

YOUR FIRST WEEKS

As President or Vice President

Understand the work you are stepping into

You inherit work at different stages of completion. There may be a program people expect to happen, a room request that is still pending, a member waiting for a response and a decision the previous team never finished. You also inherit the good things people want to keep: a welcoming meeting, a useful partnership, a tradition that brings people together or a reliable way of helping new members get involved.

This chapter will help you make sense of that first stretch. It explains how a president and vice president can divide their work, how to prepare a useful conversation with the team and how to move an idea into a realistic plan.

ABOUT THE EXAMPLES

The examples are fictional. They show a way to think through the work; your organization's rules and institutional requirements determine the decisions you may make. The organization, responses, amounts, schedule and local arrangements are invented for practice. They are not NEXT OF US results or a real campus policy.

GET ORIENTED

Start by learning how the organization works now. Read the documents that set out the organization’s purpose, roles and decision rules. They may be called a constitution, bylaws or something else; ask which documents apply rather than assuming the names have the same meaning everywhere. Ask the outgoing officers to show you their open work, and meet the advisor or staff contact who supports the group. Look at the actual calendar, records and accounts you are authorized to use. A folder labeled “transition” is a beginning. You still need to understand what its contents mean and which details are current.

Find your actual responsibilities

A president often connects the group's purpose, people and work. That can include helping members choose priorities, preparing meetings, representing an agreed position and making sure important work has an owner. Responsibility for coordination does not settle every decision about authority. Your organization may require a membership vote, an executive-board decision, a particular officer's approval or review by a university office.

The vice president's work needs its own definition. Some groups have one VP who coordinates internal operations. Others assign a portfolio, meaning a defined area of work, such as programming, membership or external relationships. You may work closely with committees, manage a calendar, support a major program or provide temporary coverage when the president is unavailable. Check whether your documents distinguish temporary coverage from permanent succession. Those are separate situations.

Bring the current documents

Check the document date, ask where the current version is kept, and note any duty or decision you still need someone to explain.

Document date	Current version	Questions to confirm
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AGREE ON THE WORK YOU SHARE

During your first conversation together, choose a recent piece of work and walk through it. Suppose the organization held a welcome event. Who proposed it? Who decided to proceed? Who contacted the venue, checked the budget, submitted the event information and told members where to go? Who handled the change when something did not go as expected? That example will usually reveal more than a general promise to “help each other.”

WORKING AGREEMENT

Write a short working agreement in ordinary language. For example: “The president will prepare the executive-board agenda with input from the other officers. The VP will check progress with the two program committees and bring decisions or obstacles to that meeting. Each committee lead will keep its own plan current. Spending and event approvals will follow the routes we confirmed with the finance and student activities offices, meaning the people and steps needed to obtain permission.” Replace it with a division of work that fits your actual roles.

Use your own division of work

Task or area of work [Describe one specific responsibility]	Who leads it [Name or role]
Who must decide or approve [Confirm locally]	Support or backup [Name the person and the help needed]

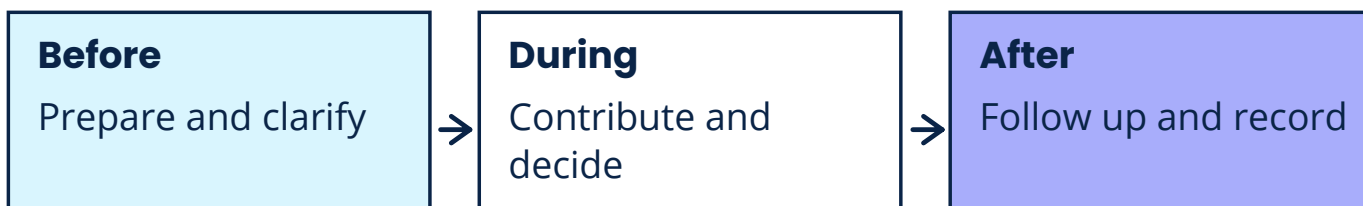
THE WORK BETWEEN MEETINGS

Your calendar should include the preparation and follow-up that surround a meeting or event. You may need to read a proposal, clarify an amount with the treasurer, answer a member's question, review an announcement or check that a successor has access to a file. If those tasks are invisible, the team can agree to more work than it can finish.

In an ordinary week, a president might review open decisions, prepare for a board meeting and check in with a committee lead. A VP responsible for programming might collect updates from two project leads and resolve a scheduling dependency. During a major event, those same people may need additional preparation, setup, communication and closeout time. This is an illustration, not a standard workload or a required weekly schedule.

Ask the outgoing officer about a recent ordinary week and a recent busy week. Have them describe the actual tasks, including what happened outside scheduled meetings. Then compare that work with your classes, job, commute and other commitments. Discuss changes early. You can contribute seriously while being clear about when you are available and when you need another person to cover a task.

At a team check-in, make the next commitment specific enough to use. “I will contact the venue” leaves several questions open. “I will ask the venue about capacity and availability, then put the written reply in our shared planning folder by Thursday” tells the team what to expect. If Thursday becomes unrealistic, the next step is to revise the commitment and explain the effect on the plan.



WORKING TOGETHER

The treasurer needs to be involved before the team makes a financial promise. Ask what funds may be used, what has already been promised or approved but not yet paid, and what documentation or approval is needed. Those unpaid obligations are financial commitments. A price someone remembers from last year may no longer be accurate. A quote may exclude fees or require a contract. Give the treasurer enough information to explain the financial choice rather than asking for a quick yes or no after the announcement has gone out.

The secretary or records lead helps the team leave an accurate account of what happened. Agree on how agenda items arrive, how draft records are reviewed and where decisions and actions are kept. If the record says “approved” but people remember different conditions, clarify the decision through your group's process before anyone acts on it. Do not ask the records lead to solve uncertainty by guessing what the team meant.

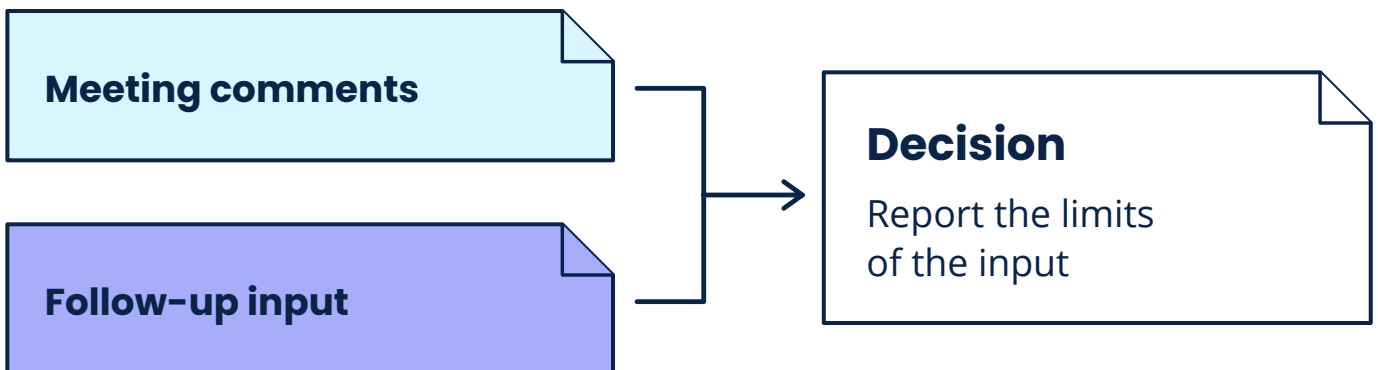
Committee leads and other officers need enough information to carry out their work. Explain the intended result, the limits of the assignment, the relevant deadline and where help is available. Ask them to identify a concern while there is still time to respond. A president or VP can coordinate a program without owning every task within it.

Your advisor can help you interpret institutional processes, locate support and think through a difficult situation. Discuss how you will work together at the beginning of the term. Agree on the usual contact method, the matters that need advance review, how often to meet and who to contact when the advisor is unavailable. The required level of involvement varies by institution and organization. A useful question is, “For this kind of decision, what should we bring to you, and what should go directly to another office?”

MAKE PARTICIPATION WORKABLE

People can be interested in the organization and still have difficulty joining its activities. A meeting that ends late, an unclear cost or a message buried in a group chat can affect participation. Before interpreting a quiet response as a lack of commitment, check whether members know what is being asked and have a workable way to contribute.

Use more than one route for input when the decision warrants it. You might invite comments in a meeting and provide a short follow-up opportunity for people who could not attend. State what you are deciding, when input is needed and what you will do with it. Keep the request proportionate. A small scheduling adjustment may need a quick check; a change to membership expectations may require a fuller discussion and a formal process.



Report back accurately

Report back with the limits of the input intact. "Several members who responded preferred an earlier ending time" is more accurate than "Everyone wants earlier events." Explain how the team used the information and what remains unresolved. Members should be able to see how their contribution connected to the decision, even when the group chooses a different option.

THREE IDEAS ONE ACTIVITY

A student organization is planning its next activity. Its officers have proposed a career panel, a peer skills exchange and a service activity. The group has two meeting dates available next month, and the events lead can prepare one additional activity. Several members who responded to a recent conversation said they wanted a practical chance to introduce themselves professionally. Commuting members also asked the team to avoid an evening finish. The community partner has not yet confirmed whether it needs volunteers.

The president brings the team back to the purpose of the activity: giving members a useful opportunity to practice a professional introduction and receive feedback. That does not automatically rule out a panel or service activity, but it gives the team something concrete to compare. The VP asks each lead to explain the preparation their option would require and the answers still missing.

The career panel could expose members to different experiences, but the proposed speakers have not confirmed. The team would also need to decide whether the format gives members time to practice. The peer skills exchange can use an existing meeting slot, although the team still needs a facilitator, a clear activity and a room that supports small-group work. The service activity depends on the partner's actual needs. The officers agree to continue that conversation separately rather than promise volunteers for an undefined task.

NEXT MONTH

1

meeting date

2

meeting date

1

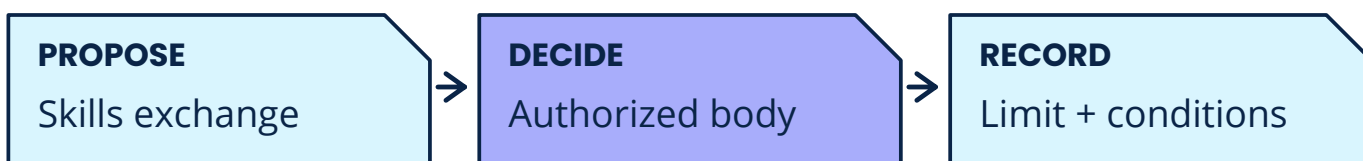
additional activity

FROM A CHOICE TO A DECISION

The treasurer confirms that, in this example, \$180 is available for this activity and no existing unpaid obligations draw on that amount. The skills-exchange estimate is \$20 for printed materials and \$60 for refreshments, including the assumed taxes and fees in this example. Those estimates total \$80, leaving \$100 unallocated, meaning it has not been assigned a use. The group does not treat the remaining amount as a reason to spend more. Any room charge or another added cost would need to be included in a revised plan and reviewed through the applicable approval route. The treasurer will verify purchasing rules and actual prices before any purchase. A room request and the event review still need to be completed through the example campus's process.

The team chooses to propose the skills exchange at the next properly called decision meeting. In this example, the organization's own rules require the executive board to approve the activity and its spending plan. That rule belongs to this example. In your organization, confirm who decides, what advance notice is required and whether enough eligible members must be present. Quorum is the minimum participation required under the applicable rules for the body to conduct specified business; it is not a number to borrow from another club.

After the board's decision, the secretary records the approved purpose, spending limit and conditions. The VP coordinates the remaining preparation, and the events lead owns delivery. The president checks that the proposal became a clear decision and that the team knows what must happen before an announcement. Nobody treats a pending room request as confirmation.



DECISION SKILLS EXCHANGE

Completed decision brief

Career panel

Speakers
unconfirmed;
practice time
unclear

Skills exchange

Needs a facilitator
and a suitable room

Service activity

Partner need not yet
confirmed

Purpose

Members will practice a short professional introduction and receive feedback from a peer during a skills-exchange session.

Why this format

Member input pointed toward practice, and the format fits an existing meeting slot and the events lead's available preparation time. Input came from the members who responded; the team has not claimed that every member prefers this option.

Decision

In this example, the executive board approved the activity and an \$80 spending limit, subject to required campus approvals and verified purchase procedures. The group will use confirmed prices within that limit or return for another decision if the plan changes.

\$80 approved

\$100 unallocated

\$180 available for the activity, with no existing unpaid obligations

COORDINATE WHO OWNS THE WORK

Example Record for the skills exchange

Owner	Work to carry out	Depends on
Events lead	Prepare the activity and setup plan	Confirmed room capacity, accessible route and setup options
VP	Coordinate open answers and check the plan with the facilitator	Facilitator availability and answers from the events lead
Treasurer	Confirm purchasing procedures and retain the required records	Confirmed prices and the applicable campus requirements
Secretary	Keep the decision and action record current	Clear approval conditions and updates from task owners
Communications lead	Prepare and release an accurate notice	Confirmed details and required approvals

Approvals still open

Room request PENDING

Campus event review PENDING

KEEP THE CONDITIONS AND REVIEW VISIBLE

Continuation of the example decision brief

Responsibilities

The events lead will prepare the activity and setup plan. The VP will coordinate outstanding answers and check the plan with the facilitator. The treasurer will confirm the purchase route and retain the required records. The secretary will keep the decision and action record. The communications lead will prepare the notice using confirmed details.

Open conditions

The room and event status are pending. The events lead will verify the room's capacity, accessible route and setup options with the relevant office. The team will confirm how members can request accommodations and whom they should contact. The announcement will be released only after the necessary details and approvals are confirmed.

Confirm the responsible campus contacts before release.

Review

After the session, the facilitator will ask participants whether they had a chance to practice and whether the feedback was useful. The team will record what it delivered, any access or timing problems and what it would change. Attendance and positive comments alone will not be reported as proof of professional readiness.

FOLLOW UP WITH A CLEAR REQUEST

Suppose the room reply is missing when the team expected it. Start with the task and its consequence, then make room for the other person to explain. You could write:

"We planned to review the room information today, and I haven't seen it in the folder yet. We need it before we can finish the setup plan. Were you able to reach the office? Let me know what is still missing and whether someone can help with the next step."

The response may reveal that the office has not replied, that the request went to the wrong place or that the lead could not complete it. Those situations need different responses. If the lead is waiting on the office, the VP might help find the right contact. If the person no longer has time, agree on a smaller assignment or an explicit handoff. Record the new owner and commitment so the rest of the team can plan around it.

If a pattern continues, schedule a direct conversation about the role and expectations. Bring specific examples and listen to the person's account. Discuss what can change and follow the organization's established process where a formal decision is needed. Avoid turning a group chat into a public judgment of someone's commitment. Concerns involving harassment, threats or other serious conduct belong with the appropriate institutional support or reporting office, not an improvised peer investigation.

USE THE SUPPORT AROUND THE ROLE

A visible leadership role can bring questions and expectations that exceed what a student officer can reasonably handle. A member might ask you to resolve a serious personal situation, make an immediate public statement or keep information that belongs in a protected institutional process. You can listen, clarify the limits of your role and help the person reach the appropriate support without taking on a professional responsibility you do not hold.

Keep current contacts for your advisor, student activities office and the relevant institutional support routes. Ask which routes apply to a routine peer conflict, a student wellbeing concern, a discriminatory or threatening incident and an urgent emergency. Use the institution’s published contacts rather than relying on a former officer’s memory. Confirm how urgent concerns are handled when the usual contact is unavailable. Do not promise secrecy where a reporting requirement or safety obligation applies. Avoid circulating personal information through an officer group chat simply because someone shared it with you.

Make room for your own support and boundaries. Discuss coverage before a difficult period rather than assuming the president or VP will always be available. If the role becomes unmanageable, seek help with the workload, a revised arrangement or an orderly transition. The organization benefits from a realistic plan that other people can understand and carry forward.

CURRENT SUPPORT CONTACTS
Advisor + student activities office
Published support routes + urgent backup

BRING IT TO YOUR NEXT CONVERSATION

Bring one current piece of work to your next officer conversation. Explain its purpose, current status, actual decision route and remaining questions. Ask each person to describe their part in it. Then agree on the next commitments and where the team will keep the record.

If you are president, pay particular attention to whether the purpose and decision are clear and whether people have a workable way to contribute. If you are VP, examine your defined portfolio, the dependencies between tasks and the information someone would need if you had to provide coverage. Compare your agreement with the current governing documents and confirm unresolved requirements with the appropriate contact.

Keep the written record short enough to maintain and complete enough for another person to use. The goal is that someone can find the work, understand its status and know what happens next. An attractive template helps only when the information is accurate and the team knows how to act on it.

If you are considering a role, use the example to prepare questions for a current officer. If you are new, try it with one live piece of work. If you are returning, examine an inherited process, help another officer understand it and check whether someone else could carry it forward.

ONE CURRENT PIECE OF WORK

Purpose + current status

Actual decision route

Questions + next commitments

SOURCES AND LOCAL CHECKS

The general role distinctions were informed by directly reviewed guidance from UConn SOLID Blueprints Chapter 1, Texas Tech Officers and Advisors, the University of Dayton's officer guidance the University of Iowa SHPE chapter constitution last ratified April 28, 2023, and Iowa's Constitution Resources guidance. They describe different local arrangements, not universal authority. The worked case, scripts and completed brief are original teaching material.

1 UConn SOLID Blueprints

Institutional role guidance. Check the organization's registration type and current requirements before applying a rule.

2 Texas Tech Officers and Advisors

Guidance on officer duties, advisor relationships and transitions. Your governing documents define the local division of work.

3 Dayton officer roles

Institutional officer examples. Specialized roles and portfolios can differ between organizations.

4 Iowa SHPE chapter constitution

A local chapter example last ratified April 28, 2023. Its specific procedures do not govern other groups.

5 Iowa Constitution Resources

A university guide to defining governing documents and meeting rules, including quorum. Confirm the current local rule.