

# Branches find creative solutions to pandemic-related election issues

**W**e are in election season—not just on a political level, but for NALC as well. Starting in September, the Election Notices section of *The Postal Record* will be triple its usual size through the fall, as branches around the country gear up for their own officer and convention delegate election procedures.

As required by the *NALC Constitution* and the *NALC Regulations Governing Branch Election Procedures*, these procedures include an opportunity for all members to nominate candidates and hold a secret ballot election if more than one candidate is nominated for a given position.

However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many branches have had to request dispensation to change the way they conduct elections. Nominations typically have been held during branch meetings, but to meet new health and safety standards, a large number of branches have shifted the way they conduct branch meetings. Several branches have developed creative solutions to this challenge.

As many buildings shut down in March, some branches realized that they were not going to be able to meet in person, perhaps for quite some time. “For the first few months of [the pandemic], we were in wait-and-see mode,” Alliance, OH Branch 297 President **Josh Lilly** recounted. After postponing several meetings, he said, “I realized, This isn’t going to go away anytime soon.” Lilly held a phone conference with the other officers, and they decided to move the meetings online. Like many other organizations, they turned to the video-conferencing platform Zoom.

Lilly says that he was apprehensive at first—“I wanted to make sure we

were holding a meeting that felt like a union meeting, with the same level of camaraderie”—but that the Zoom meetings surpassed his expectations. Aside from one technological issue at the beginning, “it’s been so easy,” he said. Attendance has even increased, because members who previously could not attend in person have been able to join the online meetings. So, when the Branch 297 officers had to start thinking about planning their election, they realized that they already had the perfect platform for the nomination process.

**Everett Wyllie**, president of Waco, TX Branch 404, reached a similar conclusion. In May, Wyllie said, the officers concluded that “this was not going to ease up, so we needed a plan.” Wyllie looked into Zoom, and decided that it would work. After it was approved by the executive board, Wyllie’s election plan passed as a motion at a branch meeting. The online branch meetings have been “very smooth,” according to Wyllie, who said that, as was the case with the Alliance branch, the branch’s Zoom meetings actually have increased attendance.

The Waco branch plans to hold nominations online, with the officers muting themselves when necessary to preserve the integrity of the nomination process. “It’s the first time we’re doing it like this, but we are excited,” Wyllie said. He added that the officers are especially hopeful that retired members will participate in a Zoom election, since those members might be reluctant to attend an in-person meeting given their potentially higher risk for COVID-19.

In Champaign, IL, Branch 671 Secretary/Treasurer **Don Thompson Jr.**

also has moved his branch meetings online, though he is using a different app. “I approached [our] president and said, ‘We have to do something, since we can’t hold our usual meetings,’” Thompson said. For branch meetings and nominations, they decided to use the Webex video-conferencing platform.

All three branches have decided that if an election needs to be held, they will use mail-in ballots as their voting method. “[Mail-in voting] is new territory for us,” Wyllie explained, but said that he believes the election committee would be able to handle any problems that arise. Thompson also was confident. “I’ve run my fair share of elections, and we’ve always done mail-in ballots,” he said.

Modesto, CA Branch 1291 is conducting nominations via Zoom and then mailing out ballots, but the officers decided not to do a mail-in election. “We have a drop-ballot box in the office,” Branch Secretary **Miriam Thomas** noted. The branch decided that “since we were already mailing [ballots] out to the retirees, we could mail out to the other members as well,” Thomas said, but the officers determined that the ballot boxes would be the safest and easiest way to collect the election mail. “The hardest part is doing all the mailing,” Thomas said. She added that the whole process, particularly the Zoom technology, has been a “learning process,” but that she finds it convenient to use. “I like being able to be at home and still be involved [in union business],” she said.

The officers for Hudson Valley Merged, NY Branch 137 also decided to hold branch meetings via Zoom,

but they were concerned about conducting the election online. “We talked to the members, and a lot of the responses we got showed that people weren’t comfortable [with that option],” Branch 137 President **Joseph Destefano** said.

However, an in-person meeting didn’t seem feasible, either. “It got taken out of our hands—because of the restrictions in New York [due to the pandemic], there was no place open” that would have been large enough to host the meeting and properly socially distance, Branch 137 Secretary/Treasurer **Frank Ramus** explained.

So, despite the additional cost of an all-mail election, the branch decided that its nominations and election would be mail-in only. “We feel confident that this is the best way moving forward,” Destefano said. Ramus added that this was a good opportunity to show off the safety and capability of the mail-in voting process.

Ann Arbor, MI Branch 434 is adopting yet another method for its nominations and elections. After writing

to NALC President Fredric Rolando for approval to change their election procedures, the branch members passed a motion. In the motion, “we decided that the nominations [would be] in-person at a large facility” to give plenty of space for social distancing, Branch 434 Secretary **Jane Grant** said. The branch then plans to hold an election, if needed, entirely by mail. Grant said that the officers had been talking to other branches to determine the best election method, given the novelty of the pandemic situation.

All of the branch officers interviewed agreed that one of the challenges of conducting an election under these circumstances was communicating with the members of their branch. Each branch had a different method, or combination of methods, that they used to make sure all members were aware of the procedural changes.

Some branches posted on social media. “We do have a branch Facebook page and email list,” Asheville, NC Branch 248 Secretary **Arkadia Smith** said. But that is only one

possible tool, and it has downsides: “Some people don’t have Facebook, and some don’t look at [social media],” Thomas said.

Gilmore agreed, and added that “some members don’t even have a computer.” Given this limitation, he says, he uses all of his resources to contact members. “We use email lists and physical mail...monthly flyers are sent to area offices to put on the board,” he said.

Other branches also use the mail to alert their members. “We send flyers to the retirees,” Lilly said. The Ann Arbor branch has even gone a step further to make sure that every member sees the election notice. “We got permission to post it on the time clock,” at the post office, Grant said.

No matter what election procedure the branches adopted, all of the branch officers said that they had put a good deal of thought into making sure that their new process was right for their branch and their members. The general attitude of the officers with regard to the NALC elections was summed up by Smith: “I just hope everything goes smoothly.” **PR**

## President grants dispensation to postpone branch elections

**I**n accordance with guidance from the Department of Labor, NALC President Fredric Rolando has granted all branches dispensation to postpone regularly scheduled nominations and elections if it is necessary to do so because of the pandemic. Postponed nominations and elections should be rescheduled as expeditiously as possible.

NALC recognizes that the pandemic may prevent some branches from conducting normal elections of officers and delegates for an extended period of time. For example, branches whose bylaws require that nominations and voting take place at scheduled branch meetings will not be able to do so if in-person meetings are postponed indefinitely.

To address this situation, branches should consider

alternative procedures for conducting nominations and elections. For example, nominations may be submitted by mail or through video web conferencing (e.g., Zoom, Webex, etc.). Elections could be conducted by mail ballot or at designated polling places.

Branches may submit to President Rolando requests for dispensation to implement alternative election procedures that otherwise would be inconsistent with their bylaws. Such procedures must comply with the *NALC Constitution* and the *NALC Regulations Governing Branch Election Procedures*. Assistant Secretary-Treasurer Paul Barner may be contacted for advice or assistance in developing alternative election procedures. **PR**