

American Legion Auxiliary

Benefits of National Executive Committee Member Serving Longer Than a Single One-Year Term

The National Executive Committee (NEC), the national governing board of the American Legion Auxiliary, includes representatives from 52 departments. Traditionally, most NEC members are limited to a single one-year term. The external audit firm to the American Legion Auxiliary National organizational has long recommended that departments consider allowing their NEC members to serve longer than a single one-year term in order to improve board proficiency. The top ten reasons why moving to longer service by an NEC Member is good:

- 1) "Continuity" of board expertise is the most important justification for members of the NEC serving terms longer than one year. Serving for only 1 year doesn't truly allow most NEC members to become familiar and comfortable with their responsibilities. Serving as a member of the NEC requires a learning curve – training regarding a governing board member's fiduciary, policy, and strategic responsibility for the organization.
- 2) Being knowledgeable about ongoing programs and issues in the ALA is of utmost importance. Allowing for an NEC member to serve more than a single one-year term can be accomplished several ways, e.g. allowing an NEC member to serve longer than a single 1-year term (multiple consecutive 1-yr terms); a 2-year term; a multiple-year term greater than two years; or more than a single multiple-year term. Term limits may be considered.
- 3) As a corporate director of the organization, a member of the NEC is responsible for ensuring that the NEC fulfills its two major responsibilities: 1) that the organization has adequate resources to fulfill its mission, and 2) that the organization adheres to legal standards and ethical norms. The personal liability for this corporate responsibility may be intimidating to some, particularly those lacking understanding of the role of the NEC as a body and of each NEC member's personal duty of care for the ALA's financial health and reputation.
- 4) The NEC is responsible for adopting the annual budget for the National Organization, adopting policies and standing rules, reviewing financial statements and memorandums of understanding, accepting the national annual audit, ratifying committees, confirming nominations of the National Secretary and the National Treasurer, confirming committee and other national appointments, levying assessments as needed, ratifying the cancellation of unit charters, providing appropriate oversight of the executive committee to the NEC (an intermediate body that assists the NEC and is accountable to the NEC), as well as other duties and responsibilities that are normal functions of a corporate board of directors. Members of the NEC must be familiar with and be willing to accept these responsibilities.
- 5) Given that most NEC members are former Department presidents, and given that a historical practice in the ALA culture is to select national leaders from among those who have served as a Department president, most NEC members are hesitant to ask questions or voice an opinion on an issue for fear they will not be considered for a national appointment the following year. To be effective as a member of the governing board, NEC members must be knowledgeable and willing to ask questions and offer suggestions. Longer terms would counter the hesitation of an NEC member to engage in board discussion.
- 6) Skills and knowledge are important for the position of NEC member. The practice of affording a Department president an automatic 1-year appointment to the NEC does not necessarily equate to the person having the skills and knowledge needed to serve on a board of a multi-million dollar corporation.
- 7) Candidates who actually run for the positions of elected NEC members would likely be those who are sincerely interested in serving and fulfilling the responsibilities of fiduciary stewardship and strategic direction.
- 8) Many Departments automatically elect their outgoing Department president as the Department's NEC member, yet some outgoing Department presidents actually have no desire to serve in this capacity on the national level.
- 9) An additional responsibility of the NEC is to address and take action as needed on questions affecting the election, conduct, and capacity of national officers. When circumstances so warrant, the NEC is responsible for establishing and implementing the process for making a determination that a national officer or a national committee member is unable to discharge the duties of that national office.
- 10) Members of the NEC need to be motivated to serve in this capacity and willing to acquire the knowledge needed. An NEC member is required to travel to NEC meetings as scheduled (minimum of 3 times per administrative year); persons unable or unwilling to travel are not able to fulfill their responsibility to the board. Board expertise is enhanced by motivated members willing to learn and able to participate to gain experience.