

**National Communication Association
2026 Budget Narrative
Presented to the Legislative Assembly
November 19, 2025**

NCA Finance Committee

Candice Thomas-Maddox, Finance Committee Chair
Kenneth A. Lachlan, Finance Committee Director
Michael Lechuga, Finance Committee Director

National Office Staff

Justin Danowski, Executive Director
Jake Greene, Chief Financial Officer

Pursuant to the NCA's Bylaws and policies and procedures, the National Office prepared the 2026 Proposed Budget and this summary of budgeted items. The Finance Committee reviewed the proposed budget in July and August. The committee forwarded the budget to the Executive Committee in August. The Executive Committee endorsed the proposed budget in October.

Several basic principles were followed when constructing this budget. First, the 2026 proposed budget and summary (as with the 2025 budget and summary) reflect realistic and informed projections of revenue and expenses for the coming year. Secondly, the 2026 budget adheres to very conservative assumptions regarding likely revenues for the Association while also working to adjust expenses to reflect anticipated needs and expectations accurately. Third, the proposed budget was constructed to reflect the Association's actual material operating revenues and expenses while removing items and funds that do not factor into the operations, such as investment income and investment fees, from operating projections. Finally, the 2026 proposed budget shows our Investment Reserve Funding needed to fund the 2026 proposed budget. This is consistent with prior years.

In June, the National Office began efforts on the revenue and expense sides of the budget that informed our assumptions for the 2026 proposed budget. This includes funds for recruiting and hiring for a full-time Chief Diversity Officer/IDEA Director (Pending Executive Committee approval in February 2026), upcoming Strategic planning for the organization, funds for the Midcareer Writing Retreat, the Department Chairs Institute, the Institute for Faculty Development, and costs for the Annual Convention that will be held in New Orleans.

The proposed budget reflects an inflationary increase in membership dues and convention rates for 2026 to account for contracted increased costs from our annual convention and salaries and benefits to the National Office staff. These increases help decrease the amount we pull from the investment reserves, putting NCA in a more favorable position to execute the Association's mission, Strategic Plan, and IDEA Strategic Plan.

Revenue

The 2026 budget projects total operating revenue of \$3,682,197, more than the \$3,458,972 projected in 2025 (~ 6% increase).

Investment Income

First, NCA's revenue projections for 2026 do not include investment income. Investment income is not part of our operations and should not be counted on year by year to sustain operations. Instead, we have balanced the budget with the funding needed to pull from our investments to maintain operations and achieve strategic planning priorities. ***The Investment Reserve Funding required to sustain operations and achieve strategic planning priorities is \$623,312, which is ~\$86,000 less than the \$709,191 projected in 2025.***

Membership Dues

Second, membership dues are a significant source of NCA's operating revenue. A substantial factor that typically influences membership levels is the location of NCA's Annual Convention. NCA's budgets are usually forecasted conservatively to account for location-specific attributes and historical patterns. From 2019-2024 (five fiscal years), NCA averaged ~\$700,000 in membership dues revenue. Note that 2020 is excluded from this projection since a 50% discount was applied to all membership levels due to the pandemic. This was in hopes of retaining NCA members during this difficult time. The National Office conservatively budgeted NCA membership dues revenue for 2026 at \$824,422, a conservative estimate based on prior years' budgeted amounts. This assumes the retention of the current active members. We are also budgeting for a ~3% increase in membership dues fees across most levels to account for increased costs for the Association and to be more in line with other comparable learned societies. Student Membership rates remain unchanged and are currently at \$75.00 per membership.

Student Organizations

Third, NCA generates income from our student organizations (Lambda Pi Eta and Sigma Chi Eta) through membership fees, chapter renewals, and merchandise sales. The 2025 budget forecasts revenue of \$221,000, an increase of \$11,000 compared to the 2025 projected budget. This projected increase factors in increased prices for LPH and SCH membership fees in 2025.

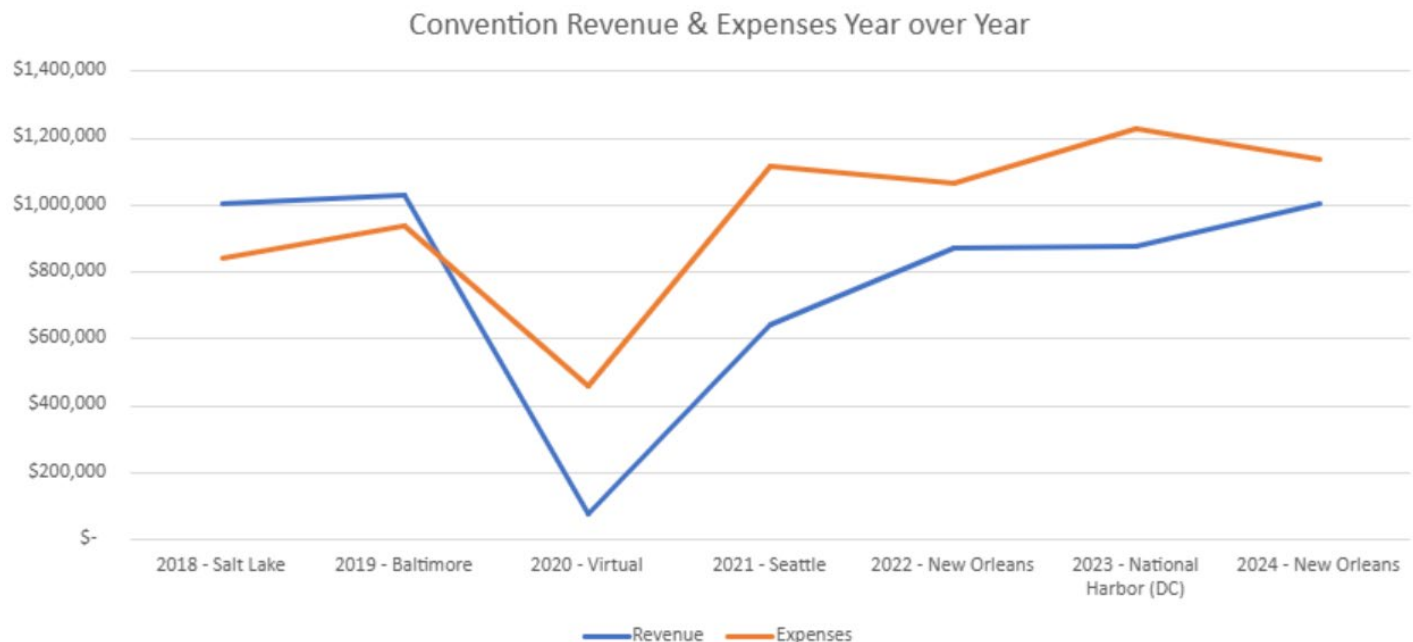
Convention

Fourth, much of NCA's convention revenue comes from registration fees. The 2024 convention was hosted in New Orleans. We used a three-year average convention attendance as a base to develop our convention registration attendance number for 2026. We increased convention registration costs for Regular and Student members by ~3% to account for inflation and overall meeting space costs. The specific rates can be seen below. The 2026 budget projection is \$1,295,775 in convention revenue, a 6% increase from 2025.

Proposed convention registration fees for 2026:

Category	Registration Type	2025 Fee	Proposed 2026
Student	Single Rate	\$150	\$155
Member	Early Bird	\$325	\$335
	Regular	\$400	\$410
Non-member	Early Bird	\$650	\$670
	Regular	\$715	\$735
Retired Members		\$0	\$0
Life Members		\$0	\$0
Discounted:			
	Guest Speaker	\$0	\$0
	Friends and Family	\$65	\$70
	K-12 Members	\$0	\$0

Note: NCA's Annual Convention has run at a loss since 2020. The expenses line takes into account staff allocation.



Publications

Fifth, most of NCA's publications revenue comes from journal royalties from Taylor & Francis and EBSCO. In 2026, the budget reflects a conservative estimate of expected revenue based on our historically received royalties. In addition, NCA receives considerable support from Taylor & Francis for its editor stipends; roughly 80 percent are supported by T&F. In all, NCA projects revenue from publications for 2026 to be \$1,175,500, a 13% increase from 2025.

Other Revenue

Sixth, the 2026 budget assumes oscillating trends in other revenue. Specifically, for career advertisements (e.g., the NCA Career Center, COMMNotes, and *Spectra*), revenue has been decreasing since the end of 2024, and we are projecting to earn \$115,000 in 2025; therefore, the anticipated budget for 2026 has been reduced to \$115,000 from the 2025 budget of \$138,250. We have also increased our Contributions budget in 2026 from \$5,000 in 2025 to \$15,000 to align with our historical revenue of contributions. Also, for 2026, we expect to earn a similar amount as in 2026 in Program Revenue, Extra Interest Group Affiliation, and other revenue that factor in minor adjustments to the budget.

Proposed Revenue – Budgeted 2025 vs. Proposed 2026

Revenue Category	2025 Budget	2026 Budget
Membership Dues	\$810,384	\$824,422
Student Organizations	\$210,000	\$221,000
Convention	\$1,218,838	\$1,295,775
Publications	\$1,042,000	\$1,175,500
Other Revenue	\$177,750	\$165,500
Total	\$3,458,972	\$3,682,197

Expenses

The 2026 budget projects total operating expenses of \$4,305,509, approximately a 3% increase from our 2025 projection of \$4,168,163. Notably, this increase is predominantly due to the rise in travel and meeting space costs.

Salaries & Benefits

For most service-oriented organizations (e.g., membership associations and learned societies), NCA's largest expense category is compensation, benefits, and taxes. Compensation includes salaries for 12 full-time staff members and a part-time Finance Administrator. The 2026 budget includes a salary increase pool for the staff, consistent with a cost-of-living adjustment specified in NCA's policies, and potentially for a modest merit-based increase or bonus. Some benefits, including retirement contributions and FICA, are tied directly to salaries. Other benefits cost the same amount for everyone or differ across individuals based on variables other than salary. These include health, dental, and life insurance. NCA is projecting 2026 Salaries & Benefit expenses of \$1,744,500 for compensation, benefits, and taxes: in 2025, NCA projected expenses of \$1,761,000 (~1% decrease).

Please note that Salaries and benefits are spread among all departments based on the level of effort in each functional area (G&A, Executive Office, Convention, Research, Membership, and Communications) for the annual audit process.

General & Administrative Expenses

NCA is projecting 2026 general and administrative expenses to be \$777,376. Expenses in this category were projected at \$826,717 in 2025 (~ 6% decrease).

General and administrative expenses include building maintenance (e.g., utilities, janitorial services, alarm monitoring), technology (e.g., phone, internet, technical maintenance fees, computer supplies), real estate taxes, credit card and other professional fees, legal, accounting, human resources, and design services, organizational insurance, training, and general office expenses. Through cost reduction efforts at the National Office, the National Office reduced general and administrative costs by 6% going into next year.

Executive Office Expenses

NCA is projecting 2026 executive office expenses to be \$380,170. Expenses in this category for 2025 were projected at \$267,270 (~42 percent increase).

The major categories of expenses are for meetings and governance/National Office travel. In 2026, NCA plans to have the February Leadership Retreat in Baltimore, the August Executive Committee meeting in the Washington, DC area, and Elected Office travel in March to attend the National Humanities Alliance Advocacy Day. NCA is projecting expenses for 2026 to be \$121,500, an increase from \$94,000 budgeted for 2025. This increase better reflects actual costs.

Other governance expenses include dues for partner advocacy organizations (COSSA, NHA, ACLS) and sponsorships of other meetings and events, officer initiative funds, interest group funding, national awards, council budgets, and organizational dues. These expenses are projected to be \$258,670 for 2026.

Research

NCA is projecting 2026 Research expenses to be \$438,395. Expenses in this category for 2025 were projected at \$426,120 (~3% Increase).

NCA's most significant expense for Research is from grants and programs, including grants for the annual NCA Doctoral Honors Seminar, the Institute for Faculty Development (formerly the "Hope" conference), Student Caucus Travel Grants, Advancing the Discipline Grants, Research Cultivation Grants, Communication Pedagogy Grants, and the virtual Chairs' Institute (formerly the Chairs' Summer Institute).

The budget projects \$147,800 for grants and programs in 2026, compared to \$129,750 projected in 2025 (~ a 12% increase). This increase is accounted for by the additions in 2026 to the grant to the host for the Mid-Career Writing Retreat (\$10,000) and for the Chairs' Institute (\$5,000), and the increase in the Institute for Faculty Development to \$10,000 from \$5,000 for 2026. The Executive Committee approved the Communication Elevation Grant in August. Funds for the grant will be included in the 2027 budget for \$30,000.

Another large portion of the Research budget is expenses for editor stipends for the twelve journals, totaling \$192,000. Taylor and Francis covers most of this expense per our royalty agreement.

Academic & Professional Resources expenses include career center ads, archives, travel for staff members, CIDD expenses, subscription costs for journal printing, and public programs.

Membership

NCA is projecting 2026 Membership expenses to be \$59,500. Expenses in this category for 2025 were projected at \$61,375 (~3% decrease).

Most of the Membership Department budget for 2026 is related to technology enhancements and integrations with NCA's website related to our Association Management system, totaling \$24,000, and \$20,000 budgeted for credit card and merchandise fees for our honor societies. The remaining budget for membership is related to Membership Swag and our recognition program, totaling \$8,500. Overall, our membership budget is just slightly less than the prior year.

Convention

NCA is projecting the 2026 Annual Convention expenses to be \$863,016. Expenses in this category for 2025 were projected at \$763,479 (~13% increase). Expenses under the convention line do not reflect allocated staff salaries.

The most significant convention expense is for AV services, which are included in the site charges.

Food and beverage is used for several events, including the welcome reception, the convention planners' meetings, the International Scholars' Reception, the Distinguished Scholars Luncheon, the Executive Committee breakfast, the Legislative Assembly meetings, and the Past Presidents Luncheon.

Professional services expenses include a meeting planning consultant, a photographer, sign language interpreters, temporary personnel, movers, keynote speakers & on-site IT support. The budget increase from 2025 to 2026 is mainly due to increased consulting costs from our Event Planner & Consulting firm, signage & drayage, travel costs, increases in Food & Beverage at the hotels, and technology support, such as the registration and the Convention App.

The National Office is currently working on a proposal that would move some of the funding provided to our current Event Planner and Consulting firms to a full-time hire by NCA to oversee the sales of exhibit booths, sponsorships, and advertisements for the Annual Convention. This position would be budget-neutral and allocate funds to Salaries and benefits specifically for the Convention vs. the current budget for professional fees.

Communications

NCA is projecting 2026 communication expenses to be \$42,552. Expenses in this category for 2025 were projected at \$62,202 (~32% decrease).

Communications incur production and distribution costs for membership communications and outreach, media subscriptions (the cost of providing members with access to electronic and print journals), and web development. Video production expenses are also included in this category.

Proposed Expenses – Budgeted 2025 vs. Proposed 2026

Expense Category	2025 Budget	2026 Budget
Salaries & Benefits (National Office Staff)	\$1,761,000	\$1,744,500
General & Administrative Expense (e.g., compensation; office expenses; professional fees and services)	\$826,717	\$777,376
Executive Office (e.g., governance; meetings & events; travel)	\$267,270	\$380,170
Research (e.g., program grants, student organizations, public programs, editor stipends)	\$426,120	\$438,395
Membership	\$61,375	\$59,500
Convention	\$763,479	\$863,016
Communications (e.g., <i>Spectra</i> ; video production)	\$62,202	\$42,552
Total	\$4,168,163	\$4,305,509

Cumulative Organizational Surplus (Net Assets)

Cumulative organizational surplus represents the bottom line over the organization's life. In CY24, this was \$8,011,412. The projected CY25 cumulative surplus is \$7,302,221, and the projected CY26 cumulative surplus is estimated to be \$6,678,909. These decreases reflect the Association's use of investment returns, not operational planning, to manage performance. The CY26 cumulative surplus represents approximately 18 months of funds available at the spending rate of the CY26 budget.