

WHAT DOES NFPA DO FOR YOU?

PART 1

By: Valerie A. Dolan, RP[®], Pa.C.P., Region IV Director

Founded in 1974, NFPA was the first national paralegal association. Created as a non-profit federation, NFPA is an issues-driven, policy-oriented professional association directed by its membership. It is comprised of member associations and represents approximately 10,000 individual members reflecting a broad range of experience, education and diversity. It was also the first national association to have a website (www.paralegals.org). NFPA's Mission Statement and Core Purpose delineate its dedication to the advancement of the paralegal profession and leadership in the legal community.

Since its inception, NFPA has assisted the profession in addressing many issues associated with the growth and expanded role of the paralegal, such as:

- § responded to the Department of Labor's 2003 proposed changes and updates to the regulations issued under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA);
- § worked with and testified before many organizations such as legislatures, bar association task forces, and court committees on issues related to paralegal participation in delivering legal services and the paralegal profession generally;
- § filed amicus briefs with courts throughout the United States on issues that could effect the paralegal profession;
- § participated in the ABA's Commission on Non-Lawyer Practice;
- § participated in the New Roles and the Law Conference in 1996;
- § created, developed and adopted the Paralegal Advanced Competency Exam[™] (PACE[®]) and the Paralegal CORE Competency Exam (PCCE[™]);
- § created position statements on non-lawyer practice, outsourcing of paralegal duties to foreign countries, short-term paralegal programs, and diversity.

The paralegal profession is facing many changes. NFPA members keep current and participate in these changes. As the leader of the paralegal profession, NFPA represents paralegals in many areas.

Monitor Legislative Activities - NFPA actively monitors legislative actions and proposed court changes. When necessary, NFPA responds with letters or by filing amicus briefs.

Present Testimony on Legislative Matters - NFPA will present written and oral testimony at government hearings and meetings held by local, state and national bar associations.

Representation - NFPA represents paralegals' interests by preparing letters and amicus briefs to educate attorneys and judges on the vital role played by paralegals in the delivery of quality legal services.

Professional and Ethics Issues - NFPA continues to research and analyze issues that affect the paralegal profession. Recent issues include exempt vs. non-exempt, ethics, recoverability of fees, and definitions of a paralegal.

Representation with National Legal Associations - NFPA works closely with the American Bar Association, (ABA), the American Association for Paralegal Education (AAfPE), the International Paralegal Managers Association (IPMA), and other legal national associations.

Committee and Commission Representation - NFPA sponsors a representative on the ABA's Approval Commission, which works with the ABA's Standing Committee on Legal Assistants.

Professional Development - As the profession evolves, paralegals can depend on NFPA to offer innovative opportunities for growth. Recent examples include on-line continuing legal education courses, courses of study in preparation for the Paralegal Advanced Competency Exam (PACE[®]) for becoming a PACE Registered Paralegal[®], and review/approval of textbooks and other reference materials for practicing paralegals and student paralegals.

Internet - The first professional legal organization to offer a server on the Internet, NFPA's www.paralegals.org provides viewers with information on areas such as continuing education, career issues, career development, and current legal activities.

PACE[®] - To support the expanded role of paralegals within the legal community, NFPA's membership voted to develop PACE. PACE allows experienced paralegals to validate job skills by becoming a PACE Registered Paralegal[®]. PACE[®] was developed by an independent testing firm.

Educational Issues - NFPA supports the growth and expansion of the paralegal profession by addressing educational issues for the practicing paralegal and paralegal students.

NFPA's Model Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility and Guidelines for Enforcement delineates the ethical guidelines and standards for conduct to which all paralegals should aspire. This document has received wide acceptance throughout the legal community. It expresses the commitment of NFPA's membership to increasing the quality and efficiency of

legal services and recognizes the profession's responsibility to the legal community and consumers. NFPA does not support the unauthorized practice of law. Further, NFPA provides its members with information related to decisions and changes in ethics rules and regulations on an ongoing basis, and the NFPA Ethics Board regularly submits opinions on relevant topics.

The Paralegal Advanced Competency Exam (PACE®) is a nationally recognized exam for experienced paralegals. Its purposes are: (a) to provide the groundwork for expanding paralegal roles and responsibilities; (b) to provide the public and legal community with a mechanism to gauge the competency of experienced paralegals; and (c) to be used in states considering the regulation of paralegals. Paralegals receive two major benefits by taking PACE. The exam (1) provides a fair evaluation of the competencies of paralegals across practice areas; and (2) creates a professional level of expertise by which all paralegals can be evaluated.

PACE presents a bold opportunity to all paralegals to advance the profession. This exam provides hard facts about the competency of experienced paralegals. While PACE® does not address all the issues of regulation, including certification and licensing, it does provide the legal service industry with an option to evaluate the competency level of experienced paralegals.

As members of a self-directed profession, all paralegals should consider the vital role the profession performs within the legal service industry. PACE® is independently monitored and well-structured. PACE® provides test results across practice. While the test is offered on a voluntary basis, all experienced paralegals are encouraged to sit for the exam.

The Paralegal CORE Competency Exam (PCCE™) was established, developed and implemented as a basic proficiency test for the paralegal profession. On-line applications have started as of October 31, 2011. It is a valid exam and any candidate with a passing score will be entitled to use the CORE Registered Paralegal (CRP) credential. The regular fee for the computer-based PCC Exam™ will be \$215.00. The full Handbook is available by download from the NFPA website.

NFPA endorses the implementation of paralegal regulation to establish standards for all paralegals on a state-by-state basis insofar as its implementation is consistent with NFPA's mission statement and expands the utilization of paralegals to deliver cost-efficient legal services. NFPA will actively promote regulation of the paralegal profession generally by providing information as to NFPA's preferred form of regulation of mandatory licensure and specialty licensure and its preference of a four-year degree being the requirement for entry into the paralegal profession. NFPA and its board of directors will not initiate the introduction of any proposal to regulate paralegals in any jurisdiction, but may educate and inform others regarding the existence, size, strength of NFPA, its regulation policy, and its resources. This includes, but is not limited to, NFPA's paralegal definition, education policy, minimum standards for paralegal regulation, publications, models promulgated, PACE®, etc. Further, NFPA may support only those regulation proposals which meet its minimum criteria for regulation and may not support opposition to any regulatory proposal consistent therewith.

NFPA holds a National Regulation Conference (in conjunction with Annual Joint Conference, which includes Certification and Leadership) periodically to assist you and your fellow paralegals to understand the issue of regulation. The Conference provides not only current information but also provides coaching on how to react to action taken in your state. Registration for the Regulation Conference is free for NFPA members and for a nominal fee for non-NFPA attendees. The conference will assist your local leaders and other interested members to be proactive and reactive to all forms of regulation.

Strategic alliances are an essential element to the advancement of the paralegal profession and an integral part of NFPA's strategic plan. Further, NFPA supports unity within the paralegal profession. To that end, NFPA maintains and promotes interaction with other paralegal associations and members of the legal community. Since 1986, NFPA has worked with the American Bar Association (ABA), the American Association for Paralegal Education (AAfPE), and others to develop a consensus on the issue of paralegal education and to discuss other issues affecting the paralegal profession. In addition, NFPA has a representative on the ABA Approval Commission which works with the ABA Standing Committee on Paralegals (SCOP) to evaluate paralegal education programs.

NFPA has a commitment to paralegal involvement in pro bono services and the delegates have adopted pro bono related agenda topics since 1979. With the legal needs of low-income individuals increasing, paralegal involvement in pro bono activities has become even more critical. Paralegals can benefit the community, the private bar, the judiciary, and the paralegal profession by volunteering of their time, abilities, and skills as trained legal professionals. Pro bono activities also give the local paralegal associations' greater visibility with bar associations, the judiciary and the public. NFPA has two distinct awards to acknowledge pro bono and community service. Every paralegal is encouraged to report their pro bono and community service hours to their local association's pro bono coordinator or to NFPA's pro bono coordinator if they have contributed a minimum of 24 hours.

WHAT DOES NFPA DO FOR YOU?

PART 2

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When you join one of NFPA's local associations, you automatically become a member of NFPA. A portion of the dues you pay to your local association paid to NFPA for each individual member. Accordingly, all members in your association are also automatically members of NFPA. You will receive all the individual members' benefits listed below.

Individual Involvement - Individuals can volunteer as much or as little time as they desire as a Coordinator or as a member of a Committee or as a member of the national Board of Directors. Members raise issues for research, study, and review by the appointed Coordinators and *ad hoc* committees. The entire membership will receive a report based on the data gathered by these groups. The issues may be raised during a national meeting. At the conventions, NFPA members adopt a democratic process of discussion, debate and vote to address the issues. Each local association, regardless of its size, has one vote. Individual members are also encouraged to participate in NFPA through submission of agenda topics for debate at conventions and participation on chats and list serves.

Internet Connection - The NFPA website, www.paralegals.org, offers individuals access to a wide variety of information on its public pages. NFPA members can view additional publications, conduct research, and learn about vendor services on members-only sections of the website.

Educational/Career Opportunities - Through the Website, www.paralegals.org, NFPA members can receive current information on issues affecting the paralegal profession and the legal community, learn about legislative activities, and learn about upcoming continuing education programs and NFPA seminars. Members can view seminars and job postings, and post their own confidential resume on NFPA's legal-specific Career Center.

E-Mail News Updates - NFPA sends regular e-newsletters to subscribers. These are short summaries of what is happening with NFPA and they supplement the *National Paralegal Reporter* to provide timely information about NFPA events and happenings. NFPA also sends relevant and timely email blasts of relevant information to our members in between issues of the E-Newsletter and *National Paralegal Reporter*.

Subscription to *National Paralegal Reporter*[®] - Members receive a subscription to this colorful, high-quality, bi-monthly publication that includes articles on timely career issues and updates on legislative activities.

Support for Individual Members - Members receive access to NFPA's extensive library on paralegal issues and reports on federal and state legislative activities. NFPA assists individuals in filing amicus briefs when the subject is deemed to have an impact on the paralegal profession.

Networking Opportunities - Members meet other paralegals and exchange ideas at national meetings, through local NFPA associations, social media (Facebook & Linked In), and networking groups offered through the Internet.

Discounts and Special Offers - Members can take advantage of preferred rates with many retailers and sites including: Walt Disney World Resort - 16 theme parks in the Orlando area; Dell products; 1-800-Flowers; Community America Credit Union; ExecuTrain Virtual Campus; SmartDraw Legal Solution software; CaseSoft software; and various other publications. NFPA has a Member Benefits Coordinator who is always seeking new and exciting member benefits so these change from time to time.

Member Recognition - Paralegal of the Year Award - This award is an opportunity to highlight the efficient, cost-effective service provided by paralegals. Persons are invited to describe specifically how they handle projects, manage time, and enhance client services. The winner may receive a trip to the annual convention, and the winner's essay is published in the *National Paralegal Reporter*. The accomplishments of these otherwise unheralded paralegals are publicized through press releases and acknowledged in publications throughout the legal field.

In addition to the individual benefits, when an individual joins a local or statewide association, the individual members receive benefits through their local or statewide association.

A Vote - Each member association, regardless of its size, has one direct national vote. Your association elects the President and the NFPA Board. It votes on positions and issues affecting NFPA and the profession, dues, and the annual budget. NFPA holds its Annual Convention in the fall each year. Each NFPA association is encouraged to send its Primary and Secondary Representatives to this convention. Thursdays of Convention weekend are usually reserved for seminars. The NFPA Board holds Board meetings on Thursday evening, Sunday after the conclusion of the convention and sometimes on the following Monday morning. Region Meetings are conducted on Friday. The Policy Meeting commences on Saturday morning and concludes on Sunday afternoon.

Timely Information - Your association will receive a report containing information about NFPA activities, ABA activities, and other national/local events affecting the profession, copies of recently published articles, and copies of other relevant activities.

Strong Associations - NFPA supports its member associations through its association assistance programs of: (a) networking with other member associations to share ideas and debate issues facing the paralegal profession; (b) internet connection through free hosting of home pages; (c) Association Management Conference Calls; and (d) assistance in general association management issues, financial issues, membership retention issues, leadership training, public relation efforts, pro bono activities and other areas.

NFPA and the Military

Members and Associations of NFPA have welcomed the Navy Legalmen Association into our fold, as well as individual military paralegals. Uniformed judge advocates are commissioned naval officers based throughout the world, ashore, and at sea who practice law, support the Navy and serve the Nation. The mission is critical to the success of military operations. The practice encompasses a broad array of law. Legalmen possess knowledge and expertise regarding military and civilian legal systems, and substantive and procedural law, which qualify them to perform the work of a legal nature under the supervision of an attorney. Knowledge, skills and abilities of a Legalman include the following: providing legal assistance in areas of the law such as wills and estates, consumer advocacy, landlord/tenant, immigration and naturalization, tax and family law, all of which include drafting and reviewing technical legal documents for attorney signature. Certain military justice duties include preparation of records and hearings, investigations, courts-martial and courts of inquiry, processing appeals, and the coordination of nonjudicial punishment hearings. Legalmen also act as trial paralegals for both trial and defense counsel. They receive extensive military justice training in administrative and civil law, substantive and procedural law, court-martial procedures, and nonjudicial punishment.

NFPA and its members participate in the Military Paralegal Outreach Program that seeks to unite paralegals serving overseas in the military with local paralegal associations by sending “care packages” to bring them a bit of home while away from their loved ones.

WHAT DOES NFPA DO FOR YOU?

PART 3

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As a member of NFPA, each Member Association receives the following additional benefits, that can be passed onto each Board member, Committee Chairperson and/or individual member:

Association Management Assistance - The Vice President and Director of Membership is responsible for overall association assistance programs in conjunction with the assistance provided by the Region Directors.

National Leadership Conference - NFPA holds an annual National Leadership Conference (in conjunction with Annual Joint Conference, which includes Certification and Regulation) to assist you and your fellow board members to prepare for your leadership roles. Dates are announced far in advance so you can obtain the lowest air fares, and NFPA arranges for the lowest possible hotel rates for attendees. Materials from the Leadership Conference are underwritten by NFPA or vendors. There is no registration fee. Your association is encouraged to send one or more representatives.

Leadership Workshops - Leadership Workshops are held periodically by the Region Directors, usually at Region Meetings and/or during the Annual Convention. Local leadership workshops are given upon request of an association or region or by decision of the NFPA Board.

Publications to Help You as a Leader of Your Association - NFPA has developed an Association Management Series of publications and articles including: (a) "A Guide to the Formation of an Organization;" (b) "A Guide to Public Relations for Organizations;" (c) "A Guide to Seminar Planning;" (d) "A Guide Concerning Legislative Issues;" (e) "A Guide to Membership Marketing Plans;" (f) "Membership Brochures and Applications;" (g) "Marketing NFPA to Individual Members," and (h) "What to Include in Your New Member Orientation Mailing."

Association Management Training - This provides the opportunity for an in-person training session with an experienced NFPA leader. Need help with your board retreat or strategic planning session? NFPA holds periodic association management training conference calls.

Networking by Areas of Responsibility - NFPA currently maintains listservs so that volunteers from member associations can share information with their counterparts from other member organizations. They are:

*Leaders2@list.paralegals.org - local association primaries, secondaries, and presidents; NFPA coordinators and committee chairs; NFPA board members

*CLEChairs@list.paralegals.org - CLE chairs/contacts of local associations, NFPA CLE Co-Coordinators, PACE[®] Coordinator - Renewals

*NewsletterEditors@list.paralegals.org - Newsletter Editors of local associations, NFPA Editorial Coordinator

*MembershipContact@list.paralegals.org - Membership contact of local associations; NFPA Vice President & Director of Membership; International Relations, Leadership Training, Member Benefits, Membership Growth, Student Membership Growth, Armed Forces, and Association Management Coordinators

*Treasurers@list.paralegals.org - Treasurers of local associations and NFPA Treasurer

*ProbonoChairs@list.paralegals.org - Pro Bono chairs of local associations and NFPA Pro Bono Coordinator(s)

Board2@list.paralegals.org – used to communicate with NFPA Board

*PACEAmb@list.paralegals.org - PACE[®] Ambassadors of local associations; Vice President & Director of PACE[®]; and PACE[®] Coordinators – Ambassadors, Education, Public Relations, Renewals and Study Materials

PACERP@paralegals.org – PACE[®] Registered Paralegals

PACESTUDY@paralegals.org – for those interested in or studying for PACE[®]

*AdvisoryCouncil@list.paralegals.org - NFPA Advisory Council and Board Advisor

Ethics@list.paralegals.org - Ethics Board; also used to submit ethics queries to the board

* You must be a member of the listserv to write to it.

Association Management Tip Sheets - NFPA creates "tip sheets" that are located on NFPA's management page under Local Leaders Resource Library on the Internet. Past topics include: "Retaining Members;" "New Members = Future Leaders;" "How to Avoid "Bored" Meetings;" "Recruiting Tips for Volunteers;" "Non-Dues Income;" "Recruiting Members;" "How to Run a Board or Committee Meeting;" "Keeping Volunteers Motivated;" "Tips for Dealing with Conflict;" and "How to Get New Life Into Your Newsletter."

Recruitment

Direct Marketing - Periodically, NFPA conducts a direct mailing campaign to individuals and/or associations who are not members of NFPA. These mailings have been directed to as many as 25,000 non-NFPA members.

Advertising - NFPA advertises in a variety of print publications throughout the United States. It also is listed in various national directories.

Your Association's Membership Information - Because of NFPA advertising and promotion, NFPA responds to more than 5,000 requests for membership information each year by providing information about local associations, including their membership contact and website addresses.

Tracking Your Members As They Move - Many local newsletters are sent electronically, and no return information is available if the recipient has changed his or her mailing address without reporting it to your local association. Because the Reporter is sent as a periodical, NFPA is notified when an address changes and can pass that information along to you, which may result in fewer "lost or missing" members for your local association.

Newsletters - NFPA provides member associations' newsletter contacts with articles for reprint to use if they so choose. NFPA encourages each member association to share its newsletter by sending a .pdf file or web link to your newsletter to NFPA headquarters so it can be posted online. NFPA's Region Directors write articles about NFPA or paralegals every two months for use by member associations in their newsletters or other publications.

Survey - Once a year, NFPA will prepare a survey for each of its member associations. The survey can be up to 30 multiple choice questions; and is done in real time. The results are shared with local association leaders and are available to members upon request.

Publicity

Free Link to Your Association's Website - NFPA currently gets more than 22.4 million hits per year, or over 247,404 page views per month. NFPA provides each member association a free link to their website. Don't have a website? NFPA will develop and host your local association's website that is flexible and easy-to-maintain and is of great value to your association.

Reporters for Handouts at Bar Association & Other Law-Related Association Meetings - To assist your association in promoting the profession to attorneys in your area, distribute copies of recent issues of the *National Paralegal Reporter* based upon availability. Simply let NFPA headquarters know how many copies you will need, when they are needed, and where to ship.

NFPA Booth - For the cost of shipping and insurance, a local association may use NFPA's retractable display and/or NFPA tablecloth. Associations should request materials in a timely manner; displays are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Display may not be available if NFPA has a conflicting exhibit event. NFPA has other marketing materials for use when exhibiting at Bar Association & other law-related association meetings.

Free Advertisement - To assist you in your association's activities (and non-dues income), NFPA will, without charge to your association, list your seminars and meetings on its calendar page.

Students

Inquiries - Responding to inquiries from potential paralegal students about schools in the area and what to look for in a paralegal program may be costing your association time and money. NFPA has this information listed on its home page. Your association does not need to respond by providing the written materials. Refer the inquirers to NFPA's home page under "Getting Started," or create a link on your association website to NFPA's web page.

Scholarships - With NFPA, Thomson Reuters, annually provides two scholarships to students pursuing a paralegal education. The award winners are honored at the NFPA Annual Convention. Members and non-members are eligible. NFPA may also provide a scholarship to defray the costs of taking PACE[®] in years NFPA can obtain corporate sponsorship of the scholarship.

Networking Opportunities - Through its homepage NFPA provides a networking base for students. NFPA has an exclusive listserv for students. Membership in NFPA or a member association is not required.

Recognition of Leadership

Outstanding Local Leadership Award - NFPA offers an Outstanding Local Leadership Award to assist local associations in recognizing their outstanding performers. The winner will receive recognition at the awards luncheon held during the Convention.

Individual Pro Bono Award - NFPA recognizes a member who gives legal service to those may not otherwise be able to obtain such services. The winner will receive a \$1,000 donation to the pro bono project of the winner's choice.

Association Pro Bono Award - Each year any NFPA member association may nominate itself or another association for this award sponsored by NFPA and a corporate sponsor, if possible. The award will fund a \$500 donation to support the recipient's pro bono program.

PACE[®] Ambassador Award - Each year an association may nominate its PACE[®] Ambassador or another association's Ambassador for this award.

Your Association's Email Address - Your local association is entitled to an address on paralegals.org. An example of the address is Illinois@paralegals.org. You can place this permanent email address on all your written materials, including stationery. Another benefit of using the @paralegals.org email alias is that NFPA runs anti-virus and anti-spamming protection software on all *http://www.paralegals.org* email addresses.

WHAT DOES NFPA DO FOR YOU?

PART 4

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In preparing for the future, NFPA will be assisting and monitoring the profession in addressing many issues associated with its growth and the inherent role of the paralegal through the following:

Professional Definitions - As the profession has expanded and grown, the membership approved a definition for the paralegal profession. Three categories have become generally accepted: traditional, freelance, and independent.

Education - As legal matters delegated to paralegals increase in complexity, so do the market demands for educational standards of those entering the paralegal profession, both in terms of general education and formal paralegal training. NFPA and the American Association for Paralegal Education (AAfPE) joined forces to set basic guidelines and principles on which to build a strong foundation to identify quality paralegal education programs. NFPA's Suggested Curriculum for Paralegal Studies and the Guide to a Quality Paralegal Education are available on NFPA's Website. In addition, NFPA sponsors a representative on the American Bar Association Approval Commission, which works with the Standing Committee on Legal Assistants to evaluate paralegal education programs.

Professionalism and Ethics - The paralegal profession has faced issues regarding professionalism and ethics. Accordingly, in September 1997, NFPA's members merged elements of two previously adopted documents, the Model Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility and Model Disciplinary Rules. The merged document, Model Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility and Guidelines for Enforcement (Model Code and Guidelines), shows the commitment of NFPA's membership to increase the quality and efficiency of legal services. It also recognizes the profession's responsibility to the legal community and the consumer. The Model Code and Guidelines provides paralegals with ethical standards and disciplinary guidelines for breach of those standards. NFPA is assisting paralegals who have an interest in adapting this Model Code and Guidelines to their local jurisdictions. It also offers ethical opinions to assist the profession with complex legal issues.

Expanding Role - Throughout its history, NFPA has recognized and met its commitment to examine issues and explore new and innovative means by which legal services at moderate rates may be made more generally available. NFPA will continue to assist the profession in validating and expanding the role of paralegals, and by responding to issues and events proposed by various legal organizations and other groups. NFPA continues its commitment to ensure the independence of the paralegal profession and the vital role played by paralegals in the delivery of quality legal services.

Internet - NFPA was the first legal association to establish a presence on the Internet. This presence provides a wealth of information to the world, including a worldwide paralegal network and vendor service.

With all of the benefits listed herein for individuals and associations alike, the real question should be - why not join NFPA?