

“Representation Of” and “Representation For”

Serving in the Academy’s House of Delegates (HOD) requires serving in a role that may be new for many member leaders. In several other governance venues, elected representatives are expected to function in what is called a “representative for” role. However, many organizations, though, including the Academy’s HOD, have moved toward a “representative of” mode of operation. To be an effective delegate requires understanding and being able to communicate to members the distinction between these types of roles. Below you will find a clarification between the two roles.

“Representative Of”

Elected leaders who view their role as ensuring that the views, beliefs, values and self-interests of the constituencies they know are at the table as part of the conversation, are “representative of”. They ensure that others are informed of the views of the constituencies. These elected leaders participate in a collective dialogue and deliberation based on the views of the constituencies and additional information. After the discussions, these leaders understand the entire issue and make decisions based on the best interests of the organization.

“Representative for”

If elected leaders believe they are “representative for,” then they see themselves as the elected representatives of a particular constituency. They voice only the self-interests and opinions of that constituency, and vote only on behalf of that constituency’s interests.

Elected leaders who are part of national governance bodies (i.e. board of directors) by virtue of their role in local or statewide governance must have a particularly clear understanding of this distinction. Leadership’s role in this case is to represent the best interests of the organization whose chair they are sitting in at the moment:

- When on a national board of directors, their fiduciary responsibility is to that board.
- When on the local or state board of directors, their fiduciary responsibility is to that organization.

On both boards of directors, their role is to be “representative of”; not “representative for”.

What does this look like in real life?

A delegate asks for feedback from members on an issue. Ten members provide similar positive feedback, 3 members provide negative feedback and 1 member provides feedback that is a new idea regarding the issue. In the “representative for” model, the delegate only discusses the major opinion regarding the feedback and votes accordingly. In this situation, the delegate is only thinking along the lines of the majority of feedback received. In the “representative of” model, the delegate discusses the positive, the negative and the new idea with other delegates at the meeting. In this situation, other delegates are interacting similarly and also presenting the positive, negative and any new idea, allowing all delegates to hear trends in positive and negative comments and to consider the new ideas. The delegates then consider what they have learned in the discussion and may decide to vote for the new idea because of other information shared at the meeting.

To find **more information** regarding Academy and the work of the House of Delegates, visit the Academy Web site at www.eatright.org/hod.