

Leadership Pipeline
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Summary: Developing the NARFE Leadership Pipeline

1. Why people become leaders

Several Federation Presidents described becoming leaders in different ways:

- **Some intentionally sought leadership** because they believed they could do the job and had ideas they wanted to implement.
- **Others were unexpectedly pushed into leadership** when vacancies occurred or someone asked them to step up.
- Previous leadership experience and **training from federal, military, or civilian careers** helped build confidence.
- Personal invitations from respected NARFE members were often the deciding factor. Many people accepted because **someone believed in them before they believed in themselves**.
- A recurring theme was the importance of **showing up, participating, and being willing to serve**.

2. Why members say “no”

Common barriers to accepting leadership positions included:

- Being **too busy** or already involved in other organizations.
- **Health or personal issues**.
- Lack of confidence or being uncomfortable speaking before groups.
- Being naturally introverted.
- Fear that leadership is a **long-term or lifetime commitment**.
- Concern about the amount of time required.
- Not knowing what the position involves or where to begin.
- A perception that NARFE leadership positions bring mostly **work and aggravation without recognition**.
- Some members simply don't understand what NARFE does or why participation matters.

A major point was that **perception can be a bigger barrier than the actual workload**.

Someone may imagine that being a chapter or Federation president requires 20 hours a week when the actual commitment may be considerably less.

3. What members can gain from involvement

The discussion identified several benefits of becoming more engaged:

- **Purpose:** Continuing to make a difference after retirement.
- **Personal growth:** Developing confidence, communication, organizational, and leadership skills.
- **Professional development:** Learning skills such as public speaking, advocacy, project management, and strategic planning.
- **Community:** Staying connected with other people and avoiding isolation after retirement.

- **Service:** Helping fellow federal employees, retirees, coworkers, friends, and families protect their benefits.
- **Personal investment:** NARFE provides information and assistance that can help members navigate important career and retirement decisions.

The central message was that leaders need to explain **“What’s in it for the member?”** rather than simply asking someone to fill an officer vacancy.

Six Ideas for Building a Leadership Pipeline

1. Recruit volunteers—not leaders

Instead of immediately asking someone to become president or vice president, invite them to participate in a **small volunteer opportunity**.

A member who helps with one event today could become a leader in two to five years.

Key concept: Leadership develops through small steps rather than one large commitment.

2. Create micro-volunteering opportunities

Give members opportunities to say “yes” to manageable assignments, such as:

- Helping at a membership table.
- Welcoming new members.
- Managing a website or social-media page.
- Helping with a newsletter.
- Tracking birthdays.
- Accompanying an experienced member to a congressional meeting.
- Organizing one event or finding one speaker.

These **small successes can build confidence and identify future leaders**.

3. Develop a NARFE Learning Academy

A structured learning program could prepare members for leadership without requiring them to immediately accept an officer position.

Potential subjects include:

- Public speaking.
- Advocacy.
- Running effective meetings.
- Time management.
- Recruiting volunteers.
- Project management.
- Strategic planning.
- Change management.

The concept is similar to leadership-development programs used in government and other organizations.

The goal would be to make leadership development a **valuable member benefit**, rather than relying exclusively on informal mentoring.

4. Recruit based on skills and interests

Rather than asking, “Who will be our treasurer?” ask:

- Who enjoys working with spreadsheets?
- Who likes writing?
- Who enjoys advocacy?

- Who likes organizing events?
- Who enjoys communicating with people?
- Who likes turning ideas into projects?

People often identify more strongly with their skills and interests than with leadership titles.

5. Create a “farm team” for future leaders

NARFE chapters and Federations should intentionally identify members who could eventually become:

- Committee leaders.
- Officers.
- Chapter or Federation presidents.
- Future national leaders.

The analogy used was a baseball organization: teams don't wait until a star player retires before looking for a replacement. They **develop talent continuously**.

The same principle can apply to NARFE: the next leader may already be participating at a membership table or helping with an event.

6. Reduce commitment barriers

One of the biggest obstacles is the fear of being **“trapped” in a position**.

Possible alternatives include:

- 90-day projects.
- Six-month assignments.
- One-year responsibilities.
- Committee or chair positions that aren't officer positions.
- Co-leadership arrangements.
- Teams rather than one person carrying an entire responsibility.

Examples include:

Short-term:

- Welcome new members.
- Coordinate one meeting.
- Staff one community event.
- Write one newsletter article.

Six months to one year:

- Membership chair.
- Legislative affairs chair.
- Town-hall coordinator.
- Volunteer recruitment coordinator.

Team approach:

- Membership team: recruitment + retention.
- Program team: speakers + logistics.
- Communications team: newsletter + website + social media.

The goal is to **reduce the perceived risk of saying yes**.

Georgia Federation: Three Practical Initiatives

Georgia shared three initiatives that have helped strengthen engagement and develop potential leaders.

1. Mentorship program

The program pairs experienced members with prospective leaders.

Mentors provide:

- One-on-one training.
- Guidance on responsibilities.
- Help understanding NARFE processes.
- Someone to call when problems arise.
- Encouragement and confidence.

The key lesson was that **people may decline leadership because they don't feel qualified or don't know where to start**. Having a mentor can remove that uncertainty. Successful mentoring requires the mentor to listen and tailor the relationship to the mentee's needs.

2. Lunch & Learn webinars

Georgia created webinars to:

- Engage national-only members.
- Give struggling chapters additional activities.
- Reach active federal employees.
- Provide educational and enjoyable programming.
- Introduce nonmembers to NARFE.

The webinars are generally held every other month during lunch and intentionally kept on schedule.

Topics have included:

Educational/substantive

- TSP.
- Wills and trusts.
- Life insurance.
- Federal employment issues.
- RIF regulations and appeals.

Interesting/entertaining

- Astronomy.
- The Hubble telescope.
- Space exploration.
- World War II history.

One RIF-related webinar attracted approximately **300 participants**, creating opportunities to introduce NARFE to other organizations and federal employees.

Georgia also developed relationships with organizations such as AFGE, NTEU, AFSA, and the Partnership for Public Service, using educational presentations as opportunities to explain NARFE's role.

3. Challenge coin recognition program

Georgia adopted a **challenge coin program** to recognize members for their contributions. The rationale is that people value recognition. Unlike certificates, challenge coins can be collected and displayed.

The program can:

- Recognize volunteers.
- Encourage participation.
- Give members a tangible thank-you.
- Help create a culture where service is appreciated.

The underlying principle is simple: **people are more likely to continue contributing when their contributions are noticed and valued.**

Important Additional Ideas

Reach nonmembers

There was significant discussion about reaching federal employees and other potential members who don't know what NARFE is.

Ideas included:

- Direct mail.
- Social media.
- Public Zoom programs.
- Inviting nonmembers to educational events.
- Using available prospect information.
- Encouraging current members to share information with coworkers.

A major concern was that some NARFE online resources are primarily accessible to members, making it important to provide **public-facing opportunities to experience NARFE's value.**

Collaborate across Federations

Georgia and Florida demonstrated how Federations can cooperate on programs such as Lunch & Learn.

Sharing presenters and resources can:

- Reduce the workload.
 - Expand the audience.
 - Provide more diverse programming.
 - Help smaller or struggling chapters.
 - Build relationships across Federations.
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Overall Takeaway

The discussion's central message is:

NARFE does not need to find one perfect future leader. It needs to create an environment where more members are willing to take one small step toward involvement.

Leadership development should be viewed as a **pipeline**, not an emergency search for someone to fill a vacant office.

The strongest approach combines:

Recruit volunteers → Give them small responsibilities → Provide training and mentoring → Recognize their contributions → Build confidence → Offer larger responsibilities → Develop future leaders.

Ultimately, **leadership rarely begins when someone is asked to become president. It begins when someone says, “I’ll help.”**