



## What is a CDL?

A Congressional District Leader (CDL) is a NARFE federation position. The NARFE member in this position serves as the liaison between a member of Congress' office and the NARFE members within that congressional district. The federation can determine how

best to appoint or elect a CDL. While not a requirement, a CDL should live in the congressional district he or she represents.

For senators, some federations will choose to have their Federation Legislative Chair serve as the liaison to the senators' offices, while other federations will have a separate person serve as a liaison to both or each senator. These individuals can be called a Senatorial Leader (SL). For the purposes of this guidance, the term "CDL" includes those working with Senate offices.

CDLs serve as the primary NARFE point of contact for congressional offices on the ground. However, they are not the only person that congressional offices work with within the congressional district. CDLs are there to help facilitate meetings and provide training to the chapters in the district. They are not meant to replace the chapter legislative officer.

## What are the responsibilities of a CDL?

Below you will find the responsibilities of a CDL. There may be other jobs that the federation asks of the CDL, but they should be legislative and grass-roots related.

Federations may find it beneficial to write a job description for the CDL. The job description should include both the responsibilities and expectations (see below), as well as an estimate of the time commitment. Having this document will ensure that prospective CDLs understand the importance of the role and the time commitment involved.

## The CDL is responsible for:

- Ensuring the federation leadership is kept up to date on activities going on in the congressional district. This includes advocacy activities, what events the congressperson is hosting and ensuring NARFE members are attending them and, in general, how the member of Congress votes on NARFE issues;
- Ensuring the members and chapter officers within the congressional district are kept up to date on the latest legislative information and are taking appropriate action;
- If requested, visiting chapters in the district and providing legislative updates and/or trainings;
- Attending public events hosted by the congressional office to help build the relationship;
- Scheduling meetings with the member of Congress and NARFE members/leaders who reside in the congressional district;
- Coordinating activities among chapters and members within the congressional district;
- Reporting activity and congressional interactions to NARFE's Legislative Department; and
- Touching base with congressional staff in advance of key votes.

## What is expected of a CDL?

Again, the list of expectations below is not exclusive. These are the minimum expectations as determined by the NARFE Legislative Department to ensure that CDLs are able to fulfill their responsibilities.

## The CDL is expected to:

- Ensure chapter legislative officers are receiving the updates they need to perform their duties and that they are using this information constructively, including providing updates at chapter meetings and in newsletters;
- Keep up to date with NARFE's training materials and information, including participation in



- monthly webinars;
- Keep up to date with NARFE's policy positions on issues before Congress, as well as demographic information for the district or state;
  - Have an email address and check email regularly;
  - Be familiar with legislative websites and resources, as well as the resources available on NARFE's website and the Legislation page; and
  - Be aware of statements made by members of Congress on NARFE issues.

## **If a CDL is a federation position, what about chapters and their congressional outreach?**

Every chapter should have a person responsible for receiving and providing legislative information. This person should update chapter members on legislative activity and should encourage member participation in grass-roots activity.

The CDL works with the Chapter Legislative Chair to assist in coordinating activities among chapters within a congressional district. The CDL works to avoid duplicating efforts by several chapters. For example: A congressional district has five chapters in the district, and the member's office will only meet with NARFE once a year. The CDL will work with the five chapters to make sure that all are represented at the meeting. This way, if Chapter 1234 requests and gets a meeting, and then Chapter 5678 makes a request and is denied, Chapter 5678 is still participating in a meeting. Similarly, the chapters should work together when inviting a member of Congress to speak at a chapter meeting or event. This coordination will allow the member of Congress to speak to a larger audience, and the chapters are not competing with one another.

The CDL is meant to streamline NARFE's grass-roots efforts and lead to working more efficiently and professionally with congressional offices.

Having a CDL does not mean that chapter legislative officers do not work to build a relationship with the congressional office, it just means that there is a designated person to help facilitate the work being done in the district.

## **What is the relationship between the CDL and the Federation Legislative Chair?**

The Federation Legislative Chair is responsible for establishing the federation's field plan and grass-roots goals. The CDL works with the Federation Legislative Chair to make sure that the work of the federation is accomplished at the local level and that chapter leaders have the tools and resources they need to accomplish legislative and grass-roots work. The Federation Legislative Chair needs to ensure that CDLs have the resources and information they need to accomplish their responsibilities.

Some federations have area or district vice presidents who work with chapters on a variety of tasks. These area/district vice presidents can work with CDLs, but because of the time and work commitment a CDL is asked to give, and depending on other duties, we do not recommend combining the area/district vice president with the CDL job functions.

## **Can my CDL also be the Federation Legislative Chair?**

Some federations will ask their Federation Legislative Chair to serve as the Senatorial Leader (SL) but the Federation Legislative Chair also can serve as a CDL, especially if he or she resides in a single-district state. The Federation Legislative Chair should not be the primary contact for the representative and two senators if you reside in a single-district state; it may be too time-consuming.

## **Do I have to call the position a CDL?**

While CDL is common among advocacy groups, you do not have to use that title. Some federations



use CDL to stand for Congressional District Liaison. Other federations have area or district vice presidents whose sole function is to operate like a CDL. In that case, the federation does not have to change the title.

However, considering the work and time commitment a CDL is asked to give, there should be no other responsibilities assigned to the position except for congressional outreach and its related work.

NARFE's Legislative Department is using "Congressional District Leader" because it is the term used most often within advocacy groups, and it's already common to some NARFE leaders. It was also used by the Future of NARFE Committee and the Strategic Planning Committee. Many federations began to look at adopting the CDL structure as a result of the Strategic Plan, and we are simply using the most common term.

## **When selecting CDLs, what should I look for in an individual?**

The CDL is not only a liaison within NARFE but also the public face of the Association to members of Congress and their staff. Because of this, selection is very important and below are some considerations you may want to keep in mind when selecting CDLs.

A key role of the CDL is to help build and maintain a relationship between the congressional office and NARFE members in the district. While the title reflects the congressional district, when selecting the CDL, it may be more about the relationship with the office. This might require changing CDLs depending on who is elected to represent the district in Congress. In general, consider selecting:

- A personable individual who can communicate NARFE's policy positions accurately, effectively and politely.
- Someone who can be nonpartisan. NARFE is a nonpartisan organization. It is important that the CDL remain nonpartisan in conversations with members of Congress. This does not mean that the person cannot be involved in

partisan politics on his or her own time, but how the person will communicate and relate with the elected official should be taken into account. A Democrat can work well with a Republican elected official, and vice versa, as long as partisanship can be left at the door.

Similarly, we suggest selecting someone who has an existing positive working relationship with the elected official and/or the office, or no previous working relationship. It is not advisable to select someone to represent NARFE who has a negative previous working relationship with an office.

- A person who has an interest in and basic knowledge of legislation, Capitol Hill and politics.
- A person who can advocate for and against the policy positions that NARFE's members have voted to support or oppose as part of NARFE's legislative program. It is not effective to have a CDL who expresses an opinion different than the one NARFE's Legislative staff presents during meetings on Capitol Hill. Additionally, it is important that the CDL stay focused on NARFE's issues and not discuss policy issues that NARFE has not taken a position on.
- Somebody who can work with all of the chapter legislative officers in the congressional district. This may require some travel.
- A person who has an email address and checks email regularly.
- Ideally, a person who lives in the congressional district he or she represents.

It is important that CDLs do not use their NARFE role to advance their personal legislative or political agendas. CDLs must stay on message with NARFE's legislative goals and priorities. CDLs must not bring up their personal agenda or the agenda of other groups that they are involved with when they are working on NARFE's behalf. At times, this will mean wearing two or more hats, but the distinction is important.



**I have an enthusiastic volunteer who is not suited to be a CDL and meet with legislators. What should I do?**

Work to find a role for this individual, even if it is not as a CDL. Try to utilize the volunteer's strengths and direct the interest in advocacy into a productive use. No relationship with a congressional office is better than a bad one. Do not appoint someone a CDL just because you need to fill a slot and you have a volunteer.

If you live in a large geographic area, you can have two CDLs for the district but make one the primary person with the member of Congress while the other provides training and resources to the local members. Work toward people's strengths.

**Does the CDL have to reside in his or her assigned congressional district?**

While it is highly recommended that CDLs be constituents of the members of Congress to whom they are assigned, we know that there are circumstances that may prevent this. For example, if an individual has developed a strong relationship with the member of Congress and is then redistricted out of the congressional district, it makes sense for him/her to continue as the CDL for that office because of the relationship.

Some congressional offices will not meet with individuals who are not constituents. If you are a CDL in that circumstance, tell the office that you represent constituents and hold a statewide title. Often times, the office will drop their objection at this point. If the office does not, then the CDL will have to reside in the district, and you will have to select a different CDL.

**My state only has one representative. Does that change the work of the CDL?**

In this case, the CDL will be like a Senatorial

Leader (SL). But the responsibilities and job functions do not change for the CDL, regardless of how many districts are in your state.

**My state has geographically large districts that would be difficult for one person to cover. Can I have more than one CDL for a district?**

While we do not recommend having more than one person designated as a CDL, we do recognize that it can be a necessity for some federations. If that situation arises, we make two suggestions:

1. Designate one person as the primary CDL who helps coordinate all of the activity. The CDL's purpose is to streamline the work, so it does not ultimately become decentralized in the effort to centralize.
2. Make sure the multiple CDLs have clear and distinct job functions. Perhaps one of the individuals is better at meeting with congressional offices while the other is better at working with the chapters. Clearly define their duties and lines of communication.

While CDLs are the primary face of NARFE to a congressional office, they should not be the only face. If the concern with broad geographic territory is that one person cannot attend all of the public events hosted by a member of Congress, then have the CDL designate strong grass-roots leaders at the chapter level who can attend those town hall events. The CDL would still attend meetings and coordinate the other activities in the district. This will also help build the bench, so to speak, for when a new CDL may be needed.

**Can a CDL cover more than one district?**

We do not recommend having one person cover more than one congressional district, but we do recognize that it can be necessary at times. For example, if you are having a problem getting people to fill all of the CDL positions, it might be a temporary fix to have somebody fill an extra



congressional district. Just remember the time commitment you are asking of people. If you are going to have CDLs double up, we recommend making sure they are responsible for congressional districts of members who tend to support NARFE and/or where there is an existing relationship.

### **Is computer and Internet access a necessity for CDLs?**

We recognize that not all of our members have computers and/or Internet access, and we make every effort to work around it so as not to exclude anybody. However, the very nature of the work of a CDL and the quick timing that is often required necessitates having Internet access. Many of the resources available, including emails and training webinars, are only accessible with a computer and Internet access. Additionally, most congressional staff prefer email communication.

### **Do CDLs receive any compensation or reimbursement for their expenses?**

At this time, NARFE Headquarters is not in a position to offer compensation or reimbursement to CDLs. If a federation wants to offer compensation or reimbursement, that is up to the individual federation. We encourage the use of 10 percent funds for this purpose.

### **What if my CDL is also a PAC Chair, either at the chapter or federation level?**

This should not make a difference. However, the two roles will have to be separated completely. The individual will have to make sure to not cross any lines and to adhere to all campaign finance laws, especially not mentioning PAC in any capacity during an official office visit.

### **I am having problems finding individuals to step up and become CDLs. Any suggestions?**

A too-common problem throughout NARFE is finding volunteers, especially for a time-consuming job like CDL. You may have to research and find the right people to fill the positions. Start by looking at the chapter legislative chairs within the congressional district and see if there is somebody there who can fill the position. Sometimes people just need to be asked. And don't overlook active Federation NARFE members who may want to get more involved in legislation.

Make sure that your CDLs have the support and resources they need. If they are concerned that they do not have experience or strength in a certain aspect of the job, offer training or direct them to the resources at Headquarters. Offer to partner them with a more senior CDL who can offer mentoring and guidance while the new CDL gets his or her feet wet. You also can set up a call or meeting with the NARFE Legislative staff to discuss responsibilities.

Good luck!

**Questions? Contact NARFE's Legislative Department at [leg@narfe.org](mailto:leg@narfe.org) or 703-838-7760, ext. 201.**