

## CONSTITUTION

### The Vokkaligara Parishat of America Constitution

#### ARTICLE I NAME AND DEFINITIONS

The name and Title of this organization shall be the VOKKALIGARA PARISHAT OF AMERICA, hereinafter called the VPA. It shall be a not-for-profit organization registered under the laws of the State of Illinois and shall exist in perpetuity. The term "Vokkaligara" shall mean that of Vokkaligas, the term "Vokkaliga" shall include those who can trace their ancestry to people engaged in the farming occupation in India. The term "Parishat" shall mean an organization for the deliberation of issues of common interest to Vokkaligas.

#### ARTICLE II MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

- Section 1** To maintain, preserve and perpetuate the heritage of the people residing in North America, who are of the farming ancestry from India, commonly called Vokkaligas in the Kannada language, which term shall include, but not limited to, Gowdas, Reddys, Bunts etc. through the establishment of a national organization of the VPA and four (4) regional Chapters in the USA: VPA-East, VPA-Mid-West, VPA-West and VPA-South and other chapters if and when necessary.
- Section 2** To assist and promote literary, cultural, educational, religious, social, economic, health and community activities of the people of the Vokkaliga community of North America.
- Section 3** To promote exchange programs for students, scientists and professionals of the Vokkaliga community between the United States of America, Canada etc. and India.
- Section 4** To invite distinguished Vokkaliga scholars, artists, artisans and statesmen to USA for lectures, seminars and congregations and to arrange similar programs in India on a reciprocal basis.
- Section 5** To solicit, raise and disburse funds for charitable purposes, cultural, religious and educational activities, directly or in cooperation with other not-for-profit organizations in the US to meet the goals of this organization.
- Section 6** To create a network of VPA members who could assist newly arrived Vokkaligas pursue their professional goals in the US and offer guidance and help to those in need.
- Section 7** To organize literary, educational, youth and cultural conferences, either independently or in cooperation with other not-for-profit organizations with similar goals.
- Section 8** To encourage the members to support and participate in the activities of Kannada Kootas/Sanghas and similar Indian cultural organizations in the USA.
- Section 9** To Marshall and channel the resources of the Vokkaligas in the US to provide material and technical assistance to the rural communities of Karnataka, India, and thereby aid in the improvement of their health, education and economic conditions.
- Section 10** The VPA shall also have such powers as are now or may hereafter be granted by the General Not-for-Profit Corporation Act of the State of Illinois.

## ARTICLE III MEMBERSHIP

### Section 1 TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP

#### A. ANNUAL MEMBER

Any qualified person who contributes \$20.00 per year is an annual member. Family membership fee is \$40.00. A person is deemed qualified if he /she satisfies all the conditions listed in **Section 2**, below. The term family shall include the husband, wife and their children who are 25 years of younger.

#### B. LIFE MEMBER

Life membership is granted to any qualified person and his/her family who contribute \$500.00 or more to the **VPA**.

#### C. PATRON MEMBER

Any qualified person and his/her family who contribute \$1000.00 or more to the **VPA** are entitled, as **Patrons**, to a **Life** membership.

#### D. GRAND PATRON MEMBER

Any qualified person and his/her family who contribute \$5000.00 or more to the **VPA** are entitled, as **Grand Patrons**, to a **Life** membership.

#### E. HONORARY MEMBERSHIP

**Qualifications:** Anyone who has performed an outstanding service to the Vokkaliga community or attained excellence in any human endeavor that resulted in National or International recognition is deemed qualified to be nominated for honorary membership in the **VPA**.

**Nomination and Election:** An active member of the **VPA** may nominate a person deemed eligible for the honorary membership. It is the responsibility of the proposer to provide the necessary information to the Board of Trustees for review and approval. Such approval is announced to the membership at the following business meeting. A honorary member shall have all the rights and privileges of an annual member of the VPA with the exception of the right to vote or hold an elected office.

### Section 2 MEMBERSHIP QUALIFICATIONS AND VOTING ELIGIBILITY

Family members, defined herein to include husband, wife and their children between 18 and 25 years of age, are entitled to one vote each, whereas individual member shall have one vote. Any person wishing to become a member of the **VPA** shall:

- A. Be at least 18 years of age.
- B. Fill out a membership application form at the time of initial enrollment.
- C. Pay the appropriate membership dues.
- D. Subscribe to the Mission and Objectives of the **VPA** as defined in **Article II**.

### Section 3 MEMBERSHIP DUES

The membership dues, which are neither transferable nor refundable, shall be recommended by the Board of Trustees from time to time for approval by a simple majority of the General Body. Any revision in the membership dues shall not be made more than once a calendar year. Annual membership dues shall be paid on a calendar year basis. Dues from the Life, Patron and Grand Patron members, if and when collected by the regional/chapter treasurer(s), shall be transferred to the national treasurer within thirty (30) days of collection.

**Section 4 DIVISION OF FUNDS BETWEEN NATIONAL AND REGIONAL CHAPTERS**

Money collected in the form of annual membership dues and the earnings from fixed income instruments such as the Reserve Fund described in Article VIII, shall be divided equally between the National VPA and the regional chapters in proportion to the number of dues-paying members in each region. The treasurers of the National and the regional chapters shall be responsible for appropriate transfer of funds within sixty (60) days of receiving the money.

**Section 5 WITHDRAWALS**

Any member may request withdrawal in writing at any time to the Board of Trustees. Upon approval of such a request by the Board of Trustees, the secretary shall remove the name from the roster. Any member requesting withdrawal will not have claim to any dues contributed to the organization. Membership ceases if dues are not paid.

**Section 6 DISQUALIFICATION OF MEMBERSHIP RIGHTS**

Documented activities against the purposes of the organization as defined in Article II, shall constitute grounds for disqualification from membership by the Board of Trustees. The allegations shall be communicated to the member by the Board of Trustees through registered mail or by FAX. The alleged member shall then be entitled to a hearing before the Board of Trustees on such charges and shall be entitled to an opportunity to be heard. In order to be eligible for the aforementioned procedure, the alleged member shall request in writing by certified mail or FAX, such hearing within sixty (60) days from the receipt of the notification. The Board shall accord the member the due process by Law.

**Section 7 VOTING RIGHTS**

Except as hereinafter provided in Article IV for the election of the Board of Trustees, each member (except the honorary members) shall be entitled to one vote on each matter submitted to a vote of all categories of members, provided he/she is a VPA member and has completed, signed and filed with the secretary a membership form as authorized by the Board of Trustees.

**Section 8 NOTICE MEETING**

Written or printed notice stating the place, date and time of any meeting of the members and in case of a special meeting, the purpose or purposes for which the meeting is called, shall be delivered by the Secretary either personally, by media, by FAX or by mail, to each member entitled to vote at such meetings, not less than twenty one (21) days nor more than sixty (60) days prior to the date of such a meeting. If mailed, such notice(s) shall be deemed delivered when deposited in the United States mail, addressed to the member at his/her address as it appears in the records of the organization. Candidates for the Board of Trustees and the VPA offices shall be present during the election to be eligible to contest exempted by a simple majority of the voting members present at the General Body meeting. Voting by proxy shall not be permitted.

**Section 9 QUORUM**

Ten percent (10%) or fifty (50) members of all the membership who are entitled to vote at a meeting, present in person, shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business at that meeting including that of the General Body. All proposals, except amendments to the constitution, are considered approved if voted by a simple majority of those present. Constitutional amendments shall require a quorum of ten percent (%10) of the total membership or one hundred (100) voting members plus a majority of the Board of Trustees, whichever is higher, and shall have the support of least two-thirds of the membership present at the meeting. No proxies shall be permitted.

**Section 10 INFORMAL ACTION BY MEMBERS**

Any action required to be taken at the meeting of the members or any other action which may be taken at a meeting of the members; may be taken without a meeting if a consent in writing setting

forth the action to be taken, shall be signed by the majority of the members entitled to vote with respect to the subject matter thereof. Such consent shall have the same force and effect as an unanimous vote.

**Section 11 NO PRIVATE INTERESTS**

The organization shall be operated exclusively for the purposes set forth in Article II and none of its assets or earnings shall be used, in whole or in part, to the benefit of any person or organization having a personal or private interest in the activities of the VPA.

**ARTICLE IV BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**Section 1 GENERAL POWERS**

The Board of Trustees shall prescribe the operating policies of the VPA in confirmation with the Mission and Objectives described in Article II, and the operation and management of the affairs of the VPA shall be handled by the officers of the VPA under the guidance and direction of the Board. In case of disagreement with the Executive Committee on policy matters, a majority decision of the combined members of the Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee shall be binding on both the parties.

**Section 2 ELECTION OF BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

The Board of Trustees and the replacements thereof, per **Section 3** of this Article, shall be elected with a simple majority by a direct ballot of the membership present at the General Body meeting from a slate of candidates proposed by a nominating committee and the nominees from the floor. The Nominating Committee shall be constituted per Article VI, Sec 2.(e) and shall function as described therein.

**Section 3 NUMBER, TENURE AND QUALIFICATIONS**

The total number of Board of Trustees shall be fifteen (15), all of whom shall be members with voting rights of the organization.

*The fifteen (15) members of the Board of Trustees shall include:*

- A. Three (3) Current National VPA officers: President, Secretary, Treasurer – for the full TERM of their offices,
- B. Four (4) Current Regional VPA Presidents – for the full TERM of their offices
- C. Three (3) at large members: two (2) youth members (18-25 years of age) and one (1) VPA founder member, elected at the convention from the floor – for a TWO-YEAR TERM,
- D. Two (2): from Life, Patron and Grand Patron members, elected from the floor – for a TWO-YEAR TERM,
- E. Two (2) **elected from the floor from the previous Board of Trustees and one (1) at-large member elected from the floor – for a TWO-YEAR TERM,**

**Section 4 MEETINGS**

The Board of Trustees shall meet periodically, but not less than twice a year. A majority of the Board of Trustees shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of the business at any meeting of the Board of Trustees. The meeting shall be chaired by the current President either in person or by using tele-conference facilities.

**Section 5 VACANCIES**

Any vacancy of a Trustee shall be filled by a voting member elected by a majority of the Board of Trustees. The candidate so chosen shall satisfy the respective vacant category guidelines of Sec. 3, Article IV. If the Board of Trustees fails to fill the vacancies by the election time, such

vacancies shall also be filled by the respective category of members through appropriate electorate process. A Trustee elected to fill a vacancy shall serve the unexpired term of the vacant position only.

## **ARTICLE V OFFICERS, QUALIFICATIONS, ELECTION AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Section 1 OFFICERS**

The officers of the VPA shall be a President, Vice President, Secretary, Joint Secretary, Treasurer and Joint Treasurer. The President, Secretary and Treasurer shall also be members of the Board of Trustees.

### **Section 2: QUALIFICATIONS, ELECTION AND TERMS OF OFFICE**

- A. The President, Vice President, Secretary, Joint Secretary, Treasurer and Joint Treasurer shall be elected for a two-year term by a simple majority of the voting members present at the General Body meeting during the convention from a slate of candidates recommended by the Nominating Committee and the nominees from the floor.
- B. Vacancies with regard to the VPA officers occurring between the General Body meetings shall be notified to all Trustees and a meeting shall be convened for that purpose by the President. A simple majority of the Board of Trustees in attendance shall elect the replacement. The meeting shall be held within ninety (90) days from the time of the vacancy. Each replacement shall hold the office till the following General Body meeting or until a successor shall have been duly elected.
- C. All officers of the VPA shall be eligible for re-election. Each officer shall transfer all his/her original and other relevant records and assets of the organization to the respective successor no later than fifteen (15) days from the time the new officers are elected.

### **Section 3: PRESIDENT**

The President shall be the principal executive officer of the organization and shall preside over the meetings of the Board of Trustees. The President shall be responsible for operating the organization within the policies prescribed by the Board of Trustees. The President may appoint individuals to render part or full-time paid services to the organization as may be required from time to time within the powers vested in the President by the Board of Trustees. The President shall perform all duties as may be prescribed from time to time by the Board of Trustees in confirmation with the Mission and Objectives of the organization.

### **Section 4: VICE PRESIDENT**

In the absence of the President, the Vice President shall perform all duties and shall exercise all powers of the President specified under Section 3 of this Article. In the absence of the President and the Vice President, one of the other officers designated by the Board of Trustees shall perform the duties and exercise the powers of the President.

### **Section 5: SECRETARY**

The secretary shall be the custodian of the VPA seal and the official records and shall keep accurate minutes of all meetings. The Secretary shall maintain a list of active members, and send out notices of meetings and membership dues to the members. The Secretary shall communicate with the membership in writing to keep the members informed of the activities of the organization. The Secretary shall perform such additional duties as may be required from time to time by the Board of Trustees.

### **Section 6: JOINT SECRETARY**

The Joint Secretary shall assist in performing the duties incidental to the office of the Secretary and such other duties required from time to time by the Board of Trustees. In the absence of the Secretary, the Joint Secretary shall function as Secretary.

#### **Section 7 TREASURER**

The Treasurer shall hold the funds of the VPA in an account approved by the Board of Trustees, disburse the funds according to the decisions made by the Executive Committee and the Board of Trustees. The Treasurer shall keep accurate records of all receipts and expenses, submit a report at each meeting of the Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee to keep them informed of the financial status of the VPA and prepare the annual budget. The Treasurer shall prepare the annual financial statement for an audit by an independent certified public accountant and perform all the duties incidental to the office of the Treasurer. The Treasurer shall sign all checks issued by the VPA. In addition, the President shall countersign checks issued for amounts exceeding five hundred dollars (\$500).

#### **Section 8 JOINT TREASURER**

The Joint Treasurer shall assist the Treasurer in performing, the duties incidental to the office of the Treasurer. In the absence of the Treasurer, the Joint Treasurer shall function as Treasurer.

### **ARTICLE VI COMMITTEES**

#### **Section 1 STANDING COMMITTEES**

The following committees constitute the Standing Committees of the VPA:

- A. The Bylaws and Ethics Committee
- B. The Cultural, Community Service and Educational Committee
- C. The Executive Committee
- D. The Finance and Membership Committee
- E. The Nominating Committee
- F. The Youth Committee
- G. The Publications Committee

#### **Section 2 MEMBERSHIP, DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES**

- A. **The Bylaws and Ethics Committee:** The President shall, at the beginning of his/her term, appoint a minimum of three (3) qualified persons to the Bylaws and Ethics Committee. The Committee shall coordinate with the President, receipt of proposals for changes in the bylaws and amendments to the constitution of the VPA and make recommendations to the General Body at the convention. The Committee shall also ensure that the organization is operated according to the current laws and regulations governing the VPA within legal and ethical bounds.
- B. **The Cultural, Community Service and Educational Committee:** The President shall, at his/her discretion and based on the need, appoint a single or multiple subcommittees consisting of appropriate number of qualified persons and charge them with duties to meet the objectives of the VPA in these areas.
- C. **The Executive Committee:** The Executive Committee shall consist of the five (5) office bearers of the organization, the two youth members of the Board of Trustees and the regional Presidents or their representatives and shall be chaired by the President. It shall assist the President and other officers of VPA in operating the organization and in performing their duties described elsewhere as per the bylaws of the Constitution. The Executive Committee

shall approve all expenses and transactions involving funds in excess of one hundred dollars (\$100). The Executive Committee shall also be responsible for approving projects, proposals and activities that would enable the VPA to fulfil its Mission and Objectives enumerated in Article II.

- D. The Finance and Membership Committee:** The Finance and Membership Committee shall consist of the Treasurer, as the Chair, the Joint Treasurer and the treasurers of the regional chapters or their representatives as members. The Committee shall ensure sound and prudent management of the finances of the organization. It shall appoint regional VPA members to a Membership Committee to ensure the growth of the organization by increasing the membership of the VPA.
- E. The Nominating Committee:** The President shall appoint a Nominating Committee, at least two months before the General Body meeting, consisting of a minimum of one representative from each regional Chapter to nominate candidates in consultation with their Chapter members. The Committee, chaired by the President, shall meet prior to the General Body meeting and recommend to the Board of Trustees a slate of qualified and willing candidates for the forthcoming election of the office bearers and the anticipated vacant positions on the Board of Trustees. The final slate of candidates shall have the approval of the Board of Trustees.
- F. The Youth Committee:** The President shall, at his/her discretion and in consultation with the Executive Committee, appoint a youth committee with a youth Trustee as the Chair and an appropriate number of community youths (16 to 25 years of age) and assign duties and responsibilities that would encourage their active participation in the operation and growth of VPA.
- G. The Publications Committee:** Soon after the election, the President shall appoint a committee of qualified volunteers to produce a souvenir for the following convention and other VPA publications. The primary objective of the souvenir shall be to provide a forum for the discussion of topics of interest to the membership by publishing quality articles and discourses on social, political and technological issues. The committee shall encourage the VPA members from all walks of life and from all regions, especially youth members; to share their concerns, experiences and knowledge by contributing articles on topics of interest to the community. Another objective of the souvenir shall be to help raise funds to pay for the expenses of the VPA conventions by soliciting and publishing advertisements from individuals and reputable organizations. The committee may also assume the responsibility to produce the VPA magazine: VISHWAMANAVA.

**Section 3 OTHER COMMITTEES**

The President, with the approval of the Board of Trustees may form appropriate additional ad-hoc or regular committees to facilitate smooth functioning of the VPA. Each committee shall have a member of the Board of Trustees as the Chair. All members of such committees shall be members of the VPA. The committees shall implement proposals approved by the Board of Trustees. The Chair of each committee shall report to the Board through the President of the VPA.

**ARTICLE VII AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION**

This constitution may be altered, amended or repealed by the General Body pursuant to the procedure stated below.

**Section 1** A majority of the Board of Trustees or ten percent (10%) of the membership with voting rights present at the General Body meeting during a convention, may propose an amendment to the constitution.

**Section 2** A proposed amendment, alteration or a repeal of the constitution shall be deemed approved

if accepted by two-thirds of the voting membership present at the General Body meeting during the convention. The same shall become effective immediately after the vote in the General Body meeting. The results shall be communicated to all members through the following issue of the VPA Magazine at least 45 days before the next General Body meeting.

## **ARTICLE VIII THE VPA RESERVE FUND**

- Section 1** Beginning 1996, a fund, hereafter called the VPA Reserve Fund, shall be established to contain the membership contributions from the Life, Patron and Grand Patron members, special contributions and any other surplus funds which the Executive Committee may decide to transfer to this Fund. The Board of Trustees shall set the guidelines for prudent investment of these funds by the Treasurer to optimize the risk and income potential.
- Section 2** The Executive Committee may approve utilization of the earnings from the Reserve Fund to meet the operational expenses but shall not appropriate the Reserve Fund for any operational expenses.
- Section 3** The Treasurer shall be responsible for collecting membership contributions from the Life, Patron and Grand Patron members and keeping appropriate records of the income and its distribution to the appropriate regional Chapters per Sec.4 of Article III.

## **ARTICLE IX THE VPA CENTRAL OFFICES**

- Section 1** Until the organization is able to establish a permanent office, the central office is deemed to be that of the Secretary or another willing office bearer of the VPA acceptable to the Executive Committee. That person shall:
- A. Receive and maintain records of regional chapters, membership dues, addresses and other pertinent information.
  - B. Mail the newsletter, the Magazine and other VPA publications.
  - C. Send out annual dues statement to the members for the calendar year.
  - D. Inform the Chapters of the membership status of their members.
  - E. File income tax returns annually before the due date with the help of the Treasurer.

## **ARTICLE X THE VPA REGIONAL CHAPTERS**

- Section 1** In order to improve the accessibility of the VPA activities to all interested persons in the continental USA, it shall be the policy of the National organization to actively support and encourage the establishment of regional chapters, subject to conditions set forth from time to time by the General Body.
- Section 2** The National VPA shall extend its active support to and coordinate the activities of the regional chapters to fulfil the objectives outlined in Article II
- Section 3** The regional chapters shall be organized and operated with their own elected officers, whose titles, duties and terms of office (one or two-years) shall be selected by the respective chapter membership. The chapter treasurers shall be responsible for collecting membership dues and transmitting the appropriate share of the same to the parent organization, per Sec. 4 of Article III.
- Section 4** Where applicable, the regional chapters shall have the same bylaws as the parent organization with some others appropriately modified where necessary, such as for instance, those applicable to their elected officers as described in Sec.3 of this Article. The regional chapters shall abide by all lawful directives of the National organization and assist the National in all possible ways to fulfill its Mission and Objectives.