



National Association
of Federal Retirees

Association nationale
des retraités fédéraux

Governance Renewal at the National Association of Federal Retirees

A Short Discussion Paper for Members and Volunteers

2026

Purpose of This Discussion Paper

This document summarizes why governance renewal is being undertaken and outlines the emerging direction of a proposed model. It is intended to support informed dialogue among members and volunteers as consultations continue throughout the spring and summer of 2026.

Importantly, no formal recommendation has yet been made regarding a preferred future state. The National Board of Directors (the Board) has deliberately approached the governance redesign by asking the following foundational question:

“If NAFR were being designed today from the ground up, what governance structure would best serve its members, mission, and long-term sustainability?”

Introduction

The National Association of Federal Retirees (NAFR) is undertaking a structured, governance renewal process that began in December 2024. The purpose of this renewal is to ensure the Association remains sustainable, accountable, and aligned with member expectations for the decades ahead.

While NAFR’s mission and people remain strong, consultations with members, volunteers, and the National Board of Directors revealed critical findings that the Association stands at a pivotal crossroads. The current governance and volunteer system has not kept pace with evolving member expectations or with the operational realities of a modern, and sophisticated national organization. Feedback received indicates that the current system is too complex and is increasingly difficult to sustain. Roles are often unclear, decision-making can be slow, and members want a more direct and meaningful voice in the Association's future.

As the findings of our consultations illustrate, these very real structural pressures require a clear and purposeful response. That is why the National Board of Directors, supported by experts in governance have worked to design, refine, and ultimately bring forward a renewed governance model for member consideration.

The model will be refined through collaboration with the National Board of Directors, volunteers and members to reflect the Association’s commitment to transparency and inclusive engagement, ensuring that any future governance structure is not only technically sound but also supported by the membership it serves.

Guiding Principles and Design Approach

The proposed governance model has been shaped by guiding principles that the National Board of Directors reviewed and endorsed earlier in the governance review process. These principles have been kept in focus throughout the review and continue to guide all evaluation and design decisions.

They emphasize:

- Responsibility, including fiscal
- Long-term sustainability
- Clear accountability
- Inclusive and respectful engagement
- Transparent communication, and
- Member-focused decision-making

Why Review Our Current Structure?

NAFR's existing governance system has supported the Association effectively for over a decade - since 2014. However, feedback gathered through surveys, interviews, and working sessions with members, volunteers, and the National Board of Directors indicates that the structure is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain.

Key themes emerged from consultations:

- Volunteers are spending significant time on administrative responsibilities, reducing their ability to focus on the core mandates of advocacy and member engagement.
- Volunteer and elected roles within branches are becoming more difficult to fill.
- Expectations and responsibilities between governance and operational roles are not always clear.
- Members are interested in participating in ways that are not well supported by existing structures.

Information obtained through consultations also suggests that the current model no longer reflects how many members wish to connect with the Association. These trends mirror broader challenges across the not-for-profit sector, where organizations are adapting to changing patterns of volunteerism and participation.

A renewed, stronger structure will sustain the Association in the coming decades, ensuring we can deliver outcomes for our members, such as advocating on the issues that matter most.

Emerging Elements of a Renewed Governance Model

While no final recommendations have been made, the proposed governance model proposes a more integrated system with clearer roles and additional routes for member and volunteer participation. The intent is to simplify structures, clarify responsibilities, and create more flexible opportunities for members to engage.

One Clear Governance Layer

- The Board is proposing a move to one clear governance layer, with the National Board of Directors as the sole governing body.
- This would be a change from the current structure, which includes multiple layers of governance.
- This change would clarify roles, making decisions clearer and timelier.

One Member, One Vote

- The Board is proposing a move to one member, one vote for the election of National Directors.
- This would give every member an equal and direct vote, replacing the current elector-based system.
- This model reflects modern governance best practices and aligns the Association with how strong, member-driven organizations operate today.

Local and National Volunteer Pathways

- The Board is proposing a change to volunteer engagement that would be supported through two complementary pathways:
 - Local branches, operating at a reduced and more sustainable scale, focused on community-level engagement and connection.
 - National Action Groups, providing structured member input and expertise on issues that are national in scope.
- These volunteer groups would not hold governance authority and would be supported by staff.

- Members told us they want more flexible ways to participate (including remote, time-limited, and skill-based volunteer roles). This model creates those pathways.

Fewer, More Sustainable Branches

- The Board is proposing a model that includes a reduction in the number of branches to support long-term sustainability and more consistent capacity locally.
- The current system is valued, but it has become too complex and unsustainable. This limits the Association's ability to grow, innovate, and expand its impact.
- Volunteers are stretched too thin, members want to engage but are unsure how to do so, and governance is not operating effectively.

Board Composition and Representation

- The Board is committing to maintain a nominations process that ensures regional representation to reflect the national membership.

The model strengthens the Association's ability to deliver on the issues members consistently value most: strong advocacy for retirement security and pensions, healthcare and positive aging, and preferred partnerships.

The Path Forward

Taken together, the consultation findings to date point to a current structure that is valued but no longer sustainable. One that doesn't reflect evolving member expectations, modern volunteer realities, or the governance requirements of a large, sophisticated national organization.

The proposed governance model responds directly to these pressures. It offers a simpler, clearer system that strengthens each member's voice, clarifies roles, reduces administrative burden, and positions NAFR to operate with greater accountability and resilience in the years ahead.

Continuing the Conversation

This discussion paper is part of an ongoing engagement process. No final decisions have been made.

Members and volunteers are encouraged to reflect on these concepts. Opportunities to provide input will include a membership and volunteers survey and an upcoming virtual Town Hall session in March. Further consultations will take place over the coming

months to ensure all voices are heard as we plan for a stronger, more influential and sustainable National Association of Federal Retirees.



For more information

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