

To Dual or Not To Dual

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When I joined the Board of Sigma Lambda Beta (Betas), we were members of the North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) and the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO). As a historically Latino fraternity, we are part of the Latino fraternal movement, and it was considered an organizational milestone when we joined the NIC.

There are several key factors that influenced how our board and staff made decisions about where, when, and how we spent money, and more importantly, our time. We had no magical formula: some decisions were happenstance; some decisions were based on convenience; and, other decisions were based on historical relationships. Here are the key questions that helped drive our decision-making process:

- How does membership in this umbrella organization not only benefit our board/staff but our members as well?
- Are the priorities and vision of the umbrella organizations aligned with those of our organization?
- Are we taking full advantage of the benefits of being a member?
- What other avenues are available to gain the benefits offered from this umbrella organization?

The important part of each of those factors is that we had regular conversations about our membership associations. Further, it was important that we let assessment data govern decision-making.

When discussing if your organization receives benefit there are a lot of intangible benefits as well as specific benefits. For example, as a historically Latino fraternity, we wanted to be at the table to help advocate for the growth of our organizations. Our NIC membership felt good, like being in the press box during a game; however, it was more than just a feeling or a perceived benefit, we actually gained value through association.

Examples of these benefits would be attendance at the NIC Annual Meetings, the advocacy about the value of fraternity/sorority life the NIC provides, and the assistance with resources on trends and legal issues, and of course, the opportunity to network with other likeminded organizations. Annual meetings were a chance to share best practices, ask others how they are handling certain issues, all in an open honest dialog about bettering the fraternal experience.

You always need to review and evaluate the direction and priorities of your member association. While we enjoyed being in both NALFO and NIC, and benefited from the organizational development provided by the NIC and appreciated the connection to our history through NALFO. As we matured as an organization and the umbrella organization developed, we found it was time to leave one of the groups. The umbrella organizations are not immutable and will change as times change; the key is recognizing when your directions are best aligned.

On the topic of taking full advantage of your membership, I think many organizations do things because it feels good, or because it is what they think they are supposed to do. As the representative for the Betas to the NIC for many years, there were several fraternities I never saw at a meeting. Why were they members? Why did

they pay dues and not attend the meetings? Were they sending dues each year and not thinking about it? Or was it a loyalist obligation? Motive in decision-making is important when reviewing and assessing those decisions. For us, we knew that we would get as much out of the NIC as we put in, and we made sure that it was a mutually beneficial relationship.

I think an umbrella has to be about helping all, and organizations must have an altruistic mentality about their involvement. At an NIC meeting, any organization would share anything about their operations and help each other; in NALFO meetings, causes related to Latino issues were always shared and were a great way to bring groups together.

When looking at options for membership, you can overlook the roles played in all of this “umbrella” talk without mentioning other professional associations, like the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors. It does make this discussion even more convoluted, but it is important to mention. Look at where your organization is duplicating effort and how your priorities could be rearranged.

While I do not have specific advice on “To Dual or Not to Dual”, think about what you are you looking for in a relationship. At the end of the day, it may mean paying additional dues and attending one or two more meetings, but the real measure of value is how you spend that time. Is the time you spend as a member in an association fueling your cause or meeting a need?

Maybe the conversation is not about joining two associations. Maybe instead, you should ask, do you belong to any? This goes back to the alphabet soup, and more importantly back to what your need is. Ultimately, you will know where you need to be, when you know why you are there. Maybe it will be dual membership, and maybe it will not be. Once again, think before you do, assess what you did, and be honest with yourself. Development and growth represent change, and change is uncomfortable. If you feel too comfortable, you probably are not making the right decision or really thinking about what you did well.

* The views expressed here are of Sam Centellas, not necessarily those of the leadership of Sigma Lambda Beta International Fraternity, Inc.