

CHAPTER BEST PRACTICES SESSION

The following successful ideas were shared by NARFE members attending the 2005 California State Federation of Chapters Convention, in San Mateo, during a brain storming session on June 3, 2005, which was open to all members attending this convention.

Special thanks to all those who stepped up to the microphones to share their suggestions with other members present and those who submitted written thoughts on improving the chapter experience.

We hope that the following enumerated ideas for improvements will be helpful to your chapter.

Helen Zajac, Federation President, facilitated this session; while Thea Max of Paradise Chapter #352 recorded the ideas. The questions asked, were based on problems most frequently raised by Chapters during the President's Chapter visits. To provide some additional ideas, some items were obtained from the publication "Chapter Rebuilding – Renovation Ideas" which is on the National Web Site www.narfe.org under Chapter and Federation Development.

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS?

- Great Speakers
- Interesting Topics
- E-mail reminders, with information concerning meeting
- Good meals
- Hold 75 minute meetings
- Form & encourage a good up-beat calling committee
- Arrange for car-pooling and rides for those who can't drive
- Use post card notification for months with no newsletter
- Try dinner meetings, offer rides and car pooling
- Speakers on subjects such as Travel & Local businesses
- Expert speakers on subjects such as: Earthquakes; Health issues or gardening
- Try sending Thank You letters for being a member, for service and for attendance
- Have a white elephant sale or raffle
- Hold a Spring Luncheon
- Try a Fall "Food Drive," or a December "Toys for Tots"
- Political Speakers such as: Mayor, Supervisor, Congressman, Senator or a forum on an issue
- Rotate meeting dates, times and locations
- Schedule strictly a business meeting – or strictly a social meeting
- Establish attendance and/or door prize drawings
- Plan non meeting meetings: pot luck, yard sale, or auctions
- Have members suggest topics or speakers
- Call visitors after meetings for feedback
- Hold joint meetings and/or social events with other chapters
- Take a meeting to POTENTIAL members at a senior center or retirement home; a lunch picnic convenient to CFE worksites
- Solicit sponsors for special programs to offset costs
- Support area chapter's events
- Enlist aid of neighboring chapter members to perform a "self assessment" of the chapter
- Have name tags for each member with their agency identified
- Consider a moment of silence to start the meeting rather than a traditional prayer or religious blessing

WHAT HAVE YOU FOUND SUCCESSFUL TO INCREASE MEMBERSHIP?

- Reach out to a local federal agency such as: Forest Service Unit; Post Office; Social Security Office
- Have a contest for membership, then take a picture of the winner for publicity
- Have a pizza party at lunch time on a military base
- When visiting a federal facility, if security resists, ask for the building manager
- Give pre-retirement seminars, if qualified
- Invite the head of a local federal agency to speak at a meeting and carry message back to employees
- Try wearing your NARFE badge while shopping
- Encourage members to give a gift membership to a friend, acquaintance or letter carrier
- Do not wait until retirement to encourage membership
- Always carry a membership application with you and give them out whenever possible
- Offer “free” membership in form of a drawing, and then use the “winner” for publicity in the agency and in the local newspaper. Use other entries for contact purposes.
- Have a “fundraising” event at a local store for Alzheimer’s with the side benefit of PR and membership – using professional prepared signs to attract attention
- Host an “open house” for members of a particular group in an agency where you worked – talk up NARFE and it’s objectives and offer membership materials
- Participate in local Senior Expos/Events
- Participate in local agency “Open Season” Health Fair Events
- Hold a Free BBQ for CFE members and encourage them to bring co-workers

WHAT IDEAS DO YOU HAVE FOR MEMBERSHIP RETENTION?

- Notify any members who have dropped out & invite them to continue with a warm letter
- Try a nice gentle phone call to those in arrears
- Include retention problems in District meetings
- Send a thank you upon renewal
- Involve members who are losing interest i.e.- appoint to boards or committee
- Do a survey to determine what members want
- Prepare an aggressive chapter plan for dues withholding
- Let the membership know what has and is being done for them by NARFE
- Impress on members the savings of dues withholding
- Call all new members that are recruited by Headquarters
- Identify and study the issues which maybe causing members to walk away
- Make dues withholding easier by Chapter Treasurer paying member who signs up and then consolidate forms to CSFC Treasurer for reimbursement to Chapter
- Set up a District Chapter, reduced rates, provide newsletter for information, two meetings a year
- Two way Communications with working federal employees by e-mail, phone and USPS
- Listen to members suggestions
- Get members actively involved as soon as possible after joining
- Establish a Chapter Welcome Committee
- Have special awards/award ceremonies for officers, committee chairs, AND members who perform in an outstanding and effective manner
- Ask members what they want regarding meeting format

WHAT ARE SOME IDEAS YOU HAVE USED FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH?

- Positive letters to the editor of local papers by mail, phone or e-mail
- Have “Information Tables” at community events i.e.: Senior Center Events and local Fairs

- Provide staffing at congressional elections
- Give donations to community organizations and be sure they are publicized
- Provide Public Service Announcements on every meeting and event
- Donate scholarships and publicize
- Support Alzheimer's by collecting aluminum cans and plastic bottles
- "Play it again can" for Habitat for Humanity
- Participate in Community Service such as: Foster Grandparents, Meals on Wheels, local Alzheimer's Walks, Reading to students at a school or library, Respite Care Centers for Alzheimer's patients, etc. and obtain publicity in local newspaper

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE OUR NEWSLETTERS?

- Use the internet & e-mail for cost savings
- Add a page or column for "FERS" information for active employees
- Go for more interesting and better information
- Edit, Edit and Edit some more
- Get ideas by exchanging newsletters with other chapters in the District or Federation
- Go to every other month if cost and work is a burden
- Eliminate typographic errors (typos) and make sure font type is large enough
- Get Sponsors to support the newsletter, ask members to support sponsors
- Eliminate blank spaces – but don't use off color or ethnic jokes or stories as fillers – often they offend members
- Utilize information from Federation Web Site and/or National Web Site to stimulate new ideas and interest
- Utilize newsletter to explain duties and responsibilities of each office to encourage member participation

WHAT SUCCESS HAS YOUR CHAPTER HAD WITH FUND RAISING?

- Collect aluminum cans from your Chapter members for a local charity
- Bus trips can be fun & a portion of proceeds can go to the Chapter, try Collette Trips
- Try a Casino Bus Trip
- Have a 50/50 drawing
- Start a "Happy Dollar" time at meetings, members pay \$1 to brag or mention something they have done
- Have a Casino Night or Bingo Party
- 50/50 winners by guessing who the "mystery person" is in a photo brought in by a member
- Hold a "no bake, bake sale"
- Sell Sees Candy, (Sees will sell to Chapter at a reduced price.)
- Help with a Community event where participants are paid
- Include envelopes in newsletters for food banks or other charities
- Have a Yard Sale
- Bring recycling items to meeting, have a member in charge, it need not be every month
- Have a "No Host" Yard Sale with a donation box
- Start with the alphabet ABC next DEF, etc., and have the alphabet donate a cake each meeting, Sell Coffee and cake for \$1.00
- Give a Talent Show for the Community, member(s) write script, produce and direct

HOW CAN WE GET CHAPTER OFFICERS?

- Share the duties, divide duties that seem overwhelming among several members
- Ask at a meeting if a member might be interested in serving
- Offer a new member a job
- Ask a member one on one to take a position, explain time and duties
- Develop an “elect” position for each office so a member can learn the job and be ready to take over that position
- Rotate officers to eliminate “burnout”
- Put each position in a hat and have members draw their assignment – if they don’t like that assignment – work out an exchange with another member
- Call a member you know and ask them to get involved
- Have new members complete a survey inviting them to become involved immediately by serving on a committee
- Identify members who seem interested through their questions/participation and ask them to take an office
- Include a brief description of each assignment in the chapter with the new member packet, along with a “volunteer” sheet
- Hold “Mini” training sessions at each meeting on the duties and responsibilities of each assignment
- Have the chapter executive board review the membership roster for members they know or have worked with and identify those who have potential for holding an office
- Rotate the Presidency monthly by allowing members to “run” the meeting to get the experience
- Borrow a current or recent officer from another chapter for a limited term
- Place new members on standing committees as soon as they join the chapter
- Enlist a current officer to serve as a transition officer for XXX months
- Locate a nearby chapter willing to act as a “sister” chapter
- Seek the background of new members to help suggest chapter jobs they might be interested in
- Inquire if CFEs would consider a leadership position
- Consider President of the Month
- Send a “NARFE Needs You” survey to identified candidates selected by members of the board from review of the M114
- Identify and cultivate future leaders
- Prepare clear position descriptions, which include approximate time needed to fulfill the responsibilities
- Minimize leaders’ work via e-mail, databases, and word processors
- Institute a “buddy” system where former chapter leaders or others with strong leadership skills are paired with new leaders
- Offer a training session that offers practice in conducting a meeting, public speaking, working with others, understanding the chapter’s bylaws, etc.
- Have two or more members with a proven track record of achievement and sincerity visit the potential volunteer, share experience in leadership and offer to help
- Set term limits
- Focus on “team” building – chapter leadership as a whole
- Let members know they are welcome to become an officer and they will be assisted
- Have an assistant position for each office
- Rotate members monthly or quarterly through the presidency