

# Updating your bylaws



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**N**ow that we have begun the collective-bargaining process with the United States Postal Service, I'm sure that many of our branch leaders and activists are anticipating beginning the process of local negotiations. This is the time that many turn their attention toward their own local bargaining and the provisions that directly affect members within the branch.

Well, that may not be anytime soon. Just because our current contract expires in May, an agreed-upon settlement or even an arbitration decision can be a long way down the road, and local negotiations don't begin until after that.

So, instead, right now is a good time to turn your attention toward updating your branch or state association bylaws. Unfortunately, very little attention is paid to the documents that govern our union until something happens and the question arises: Can they do that?

**Our NALC Constitution, and our branch and state bylaws, provide the "instructions" on how our organization is run.** We recently had a training in Los Angeles and many of our local leaders acknowledged that they spend much of their time focused on the contract, because they know this is how we protect our members. But it was explained to those in attendance that we need to understand and appreciate our Constitution and bylaws, because they, too protect our members by protecting the union.

Our *NALC Constitution* is made up of five separate constitutions: the *Constitution of the National Association of Letter Carriers*; the *Constitution for the Government of Subordinate and Federal Branches* (locals); the *Constitution for the Government of State Associations*; and the constitutions for our life insurance—the Mutual Benefit Association (MBA)—and the Health Benefit Plan.

The *NALC Constitution* also provides within it the guidelines on how these rules can be changed or amended. That's why it is wise to regularly look at your bylaws to make sure that they accurately reflect what you are doing, and to adjust them to reflect any changes that come about at our conventions.

Our national convention is the biennial meeting of the "supreme body" of our organization, which is made up of delegates who are elected to represent the members.

Often, there are changes that are adopted at the national convention that will directly affect the local membership.

For instance, it is now required that every branch have a representative for our life insurance (MBA). That was not required in the past, so there probably are many local branches that do not have a representative. This could make your local bylaws in conflict with the *NALC Constitution*. State and local bylaws cannot have provisions, changes or amendments that would be in conflict with the *Constitution*.

**Sometimes, a bylaw change can be as simple as a change regarding your general membership meeting: the day, time, location or how you meet.** If this is a permanent change, it requires a change to your bylaws. Those branches that now have the ability to stream meetings may have to update their bylaws if doing so affects the quorum, delegate selection or participation of the members.

The process of changing bylaws requires membership approval. Many branches have a bylaws committee whose job it is to make sure that the bylaws are always up to date. Then again, there are many other branches that may not be as familiar as they should be with what is in their bylaws. To the latter, no worries! It is not too late to get acquainted with the "instruction manual" that runs your local, the branch bylaws, or to make changes to bring the bylaws up to date.

By the time you are reading this article, the latest version of the *NALC Constitution* might be available to the membership on [nalc.org](http://nalc.org). I suggest that you refer to it as a guide and make sure that any current language in your bylaws does not conflict with the *Constitution*.

**Article 15 of the NALC Constitution provides the instructions on changing bylaws, and this process must be followed in order for any change or amendment to be approved by the Committee of Laws.** Outside of items that may be specific to your local branch or state association, you can use the *Constitution's* language as a reference when revising your bylaws.

Proposed bylaws changes must be submitted to the Committee of Laws. You can do so by mail or electronically. For instructions on how to submit your changes, go to the assistant secretary-treasurer page on the NALC website and click on "Branch bylaw changes." You also can call my office with any questions and I will assist as much as possible.