

Notes from the BAC meeting held on May 9th via Zoom, summarizing the main topics discussed. (AI generated from audio recording – as always, there may be errors!)

It was a productive meeting focusing on several key challenges and opportunities facing the organization. Rich opened the discussion by sharing feedback he had received, particularly highlighting comments from Tom Palmer and Carlos Xavier, setting the stage for the main points of conversation.

Here's a summary of the key areas we covered:

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Volunteerism and Staffing Needs: A significant point of discussion revolved around the challenges of attracting volunteers at the state level. Feedback indicated a disconnect between local branch members and the state organization, with state often perceived as a detached entity. It was noted that volunteers doing the most work at the branch level already have full plates, making it difficult to step up for state roles. The lack of volunteers at the state level creates a heavy workload for those currently serving, with some putting in 30-40 hours a week, which is unsustainable for a retired/semi-retired group. This shortage necessitates considering hiring paid staff (like an Executive Director, IT support, or legal assistant), although feedback suggests members don't want to pay for an Executive Director. There's a concern that if state-level volunteering becomes too burdensome, volunteer numbers could decrease further. The lack of branch volunteers directly impacts the need for increased assessments to fund paid help. It was emphasized that the solution to the volunteer issue ultimately lies with the branches, as they are the source of volunteers and future leaders.

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Communication and Relationship between State and Branches: There was a clear acknowledgment of a perceived barrier and disconnect between the state organization and its branches. Some members view the state as being in an "ivory tower" or an "obscure overlord". Improving communication and building trust is a major goal of the BAC. Area Representatives (ARs) were identified as the strength and primary conduit for communication to the branches. However, difficulties in finding volunteers for AR positions were noted, and state officers often filling these roles are too busy to do so effectively. Branches are eager for information from the state. It was suggested that communication needs to be more consistent and flow both ways. A challenge exists in communicating with branches that are not participating in the BAC. Some long-standing negative opinions about the state organization were mentioned, highlighting the need to better explain state's purpose and activities. Visiting branches, understanding their specific needs, and acting as consultants was seen as a key role for ARs.

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The Form 65 Submission Process: This came up as a specific example of communication challenges and member reluctance. The purpose of Form 65 is to collect a complete membership list with emails for state communication and eligibility for events like NCGA tournaments. A significant number of branches (about a third) have not submitted the form. Reluctance stems partly from privacy concerns and fears about data security, although it was noted that much personal information is already publicly available online. State requires names and numbers for insurance purposes, even if members opt-out of email use. The due date was intentionally changed to April 15th to get a firm membership count after renewals. There seemed to be some confusion or lack of awareness among branches and ARs about this change.

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Marketing and Attracting New Members: The discussion touched on the urgency needed in marketing and emphasizing that the organization is branch-led. There's a focus on attracting younger members, specifically those in their 60s, but understanding this generation is challenging. New marketing approaches are needed, as traditional materials may not resonate with this age group. State-level marketing efforts are a high priority to develop methods branches can use. The fundamental solution for membership growth and leadership comes from the branches.

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Future Structure and Benefits of the Organization: The potential need to consider significant structural changes, including hiring paid staff, was linked to the success (or lack thereof) in improving volunteerism and membership. Funding paid staff would likely require seeking grants and other income sources beyond current branch assessments. An alternative discussed was a move towards a more decentralized, confederation-like structure with minimal state management, potentially impacting statewide programs. The crucial benefits of participation in the organization were highlighted, drawing on studies showing that social engagement, physical activity, and mental stimulation contribute significantly to living longer, healthier lives (potentially 5-10 years more). This health benefit, particularly for cognitive function, was suggested as a compelling point to market, especially to men in their 60s and 70s.

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Website Passwords and Security Alerts: New passwords for the state website member directory and other areas were announced, effective June 30th. An alert was given regarding potential scams using QR codes and official-looking requests for payment for filing branch SI 100 forms (which SIR State handles).

Overall, the meeting underscored the importance of improving communication between state and branches, addressing the volunteer shortage, and highlighting the unique benefits of the organization to attract new members and leaders.

Here is a summary of the activities and responsibilities agreed upon or noted during the meeting:

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Provide support/presentation on Form 65 to Branch 106: Rich offered to join Michael Gardner's branch board or members for a conversation to clarify the Form 65 requirements and address privacy concerns.

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Responsible: Rich (or another state representative), coordinated with Michael Gardner.

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Share State Board Meeting Summaries with ARs: Derek generates summaries quickly after board meetings. It was agreed that these summaries would be helpful for ARs to communicate important state information to their branches. Rich will facilitate sending out Derek's summary.

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Responsible: Derek (generates), Rich (will distribute to BAC and Fred for ARs).

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Explore Recruitment Strategies for Area Representatives: Rich will discuss with Lee (the VP responsible for ARs) the idea of personally tapping former Big Sirs as potential candidates for the AR role.

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Responsible: Rich.

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Area 2 AR Outreach and Information Gathering: Mark Stewart as the AR for Area 2 is reaching out to branches. John Oberg committed to sending Mark a couple of months of his branch's minutes to help him get caught up.

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Responsible: Mark Stewart (outreach), John Oberg (provide minutes).

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Share Information on SIR Benefits: Neil's article on the benefits of SIR, particularly cognitive function, was discussed as a useful resource. Derek's AI summary on the health benefits was also mentioned. Sharing this information more widely was requested.

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Responsible: Neil (article exists), Rich/Derek (will share Derek's AI summary with BAC and Fred for distribution).

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Develop Program on QR Code Scam Protection: Based on emerging scams, Rich plans to work with the IT people to create a program educating members on how to protect themselves from fraudulent QR codes.

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Responsible: Rich (with IT people).

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Alert Branches to SI 100 Filing Scam: Rich alerted attendees to outside firms sending official-looking requests for payment for SI 100 filings, emphasizing that state handles this and branches should disregard or forward such requests.

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Responsible: Rich (alerted group, ongoing communication needed).