

New responsibilities



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This past year has really been quite a transition for me. Obviously, relocating and acclimating to life in Washington DC, and the East Coast has not been easy—6 a.m. still comes too early for me here. But the real learning curve was making adjustments with new and different responsibilities as a resident national officer of the NALC.

Understand that for the past 13 years as president of Branch 11 in Chicago, everything was like clockwork. It had become relatively “easy,” because not only did I know where everything was, I put it there. Successfully navigating the needs of the branch and

my members while fighting management was second nature. But now as your assistant secretary-treasurer, my duties are quite different. Yet the core remains the same—the representation of city letter carriers. I use this example of my journey over the past year to illustrate the profound challenges facing those of you who will be assuming new responsibilities this year in your elected or appointed roles within your respective branches.

Let me first say congratulations, and always remember this is what *you* asked for; now put on your seat belt because you may be in for a heck of a ride! This is the very reason Secretary-Treasurer Nicole Rhine puts together officers training courses two or three times a year. There is always someone who needs initial or refresher training as officers of our branches and state associations.

One of the more relevant training sessions, aside from those involving fiduciary responsibilities, is identifying the basics needs of new officers in the class, aptly titled “I’ve just been elected, now what?” Unfortunately, there is so much to take in from what we present in that class that there isn’t space to thoroughly go over the whole presentation here. So, I want to focus on a few things from this class that the newly elected officers should be mindful of, especially the branch presidents and secretaries.

We all like to see outgoing officers remain true to their oath to facilitate an orderly transfer of power, but we know that is not always the case. Too often the newly elected do not have any cooperation or assistance from the prior administration. With that in mind, let’s look at

some of the things that we need to consider when we take on the duties of our newly elected positions.

What do the *Constitution* and branch bylaws say about your new position and responsibilities?

Particularly at the branch level, a lot of us first run for positions with pre-conceived notions of all the things we will do differently. Some of us come in as masters of the national and local agreements and thus are effective at dealing with management. This may propel us into the office, and we feel like we can come in and instantly make changes, but those changes might be in direct conflict with the branch bylaws. That’s why it is so important to become familiar with your bylaws and the *NALC Constitution*, to understand the parameters of what you can and can’t do. Your bylaws can contain everything from the official name and objective of a branch to the order of business in general membership meetings. The bylaws outline the duties of the officers, the terms of office and when they are elected. It also offers the guidelines of how and when money is spent. Trust me, all of this is important to know, especially if you are the president, secretary or treasurer.

What records does the branch have and where are they kept?

This is a loaded question and can encompass so much. Depending on the size of the branch, there may be a multitude of records with different timelines for retention. Let’s just start with the basic grievance files and information pertaining to the membership. There is a level of confidentiality that needs to be protected, as well as a responsibility of representation with pertinent grievance files. Then there are the tax records (IRS), Department of Labor LM reports, employment records (stewards and officers are branch employees), bills and, of course, the number of documents and records can increase exponentially if there is property owned or leased by a branch. There also are records involving labor-management meetings, LMOU negotiations as well as records that include the charter of the branch, the minutes of its meetings and the history of its officers and bylaws. Then there are the more immediate and tangible items such as credit cards and bank records, the signing over of the responsibility for these accounts and any other possessions of the branch.

Yes, the new year brings a new beginning, as well as new responsibilities. If any new or existing officers need assistance, don’t hesitate to reach out to your national business agent and national officers. Good luck—you can do it!