

NAC Membership Committee Report - June 2020 (dated 14 June 2020)

Membership Committee

The activity of this committee has been dormant until end-January 2020. However, while the committee chair position was not filled until end-January 2020, there has been a good deal of membership related activity since the 2019 AGM.

The new Chair of the NAC Membership Committee is King Wan. He is supported by committee member Mark Phillips – NAC National BOD member and NAC-TO President). This committee will be activity soliciting committee members from each Branch in the near future and has only recently stood up (late Jan 2020) with the Chair position having been vacant since Canon (ret'd) Bill Thomas retired post-AGM 2019.

Membership Registration and Common Payment System

Since the June 2019 AGM, the focus of effort at National level has been the creation of a template for a National membership database using the software application WildApricot. This has been targeted at the largest branches, NAC-O and NAC-VI Thanks to a big effort by Gerry Powell (NAC-O), supported by Bill MacDonald (NAC-VI) this task has been largely completed. While NAC-O has used the system for well over a year, the next stage is for NAC-VI to get it working for their branch.

Over this coming year, the intent is to populate the system with member information from all branches to create a complete National members database. To date nearly 80 percent of NAC members are in the database. The system can be used for a variety of branch and National applications including event registration, member focussed emails such as NAC News, branch newsletters, event registration among other uses. The cost of the system will be borne by the National office. More to follow in regard training/informing members how to use the system.

The one remaining shortcoming is to establish a modern payment system, to include electronic payment, for such NAC needs such as membership renewal and event registration/payment. This has proven to be more complex than originally envisaged. One hurdle to overcome is the fact that most branches have a wide-variety of membership categories and associated dues. Over the next several months the Membership committee will work with branch representatives to resolve these differences where possible. The intent would be that members pay their membership renewals (National and branch) through the National portal and the branch portion would be transferred to the branch. If all works for the best, the transfer of branch dues/funds could happen in near real time or with some other routine transfer schedule, as well as National issuing the tax receipts to members. **This does not mean that branches will no longer be involved in recruiting and retaining members.** In the end, seeking out new and retaining current members is a person-to-person engagement best done at the branch level.

NAC Membership Numbers

As of 31 December 2019, NAC had approximately 850 members. Essentially we “holding our own”.

Member Value Proposition Status

A number of initiatives have been undertaken or were explored in the past year. This remains, very much a work in progress. Why does this matter? I have been asked what does the individual member receive - “what do I get from my dues”. The following is a summary of benefits as well as discussion points and where we must “move” forward.

Starshell - continues to be the NAC national publication. Over the past year the publication has assumed a more balanced approach to cover more recent past, current, and forward looking naval and maritime related issues as well as the past. In addition, it continues to serve as a member -event related magazine. The challenge will be to increase its distribution to the public, especially Government officials and other like-minded groups. One fundamental challenge is encouraging members (and branches) to contribute articles and other media for Starshell.

NAC News – this continues to be very popular. Readership is in the order of 55% (out of some 820 subscribers) which is considered very good for this type of medium. Based on your executive director’s assessment of the 55% who read “The News”, approximately 80% are regular readers.

NAC website – this was subject of a major revision and has been “tweaked” over the past year. NAC National is now hosting several branch websites (the branch is responsible to generate their material). A major focus for the site update was for Naval Affairs. While much well-researched and current material is posted there, the challenge is to gain an audience. This is a challenge as maritime related issues are not in the public eye very often in Canada so how to address this will be the focus of the marketing plan (see below). Essentially we must “get the word out”. To note - the Canadian Naval Review website has been posting NAC naval affairs generated briefing notes and Niobe papers on its webpages. This is good news. NAC provides financial support to CNR’s publication annually. Finally I want to work this year to make sure we make better use of our “Events” calendar – it could be much more effective.

Events – one major benefit of your membership is access to events such as conference, which may be local or national in scope. The Battle of the Atlantic Gala Dinner is a major fundraiser for the naval affairs program and one of the major attractions is that it allows the Navy senior leadership, Government officials and politicians and Industry, among other attendees to meet in a social setting while recognizing the achievements of the RCN in the past and present. Sponsorship is critical for our survival as an organization, not just our naval affairs program but our member publications such as Starshell. Our conferences, local and national provide the opportunity for you the member to become better informed of a variety of maritime and naval related subjects. We think these initiatives are good value but these cannot occur without sponsorship and marketing. Unfortunately for 2020 COVID-19 has had a major impact on our fundraising event opportunities.

Marketing – focus is to increase awareness of NAC and why NAC matters in order to establish NAC as a credible source for information on the need for the RCN and awareness of Canadian maritime security related issues including the importance of maritime trade for Canada’s high quality of life. In the coming months, NAC will be soliciting professional media

assistance for this to scope out an affordable to do this. We need to be more media savvy and employ some expertise.

Corporate membership – It is becoming increasingly clear that in the short term (next 2-3 years for sure) that individual member dues and donations will not be suffice to support NAC day-to-day operations, let alone a naval affairs program or other initiatives without sponsorship. The National BOD is currently under investigation as to how best do this and allow for corporate sponsorship. Questions to be resolved include do we treat these as NAC members or perhaps as partners. Do we need a corporate member category or do we consider a corporate member as a supporting/partner organization and offer the corporation a number of individual memberships, based on the amount of their donation, to persons in their company who are interested in NAC activities. The corporation itself, would not have a vote at the AGM. This issue remains a work-in-progress.

Distribution of electronic recordings of NAC events (National and Branch) – during the past two months NAC-O has conducted its monthly meetings using a social media tool, GoToMeeting, in a similar manner to other like-minded associations such as RUSI(NS). These events have been remarkably successful and attracted the participation of NAC members from across the country. The intent is to continue this practice with the aim of allowing other branches/members access in real time or being able to view the event time-late. NAC National is assessing what product is best value and will pay the associated fees. This is considered to be of considerable “value-added” benefit to NAC members. The intent is that all branches will be able to use the media tool and National will pay for the service. As another example, the recent Oct 2019 NOABC 100th anniversary conference had perhaps the best analysis and background I have heard to date in regard Canada-China relationships with world-class speakers at a fraction of the cost of similar and less informative events. It was a pity we were unable to record and share this to all National members – this was truly a big missed opportunity!

Other Items – the NAC BODs approved a new NAC logo in January 2020. In the coming weeks it is intended to produce a lapel pin for all members as well as a membership card. Unfortunately, this was delayed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

2017 AGM Membership Committee Recommendation Scorecard

The following is an update of the Membership Committee recommendations (9) tabled at the 2017 October AGM in St. John’s: (some of these have been addressed above)

- 1. Offer increased value for the membership fee: by offering grants to Branches.** Budget priorities in the face of declining income, and difficulties in defining criteria and purposes of these grants, has delayed implementation of this recommendation. – **Not agreed for implementation (DS 2020).**
- 2. Planning for and training a successor to continue the distribution of the NAC News Links.** This has been accomplished most successfully in an expanded format by Rod Hughes, and has become for the majority of members a principal benefit of membership, as well as a solid recruiting tool. **In place – need to consider Hughes successor. (DS 2020)**

3. **Planning for and training a successor to continue the editing and distribution of STARSHELL.** While STARSHELL continues to be published, it faces the difficult decision faced by most print media arising from the cost of producing and mailing hard copies, and in recruiting and retaining an editor, with the skills and experience to guide the Board through this difficult assessment of value. (DS 2020 – Editor is Dr Adam Lajeunesse – Mulroney Institute St Francis of Xavier University)
4. **Planning for and training a successor to continue the editing of our National web site.** With assistance from Barry Walker, and contracted technical support, this function has been assumed by David Soule our Executive Director, and is showing steady improvement in content and quality. (DS 2020 – need to monitor web support services and quality)
5. **Preparing a “Membership Benefits” brochure template in digital form.** Based on some original and creative work done by the Calgary branch, a template was circulated in 1918 to all branches for local adaptation and use. A national form has been difficult to establish because of the great range of branch fees and membership categories. (DS 2020 – under consideration)
6. **Encouraging all Branches to turn over the collection of membership fees to the online process.** & (DS 2020 – see above under National Registration System)
7. **Using a Standard Form for online membership.** The complexity of Branch membership categories and fees has significantly delayed progress on this recommendation because of the technical difficulties involved, but it remains an objective of the Board. (DS 2020 – see above under National Registration System)
8. **Developing a “Departure Kit” promoting NAC membership to be delivered by Branches to their local Reserve Divisions and CF Bases as a gift to retiring members.** Discussion on this recommendation has expanded to include how to recruit from other like-minded institutions and organizations, and individuals who share in the vision, goals, and objectives of the Naval Association of Canada. (DS 2020 – based on branch annual reports this and other recruiting methods/opportunities have borne mixed results but must be pursued as best as possible)

Additional comments

Challenges – a quick review of individual branch reports for 2019 reveals most branches face an aging membership and additional efforts, some identified in the 2017 AGM report above, to attract members remains mixed if not elusive. We are well aware that relationships with local naval reserve units are mixed, many local branches are not located in communities like Victoria, Halifax or Ottawa so linking with the Navy is difficult, and in some cases members are spread across a large area (Toronto comes to mind). That said what we do know – it is the individual member who makes a difference in attracting folks to our organization. And we need you the member to be more active at the branch and nationally; no need to serve on the Board but you can support committees, tackle a project of interest to further the organization and address my major concern, the lack of depth /back-ups for folks in key positions.

Opportunities – over the past year the NAC national organization has moved forward to link

more closely with like-minded organization such as the Navy League of Canada (NLOC). The MOU that was signed between us, the “Canadian Maritime Security Alliance” offers an opportunity to work closely with those involved in NLOC’s maritime affairs program and perhaps share resources. The NAC leadership has developed a good working relationship with the RCN’s leadership. This is not just one-way. The RCN leadership has told us where their priorities lie and where they believe we can assist – i.e. get “the Word” out. This allows us to plan a better speakers program for example. All to say if you want to hear from the Navy’s senior leadership this working relationship can only help!

So what? For you the member it means we can develop, for example, a more wholesome program of guest speaker engagements, be seen to actively promote our message of informing Canadians about the need for a Navy, and recognize the RCN’s achievements. You may become aware of, and actively engage, in supporting a project sponsored by our Endowment Fund. Finally, we offer the opportunity through special national level events and local branch initiatives to engage in a social setting with those who have similar interests, socialize and network.

Respectfully Submitted,

David Soule
Executive Director – NAC