**Practices**

The USSLA's constitution serves as a written rules, statements, principles or directives in making good governance. It also serves as a foundation and guideline for the executive members to make good decisions without intimidation, fear or favor and also for the general membership to know their rights, entitlements and limitations.

THE UNITED STATES – SIERRA LEONEAN ASSOCIATION

(USSLA CONSTITUTION)

**Preamble**
The United States – Sierra Leonean Association, Inc. (hereinafter “the Club”) was founded on 2nd July 2006 by Sierra Leonean’s residing in Staten Island, New York, U.S.A. The Club, which was formerly named De Mabinty Foundation For Sierra Leone Unity until formally changed by majority vote on 3rd December 2006, was created after the death of Mabinty, a young lady from Sierra Leone who was part of the Staten Island community.  Her death was a wakening call to a divided, helpless and uncompromising Sierra Leonean community living in Staten Island. A call was made to bring all Sierra Leoneans in the United States together with emphasis to the residents of Staten Island to mutually support, assist and benefit each other morally or otherwise  regardless of age, sex, religious or tribal affiliation and to also reach out to other Sierra Leoneans abroad and at home.

The Association is a not-for-profit Association and as such, is not affiliated to, subscribes, or endorses a political party or agenda.  It is nonpolitical in its day to day affairs.

The founding members of this Association are:

Mr. Alimamy Daramy
Mr. Mohamed Kabba
Mr. Charles Caulker
Mr. Morlai Kamara
Mr. Samuel Bangura
Mr. Abdulai Kaikai
Mr. N.D. Mansaray
Mr. Mohamed Jalloh
Mr. Tejan Kargbo
Mr. Samuel Samura
Mr. Musa Sewa
Mr. Morris Titus
Mr. Alieu Turay
Mr. Minkailu Davis
Mr. John Belmoh
Mr. Wilfred Pratt

**ARTICLE 1
Name of the Association**
The name of the Association shall be “The United States-Sierra Leonean Association, Inc.”

**ARTICLE 2**
**Motto and symbol**
The motto shall be “Unity and Progress” and the symbol shall be the “United States and the Sierra Leone flags with the Sierra Leone Cotton Tree".

**ARTICLE 3**
**Purpose**
To serve and promote the diverse needs of Sierra Leoneans by providing the following:

1. Social, community and counseling services.
2. Provide empowerment to the youths and family support groups, counseling services and job readiness.
3. Foster strong brotherhood, social and moral ties within the membership and the community at large.
4. Assist on issues affecting Sierra Leoneans within the United States.

**ARTICLE 4
Membership (AND) Dues**

1. Membership is open to all Sierra Leoneans in and out of the United States.
2. Non Sierra Leonean’s who are spouses of members of this Association are eligible to become members but cannot be voted for the post of the president or vice president.
3. A non- refundable registration fee of fifty dollars for a single member and seventy five dollars for couples has to be paid to become a member.
4. To actively maintain membership, members have to pay monthly dues of twenty dollars for single and thirty dollars for couple.
5. Any member who fails to pay his or her dues for two consecutive months will be reminded of his or her delinquency by the Financial Secretary.
6. If all payments are not received by the beginning of the third month meeting, the Financial Secretary shall communicate to such delinquent members. If no resolution is reached, the member shall fall under  article 12 ( BENEFIT).
7. Any action or decision made by the general body will be communicated to such member in writing by the Secretary General and such decision is final.
8. All members are registered into the Association but only members that are paying their dues are eligible to receive the benefits stated herein.
9. Old members who do not pay their monthly dues for three months will be put on a probationary period of six months with no benefit and no voting right for one month after they pay their arrears.
10. New members shall be on a probationary period of one year before they are elligible for any benefit and one month before they can vote.
11. When a husband and wife register to the Association as couple and one decides to cancel or withdraw his or her membership, it is the responsibility of the organization to notify the other patner. Any sitting president is exempted from paying monthly dues.
12. Any female Sierra Leonean youth who becomes Miss USSLA by winning the annual beauty pageant automatically becomes a member of ussla for that period and exempted from dues but must be able to represent the Association on important occassions.

**Clause 1**
The Association retains the full right to suspend or revoke the membership of any member whose conduct is detrimental to the principles, aims and objectives of this Association.

**Clause 2**
**Observation Period**
Any non-member who is interested in becoming a member of this Association may attend up to two meetings as an observer.

**ARTICLE 5**
**Elected and Non-Elected Officials**
The Association shall comprise of a Board, Executive, Committees, and a general body. The president and his vice are voted for and all other executive members are selected by the president, and approve by the general body.
**The Executive Body**

1. The President
2. The Vice President
3. The Secretary General
4. The Assistant Sec. General
5. Financial Secretary
6. Assistant Financial Secretary
7. Treasurer
8. Assistant Treasurer
9. The Organizing Secretary
10. Assistant Organizing Secretary
11. Public Relations Officer
12. Assistant  Public Relations Officer
13. The whip (Appointed by the chairman)

**Non-Elected Officials (Committees)**

1. The Ethics / Disciplinary Committee
2. The Welfare Committee
3. The Scholarship Committee
4. The Constitution Committee
5. Children's Affairs
6. Women's committee
7. Religious Affairs
8. Fund Raising committee
9. Youth committee
10. Website and mass media team
11. Board members

The following Amendment was made after debating the issue at several General Meetings:

**The Board:**

**Five members of the board shall be elected through a general election to serve in this capacity for a period of two years. The president with the elected board members will nominate three other community members out of USSLA to serve as board members for a period of two years. Each board member will have one vote. Meeting dates and time will be determined by the general board members in their first meeting.**

Board members are the fiduciaries who steer the organization towards a sustainable future by adopting sound governance and financial management policies, and ensuring adequate resources.

The board is legally responsible for the operation of the organization. In fact, individual members can even be held personally liable for improper conduct if they breach their duties. So, pay careful attention to the law and board duties. Doing so will minimize risk and ensure the organization is the best it can be.

**Standards of Conduct**

Under the law, each board member must meet certain standards of conduct. These standards are typically described as duty of care, duty of loyalty and duty of obedience.

1. **Duty of Care**board member must exercise “reasonable care” when he or she makes a decision for the organization. In this case, “reasonable” is what a prudent person in a similar situation might do.
2. **Duty of Loyalty**board member must never use information gained through his or her position for personal gain. This means each member must always act in the best interests of the organization.
3. **Duty of Obedience**A board member must be faithful to the organization’s mission. This means he or she cannot act in a way that is inconsistent with the organization’s goals.

**Board Responsibilities**

In addition to standards of conduct, as a governing body, the board has a responsibility to support management and staff, and ensure operations run smoothly and in accordance with the law.

**Following, are 10 responsibilities of USSLA’s boards:**

1. Establish mission and purpose.
2. Support and evaluate the President/executive director.
3. Set policies and ensure effective planning.
4. Monitor and strengthen programs and services.
5. Ensure adequate financial resources.
6. Protect assets and provide proper financial oversight.
7. Build a competent board.
8. Ensure legal and ethical integrity.

Enhance the organization’s public standing.

**FUNCTIONS
President**
Shall be the head of the Club shall summon, chair and preside all meetings of the Association.
Shall determine that all duties of other officials are performed in accordance with the constitution.
Shall act as one of the signatories for the finances of the Association.

**Vice President**
Shall assist the president in the performance of his or her duties.
Shall act and assume the responsibilities of the office in the absence of the president.

**Secretary General**
Shall be the bridge between the executive and the general body.
Shall be responsible for all correspondences of the Association.
Shall be responsible to record minutes in every meeting and maintain and provide such records when requested.

**Assistant Sec. General**
Assists the Secretary General in the day today activities of the Association.
Assumes the responsibilities in the absence of the substantive holder.

**Financial Secretary**
Shall keep all financial records of the Association.
Shall report and update members on the Association’s financial standing.
Shall give report at the end of every meeting, funds collected during the meeting.
Shall coordinate and transfer all monies collected to the Treasurer for proper record keeping and accountability.
Shall issue and provide receipts for all financial transactions on behalf of the Association.
All checks and money orders must be made payable to USSLA.
Shall act as one of the Signatories to the Association's account.

**Treasurer**
Shall be the custodian of funds belonging to the Association.
Shall coordinate with the Financial Secretary and maintain proper accounting records.
Shall deposit all Association funds in the proper account and shall co-sign all financial transactions on behalf of the Association.
Shall be one of the signatories to the Association's account.

**Organizing Secretary**
Responsible to put together all activities of the Association: These will include but not limited to meeting locations, functions (social and fun raising events) and new membership drive.

**Assistant Organizing Secretary**
Performs the duties of the organizing secretary in the absence of the substantive holder.

**Public Relations Officer - PRO**
Shall be the liaison between the Association and the general public.
Shall reach out to other organizations, extend and attend invitations on behalf of the Association.
Shall also do a new membership drive.

**Assistant Public Relation Officer
Shall assist the PRO in the functions of that office.**

**Whip**
Shall be appointed by the chairman in every meeting.
Shall be responsible to main order and impose minimal fines on disorderly members.
Shall also act as a time keeper.

**ARTICLE 6**
**Functions of the Non-Executive (committees)**
**The Ethics/Disciplinary Committee**
Shall undertake proceedings in settling disputes among members.
Shall make recommendations to the executive after an investigation on a member is completed.
Shall protect members privacy.

**Welfare Committee**
Shall act on behalf of the members on disciplinary matters in conjunction with the Ethics/Disciplinary Committee.
The Committee shall coordinate necessary assistance with members as provided in the constitution.
Shall develop a fact finding mission on issues affecting members and report to the executive. These include Illness, Death, Wedding, Baby Shower, Christening, Birthdays, and Natural Disasters.

**The Scholarship Committee**
Shall cater for funding to assist eligible Sierra Leonean students in pursuit of their education.
Funds shall also be used to create educational facilities and stationery supplies for the under privileged children back home.
All funds received by this committee for this purpose shall be utilized for the purpose it is intended for.

**The constitution Committee**
This committee is responsible for the amendment to the constitution.
They shall handle all matters that pertain to the constitution.

**ARTICLE 7**
**Meetings**

1. There shall be an agenda for every meeting and meetings shall not exceed three hours.
2. The official language in every meeting shall be English and or Krio.
3. Meetings and venues shall be scheduled as agreed by members. Special or emergency meetings shall be called and approved by the President.
4. Any member who comes late to meetings will have to wait for AOB to be briefed about matters already discussed during such member’s absence.
5. No alcoholic beverages will be permitted during meetings.
6. Any member whose behavior is disruptive during meetings will be asked to leave the meeting.
7. A member will be permitted to speak on a particular subject as many times as permitted by the chairman without interruption from another member.
8. All comments, concerns, corrections or point of order must be directed through the chair.
9. Any member who interrupts another member who is on the floor shall pay a fine of five dollars.

**Clause 1**
**Meeting procedure**

1. Members shall sign an attendance sheet in every meeting.
2. The Secretary General shall read the agenda of the current meeting and shall read the minutes of the previous meeting. The minutes shall be adopted by a motion.
3. The Financial Secretary shall report on the status of the finances of the Association at every meeting.
4. Any motion over-rule(d) by the chairman is final.

**ARTICLE 8**
**Quorum**
The chair person can call a quorum.

**ARTICLE 9
Amendments**

1. The constitution may be amended or ratified by a simple majority.
2. Any amendment to this constitution must be submitted to the general body for a vote and then submitted to the constitution committee for a final endorsement.
3. If there is a tie on any vote, the chair person shall be the tie-breaker.
4. A vote of non-confidence on any executive member shall be the responsibility of the Ethics/Disciplinary Committee to assess and recommend to the  general body.
5. If removal is recommended for any abuse of power, the Ethics/Disciplinary committee shall appoint a member to temporarily act in that capacity until an election is held within four weeks for the president.

          If a vote of non-confidence is cast for the entire executive, the same procedure (E) shall follow.

**ARTICLE 10
Elections**
A general election shall be held every two years on a date approved by the Electoral Commission. An outgoing executive member shall seek re-election if he or she so desires

  Before an election is held, the current executive members shall relinquish their positions two weeks before the election and a committee of four members shall be appointed by the general body to audit the outgoing executive and to run the day today affairs of the club as an interim body until an election is held.

1. If any outgoing executive member is found guilty of any misuse of any kind, such member shall be held responsible to give an account.
2. To be eligible for any executive position, a member must be in good standing. (all dues are paid and must have a good attendance record)
3. All registered members are eligible to cast one vote in any election if their monthly dues are fully paid. A member who fails to meet this obligation has forfeited his right to vote and any other benefit.
4. A member shall be elected into office  of the president and his/her vice by a simple majority vote
5. There shall be a one-hour open debate for all candidates vying for positions.
6. Absentee Vote – case by case basis, with a dead line of 24 hours emergency only.

The following is an amendment to "article 10" by two thirds of members present and it becomes part of the constitution.

ARTICLE 10:
A general election shall be held every two years on a date approved by the Electoral Commission for the post of president and vice president.  A member cannot seek re-election for the post of President or vice president after serving two consecutive terms.

a. Before an election is held, the current executive members shall relinquish their positions two weeks before the election and a committee of four members shall be appointed by the Electoral Commission to audit the outgoing executive and to act as care taker to run the day today affairs of the organization until election is held. An electoral commission of three members shall be appointed by the executive to conduct the electoral process.

b. There shall be a debate for all members contesting for the presidency and his or her running mate.

c. The president and his/her running mate shall be voted for during the election with an electoral fee of $30.00 to be paid to the electoral commission. The president-elect shall present his appointed cabinet
to the general body within two weeks for confirmation where each confirmed member shall pay $25.00 each to the electoral commission.

**ARTICLE 11**
**Fund Raising**
This Association shall have a fund raising dance every year, date and venue to be determined by the entire membership as well as grants for community development projects.

**ARTICLE 12
Benefits**
one of the primary aims of the Association is to support club members in times of need, special events or occasions. Hence, members are encouraged to give financial donations to club members through pledges or contributions to the welfare committee during such events as weddings, Death to a family member (Husband, Wife, Child, Mother and father), Baby Shower, Christening and Natural Disasters. All such monies collected shall be given to the members as follows within two general meetings.
**Death to a Member or family member**

1. Members shall contribute by pledges or contributions towards the bereaved member an amount of $50.00 each. Such contributions shall be paid only to members who are in good standing in monthly dues and attendance
2. Regardless of the number of members bereaved in one family, a lump sum as determined by the executive shall be given to such member(s) belonging to that family.
3. When a member of this Association dies, the Welfare Committee shall request from all the members to give donations or contributions of $200 per member.

**Wedding**
If two members from the organization decide to get married, a total sum of $200.00 shall be given to such member/members from the organization and support from the members.

 **Shower/Christening**
A one-time amount of $100.00 shall be given to those families/family for the Baby/Bridal Shower or Christening from the Association and support from members.

**Natural Disaster**
When a member has a natural disaster like his or her apartment or house is burnt or damaged for some other reasons, The welfare committee shall determine what to be given to that member through contributions.

**Illness**
When a member is terminally ill or disabled, the Association shall determine the disbursement of any funds to that member.

This constitution is subject to amendment and ratification by the majority of the entire membership present at a meeting.

Job/Unemployment
when a member loses his or her job, after one month, his or her monthly dues must be waived until he or she gains employment and a one-time $20 contribution from each member shall be given as help to that member.

To receive any of the benefits mentioned above a member must be up to date (dues and attendance) and all
monies collected must be handed over within two general meetings.

**Amendment to article 12** of the United states Sierra Leonean constitution under Benefit. This amendment becomes part of the constitution.

**DEATH TO A MEMBER OR FAMILY MEMBER**

A member has to be in good standing to be eligible for this benefit: All dues must be paid in full and up to date; a member is not qualified if such member is on a probationary period.

This amendment overrides (a) and (c) of article 12.

1. If a member dies, the Association must support the bereaved family members in all funeral arrangements plus a $500 donation from the Association and pledges from other members.
2. If a family member dies, [father, mother, biological/adopted daughter and son, husband and wife] the sum of $300 shall be donated from the Association and other pledges from the general membership. For other relatives, it is not mandatory but shall be by pledges from the general membership.

  **2015 Election Provision**

**Reference: Article 10 subsection-c.**: All members are subject to one vote in any election if their monthly dues are paid in full.

The above clause disqualified almost two third of the membership as they were not paying their monthly dues. Only fifteen (15) people were qualified up to May of 2014. As it was not plausible to conduct the presidential election with just fifteen people, several proposals were tabled for debate in our general elections. After several debates, the proposal “members should pay at least half of their owed dues to qualify to vote.” This proposal was agreed upon after the majority voted for it.( See General meeting minutes).

After several months, again the general membership failed to meet this obligation to pay half of their owed monthly dues. This means that the proposal agreed upon did not solve the problem.

In a board and executive meeting, another proposal was introduces.” To allow every registered to vote, but members in arears will have to pay ten ($10) dollars fine to cast one vote, while those that are up to date will have five votes”. The proposal was also introduces in three general meetings for debate. In a beautiful evening general meeting, the proposal was tabled for a vote. Majority of the members present during this meeting voted yes for the proposal. As such the proposal “ All registered members will be allowed to vote after paying $10 dollars and members who are up to date with their dues, will have five votes.”

Note that this provision is only for this presidential and Board Elections 2015.