

John Triplett & Arthur Bowens, Role of a Federation

9:00 am – 10:30 am

Friday, August 21, 2026

The meeting focused on **the future role of NARFE Federations and how to strengthen the organization at the national, federation, and chapter levels**. The central message was that NARFE is at a crossroads and must become more focused, collaborative, and effective.

1. Purpose and direction of NARFE

- NARFE leadership emphasized that the organization must continue moving forward and use meetings such as this one to generate **practical ideas and solutions**.
- The organization's mission and vision should serve as the foundation for decisions and activities.
- The goal is to make NARFE a stronger organization and develop a clear path for future success.

2. Three levels of responsibility

The presentation identified three distinct roles:

- **National:** Sets association-wide direction, conducts national advocacy, manages member benefits, communications, and the NARFE brand.
- **Federations:** Serve as the **connector between National and chapters**, coordinating state activities, advocacy, communication, training, leadership development, and chapter support.
- **Chapters:** Provide the local membership experience through fellowship, relationships, recruitment, community visibility, and member care.

The Federation's unique value is its ability to **connect, coordinate, strengthen, and support the entire NARFE network**.

3. National-only members are a major issue

A recurring concern was how to engage members who belong to NARFE but are not assigned to or active in a chapter.

Ideas included:

- Federations directly communicating with national-only members.
- Including chapter announcements in federation newsletters.
- Inviting national-only members to chapter events, presentations, social activities, and webinars.
- Finding ways for national-only members to transition into chapter membership when appropriate.
- Changing the database so national-only members can be assigned directly to Federations rather than chapters.

There was agreement that the **current database structure makes this unnecessarily difficult** and that this should be raised with National leadership as a potential future system change.

4. Communication is a major weakness

Participants repeatedly identified communication as one of NARFE's biggest challenges. Problems include:

- Outdated or missing email addresses.
- Members who do not use email or technology.
- Difficulty communicating directly among Federation presidents.
- Lack of easy access to accurate Federation contact lists.
- Repeated or duplicated national communications.
- Difficulty identifying bounced emails.
- Uncertainty about how mass email communications should be handled.

One important definition offered was that **communication means taking responsibility to ensure that the message was actually received**, not simply sending it.

5. Federations should focus on value—not activity

A major theme was the need to stop measuring success simply by how much work gets done.

Instead of saying:

- "We held a meeting."
- "We produced a report."
- "We sent a newsletter."

Federations should ask:

"What changed because we did it?"

Examples of meaningful outcomes include:

- Training new leaders.
- Strengthening struggling chapters.
- Increasing member engagement.
- Advancing advocacy.
- Solving chapter problems.
- Sharing successful programs between Federations.

6. Reduce duplication

Federations should avoid recreating things that National or another Federation has already developed.

Instead, Federations should:

- Localize existing resources.
- Share successful programs.
- Coach and mentor chapter leaders.
- Coordinate advocacy.
- Solve problems.
- Develop new leaders.
- Encourage collaboration among chapters.

A recurring principle was essentially: **don't reinvent the wheel—share what works.**

7. Leadership development and succession

Leadership development was identified as essential to NARFE's future.

Federations should:

- Identify potential new leaders.
- Train and coach them.
- Develop succession plans.
- Give newer leaders opportunities to participate.

- Use experienced Federation presidents to mentor others.

The objective is to ensure that NARFE does not continually depend on the same small group of volunteers.

8. Strengthen and rescue chapters

The discussion recognized that some chapters are thriving while others are struggling or barely functioning.

Federations should:

- Support chapters that need help.
- Learn from successful chapters.
- Share successful practices.
- Rescue chapters when possible.
- Develop a process for dealing with chapters that can no longer function.
- Ensure that members remain connected even when a chapter closes.

The goal is that **every chapter should be stronger because its Federation exists.**

9. Measure Federation performance

A proposed **Federation scorecard** would measure meaningful organizational health, potentially including:

- Leadership pipeline.
- Member engagement.
- Advocacy.
- Collaboration.
- Value delivered to chapters.
- Whether chapters can identify something valuable the Federation provides.

The scorecard would help Federations determine what they should **keep, stop, or start.**

10. Potential future Federation model

The proposed definition was that a modern Federation should:

Connect national priorities with state and local action, strengthen chapters and leaders, coordinate advocacy and communication, and deliver value through statewide collaboration.

The future Federation should focus less on administration and more on:

- **Coaching**
- **Connecting**
- **Communicating**
- **Collaborating**
- **Solving problems**
- **Developing leaders**
- **Sharing solutions**
- **Building statewide capacity**

11. Recruitment opportunities

Participants also discussed expanding recruitment beyond traditional sources, particularly:

- Federal employees who are military reservists.
- Military technicians.
- Veterans and their spouses.

- Partnerships with organizations such as the American Legion and VFW.
- Community events and retiree appreciation events.
- Health-related programs and speakers.

The idea was to identify **communities that already have a strong connection to federal service** and use those relationships to introduce people to NARFE.

Overall takeaway

The meeting's central message was:

NARFE Federations need to move from being primarily administrative organizations to becoming active statewide service, leadership, communication, and problem-solving hubs.

The Federation should exist because it **adds measurable value**—helping chapters succeed, engaging national-only members, developing leaders, improving communication, coordinating advocacy, and sharing successful ideas. The ultimate test is simple:

If the Federation disappeared, would members and chapters notice a meaningful loss? If the answer is not clearly yes, the Federation needs to rethink what it is doing.