

The Leadership Academy selection process



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Once again, NALC activists from around the country submitted applications to the 2015 Leadership Academy during the recent application period, which closed on Aug. 31. We were a little concerned when, with less than a week to go, we had fewer than 75 applications to fill the 60 available slots for next year; but as has happened in recent years, a tsunami of applications struck NALC Headquarters the last few days of August and we ended up with 183. The task of verifying, organizing and confirming the applications began.

Each application form is reviewed to make sure it is complete, and the information on it is compared to what

is in the NALC's membership records. Any missing information or discrepancies are resolved by contacting the applicant or the applicant's national business agent. Letters are sent to each applicant confirming receipt of his or her form. Additionally, a letter is sent to the NBAs and the branch presidents of each applicant informing them of the application and providing them the opportunity to submit any information about the applicant they would like President Rolando to consider when he makes the selections. This process takes several weeks to complete, but the applications are usually ready for review and selection by the end of September.

Here are some statistics about this year's applications: Of the 183 applicants, 124 are male, 59 are female; this closely reflects the current gender ratio of NALC membership, which is approximately 68 percent male, 32 percent female. Of the applicants, 90 had applied previously and about half of those had applied three or more times. That's persistence. As hoped for, we are beginning to see CCAs apply for the Academy. This year, we received applications from 15 members who were currently CCAs or had served as CCAs and had recently been converted to regular. Several of these had served five years or more as a TE prior to becoming a CCA. Among all applicants, the years of service time in the USPS ranged from less than one year to more than 35 years, with the average being about 18 years. When it came to choosing mentors, some of the applicants chose Leadership Academy graduates while the rest choose branch, state or regional leaders.

Having personally reviewed each of the applications, I know that President Rolando is going to have a difficult task of selecting only 60 (four from each NALC region) out of these 183. Just as it has been every year, there

are many more outstanding applicants than we have spaces. But as President Rolando says: "That's a good problem to have." Nevertheless, it's not an easy or desirous task to have to select one deserving member over another.

By the time you read this article, the selections will have been made. It's not a quick process, as President Rolando reads each and every application, including the applicants' essays, their mentors' recommendations and the comments supplied by others. He is meticulous about making the best selections, and he also finds that reading the applications gives him insight into the hearts and minds of the membership. When he is reviewing the files, it's not uncommon for him to make a remark like, "Hey, look what this brother does in his spare time," or "Here's a sister who is raising three kids on her own, going to school at night, and is the president of her branch." He truly enjoys reading and learning about the members, but that makes it just that much harder for him to have to choose.

Choosing the best candidate does not always mean selecting the applicant with the best "résumé." President Rolando also takes into consideration the needs of the branches and the regions when choosing. He may opt to select an applicant from a small branch in an area that has not had someone attend the Academy over an applicant from a larger branch that has had four graduates in the last three years. It's more of an art than a science, but it has produced great results.

No doubt, many applicants are going to be disappointed if they are not selected. That's completely understandable. But my advice to them is: Don't be discouraged. Keep trying. Apply next time and in the meantime, consider what steps you can take to "beef up" your résumé. If writing or computer skills are not your strong suit, most community colleges or local adult education programs offer classes on these subjects. If you have a fear of public speaking, or just want to improve what speaking skills you have, I would strongly recommend attending Toastmasters, a non-profit organization that helps develop public speaking skills. Additionally, become as actively involved in your branch and state associations as you can. Volunteer to help out whenever and wherever you see an opportunity. Find someone in your branch, or who is otherwise available to you, whom you respect and who demonstrates the qualities listed above and ask them to mentor you. Call your NBA and let him or her know that you are interested in becoming more involved in the union and ask what you can do to help.

As I've noted in earlier articles, 2015 will mark the 19th and 20th Leadership Academy classes, bringing the total number of graduates since the Academy began in 2005 to nearly 600. Academy graduates are now serving the NALC at all levels of the union, from shop steward to national resident officer. I am privileged and honored to be a part of it.