

# Updating Our Constitution

**B**elow are the changes proposed last spring by the Board of Directors to the Constitution of the National Forensic League d.b.a. the National Speech & Debate Association, and approved by the voting membership. We are excited to share our plans for implementing these changes with our membership.

These updates will allow us to prioritize meeting our fiduciary responsibilities as the organization grows to ensure that our core mission and strategic objectives are met, while maintaining the financial stability necessary to keep membership affordable.



## Approved Amendment to Article III-A1 Membership Eligibility

**Overview:** The approved amendment gives schools the ability to determine when students become members. Instead of requiring that a student achieve the Degree of Merit and a scholastic ranking in the upper two thirds of their class, membership will be gained by affirmation from the administration and/or school advisor that the student has met appropriate academic standards established by the individual school and has represented character reflective of the Honor Code of the Association. The Degree of Merit will still be required for students to participate in NSDA District and National competition and will remain the first Degree of membership strength. This approved change expands access to membership benefits and allows the administration and advisers at a member school to determine the appropriate academic standard and character reflective of the NSDA Honor Code to warrant participation in the Association.

**✓ Voting result:** 73% in favor, 27% against

**⚙️ Timeline:** *No change this year. Membership at the discretion of the school, concurring with registration and payment, will be in place for the 2017-2018 school year.*

### Former language:

1. Eligibility. Any instructor or student in a school holding membership in the National Speech & Debate Association, who has participated in high school speech activities to the extent of qualifying for the Degree of Merit, and who, if a student, ranks scholastically in the upper two thirds of his/her class, shall be eligible to become a member of the National Speech & Debate Association. A person who has participated in high school speech activities, but has not otherwise qualified, may be elected if the Board of Directors concurs.

### Approved language:

1. Eligibility. Any instructor or student in a school holding membership in the National Speech & Debate Association, who is deemed worthy of membership by the administration of their school, and who, if a student, has participated in high school speech activities, has represented high academic standards and character reflective of the Honor Code of the Association, and has paid the membership fee, shall be eligible to become a member of the National Speech & Debate Association. A majority of the Board of Directors may elect anyone for membership.

## Constitutional Timeline

1925

The Association's Constitution was first established in 1925 and has been amended periodically by its members. Amendments to the Constitution require a majority vote in favor of any approved core change.

*In the 2015 membership survey, a significant number of respondents expressed a desire for the organization to demonstrate inclusiveness and equity, as well as to increase access to the benefits of membership.*

2015

MAR 2016

The NSDA hosted an online membership Q&A about the proposed amendments on Thursday, March 31, 2016.



## Approved Amendment to Article IV Credit Points

**Overview:** The approved amendment will allow the Board of Directors to adjust credit point allocations within various competitive areas and events as required by growth and trends in the activity at the local, state, and national level. Currently, the NSDA Constitution severely limits the ability of the organization to adjust credit point allocation for various activities. The proposed amendment would lift those restrictions by allowing the Board of Directors to determine appropriate rules, procedures, and guidelines on credit points moving forward.

✓ **Voting result:** 77% in favor, 23% against

⚙️ **Timeline:** *No changes in credit point allocations are planned prior to Fall of 2017. Any changes will be announced in future issues of Rostrum and other membership communications.*

### Approved amendment to add language:

#### G. Credit Points - Allocation Determination

Credit point allocation shall be determined by majority consent of the Board of Directors and shall be published in the official chapter manual(s) of the organization.



## Approved Amendment to Article V-D1/2 Voting Strength

**Overview:** The approved amendment changes the current weighted voting system to a “one member, one vote” and “one school, one vote” model. The current weighted voting system is one of inherent biases that leads to unequal voice and representation. By moving to a system where each individual member and each member school is afforded the same voice through equal voting weight, the organization can advance its goals of inclusion and equity.

✓ **Voting result:** 52% in favor, 48% against \*

⚙️ **Timeline:** *The “one school, one vote” model will be implemented in Spring 2017 for district and national elections. At that time, district leaders will also be elected for two year terms to lend more stability and continuity into district tournament preparation, district communication, and other district efforts.*

\* Note: 66% of total schools voted in favor of the voting strength amendment, compared to the 52% of total strength-based votes in favor. This is the only amendment vote where the results of the strength-based vote and the school-based vote varied more than 2%.

### Former language:

#### D. Votes

1. Number. The number of votes cast by each member shall be: One, if s/he holds the Degree of Merit; Two, if the Degree of Honor; Three, if the Degree of Excellence; Four, if the Degree of Distinction; Five, if the Degree of Special Distinction; Six, if the Degree of Superior Distinction; Seven, if the Degree of Outstanding Distinction, and Eight, if the Degree of Premier Distinction. Instructors shall cast one additional vote for each diamond awarded them.
2. Chapter Strength. The total number of active degrees possessed by a chapter determines strength of its vote in district and national matters. Provisional and member chapters are granted voting privileges at one-half of their degree strength.

### Approved language:

#### D. Votes

1. Number. The number of votes cast by each member shall be one, if they hold the Degree of Merit or higher.
2. Chapter Strength. Each active member school shall have one vote in district and national matters.

The national Board election was conducted by electronic balloting in conjunction with the constitutional referendum beginning April 4, 2016.



In April, a total of 730 member chapters, representing a total voting strength of 115,882, cast a ballot on the proposed Constitutional amendments. In order to pass, an amendment must have received at least 57,941 votes.




Official, audited results from the referendum were released in the District Leader Newsletter on May 9, 2016.



## Amendment to Article VII-B Board of Directors

**Overview:** As the organization grows in size and scope, it is necessary to evaluate its national leadership structure. Giving the Board of Directors the ability to change its size and makeup in the future can improve representation, ensure fulfillment of responsibilities, and diversify voice. The approved amendment below will allow the Board of Directors to adjust its size and scope as determined by the Board. The amendment allows for additional elected Board members, if needed, to ensure proper representation of the membership. It also allows the Board to appoint members with additional expertise, similar to the existing administrative representative, to navigate its legal, financial, strategic, and administrative responsibilities. The terms of appointed Board members would remain at two years.

 **Voting result:** 74% in favor, 26% against

 **Timeline:** The Board of Directors will initiate board expansion efforts, including evaluating capable experts who can provide a service to the speech and debate community, at the Fall Board Meeting. The Board's intent is to maintain a majority of elected leaders on the Board.

### Former language:

1. Personnel. The Board of Directors consists of a president, vice president, six directors, and one representative from secondary school administrators.

### Approved language:

1. Personnel. The Board of Directors consists of a president, vice president, at least six elected directors, one representative from secondary school administrators, and additional Board appointed directors. The number of Board appointed directors is not to be equal to or greater

than the total number of elected directors. Appointed directors are not eligible to be president or vice president. The Board, by majority vote, may expand or decrease the number of elected and appointed directors as long as the action does not violate the above provisions.

### Former language:

2. Election. Eight directors and an alternate director shall be chosen by the active members in even numbered years in such manner as the Board of Directors shall prescribe. The Board will elect the president and vice president. In odd numbered years, the Board shall elect a school administrator as a director.


### Approved language:

2. Election. Eight directors and an alternate director shall be chosen by the active members in even numbered years in such manner as the Board of Directors shall prescribe. The Board will elect the president and vice president from the elected directors. The Board shall elect a school administrator and any additional appointed directors.

### Former language:

3. Terms. In the 1992 election, the four candidates receiving the highest number of votes will be elected for four-year terms. The next four candidates will be elected for two-year terms. The candidate finishing ninth will be alternate for two years. In 1994 and subsequently, the four candidates receiving the most votes will be elected to a four-year term. The fifth candidate will be the alternative for two years.

### Approved language:

3. Terms. Elected directors shall serve four-year terms. Fifty percent of the elected directors shall be determined in each even numbered year. The fifth placed candidate will be the alternative for two years. Appointed directors shall serve terms of two years. 

## MISSION

The National Speech & Debate Association believes communication skills are essential for empowering youth to become engaged citizens, skilled professionals, and honorable leaders in our global society. We connect, support, and inspire a diverse community of honor society members committed to fostering excellence in young people through competitive speech and debate activities.

## VISION

We envision a world in which every student has access to competitive speech and debate activities. We are the leading voice in the development of resources, competitive and ethical standards, curricular and co-curricular opportunities, and recognition systems for our vast network of student, coach, and alumni members.

To learn more, visit [www.speechanddebate.org](http://www.speechanddebate.org). Questions? Email [info@speechanddebate.org](mailto:info@speechanddebate.org) or call (920) 748-6206.