Research Committee helps build NUGW's strategy by discovering and analyzing information relevant to higher education labor practices at NU and beyond. The Research Committee maintains current information on the NU's leadership, including the board of trustees. The Committee also maintains current analysis of NU's finances, including tax returns, bond yield rates, and financial reports.

F. Budget

The Budget Committee is responsible for managing NUGW's financial resources in collaboration with the Co-Chairs, the CC, and the OC. It creates budgets, collects voluntary donations, manages operational and campaign related expenses, keeps the books, and

oversees the organization's cash flow. The Budget Committee must release a financial report once a year at the end of the fiscal year.

Section 6. Working groups. Working groups are formed on an ad-hoc basis, in consultation with the OC or CC, and exist to facilitate the completion of tasks. As task-delimited entities, working groups are formed to promote collaboration between standing committees or to target organizational needs outside currently articulated standing committee responsibilities.

Article 6: Decision-making: types of decisions

Section 1. Procedural decisions. Procedural decisions involve the maintenance and everyday functions of NUGW. The decisions to create working groups, determine meeting times, set agendas, develop strategies, select issue campaigns, and propose referenda are all examples of procedural decisions.

Procedural decisions at meetings are made, preferably, on the basis of the consensus of all members present at the meeting. In case a consensus cannot be reached, a vote will take place in which a decision will be won by a simple majority of members.

Section 2. Substantive decisions. Substantive decisions are made through general referenda. Examples of substantive decisions include the decision to affiliate or disaffiliate with a national union, strike votes, the initiation of contract negotiations, and the acceptance or rejection of any agreement with NU. All referenda held for substantive decisions are binding.

Section 3. Types of referenda.

- A. There are two types of referenda: (a) binding referenda, and (b) advisory (non-binding) referenda. Both follow the same procedure. While binding referenda require that NUGW faithfully implement the result of the referendum, non-binding referenda do not require such implementation, and instead play an advisory role in decision-making. Referenda may be called in three ways:
 - a. 10% of the NUGW membership may call a referendum by submitting a signed request to the Co-Chairs.
 - b. Members at a general meeting may call a referendum by consensus or majority vote.
 - c. Members of the Organizing Committee or voting members of the Coordinating Committee may call a referendum by consensus or majority vote.
- B. Referenda votes shall occur online. Except for the decision to affiliate or disaffiliate with a national union, referenda require a simple majority to pass. All referenda require a quorum of 25% of the membership. An affiliation or disaffiliation decision requires a two thirds majority to pass.

Article 7: Officer Elections

Section 1. Election Coordinators. The sitting Co-Chairs will designate a minimum of two Election Coordinators to oversee the elections of the Committee Coordinators and the Co-Chairs. The Election Coordinators may not include current nominees. The Election Coordinators will oversee the election process, including publicizing the election event and nominees, collecting and maintaining votes, and announcing election outcomes.

Section 2. Election Procedures.

- A. Elections will take place at the end of every spring quarter to select officers for the following academic year. In the case of resignation prior to the fulfillment of the officer's term, an election will take place on an ad-hoc basis. Officers may serve consecutive terms but must be re-elected at the end of every academic year.
- B. Election Coordinators will solicit nominations, including self-nominations, early in the spring quarter. NUGW members will have a period of at least 2 weeks to nominate their fellow members online.
- C. Election Coordinators will provide written notice of elections to NUGW members no fewer than 15 days before the election is to take place. All voting will take place online, and instructions for voting will also be distributed no fewer than 15 days before the election is to take place. Voting will open for a period of 5 working days.
- D. The Election Coordinators will announce the election results within 1 working day of the end of the voting period.

Section 3. Ballot Maintenance.

- A. Ballots will be collected online by the Election Coordinators and be made available to the Co-Chairs throughout the voting process.
- B. Completed ballots will be preserved in the NUGW archive for up to one year following each election.

Section 4. Recall Procedures. Recall and contestation of elections or election outcomes will be addressed following the procedures for grievance and accountability, as outlined in Article 8.

Article 8: Grievance and Accountability Procedure

Section 1. A member feeling aggrieved by an action, inaction, interpretation of the NUGW Constitution and Bylaws, or an action undertaken by an NUGW member, may initiate a complaint. Complaints may result in the expulsion of members from the union, if so determined through the grievance procedure below.

- A. The grievance shall be made in writing to the Co-Chairs and, if applicable, refer to the section of the NUGW Constitution and Bylaws the grievant(s) believe(s) has been violated.
- B. The grievance must be submitted within thirty days of the time the grievant(s) is aware, or reasonably should have been aware, of the violation.

- C. The Coordinating Committee is empowered to dismiss grievances that are not made in accordance with the guidelines in this section with written notice to the grievant(s).

Section 2. The Co-Chairs will work with the grievant(s) and all involved parties to determine if mediation would assist the parties in coming to a resolution. If all parties agree, the Co-Chairs shall appoint a member sufficiently removed from the dispute to serve as mediator.

- A. The mediation shall commence within 30 days of the filing of the grievance and be conducted according to mediator standards of practice adopted by the Association for Conflict Resolution.
- B. Any voluntary agreement reached in mediation shall be memorialized in writing.
- C. If a voluntary agreement is not reached within 10 weeks, the grievance process shall continue, as outlined in Section 3, if not voluntarily dismissed.

Section 3. The Coordinating Committee shall consult with all involved parties and grant them the full opportunity to be heard prior to making a written decision on the matter of the grievance.

- A. If the grievance involves one or more members of the Coordinating Committee, those involved members must recuse themselves from deliberations. If, after recusal, there are less than five Coordinating Committee members available for deliberation, neutral replacements will be selected among the general membership by an eligible Coordinating Committee member.
- B. All members involved in the subject matter of the grievance will be encouraged to file written statements responding to the grievance with the Coordinating Committee.
- C. The Coordinating Committee shall issue its decision explaining its rationale within 30 days of the filing of the grievance, or the referral from mediation, whichever is later.

Section 4. Either party may appeal the resolution within 15 days, after which the Coordinating Committee shall place resolution of the grievance on the agenda of the next General meeting. The written grievance, along with all submitted written statements and the Coordinating Committee's final decision shall be communicated to the general membership for review prior to the meeting. Time must be allotted to each party to discuss the grievance at the General meeting. A majority vote will be held to decide whether the decision made by the CC will be upheld. General meeting decisions on grievances are final.

Section 5. At the conclusion of the grievance process, the Internal Affairs Committee Coordinator shall transfer a permanent record detailing the grievance and the final disposition of it to the NUGW archive.

Article 9: Amendment Procedure

Section 1. The amendment procedure exists to permit NUGW to evolve as its membership grows over time and adapt to new institutional challenges. The NUGW Constitution and Bylaws may be amended through the following procedure:

- A. Amendments may be filed by the Coordinating Committee and/or with a written and signed petition of 5% of members. Amendments may also be proposed at General Meetings with approval of the majority present.
- B. Voting on amendments will take place on an as-needed basis throughout the year, but no more than two amendment votes may be held in any given year.
- C. Amendment votes will be held online. The Coordinating Committee will provide notice and text of proposed amendments at least 15 days prior to the vote.
- D. General members may comment on the proposed amendments in the 14 day period prior to the vote. One person designated by the Coordinating Committee will collect comments, and will circulate the statements in a single document to the general membership 1 day prior to the vote for consideration.
- E. With permission of the Coordinating Committee, the original proponent may decide to withdraw the amendment for resubmission at any time.
- F. Amendment proposals will be ratified by a voting majority after a voting period of five working days.

Article 10: Finances

Section 1. NUGW's finances are the joint responsibility of the CC and the OC. The daily management of NUGW's financial resources is the responsibility of the Budget Committee who also shoulders accounting and reporting duties.

*Section 2. **Income.*** NUGW's income consists of voluntary donations from NUGW members and non-members alike.

*Section 3. **Expenses.*** All major NUGW expenses must be approved by the OC (ex: ordering swag, event space rental, any and all subcontracting, any and all payments or donations to individuals or external organizations). Minor and recurring operating expenses (ex: food and drinks for NUGW events, printing costs, supplies to make signs, recurring website and online services costs...) can be approved by the Co-Chairs and/or Budget Coordinator without input from the OC as long as it remains within budget. Individuals seeking reimbursement for approved NUGW expenses must submit receipts to the Budget Committee in order to be reimbursed. Unapproved expenses will not be reimbursed.

*Section 4. **Budgeting and Reporting.*** At the beginning of the fiscal year, the Budget Committee is responsible for creating a yearly budget in collaboration with the CC. This budget must be submitted to the OC for approval. The OC may request changes to the budget before approval. Should a sudden and drastic change in income or expenditure occur during the course of the year, the CC and Budget Committee shall propose a revised budget to be approved by the OC. At the end of each fiscal year, the Budget Committee must prepare a financial report and present it to the OC for review. This financial report must be made available to all NUGW members upon request. NUGW's fiscal year begins September 1 and ends August 31.