

CEC Adopts Changes to Leadership Procedures
By DAVE McNEILL, Managing Editor
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Major decisions clear the way for a revised leadership manual. SGI-USA Council must approve certain rule changes.

After more than 18 months of talks, the Central Executive Committee adopted this weekend several major reforms in the way the organization is run. The decisions, reached after two grueling marathon sessions, clear the way for a revised leadership manual to be finalized by year's end.

"I am very excited about the discussions here, because they mean a major reform to our organization," General Director Zaitso said.

The changes, though in many ways technical, symbolize CEC efforts to make the organization one that better fits with American society. Responding to members suggestions, the CEC tentatively adopted, among others, changes that would modify the way leaders are appointed, implement for the first time terms for leaders and bring some of the language we use regarding leadership more in line with U.S. culture.

Appointment Process

One of the most important issues for many was the leadership appointment process itself, and the current system was simplified this weekend. The current system calls for three levels of leadership to be involved in any leadership appointment: a recommending level, a review level and an approval level. For example, to appoint a district leader, the chapter leaders would make a recommendation, which the headquarters would review and the territory approve.

The new system will require only two levels to make the appointment: a recommending level and an approval level. The third level will handle appeals and give support in the case of disputes. In the new system as with the old, the recommending level is one level above the one being appointed (district recommends group leaders; chapter leaders recommend district leaders, etc.). This change means less administration for every level and allows decisions to be made by those who work more closely with the people involved.

Terms for Leaders

In another major change, the CEC decided to implement three-year terms for all leaders. Until now, leadership appointments were for an indeterminate time. Leaders stay in the positions they are in until they are given a new assignment or until they decide to resign.

Under the new system, all leaders will be given a three-year term. Six months before the end of the term, a review process will begin. At the end of the review process, the same leader can be reappointed or someone new can be found. There is no limit to the number of terms a leader can serve, and a leader can resign before the term is up.

The point of the new system is to give leaders an opportunity to refresh their determinations and help revitalize the organization as a whole. It will also make it easier to put people in the right place according to their ability and time availability and to respond to the person's changing life circumstances.

Moreover, it is hoped that the new system will help clarify that a leadership position is not a badge of honor but a position of responsibility and that positions in the organization

are functional and limited. As SGI President Ikeda said in 1990: “Differences of position in an organization are temporary and provisional. They are no more than an expedient means for enabling all members to practice joyfully and become truly happy.”

Monitoring the end and renewal of terms will be implemented by each joint territory.

New Names

Several changes in the names of organizational levels and leadership positions were also proposed and discussed. Currently, the organization has eight levels: unit, group, district, chapter, headquarters, territory, joint territory and SGI-USA [national]. According to the streamlining plan adopted in 1995, by the end of this year the organization will have only six levels. The CEC tentatively adopted the names of these levels to be: group, district, chapter, area, region and SGI-USA. The new names, it was felt, are more in line with American society.

The terms *chief*, *division* and *vice* were also discussed at length. Over the years many people have suggested changing these terms, which were originally translated from Japanese. The CEC decided to replace *chief* with *leader* in all uses. Hence, a district chief will be known as a district leader once the new manual takes effect.

The committee also decided to retain the term *division*, as in young women’s division, men’s division, etc., and the term *vice*, as in vice chapter chief, etc. Many people said these revisions, though important, are really just a start. Reform of the organization comes down to the human revolution of individuals more than the changes in the system. But the changes adopted this weekend are significant because they indicate that the organization can reform itself from within and improve the way it promotes Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism in America, people said.

The discussions themselves also showed how the democratic spirit to respond to the members and listen to all opinions is alive and well in the SGI-USA, said many youth division leaders attending for the first time.

Some of the proposed changes need to be considered by the SGI-USA Council in light of the Rules of the Religious Organization. The Council is expected to meet in the next few months. After approval, a final draft of the manual will be circulated for editorial suggestions with final approval scheduled to come in September. The new manual will then be printed and distributed free of charge to every leader.

The manual, which outlines the function and qualities of leaders, as well as how they are appointed, was first published in 1992. It was the SGI-USA’s first attempt to act on President Ikeda’s guidance in February 1990 that the organization’s procedures be set down in writing. “It seems to me that [the SGI-USA] also has now entered a phase in which the rules and procedures of the organization must be further defined so as to enable members to take confident action,” he said at the time.

Since that first printing, members across the country have offered suggestions on how to improve it. It was these suggestions that have been discussed for the past year and a half, with the final major questions addressed this weekend.

In other business:

- The CEC decided to confer the Nichikan-transcribed large Gohonzon as it becomes available to all members who wish to receive it, with some criteria. The criteria, which are still to be decided, include a minimum of 15 years of practice.
- The CEC decided to consider plans for forming official language groups within the

organization. Many areas offer special meetings for members who speak languages other than English. Meeting types include introductory meetings, study meetings and annual festivals. To better support each area's activities, including providing translated materials, the CEC will consider a plan for a national committee to be formed.

This weekend's conference was the first in a new system of CEC meetings decided upon last year. The CEC is scheduled to meet only twice a year, with all national-level leaders and all four-divisional chiefs from each joint territory attending. Previous conferences included only representatives from each joint territory. The new system allows for a greater sharing of opinions and a greater mixture of men, women and youth involved in the decision-making.

The new system also calls for a smaller Standing Central Executive Committee, with representative national and joint territory leaders, to meet twice a year. The SCEC generally gathers for discussion purposes only, not to make decisions unless specifically asked to do so by the CEC. In regards to the leadership manual, the CEC has authorized the SCEC to approve the final draft at its meeting in September.

The next CEC is scheduled for December, at which time the committee will propose guidelines and schedules for 1998 and discuss other items to be announced.

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