# National Federation of the Blind Membership Practices Overview for Affiliates

*Updated February 26, 2024*

This technical assistance document for affiliates of the National Federation of the Blind is intended to articulate practices consistent with the national constitution and other practices adopted by the organization and affirmed by the board of directors. It is intended to document the spirit, intent, and practice behind membership in our movement. It should guide local practices and training for leaders regarding membership. It shall also govern the management of membership data and validation of members for voting purposes. It should be noted that affiliates have responsibility to manage membership in accordance with organizational practices and to provide guidance to affiliate members regarding the practices of the affiliate.

## General Principles of Membership:

* Everything we do is built upon membership; thus, we want as many blind people as possible to understand and experience being a member of our movement.
* We have an open membership policy which means we do not limit participation in membership based upon any other characteristics. We seek diversity. We strive to make participating in the movement accessible to all.
* We are driven by the hopes and dreams of blind people. Thus, a majority of our members must be blind, at least a majority of each of our governing boards—at all levels—must be comprised of blind people, and our presidents and vice presidents must be blind. The only exception are our divisions for parents of blind children and educators of blind children.
* We believe in an active member standard. This means an individual has paid their dues for that year, they are in good standing, and they participate in some meaningful work of the movement during the year.
* Membership runs the calendar year and is effective during the year for which one has paid dues. Membership status is in effect at the level of the organization where one joins and at all higher levels (membership never extends to lower levels).
* Membership is specifically governed by constitutions. Chapter, division, and affiliate constitutions must be filed and approved by the national organization including all amendments.

## Membership Requirements:

* Pay dues each year.
* Continue to commit to the NFB Pledge.
* Participate actively in at least one significant activity of the organization during the year. Paying dues is not enough.
* New members must be voted in by the membership. All members must remain in good standing. Failure to remain in good standing or to pay dues for two consecutive years will result in the need for an affirmative vote to be taken to restore membership rights and privileges.
* The determination of good standing is set by the membership and should, at a minimum, be what is outlined in the organization's code of conduct.
* Federation members may participate in other organizations of the blind that might exist. Members of other organizations are warmly invited and encouraged to learn about the Federation in order to make an informed decision about joining the Federation. Federation members seeking to serve in elected offices anywhere in the organization may not be a member of another blindness organization that has policies in opposition to those of the National Federation of the Blind or in contravention to its constitution. This must be the case when an individual stands for election within the organization and during the entire time they serve in an elected office within the Federation.

### New Members

A new member is an individual who has paid dues to join the Federation at any level and who has been determined not to have been a member, anywhere in the Federation, for two consecutive years or more. This determination might be made through conversation with the prospective member and/or through use of our database. When an individual moves to a new chapter/affiliate/division, they should be voted into that unit of the Federation—but they would only be a "new" member if they have not been active for two years or more. It should be noted that individuals who have only been a member of a national division will not be integrated into the new member process. Thus, affiliates/chapters should work to welcome new members in and include them in the new member onboarding process.

## Affiliate Members (generally, three types):

1. Local chapter members, including at-large chapter members
2. Affiliate division members
3. At-large affiliate members (alternatively some affiliates choose to organize these members into an at-large chapter)

## Common Membership Policies That Apply in Every Affiliate:

* Membership year must align to calendar year. (Example: 2020 membership is January 1-December 31, 2020.) Affiliates/chapters have discretion as to when to start accepting dues for the year (e.g., some chapters grant new members who join in October membership for the final three months of the year as well as the next full membership year). Affiliates should define this for their organizations.
* Affiliates are responsible for providing an accurate membership list to the national organization upon request—this is documented through the Membership Management module.
* Manage lifetime membership structure in affiliates. Affiliates should phase out permitting people to buy membership that lasts forever unless they are prepared to carefully manage and track these memberships. For those with existing lifetime memberships, governing boards should track and determine that those individuals continue to be active in the affiliate/chapter. The two-year standard should be applied to lifetime members—if you are not active in the affiliate your lifetime membership lapses. Affiliate conventions may wish to establish an honorary process for conferring lifetime membership on long-serving members. Affiliates should clarify that lifetime membership does not transfer to other affiliates.
* Members need to be voted in when they first join, and the vote must be recorded in official meeting minutes (chapter meeting, division business meeting, affiliate board meeting, or state convention business meeting).
* Membership in multiple affiliates: An affiliate should make a positive determination about accepting members whose residence is outside the state. If the affiliate votes on it, the affiliate makes the decision about the exceptions. The objective of affiliates is for the blind residents of that state to direct the policies and elect the leaders for the blind of that state.
* Membership in one Federation affiliate does not grant automatic membership in another affiliate for voting purposes. Federation meetings are open, thus, members are always welcome to attend public meetings where they are not active members.
* Affiliates are required to utilize the national new membership process.
* Modify associate membership (supporting membership) as a category authorized in the constitution. Boards should consider carefully how to appropriately acknowledge financial contributors. It is recommended that we no longer use the word “membership” to describe their distinction in the organization. A suggestion is Federation Friends.
* Affiliates decide when dues need to be paid in order to be eligible to vote in business meetings. We want to welcome people to be members. We also need to validate who is a member for voting purposes. Once a business meeting starts, people should not be permitted to join. (If they do, their membership takes effect after the business meeting closes. We should use the business meeting to vote new members in.)