



REGION X REPORT
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During the week of November 16, I was attending the National Executive Board (NEB) meeting at NARFE Headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia. Most of the meeting was devoted to a discussion of the recently developed NARFE Strategic Plan. The NARFE Strategic Plan is the outcome of the process the NEB set in motion in the spring. The NEB has reviewed it carefully and endorsed it as the foundation on which to recommend bylaw changes, to the 2016 NARFE National Convention that will ensure the future of NARFE. The NEB has responded to the challenges put before them by carefully reviewing and discussing actions that can immediately begin to address challenges faced by NARFE. These items will be more fully addressed with the thinking and strategy behind the decisions that were made around December 9, 2015.

CURRENT SITUATION

There are no surprises in the plan. It is a very straight forward document that addresses the future of NARFE head on. It must be remembered that the plan -- as the outcome of the approved process and based on recommendations from a committee of NARFE members from every region -- speaks for NARFE. This is not any one person's plan, this NARFE's plan. The plan sets achievable objectives that were arrived at with the intention of enabling NARFE to continue its mission into the future. The plan is the result of hard work done in good faith by responsible members of NARFE who truly put the interest of the association first.

SECURING THE FUTURE

The plan lays out in full detail includes a realistic assessment of the financial condition of NARFE, which is very weak and demands that actions be taken to preserve the future of the organization. We can't expect to have the future improve if we don't act decisively now. The critical driver of NARFE revenues, and thus its financial health is membership. The number of NARFE members has been declining at a rapid rate and the rate of decline is accelerating.

To grow and improve its financial situation NARFE needs new members to join NARFE. The segment of the population for whom NARFE membership has the strongest appeal is the Baby Boom generation. NARFE needs to sell membership to this group.

Market researchers and marketers have identified and confirmed a clear behavior profile for boomers. Features of that profile relevant to NARFE are that boomers are not "joiners," but they will pay for services that they perceive to support their personal interests. NARFE's marketing team has done research and is modifying its offer to appeal to boomers. Once the membership declines are stabilized, NARFE can focus resources on growing its membership and on accelerating its new and existing programs to build non-dues revenues.

REGIONS

The NEB voted to reverse an earlier NEB decision to move from ten to five regions and to remain at 10 Regions. The role of Regional Vice Presidents (RVPs) has been cited by numerous federation, regional and chapter leaders as critically important in supporting their work in the field among the membership. The RVPs reported that their workload continues to grow and that a doubling of an RVP's workload by halving the number of regions would be impractical and weaken the organization.

NON-MANDATORY CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP

After reviewing the current situation for NARFE and fully discussing the organization's options, the NEB voted to prepare a bylaw change to eliminate the necessity for a member of NARFE to belong to chapter. The impetus for this is that mandatory chapter membership has discouraged boomers from joining NARFE and it has contributed to non-renewals by current members. Extensive research by the marketing team showing that this is the case has been confirmed by the rapid grow of E-NARFE. Lapsed members who have ignored renewal offers are likely to join E-NARFE when it is offered to them. New members are more likely to join E-NARFE than a chapter.

This move to non-mandatory chapter membership is an important step to support the growth of NARFE membership, which is at the heart of the future of NARFE. The NEB does not believe that this is the death knell for chapters. Current chapter members are likely to continue their chapter memberships when they renew. All members will always have the option to join a chapter at any time.

In fact, if NARFE membership as a whole grows, its financial situation stabilizes and its non-dues revenue sources accelerate their growth, chapters with motivated and active members will benefit from increased activities to support members by the national organization. Strong chapters could get stronger.

ONE MEMBER ONE VOTE

The NEB also voted to prepare resolutions ensuring that each member has a vote (one member one vote) and to prepare a resolution to change the bylaws so that every member can run for national office. This change is related to the move to non-mandatory chapter membership and is intended to ensure that no members are prevented from getting the full benefits and privileges of NARFE membership.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In looking forward, key to NARFE's growth is consistency in managing the business aspects of the organization. Bringing in an executive director to act as the chief executive of the organization and lead efforts that will bring in new revenues to NARFE can position us to better secure the future. The NEB agreed to support recruiting, hiring and supporting an executive director. This person will have proven, successful experience as an association executive; recognize the opportunities for NARFE's growth and positive development in the future; and have an eagerness to take up the challenges of reversing NARFE's current direction.

The proposed changes that will result from adopting and following through on the plan will not change the basic character of NARFE. What they will do is revive the organization and enable its future leadership to continue growing the organization.

It also must be noted that these proposed changes in the plan will affect the members of the NEB and NARFE officers more than any other group of members it is going to be difficult. But we have known and been aware for many years that NARFE has been approaching a point where its options are limited. We need to act now. This is the time to do what needs to be done to protect the organization from further imperiling its future.

This is the beginning of a staged process that will unfold over time in the future. Progress made under this initial plan over the next two years is critical. We need to make a decisive first step with this plan so that the leaders of NARFE in the next stage can continue to build the organization.

National President Richard Thissen believes that any other responsible committee and team engaged in the same process would have come up with the same plan. I fully concur with his assessment.

The NEB will need to develop critical bylaw change resolutions and all of us must work together to support their passage to enable the plan to work. As an organization, we have no other course of action open to us in order to remain viable.