

Federation & Chapter Sustainability

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1:00 pm – 2:45 p.m.

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Summary – Federation Leadership, Chapter Sustainability & Organizational Renewal

The discussion focused on **repositioning Federation leadership from an oversight role to a support-and-development role**. Federations should actively help chapters remain **relevant, capable, healthy, and sustainable**, rather than simply monitoring whether chapters are functioning. The central message was that **the chapters of today are not the chapters of 10–20 years ago**, so NARFE needs more flexible models and new approaches.

1. Conduct a Chapter Health Assessment

Federations should formally assess each chapter in several areas:

- **Leadership:** Are officer positions filled? Is there a succession pipeline?
- **Membership:** Is membership growing or declining? Where are new members coming from?
- **Engagement:** Are members volunteering and participating in events and advocacy?
- **Communication:** Are members receiving regular, useful information?
- **Programming:** Does the chapter provide activities that members value?
- **Technology:** Are Zoom and hybrid meetings working effectively?
- **Compliance:** Are required tax filings and bylaws current?
- **Overall sustainability:** Is the chapter actually functioning and providing value?

The purpose is not to apply a single standard to every chapter, but to **identify what each chapter needs and tailor support accordingly**.

2. Recognize That One Chapter Model Will Not Work for Everyone

The discussion emphasized that chapters have different circumstances. Some may thrive through:

- In-person meetings
- Zoom or virtual meetings
- Hybrid meetings
- Social activities
- Legislative advocacy
- Professional or occupational interests
- Shared interests rather than geography

One example was a chapter whose members had worked together at CDC and remained connected even after moving around the country. Its virtual structure and common professional interest helped it remain successful.

The conclusion was that **chapter membership should be driven by relationships, interests, and value—not necessarily geography**.

3. Deal Proactively With Inactive Chapters

Federation presidents need to identify struggling chapters **before they completely fail**. A proposed approach is an early-warning system or health assessment that identifies chapters needing:

- Assistance

- Leadership development
- Revitalization
- Merger
- Closure

When closure is necessary, the preference expressed was to **move members into functioning chapters or national-only membership rather than simply losing them**. Chapter funds should also be properly handled and ultimately benefit the membership rather than remain unused.

4. Build a Leadership Pipeline

A major concern is that people rarely volunteer by simply announcing that they want to become president, treasurer, or another officer.

Instead, leaders should:

1. Identify members with potential.
2. Ask them personally to participate.
3. Give them small responsibilities.
4. Put them on committees or action teams.
5. Let them develop confidence and skills.
6. Gradually move them into leadership positions.

Training, education, and communication were identified as essential tools for rebuilding this pipeline.

5. Restore Training

COVID disrupted many traditional training practices. The group discussed bringing back more **hands-on, in-person training**, while continuing to use webinars and Zoom.

Training should also be designed for people who are uncomfortable with technology.

Recording training sessions could allow members to watch them privately and at their own pace.

There was also discussion of potentially partnering with organizations that provide professional continuing-education credits, which could make NARFE programs more attractive to working federal employees.

6. Find and Use Members' Skills

An important idea was to identify what members **can and want to contribute** rather than simply assigning them traditional positions.

Examples included members with skills in:

- Legislative advocacy
- Social media
- Editing
- Communications
- Training
- Technology
- Public affairs
- Government relations

The key strategy is to **ask people what they enjoy and what they are good at**, then connect those skills to organizational needs.

7. Increase Community Presence and Partnerships

Several participants stressed that NARFE needs to become more visible in local communities.

Potential approaches include:

- State and community fairs
- Veterans organizations
- AARP-related activities
- Other nonprofit organizations
- Labor organizations
- Federal agencies
- Professional groups
- Community organizations

The underlying philosophy is: **show up where people are and provide value before asking them for membership.**

Partnerships can also provide access to active federal employees and potential future members.

8. Better Engage National-Only Members

National-only members represent a significant potential resource. The discussion recognized that some national-only members genuinely prefer to remain uninvolved, but others may have become disconnected from chapters without realizing they could participate.

A proposed **chapter partner/support system** would assign knowledgeable people to support chapters—not as police or overseers, but as resources and communication links. This could help Federations maintain relationships with many chapters without personally managing every detail.

9. Modernize Technology and the AMS Database

The existing membership/database system was described as a significant obstacle.

A new system needs to allow NARFE to identify and communicate with members based on information such as:

- Skills
- Professional background
- Interests
- Chapter affiliation
- Member status
- Other useful characteristics

The group stressed that **the database must be designed around the information Federations actually need to do their jobs.** Accurate data is essential for targeted communication and member engagement.

There was also concern that Federation presidents and field leaders need a meaningful role in defining the requirements for the new system because **they are the people who ultimately have to use it.**

10. Develop Metrics and a 12-Month Plan

The group recognized that Federation presidents need ways to determine whether their efforts are actually working.

Possible measurements include:

- Membership growth
- Member engagement
- Volunteer participation
- Leadership development
- Chapter health
- Training participation
- Community outreach
- Successful programs
- Chapter revitalization

The work should not be treated as a “**one and done**” project. The discussion proposed creating a **12-month roadmap** that helps a new Federation president:

- Assess the organization
- Establish priorities
- Take action
- Measure results
- Develop future leaders
- Prepare the next person for the position

The need for metrics and an ongoing plan was explicitly emphasized.

11. Clarify Federation Authority and Relationship With the NEB

A recurring issue was the tension between wanting Federations to solve problems and the fact that **Federation presidents may not have the authority, information, training, or tools necessary to do so.**

The group recognized the **NEB as the governing authority/North Star** and emphasized that Federation ideas should ultimately be brought forward through the appropriate channels.

At the same time, participants argued that Federations should not simply wait for National to solve every problem. They should **collaborate, experiment where appropriate, share successful practices, and bring recommendations forward.**

Overall Message

The strongest theme throughout the discussion was:

Move from managing chapters to developing chapters.

Federation leaders should **assess, support, train, engage, communicate, experiment, measure, and develop future leaders.**

The organization needs to recognize that its membership, technology, workplace environment, and communities have changed. Sustainable chapters may look very different from traditional chapters, and success should be measured by **member value, engagement, leadership development, advocacy, relevance, and sustainability—not simply meetings, paperwork, or organizational structure.**

The group also sees itself as a **collaborative leadership network**: share what works, avoid reinventing solutions, identify problems early, and collectively develop recommendations for the NEB and National leadership.