

## Electronic Communications Committee Report

### Executive Summary

The Maryland Federation Executive Board established the Electronic Communications' Committee (ECC) with the goal of providing membership with electronic communication methods essential for recruitment, retention, and Legislative advocacy. The committee was asked to envision the state of social media use within the Maryland Federation in the next two years using new technologies and then map an action plan with implementation strategies to make the vision a reality.

The ECC approach to this charge is two-fold: (1) explore available social media venues which will bring the Maryland Federation's use of electronic communications and social media into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and (2) explore and identify the most cost-effective means to do so. First, we examined various ways electronic communications and social media are used within NARFE Federations and the Maryland chapters. The purpose of the review was to identify best practices that could successfully be integrated into the Maryland Federation and its chapters. Second, we solicited member input through a survey of Maryland Chapters and NARFE Federations. The initial findings indicated that Maryland Chapters supported the use of new technologies such as social media. However, there was a common theme that technical support and training were lacking. All Maryland Chapters were willing to provide a contact for the Maryland ECC. The survey indicated that NARFE Federations maintain websites at varying degrees of usefulness. Some presented best practices that need further exploration.

As a result of the member survey and the review of electronic communication uses throughout NARFE, recommendations were developed that when fully implemented could provide reliable, sustainable, cost-effective electronic communication services. The following summary of priority recommendations may help jump-start the Maryland Federation's electronic communications' initiative:

1. Contract a Social Media Expert to provide a written (template/)design for the use of diverse Social Media tools by the Federation and its chapters, as well as identify pertinent training for a Federation Social Media Coordinator.
2. Create a permanent Social Media Coordinator position at the Federation and Chapter levels. These positions would provide sustained long range technical support to initiate, develop, and update information..
3. Hire a Web Designer to revamp the Federation website based upon provisions established by a Requirements Committee to ensure users' wishes are included in the new design. Create an assistant webmaster position to assist with the added demands.

4. Federation President and Executive Board encourage and support the change management process through ongoing and open communication with chapter leadership and through the creation of a Change Management Group.

Through the adoption and implementation of these primary and other recommendations, the ECC believes that within two years, the Maryland Federation can move to a new level where the use of electronic technologies plays a major role in revitalizing our organization. The full narrative explaining these and other recommendations are included in the ECC Report which follows.

## ECC REPORT

The Electronic Communications Committee (ECC) was established within the Maryland Federation of Chapters to assess and evaluate the current state of electronic communications within the Federation. Recommendations were to be presented to the President, Maryland Federation. The goal and objectives of the ECC are:

Goal: To provide membership with electronic communication methods essential for recruitment, retention, and advocacy.

Technical Objectives:

1. Our basic charge is to develop recommendations to enable the chapters and Maryland Federation to maximize the use of electronic communications.
2. Envision the state of the Maryland Federation in two years and map a strategic plan and implementation strategies to make the vision a reality.
3. Provide a skills and personnel assessment of individuals who may be available to provide technical advice on a regular basis to members at all levels of competency.

Organizational Objectives:

1. Review need of on-going organizational support.
2. Review oversight and direction of these efforts in an existing Federation position or recommend the establishment of a new position (at both the Federation and/or chapter levels) or a standing oversight committee.
3. Determine the basic tools (human and IT resources) needed to provide reliable, sustainable, cost-effective, and up-to-date communication with members and outside entities.
4. Establish a change management group.

The following report analyzes the use of electronic communications within the Federation as well as proposes ECC recommendations to achieve the above goal and objectives. These recommendations will take time to complete if the action plan includes all of the various recommendations. The report is broken down into the following categories: Social Media, Websites, Other Electronic Communication Tools and Change Management.

## SOCIAL MEDIA:

1. During this past year, the ECC has conducted surveys within and outside the Federation. The results from the survey indicated that chapters would like to use social media, but do not have the support to accomplish this task. Survey results will be distributed separately because State Federations across the country were given until January 31, 2013 to respond.

Recommendations: **Positions dedicated to social media should be established at both the Federation and chapter levels.** Recruitment should be made within the Federation for a person to coordinate social media activities. The people assigned to social media should be trained to accomplish the assigned duties. The ECC has already made a recommendation to classify these positions when the Configuration Advisory Board (CAB) sent position classifications to Federations for review. The position was suggested as Social Media Coordinator (SMC). The ECC felt that by defining these positions within the Federation and chapters the positions would be documented within NARFE and given the merit they deserve. Other duties of the SMC will be described in further sections.

2. Social media is being used by diverse public and private organizations to disseminate information quickly and efficiently. Using social media is a very cost-effective tool and reaches individuals and organizations quickly. Some examples that could be explored for enhanced Federation and Chapter use and outreach include, but are not exclusive to, the following:
  - LinkedIn is just one way of reaching active employees since many employees use this form of social media to recruit and interact with organizations. Retired individuals are also familiar with this form of social media, and, it could be researched as a viable way to reach large numbers of active employees, while raising the awareness of NARFE itself.
  - Facebook is an ideal way for NARFE chapters and/or members to interact with existing and potential members.
  - Twitter is used to immediately communicate with members. Today Twitter is used in addition to email. Items of utmost importance can be transmitted instantly to a wide audience.

Recommendations:

LinkedIn: (a) This form of **social media should be the first method adopted** at the Federation level to provide concise and value-based information on NARFE, the organization, and its activities on behalf of the active and retired federal employee. At the May 2012 training session, Catherine Reed discussed potential action steps. (b) A **contract** should be placed with Ms. Reed or a comparable expert to work with the Federation President and Social Media Coordinator to reach out to current government employees and groups within LinkedIn as she recommended at the training session. (c) Once both President and Social

Media Coordinator have been trained, bi-annual or annual **messages** from the Maryland Federation President should be “linked” to appropriate groups and current and retired federal government employees within the MD Federation. A sample message can be found in Addendum A to show how this medium could be used. Funds should be budgeted to maintain this form of social media. (d) **Documentation** should be requested as part of this training so future SMCs could use this information as **training** modules. (e) A **strategy paper** should be constructed with the contractor on how to use social media.

Facebook: Many chapters are currently using Facebook (FB) to reach members. (a) Facebook should be **extended to as many chapters as possible** within the Federation. (b) **Training** for Facebook can be found at many of the Continuing Education Centers in the various counties and cities, and chapters should encourage and train recruits for their SMC position to use these resources. A listing of some of the centers can be found in the Newsletter Editors’ Guide. The Federation can cost out a consolidated training program for the individual chapters and the Federation Social Media Coordinator, but it may be easier and more cost-effective at the chapter level. Many books are also available to train individuals and can be found at on-line book stores. Some chapters are more sophisticated at FB than others and those individuals might be able to help others in their chapter’s development. Some FB pages connect to chapter websites which can easily be demonstrated to new users, if desired. (c) A **group of chapter SMCs** could gather and work together on various types of usage. This would not only be cost-effective but also serve to bond chapter SMCs.

Twitter: (a) Twitter can be used by chapters to **communicate with members**. This is a lower priority than FB and LinkedIn. SMCs could meet to discuss and explore how they could use Twitter to meet their chapter goals on recruitment and retention. (b) Create a Twitter account at NARFE Headquarters. The SMC could coordinate this effort with HQ.

## WEBSITES

3. NARFE Headquarters recently revamped its website based on a less than stellar review of their website. Based on the national website redesign, a similar design could be implemented at the Federation and/or chapter level(s) for effectiveness and usability for members. The national site currently serves as host to many chapters. There is a fee of \$29.95 per month for usage. The Maryland Federation hosts several Chapters’ websites free of charge.

*Recommendations:* (a) **Hire a web designer** to revamp the Federation website using off-the-shelf software. The ECC recommends using the template based software supplied by the host, Network Solutions, as these products create attractive and effective websites and they are easier to learn and use. (See item #8 for further discussion of software.)

(2) **A committee should be named to help with the requirements phase** of this endeavor. The requirements phase gathers information for the designer to use in the development of the site such as what in the legislative area you want

to have as a permanent part of the site. Basically, the requirements phase is what chapters/members want on the website. Members should be drawn from the various entities within the Federation both at the Federation and chapter levels. This committee should be formed before the web designer is hired. They would then have information for the designer to use in the construction of the website. The Federation webmaster should be a member of the Requirements Committee. Many state federations have very well-constructed websites. These should be reviewed to see which aspects could be used by the Requirements Committee. The Colorado Federation website contains a page for active employees (<http://www.narfe-colorado.com/id14.html>) on their Federation's website so examining current state websites will help to develop the requirements. Another excellent example is located on the Texas Federation website. They constructed a manual to access the On-line Activities Module system for generating reports from the HQ database ([www.txnarfe.org/GoingPaperlessTXHandbook.pdf](http://www.txnarfe.org/GoingPaperlessTXHandbook.pdf)); it also teaches members how to log onto the HQ webpage. Other Federations link to this page; North Dakota links to this website so others might also. The Requirements Committee could also provide a resource for a usability study as the website is completed.

4. As the website is developed and usage increases, the Federation webmaster's workload will increase. Currently any changes to the website hosted on the Federation website have to be made by the Federation webmaster.

Recommendations: Because of the additional workload, the ECC, in coordination with the webmaster, should determine what work would be completed by a co-webmaster or assistant and what work would remain with the webmaster, but at a minimum a permanent **co-webmaster or assistant position should be established**. This new position would provide for a fully trained back-up webmaster in case the current webmaster needs help, goes on vacation, etc. This additional position would also assist in the implementation of future actions recommended within this report. *This should be a high priority for the federation.*

5. Many members are currently acting as webmasters within the chapters, but there are some who do not have these positions filled. These are difficult positions to fill, but there may be members willing to take on these duties if training is available.

Recommendations: Chapters should **recruit for webmaster positions** if they do not currently have this position filled. Those chapters that are lacking positions should recruit for these positions at the chapter level both within their chapter, as well as outside their chapter (possibly within other chapters) since these positions can be completed by anyone. They can do this with the knowledge that they will receive help from the Federation webmaster, contractor and chapter resources for training if needed. Chapters should offer to support training for these people if they do not have a background in webmaster duties. Using a template will make this position and subsequent duties easier to recruit for and complete.

6. Local chapters that have a website should obtain a domain name. Local chapters and the Federation should have domain names for recognition on search engines. This helps name recognition and shortens the URL. It would be helpful if it were standardized

where possible. Search engines look for names at the top of the document/web page as well as other data sites, such as state and chapters served. The Federation already has a list of links to local chapters' homepages and each chapter could benefit from using the same list. This would help the page rank of all local chapters. The top of each chapter web page or new template should have a link to the Federation and HQ websites. Some chapters have simplified their individual websites into one website. Chapters should list all communities that they serve. For example, the Bowie-Crofton chapter serves the communities of Bowie, Crofton, Mitchellville, Odenton, and Gambrills as well as other surrounding areas. The list of communities served should be on the home page.

*Recommendations:* (a) Each chapter should **create a domain name** for their chapter for recognition on search engines and use standardized names within the Federation. A standard format should be used such as NARFE409.org. Place the Maryland Federation and chapter name at the top of all chapter web pages to help search engines identify them. (b) All chapters should have a **page of links to other chapters'** homepages similar to that of the Federation website. (c) They also should have a **link to the Federation and HQ** on the top of their home page to increase page rank which is important for search engines. (d) Chapters that don't currently have websites should invite other chapters to **join their resources and use one website** for multiple chapters.

## **OTHER ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS AND SUPPORT**

7. The Newsletter Editors Guide has been developed to aid in the recruitment and retention of newsletter editors for the chapters and Federation. Further guides would help the recruitment of individuals to hold positions within the Federation and chapters. Position descriptions are an invaluable asset in the recruitment of individuals to fill vacant Federation and chapter positions.

*Recommendations:* (a) A **Webmasters' Guide** should be developed to help recruit and retain webmasters. The Federation webmaster, along with other members that are willing to compile the information needed, should be assigned this task. The format could be similar to the Newsletters' Editors Guide which was compiled with help from chapter newsletter editors and other chapter members. Additional Federation guides could follow on such organizational topics as the legislative process, membership and recruitment, and publicity (Chapter 1747 currently has a fine draft of a manual/guide.). Similar to the Newsletters' Editors Guide, future endeavors should garner the support and information base/knowledge from both chapter and Federation officers/members in those positions. This is a long-term effort, but the ECC concurred that it is worth the effort. (b) **Position descriptions** should be created and compiled at the HQ level for both Federation and chapter positions both new and old. Some positions are listed on the HQ site, but not all.

8. Software is costly as it always is for organizations. Purchasing off-the-shelf software or using free software is more cost-effective than maintaining websites that are coded by contractors. Free template driven software provided by website hosts is even better.

Most government facilities consolidate their purchase of licenses or use free software - practices which have been found to be cost-effective. Free software is available for use on the host server and local chapter websites.

Recommendations: (a) The ECC looked into **consolidating purchase of licenses** by chapters or the Federation in both web design and publishing software. They will work with the CAB to see if it is more feasible for HQ to assume this task. Regardless of whichever level the purchase occurs, it would help the chapters and Federation that need to acquire software. (b) The ECC recommends that **free software be used or off-the-shelf be purchased** for designing both newsletters and websites. Chapters might also consider using Google as a host since Google hosts sites free of charge. Google also provides template driven website software, also free of charge. The [North Dakota Federation website](#) is an example of a website using Google. Some learning centers are noted in the Newsletter Editors Guide.

The Federation has a website with free space available and free software such as Wordpress, Joomla or other free software could be used by the chapters as well as the Federation. Purchased software such as MS Web Expressions and Adobe InDesign may also work well for chapters. Training on free and/or purchased software can be found on YouTube. YouTube is also a good resource for all software training and it is free. Purchased software training can be found for free on YouTube or for a cost at local Continuing Education Learning Centers.

9. Training is always an issue, but one must question why Legislative Training is the only training which is given such visibility and occurs at the HQ level? Why not provide web, publishing, and/or overall electronic communications training at the HQ level? The ECC feels that vendors will be interested in participating in such training and would benefit all chapters across the country. This could be a long-term objective.

Recommendations: (a) The Federation and ECC should investigate **other avenues for training with HQ and the CAB**. Electronic communications is a very crucial piece of the communications process as can be seen with the re-vamping of the HQ website and the new “look” of the NARFE magazine both on the website and in hard copy. (b) If **training** at the HQ level in the short-term cannot be offered, then the Federation and ECC should investigate what training methods could be used for their chapters in the short-term. Suggestions could be presented to the Federation Executive Board for consideration. If the Federation is unable to offer such training, help should be given to chapters to find training in their local areas.

## CHANGE MANAGEMENT

10. To encourage members and officers to undertake any approved changes, the ECC felt incentives be defined to encourage chapters to participate in the change management process..

Recommendations: (a) At each annual convention, the Federation President could **report to chapters** on the change management of electronic communications



within the Federation and what chapters were doing. Bar-graphs, similar to those used in the CFC campaigns, could be used to depict which chapters were increasing their use of social media, had websites, increased emailing of newsletters, etc. (b) An **award** could be given to the chapter(s) that had advanced electronic communications the most within the year.

11. Federation leadership support was considered paramount to this change process.

Recommendations: The **Federation President and Executive Board should meet with Chapter Presidents** and other appropriate chapter officers to encourage the change management process. If Chapter Presidents are reluctant, ask them to assign someone who would be willing to help with the change management process. Everyone reacts differently to the speed of change, but it is also important to go forward with electronic communications. New NARFE members are much more proficient in the use of electronic communications and NARFE needs to grow with the times. Naturally, it is important to be prepared to address the risks involved in enhanced social media interaction.

12. In any change of this magnitude, an action plan would be of assistance. The ECC will complete an action plan on those recommendations which the Executive Board approves. Once this plan is in effect, implementation strategies can be identified to ensure success. A strategy paper also would benefit the technical aspects of all of the recommendations.

Recommendations: (a) The **ECC will continue as a standing committee** helping Federation leadership with electronic communication needs by working with chapters, leadership, and the CAB to accomplish the assigned goals and objectives. (b) The ECC also recommends using the **ECC as the change management group** in coordination with the Federation Executive Board.

## ADDENDUM A

Hello, I am Ted Jensen, President of the Maryland Federation of the National Active and Retired Employees Associated (NARFE) ([www.NARFE.org](http://www.NARFE.org)). I am sending this message to you to let you know how our organization can benefit you.

This is a critical time for active employees as well as annuitants. Budget cuts loom in our future and NARFE is a legislative power whose sole purpose is to work to protect your salary and benefits. Please visit our website at: [www.NARFE.org](http://www.NARFE.org) where you can gather information regarding NARFE and how NARFE can benefit you. You can also register on this website to receive our monthly magazine and join this active organization. Additionally, you can request a free sample magazine to read the latest month's articles. It contains a question and answer column that can answer many questions which you may have. Local Service Officers at the chapter level of NARFE also can help you with questions. We have an eNARFE chapter if you choose to participate in that manner. If you register, please use ID number XXXX to identify this email as your contact.

Thank you for your time and we hope you will see what a benefit this organization can be for you.

Ted Jensen  
President  
Maryland Federation of Chapters  
NARFE