

Getting back to the basics on branch bylaws



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As chairman of the Committee of Laws, it is my job to review submissions from branches for proposed changes to their bylaws. When reviewing close to 200 submissions each year, recurring issues with branch bylaws becomes apparent. This month, I want to get back to the basics and also share a few common issues the committee sees that are present in branch bylaws.

The following checklist contains items every branch's bylaws should address:

Date and time of meeting—This must be set in the bylaws (Article 3, Section 1 of the *Constitution for the Government of Subordinate and Federal Branches [CGSFB]*). Regular meetings of the branch shall be held not less than once a month (branches have the option of only meeting 10 times per year) and at such time and place as may be designated in the branch bylaws. Example: "The second Thursday of every month at 7 p.m., except if the date falls during the week of either a national or state convention or on a holiday, then the meeting will be at 7 p.m. the following Thursday."

Quorum—This must be a specific number, not a percentage. You should indicate in the branch bylaws the quorum number for both special meetings and regular meetings.

List of officers—This must be in the branch bylaws. Article 4, Section 1 of the *CGSFB* lists the required officers. If a branch consolidates offices, it must so state in the bylaws (e.g.: financial secretary/treasurer).

Term of office—This must be indicated in the branch bylaws. As indicated in Article 4, Section 2 of the *CGSFB*, all officers shall be elected for a term of one, two or three years, at the option of the branch. Again, the branch bylaws should indicate one of the three terms the branch voted to have for term of office for its officers.

Date of elections—This is for both officers and delegates to state and national conventions, and instructions can be found in Article 5 of the *NALC Constitution* (for delegates) and Article 5 of the *CGSFB* (for officers). Most branches have this information, but some the committee has seen fail to have the election information. Example: "Nominations for officers and delegates to both the national and state conventions shall be held at the regular October branch meeting and elections shall be held at the regular

November branch meeting by secret ballot." (Having this in the bylaws does *not* negate the responsibility of the proper written notices of upcoming branch nominations and elections.)

How stewards are selected—The two most common methods are: 1) the branch president appoints the stewards, or 2) the stewards are elected by the members in the stations where they work. However, if stewards sit on the branch executive board, then they must be elected by the entire membership, including retirees.

Branch dues—They must be outlined in the branch bylaws. If the branch has the minimum dues structure, the bylaws can simply indicate that branch dues for active members of the branch shall be the same as set by Article 7, Section 2 (a) of the *NALC Constitution*. If a branch has local dues for retired members, it should also state in the bylaws. Example: "Retiree dues shall be \$24 a year. The \$24 will include the national per capita, state dues and local dues."

Some common problems the committee sees often involve funds. All funds shall be devoted to such uses as the branch may determine, provided that no appropriation shall be made except when ordered by a majority vote of the members present and voting at a regular branch meeting; provided further that branches may make provision in their bylaws allowing officers to spend a certain sum of money between branch meetings in cases of emergency, as mentioned in Article 12, Section 3 of the *CGSFB*. (The branch should indicate in the bylaws both the officer(s) authorized and the maximum amount of funds that are authorized between meetings for an emergency.) Additionally, the branch is also permitted, but should indicate in the bylaws, to allow routine bills be paid by the officers between meetings (e.g., electric bill, branch phone bill, internet bill, rent). We also recommend that any expenditure(s) be reported to the branch at the next regular meeting.

Hopefully, this article will assist branches that are currently reviewing bylaws with ensuring that their bylaws have the basics required.

I wish everyone a safe and joyous holiday season.

