

The importance of structure and networks



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Organizations exist in many forms. Whether a business, government entity, social or sports club, neighborhood association, or in our case, a union, all successful organizations have something in common. Each has a structure that lends itself to the organization's effectiveness and success in achieving its goals.

Let's look first at an organization we are familiar with—the United States Postal Service. There have been a lot of structural changes over the years in the Postal Service. In fact, the latest large structural change is now in process, with the network modernization plan and the realign-

ment of areas and districts in recent years. While it is too early to determine the ultimate impact of these latest changes at USPS, those of us who have been around for a while have seen many such changes in the past. Some changes have been successful. Others, well, we all know how many of those turned out.

There are times when structures must evolve to accommodate change in order to remain as effective as they can be. I firmly believe that a strong foundational structure combined with continuous and thoughtful evaluation, and modification where necessary, is the path to maintaining the most effective structure for our union. Thankfully, we have a long and proud history of doing just that.

The past leaders and members of NALC established the union's governance structure at the branch, state, regional and national levels. This foundational structure is laid out in the *NALC Constitution*.

Our structure has served us well and continues to do so today. However, we have never accepted that it will not need to change. Over the past several conventions, the delegates have discussed and debated the effectiveness of our current structure. We have discussed the pros and cons of potential modifications. A few modifications have been made to officer duties and responsibilities through constitutional amendments adopted by the delegates in recent years. But thus far, the delegates have chosen to maintain the overall structure of NALC.

This debate and discussion at our conventions is healthy for us as a union. There is one thing I know for a fact—the members of the NALC are always right. We have 134 years of history to

prove it. Whether through debate on proposed constitutional amendments or general discussion, I'm sure that these conversations will continue at the Boston convention in 2024 and beyond. I'm also sure that the delegates to future conventions will make the decision to modify our governance structure if and when it is the best move to allow us to most effectively represent our members. Quality representation of our members always has been—and always will be—NALC's primary focus.

Officers at each level of our union have responsibilities, including representational responsibility, in a variety of areas such as grievance-arbitration, organizing, workers' compensation, and our legislative and political efforts. While the governance structure of our union hasn't changed in recent years, we have grown the networks of representation in each of these areas.

NALC's full-time advocates, regional grievance assistants, regional workers' compensation assistants, and legislative and political organizers have beefed up our networks in each of these areas. They provide direct representation, as well as support by training other NALC representatives and supporting the work of NALC officers at the branch, state, regional and national levels. One direct impact of the investment in these networks can be seen at the branch level. Activists often have been recruited by their branch leaders and educated by those plugged into these networks to allow them to become stronger representatives or to specialize in a particular area. Our union has always been blessed with the most active membership in the U.S. labor movement. I speak on behalf of Headquarters officers and staff, our regions, state associations and branches in saying this: We are committed to continuing to invest in these networks to provide the best representation we possibly can for our members.

While we will continue to invest in growing these traditional networks, we are also committed to expanding opportunities to learn and plug into these networks through online and electronic tools that interested members may use in their own time. We are excited about the endless possibilities of using technology to supplement, not replace, the robust training that already is a large part of our representational networks.

Embracing the longstanding portions of our union's structure that have made us successful, while continuing to evaluate the need for change and driving network growth that will allow us to better represent our members, is an approach that has been successful for letter carriers for well over a century. It will continue to be successful far into the future.