



NARFE LOCAL CHAPTERS

"WHO NEEDS 'EM?"

Based on a simple observation of my local chapter in [REDACTED], only approximately 4% - 5% of its 350 members participate in chapter activities; 95% have no interest. Furthermore, part of that participation is only passive, leaving a much smaller group of members willing to carry out the business of the chapter actively and participate as officers and appointed leaders. Although these numbers may vary among other chapters, this appears to be an endemic problem for local NARFE chapters elsewhere.

Throughout the Department of Defense (DoD), every group of any significance prepares a Mission & Functions Statement *explaining why the unit exists (mission) and how it functions to execute that mission*. The function statement for a local chapter is easy to develop, e.g. "A Secretary shall prepare and publish minutes of all meetings," "The Treasurer shall follow standard bookkeeping practices to track income and expenditures," and so on.

Searching through the possible missions that a local chapter might have, the first that stands out is "Recruitment of New Members." Given the almost total lack of available data regarding prospective new members, the recruiting mission is basically a non-starter. Getting placed on the agenda of Government agency's pre-retirement seminars is met with much difficulty. We also learned recently, as reported on the narfe.org website, that a resolution requiring NARFE to encourage federal agencies to include NARFE presentations in pre-retirement seminars was **voted down** at our most recent national convention which begs the question: Are the few active chapter members getting the support they need?

The second possible mission is "Membership Retention." This is critical, but with most members having only passive or no interest in local chapters, this, too appears to be a non-starter. *Thus, do local chapters have any meaningful/sustainable missions?*

Ninety years ago when our founders set up NARFE (National Association of Retired Federal Employees), they, without a doubt, used the handiest and probably *most* popular model available at that time, i.e. the traditional labor union pyramidal structure. In that period, perhaps, a strong argument could have been made to have an organization with a strong local presence and a state-level function. Today these circumstances do not prevail. There can be no argument that a NARFE chapter has local issues to support that the national-level structure could not perform as well if not better.

Now let's look, for example, at another national organization which successfully competes for many of the same members NARFE seeks: AARP. Their model sustains only a national office with dues much less than NARFE. In this model, all of the membership dues are available to fund a national level membership lobbying effort at a significantly lower cost than the pyramidal structure of NARFE.

This AARP example is similar to the old *NARFE* "National Only" membership, which for some reason(s) was discontinued years ago. Therefore, I propose that NARFE re-establish the "National Only" membership independent of local chapters, but *also allow local chapters where there is an interest*. For after all, the absolute primary mission of NARFE is to represent members' interest to the national government.

Do not read this editorial as opposing the important goals and functions of NARFE. Do consider, however, that NARFE's organizational model is not working, as it does not fit our times.

The above is the opinion of [REDACTED] and is supported by the Executive Committee of Chapter [REDACTED].

[REDACTED] retired from federal civil service after spending 40 years as an Operations Research Analyst with the Department of Defense. He lives in [REDACTED] and is a member of Chapter [REDACTED]. He can be reached at [REDACTED]. Comments agreeing or disagreeing are welcome. . He extends thanks to other members of the local chapter who provided editorial comment.