



American Youth Soccer Organization

**NATIONAL  
ANNUAL  
GENERAL  
MEETING**

June 3 - 5, 2022, Las Vegas, NV



# CANDIDATE ANSWERS TO NOMINATING COMMITTEE QUESTIONS

AMERICAN YOUTH SOCCER ORGANIZATION  
NATIONAL ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

# 2022 QUESTIONS FOR NBOD CANDIDATES

The National Board Of Directors candidates were asked to respond to a set of seven questions. They were notified that their responses would be distributed to all Executive Members who are eligible to vote at the 2022 AYSO National Annual General Meeting (NAGM.) The candidates' statements and responses to these questions are listed on the following pages. Please review them carefully in preparation for your vote in the upcoming election at the 2022 AYSO NAGM in Las Vegas, Nevada.

The questions posed to National Board of Director candidates for the candidate statement were as follows:

1. Describe specific accomplishments, improvements or projects in which your involvement was instrumental and had a significant impact on AYSO at the Region, Area, Section or National level.
2. Describe the nature of your current involvement in your local AYSO Region, Area, Section or National programs.
3. As we emerge from the constraints of the pandemic, AYSO has been pleased to see player numbers return to similar of those of 2019/20. What changes or processes would you propose to create financial stability and ensure the future success of AYSO?
4. How would you address the different needs of Regions, Areas and Sections based on geographic differences, particularly programs located furthest from the AYSO National Office?
5. What growth and business development strategies would you propose to help AYSO retain and expand around the country, specifically in areas where we do not currently have programming?
6. Why are you running for the National Board of Directors?
7. If you had a blank slate for AYSO, how would you envision that it be structured?
8. What specialty would you like to see on the NBOD?

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2022 National Board of Director Candidates:



Yvette  
BARRETT



Rick  
BUITEWEG



Richard  
GOLDBERG



Kris  
GRAFF



Dan  
HOWALD



Cathy  
FARLESS



Al  
PRADO



***Please Note:** The following responses from the candidates have been inserted as submitted by the candidate. The text has been formatted to fit this document. No other alterations or edits were made.*



# NBOD QUESTION 1

## 1. Describe specific accomplishments, improvements or projects in which your involvement was instrumental and had a significant impact on AYSO at the Region, Area, Section or National level.



**Yvette BARRETT:** Serving as a volunteer on every level of this organization, I feel like I have accomplished many things, along with a wonderful team, at every level. At the regional and area level we were able to build player numbers. As an RC, we were the first region in our Area to bring U5 to our families. (Way back when it was called U5) We were successful in holding training camps, bringing volunteer coach, referee, and management certifications from 15% to 98% throughout my tenor at the regional and area level. We were able to turn our Area and All-Star tournaments in to fundraising events for the Area, a reversal from them losing money. Those funds helped with training, sending volunteers to Expos, player scholarships, etc. At the Section level my team and I were able to reenergize and elevate the yearly volunteer training at Golden Gate Camp. We also held the state games in our Section twice while I was SD. We were also successful in getting volunteers trained throughout the Section. We received the Section of the Year Award. At the National Level I have served as the Coach council liaison since its inception. I helped create Alliance as another level of play we offer our players.



**Rick BUIREWEG:** I continue to support AYSO leveraging my professional background to help with our system support and development. I have provided this support in a variety of ways for the past eight years working to improve our systems and business processes. This has included work with our 3rd party partners and providers along with working with AYSO staff. NBOD and AYSO staff continue to leverage my expertise on a wide variety of technical needs and to help support our AYSO systems.

I have worked with NBOD on several major initiatives including supporting the efforts to stabilize our finances, launch the volunteer membership program, and support our growth objectives. I have developed operational metrics to help us navigate the COVID crisis and developed metrics to help us understand real time how we are doing and to provide insight into our volunteer and player registration.

For the past 7 years I have been the Section Director for Section 8. I have worked to improve communication and cooperation with the AYSO Organization and within my Section. I have worked to make sure that programs in my section know that there is support for them and they are not alone. I have also pushed the organization to change the focus from compliance to how can they enable Regions to do what they need to do and removed many real and perceived roadblocks. I was part of a group of Section Directors that created and established the new process for Expos and returned control to the Sections. I have also supported and encouraged many alternative ways of conducting business within my Section.



**Richard GOLDBERG:** I was able to become a National Referee as a result of the numerous AYSO referees who took the time to mentor me. As a result, I became the first National Referee in the history of my region. Since then, I have continued to “pay back” those referees by mentoring others. While I have lost track of all the referees I have worked with, I am proud to say that I am no longer the only National Referee in my region. In addition to mentoring, as my Region’s RRA, I was able to tap into the local high school’s community service program to develop a pool of over 20 youth referees to cover all of our 8U and 10U games each weekend. As my Area’s ARA, I promoted and participated in Area “Road Shows” to maximize the training effectiveness of the Area’s instructors. As the Section SDRA, I promoted a centralized assessor scheduling program that ensured every referee observation/assessment had an assessor. As my Section’s SRA, I am active in the National Referee Council and regularly participate in meetings and updating/reviewing of the NRP training materials.

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**Kris GRAFF:** I have been involved at various levels of the organization where I feel I have made a significant contribution. While serving as the Area Director for Area 9B, I was successful in maintaining 100% participation in the RAP each year I was the AD helping regions work to provide the best program they could. I also maintained 100% attendance at RC Training throughout my area, a program which I believe helps strengthen our volunteer leadership and our Regions. I have been a member of the Management Council (formerly Management Commission) for several years during which time I have helped update courses and create new ones. I was part of the work group that created the new Management Training Grid that became available during this year's EXPO season. I have participated as an instructor at multiple RC Training and AD Training courses and periodically assisted with content review of those course materials. I have most recently been in the work group that is updating our EM Appointment Forms to align with our new requirements, procedures, and guidelines.



**Dan HOWALD:** During my tenure as RC of 3/T/455, I organized and launched the VIP program in my Region. Three years later, I organized and launched the Region 5U Program. I also oversaw the launch of our Region's AYSO Extra program, which grew from 2 teams to 9 participating in Area play.

As 3T Area Director I oversaw the Area's Extra program, our Core Inter-Regional Play program, and helped Regional AYSO Tournament operators with cross-Region recruitment ("selling" AYSO tournaments vs. the legacy tournaments run by local clubs, that many AYSO Regions had historically sought out). During this time, we also entered into agreements and cross registration partnerships with clubs in two of our largest Regions, shifting from "us vs. them" battles for players to a model that allowed both programs to flourish and made it easier for families to participate; this had not been attempted before. Our Area Achieved Platinum Status all three years during my term.

As Section 3 Director of Marketing, I help organize our Expo annually, create bespoke curriculum based on what our ADs and RCs are asking for, develop sponsorship

sales material, and promote/market the event. I played these and other roles in creating the first ever all-virtual Expo (2021) which our SD had the courage to let his crazy Section staff pursue.

As Chair of the National Marketing Commission, I was privileged to be a part of the team that developed the AYSO 50th Anniversary events and grassroots programming in 2014. I also played a prominent role in applying a 2011 consultant's study on the youth soccer marketplace into various applications for AYSO - everything from setting a positioning foundation for what would become AYSO United, to re-energizing our core offerings ("Rec is Not a Four-Letter Word").

As a member of the National Board of Directors, I've had a hand in many of the initiatives currently underway to prepare AYSO for future growth - building and expanding the growth workshops concept, fostering a culture of enabling Regions to think more creatively about how to serve their communities, and (presently) identifying resources specifically devoted to augmenting our National marketing resources with tangible, accessible local marketing services. I was also given the task of creating the architecture for AYSO's pandemic response in the Spring of 2020, which yielded a plethora of new organizational initiatives that had value well beyond the moment they were created for, and which I am thrilled to see endure and evolve and form the basis of our strategies for the future.

# NBOD QUESTION 1 cont.

## 1. Describe specific accomplishments, improvements or projects in which your involvement was instrumental and had a significant impact on AYSO at the Region, Area, Section or National level.



**Cathy FARLESS:** During my first term on the National Board of Directors, I served on the NAGM 2021 committee and lead the committee for NAGM 2022. This the committee developed the all virtual NAGM for 2021 and this year the Hybrid (with both Virtual and On-site attendees) format. I also served on the Volunteer Engagement committee working to shape our volunteer program for today's volunteer and the Registration and Training committee working to provide tools and resources for volunteers and simplify the training requirements for volunteers. I also served on the Hall of Fame, Historical Preservation, and the National Games committees.

As ARA and SRA, I developed Area/Section based training capabilities by developing local instructors and training opportunities to support the regions. Starting with developing instructor trainers, I expanded the numbers of instructors for all levels of referee and instructor training. I worked with our coaching and management administrators to develop the same capability in all disciplines, resulting in the ability to staff and conduct affordable volunteer training camps across the Section. Since we are a large Section geographically, the camps are held annually in the West, Central and East areas of the Section at different times of the year offering volunteers more opportunities for training. With local staff, we are able to reduce the cost of training and reduced or eliminated the cost to individual volunteers. For most of the last 20 years I organized and conducted the Section 5 annual Winter Volunteer Training Camp and was an instructor in the other training events across the Section.

As RC, I expanded board positions so that no one individual was over-burdened in their AYSO role. I developed and recruited individuals for the Division Coordinator positions responsible for supporting team formation, recruitment of coaches, game scheduling, and

communications. I also expanded the role of Team Mom to Team Manager responsible for team communications, coordinating parental support, maintaining records, and coordinating team events - allowing our coaches to focus on player development.

For the National Programs Director, I developed a volunteer database for the AYSO Office to use to develop requirements for what was to become eAYSO.

With Jim Malcolm, I conducted Area and State annual tournaments for raising discretionary funds used for volunteer training. Using this model, we proposed the Section do the same, resulting in our annual, very successful Section Games which moves every 2 years to a different part of the Section giving more players the opportunity to participate in the Games.



### **AI PRADO:**

- a. As an AYSO employee, I was hired to help address the Blue Sombrero and AYSOU transition and migration issues which I believe I was successful in
- b. As an employee, I was the project manager and point of contact for the Volunteer Membership program in 2019
  - i. It was a coordinated effort between 8 different companies (AYSO, Blue Sombrero, Accord (AYSOU provider), Yozon's (eSignature), KRG (AYSO offshore IT Team), It-Refined (AYSO network and infrastructure team) and inLeague (3rd party registration system)
  - ii. Implementation was on time and under budget
- c. I worked with other instructors from Sections 2, 10 and 11 to develop the Online Teaching curriculum, which established online norms for teaching as well as adding an online coordinator role as support for the actual instructors
- d. As a member of the Section Referee Administrators and Instructors, I updated the Advanced Referee Exams (a and b versions)
- e. I am a member of the WhistleStop monthly Referee newsletter team
- f. I coordinated AYSO specific eTrainU meetings (recorded) intended to help AYSO Instructors set up classes, enroll students, mark the classes complete and overall volunteer and class reporting
- g. I've been a guest instructor for EXPO's in Sections 8 and 12.

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## 2. Describe the nature of your current involvement in your local AYSO Region, Area, Section or National programs.



**Yvette BARRETT:** I am a current NBOD member 4 years, NAGM Task Force 1 year, Expo Task Force 1 year, Nominating Commission 3 years, United Liaison 4 years, Coach Commission Liaison 3 years, Section 2,10,12,14 Liaison 4 years, Alliance Liaison 3 years, Soccer.com liaison 1 year.

I coached/assistant coached my grandsons 8U and 10U teams the last 3 years. I am currently the Area treasurer, to help the new AD until he can recruit one.



**Rick BUITEWEG:** I am the Section Director for Section 8 and in this role my focus has been on providing support to my Area Directors and Areas without ADs and the challenges they have face. This has included helping Regions and Areas through rebuilding efforts and supporting the challenge of operating in a very competitive and changing environment. I am championing new ways to operate our programs and support structures outside of our traditional methods.

I also support AYSO with a second role leveraging my professional background to give support to both AYSO Office and NBOD. This support is across many initiatives, projects, and task forces.



**Richard GOLDBERG:** Currently, I am in the fourth year of filling my section's SRA position. While some of the regions in my Section have not played much soccer over the last two years, I have continued to be active at all levels. As previously mentioned, I am active at the National level representing my Section on the National Referee Council. Additionally, I participated in several of the initial Zoom referee training sessions. Closer to home, we just completed an in-person EXPO where I organized almost two dozen different referee training seminars and courses. Last year, as my part of the country was in lock-

down, I organized a four-day virtual (ZOOM) EXPO for the section's referees. This was followed by Regional Referee and Intermediate Referee ZOOM training courses held over successive weekends. This past April, I conducted in my Area the first in-person Regional Referee training course in two years.



**Kris GRAFF:** My level of current involvement includes participation in both Section and National programs. I have served the last 6 years as the Section Director of Section 9, seeing the RC's and AD's of the section through the challenges of the pandemic, the Mobile First upgrade, and the transition to Divvy and Zipbooks. A primary area of focus for me has been to create videos, tutorials, and guides to assist them with the changes. Nationally, I am on the EM Appointment Task Force where we are working on updating the appointment paperwork for our EM's and reducing the time for onboarding of new EM's. I serve on the NAGM Planning Committee and for the last two years have assisted with the work to provide virtual and hybrid NAGM opportunities for our Executive Members. I also serve on the Management Council where I work on a variety of tasks pertaining to the Management Curriculum.



**Dan HOWALD:** As a member of the National Board of Directors since 2018, I am deeply involved in all matters that come before then Board on an ongoing basis and maintain a focus on the development of new growth and retention programs.

As Section 3 Director of Marketing, I help organize our Expo annually, create bespoke curriculum based on what our ADs and RCs are asking for, develop sponsorship sales material, and handle promotion marketing, and follow up surveys about the event.

At the local level, I am the Master Coach for my home Region's 5U program. In that role, I get to help introduce first time players to soccer (of course) and importantly, begin to develop relationships for the Region with the first-time player parents, because these are the people who form the core volunteer base going forward. These Saturday sessions are my 20 favorite AYSO volunteer days of the year.

## NBOD QUESTION 2 cont.

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### 2. Describe the nature of your current involvement in your local AYSO Region, Area, Section or National programs.



**Cathy FARLESS:** Since being elected to the NBOD in 2018, I have focused my AYSO involvement on the activities and tasks of the NBOD. I continue to be an available resource to assist in the management of Region Area and Section tournaments, volunteer training, and mentoring volunteers.



**AI PRADO:**

- a. At the Regional Level, I am the Regional Director of Referee Instruction where I set up and hold Referee Courses as well as mentor referees
- b. At the Area Level, I am the Area Management Administrator, setting up and occasionally teaching Management classes
- c. At the Section level, I am the Section Director of Referee Instruction, coordinating referee training within the Section. I coordinate the Section Instruction EXPO sessions as well as organize the referee portion of Section Roadshows
- d. As a Referee, I referee most weekends, at all levels, Regional, Area and Section as well as Tournaments



### 3. As we emerge from the constraints of the pandemic, AYSO has been pleased to see player numbers return to similar of those of 2019/20. What changes or processes would you propose to create financial stability and ensure the future success of AYSO?



**Yvette BARRETT:** I am not sure I would necessarily change what we are currently doing. We have a great financial team including our treasurer. We could benefit greatly if we would engage with a grant writer. We need more education to reduce risk at every level. We need to continue the path of reduced spending and not jump back on the spending train. We need to be more financially prepared for anything that may come our way. We need to build back our reserve account and not start spending unnecessarily when we feel secure. I think we all have come to realize, there are no guarantees in what may come. We must be prepared. I would like to find ways to bring in more sponsors for specific needs. I feel a big part of why we do not have more support is because we do not outline a specific want/need. In the past we have not always been clear on the needs of the organization. The success of AYSO is due to the dedication of the volunteers at every level, our families, and our very committed staff. We need to support the volunteers and staff we have and find more like them.



**Rick BUITEWEG:** There are two major things we need to do to keep financial stability and ensure future success. The first is to make sure the organization reflects what we can afford. The second is to make sure we have a solid base of revenue.

We need to have the tough conversations about the services the AYSO Organization provides. There are services that we are required to do because of our corporate structure and additional services that AYSO provides beyond that. We need to make sure we keep the required services to a minimal and ensure that they still make sense to run our business. The additional services need to be targeted to things that really bring value to our programs. We will need to continue to make tough choices on which services are provided. To help us make these choices we need to use more business-like measurements such as Return on Investment (ROI) or Net Promoter Score (NPS).

The second is making sure we have a solid base of revenue, which over the years, has been primarily through membership fees. To maintain this strong base, we need to continue to focus on helping our current programs connect better with their communities. We also need to establish new AYSO programs in communities we are not. The focus cannot be one or the other - it must be both. We must realize that we cannot stand still, and we need to make sure we are moving to where the soccer playing population is - which may or may not be where we are today.



**Richard GOLDBERG:** While player numbers have returned in some regions, several regions in my Section are not seeing the numbers they had before as many were not able to play soccer due to state restrictions. In order to create financial stability and ensure the future success of AYSO, I believe AYSO needs develop an active promotion program with its sponsors and the US Soccer Federation (USSF). I mention USSF as we both have the same goal - promote soccer in the US. AYSO needs to get the word out that the premiere youth soccer program is back and ready to play. We need to tap into social media to let everyone know we are back. We need to hold in-person sign-up sessions as this will be one way to tackle our lack of volunteer issues. We can't expect volunteers to join if we can't show them who we are. As our player numbers grow, so will our financial stability.



**Kris GRAFF:** The current board, along with support from the Section Directors, has made significant changes to how we as an organization prioritize and manage our expenses. We tightened our budgets and made difficult but necessary cuts to ensure we were able to emerge from the pandemic in a strong financial position. To make certain that we continue to maintain our strengthened financial status and safeguard future stability, we need to keep to responsible levels of spending and focus on providing available resources to support our regional volunteers for the benefit of player and leadership development.

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## NBOD QUESTION 3 cont.



**Dan HOWALD:** In the couple of years leading up to the pandemic, AYSO had taken some pretty rigorous steps towards streamlining and getting our financial house in order, particularly cash position visibility. It turned out to be a prescient maneuver but not for the reasons we were doing so at the time.

Most of the organization's operating revenue comes from player registration fees, so having a stable if not growing player base is the main engine to ensure financial stability. This means we need to invest in programs that promote - and produce - retention and net new growth, which we are actively doing.

Retention and growth also make us more attractive to potential National level sponsors, which is another revenue source. Getting more aggressive in the sponsor recruitment space is something that had also begun before the pandemic, and that is another area that we can now get back to this from a position of value to offer potential sponsors.

Holding down insurance premiums to the extent that we can is and will remain a driving factor in our ability to keep fees low while maintaining financial stability overall.

Looking forward more broadly, as we get to a point where we can consider making investments in people and tools, I think it is also fair to say that we should not be in a rush to build out the National Office precisely to its prior state. While we need to make sure we have adequate staffing levels to provide the types of support our members require, the truth of the matter is many of the services our programs need could be better delivered, and rendered more cost-efficiently, closer to the source. To that end, part of being financially stable and setting up for future viability means we need to be open to establishing new service structures at the Section or Area level and having certain support operations funded by and for local use.

I am convinced that if we keep or focus on putting players on the field - sourcing revenue for that, then investing in activities that support it - we will make the right decisions that align financial stability today and future viability over the long term.



**Cathy FARLESS:** Develop a Marketing Program with both National and Regional components and includes internet-based, targeted advertising to present AYSO as the premier youth soccer organization with quality programs for everyone. We must understand our customers and be a presence across the internet, social media, broadcasting media, and billboards so that when looking for a soccer program, AYSO is the easiest to find and the name they remember.

Ensure that our Programs work in concert to attract membership and demonstrate/exhibit the AYSO philosophies. Experiences in one of our programs must increase interest in all the programs, with no program bringing a disadvantage to the others. All AYSO programs must be accountable to either the Area or Section in the same way as our core programs and must operate with transparency and adherence to our philosophies to contribute to, rather than detract from, the reputation of AYSO. Our philosophies are our foundation and must be reflected in all our programs.

Increase access to affordable training by expanding on-line training, section and area sponsored webinars, and continuous improvement of our current instruction and instructors. Continuous improvement should include streamlining our training requirements to be sure we provide what is needed and do not overburden our volunteers. The key to quality programs is trained volunteers.

Ensure our tools work. Since registration is often the first exposure to AYSO, we must have intuitive and efficient tools to join the program. Also, the tools our volunteers use to deliver the program should make their job easier, not add to their workload. We are currently reviewing our tools to identify what is not working, and planning an affordable path to resolving the deficiencies, focusing on a usable, efficient, and intuitive user interface.



**AI PRADO:** I would keep things as they are for now. The changes the made in 2020, as a reaction to the pandemic, resulted in a more efficient organization.

I don't think the organization would have survived without the changes.

That said, I believe our volunteers have gone through enough changes; likely in many aspects of their lives, not just with AYSO.

Now that the numbers are returning to 'normal', I'd like to take a wait and see perspective.

We need to continue keeping expenses down while ensuring we support our regions, understanding how our decisions impact regions, children, and volunteers.

We have a real chance to strategize and plan in a proactive and not reactive mentality.



## NBOD QUESTION 4

### 4. How would you address the different needs of Regions, Areas and Sections based on geographic differences, particularly programs located furthest from the AYSO Office?



**Yvette BARRETT:** We need to ask Section Directors what their communities need and LISTEN to what they say. They are the ones who know the communities they serve. AYSO is not a one size fits all. We need to identify what is working, address the needs of the regions and let volunteers run their programs. We need to be responsive to the needs of our regions, no matter where they are located or what size of program they run. As a Section Liaison I have become abundantly aware of how different programs are, even within the same Section. There really is no right or wrong way.



**Rick BUITEWEG:** The differences are not solely based on geographic location or distance from the AYSO Office, and you need to dig deeper to understand and address these differences. To help you frame the issue better, think of your own definitions of Regions, Areas and Sections and realize it is different from others in the organization. Your definition is influenced by what you have experienced and are part of, but that will be different among each of us. There is no one definition of what those entities are or what they provide.

The differences in our programs have very little to do with how far things are located away from the AYSO Office. In today's virtual world having people in the same location is not as critical as it once was. The main issue is not the location of the office but the fact that the staff is centralized in one location. Soccer programs are local in nature and AYSO programs require a strong local connection to the community. A centralized staff will have limited exposure to those local differences; therefore, we must rely on local leadership for this information.

The real differences are in what the programs are doing to support the community because the communities themselves are different. Weather, geographical location, community size, and market does influence some things, but so does how many AYSO programs are near you, competition in your market, and knowing if your community is a soccer, football, or baseball town. These are just some of things that create differences in our programs.

One of the ways to help address the differences is to focus on what our entities are providing. I have had to change the conversation to use new terms like Program Provider, Playing Circuits, and Geographical Associations to describe what entities in our organization are doing versus describing the label we give them in our SAR structure. This has helped to explain what these entities are doing which helps us better understand their differences and needs.

Once we understand these differences, we can develop flexible models and services that allow us to support and adapt to the needs of these entities. We often say 'one size does not fit all', however, we still have many rules, systems and practices that drive us in that 'one size fits all' direction. We can now use data to better understand our total organization and these differences and make the right trade-offs as we look at supporting these differences.



**Richard GOLDBERG:** This is an everyday issue for my Section. We have regions in major metropolitan areas and regions in rural farm areas. Each has its own unique concerns. My experience is you address the different needs by assisting each region with the support they request. Cookie-cutter solutions will not work here. You have to trust, within reason, that each region or area knows the type of support they need and how best to provide it. It is then my responsibility to do my best to provide the type of support they need.



**Kris GRAFF:** At the level of the National Board, it is challenging to address the individual needs of each region or area while still maintaining an overall view of the variety of needs across the organization. The current Board and Section Directors have worked together the last several years to address this issue by providing more ways to say "yes" to our Regions, Areas, and Sections. We have provided guidance on how to implement a variety of play types that are different from the standard small-sided weekly games to allow Regions and Areas to offer programs that best meets the needs of their communities. New financial tools have been provided to better address the challenges of digital finances in the current economy. While these are not all the needs of our programs across the country it does provide a framework for future support-addressing the needs of Regions and Areas in ways that help and support a majority of regions wherever they are geographically. Then when needed,

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the Section Directors are able to ask the Board for more specific assistance, regardless of how far the region is from the AYSO office

Another resource to meet Region, Area, and Section needs came about through the course of the pandemic. Many of us have been using digital tools to hold virtual meetings, trainings, and offer a wide level of support. Section 9 covers approximately 515,000 square miles across 5 western states and traveling to the various regions and areas in the section is challenging even without the constraints of the pandemic. I have been using these digital tools to offer virtual support-live and recorded-to meet the needs of all my regions, including those in the furthest corners of the section. I have found that taking 5 minutes to get on a video call and walking an RC or board member through an issue with shared screens and step by step guidance is more effective than a phone call or back and forth emails. If we will commit to making the most of our available technology, while being conscious of digital fatigue, we can work with Regions, Areas, and Sections by coming to them virtually to help them meet their needs.



**Dan HOWALD:** Happy to answer this question as the Board Member located furthest from the AYSO Office.

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it's that we can effectively mobilize and support people, programs, and Regions at a distance, using technology. Proximity to the AYSO Office should have nothing to do with the quality of support available. While it is true that many things we do are delivered better when organized and executed on the ground/in person, physical distance is not the barrier that it once was when it comes to offering support, and many aspects of training.

More broadly, I think the question isn't so much about geography and distance as it is about the many different types of AYSO programs that run across the country. There are Regions in central California that operate and serve communities more like Regions in upstate New York than other Regions in their home state or time zone, for example. To that end, I think we are naturally evolving to a more localized support model where some services can be offered in a hub-and-spoke type of organization, and this is a direction we are actively evaluating, as noted in my response to the question preceding this one.

Organizing our support services around specific program needs vs. geography alone will bring us a long way to improving delivery and getting questions answered. As our programs continue to evolve and incorporate new models of play that supplement our core teams-and-leagues model, it's really a necessity to begin experimenting with ways to make this a reality.



**Cathy FARLESS:** My home Section is one of the farthest programs from the National Office. Our Section and Area leadership is committed to develop local resources to reduce the need for operational help from the AYSO Office both in personnel and funds. We now have a robust instructor base to train volunteers, regular and frequent opportunities for training, and ways to generate discretionary funds to support these activities. Across AYSO, we need to work with the local leadership to be able to determine the best ways to implement the programs and share what works with the AYSO Office so these ideas can be tailored by other Sections to their needs. We share ideas within the Section at the Expos, but we need ways to share ideas with other Sections.



**AI PRADO:** I would address and support them individually. As we often say, AYSO is not a one-size fits all organization, I would embody that philosophy.

I would listen to the local leaders, gathering information and details and then team with the Region, Area and/or Section on a workable solution, with flexibility being the key.

I'd find more ways to say yes (as long as its consistent with our rules and regulations) and help the Region, Area and/or Section come up with creative ideas and help them thru implementation.

## NBOD QUESTION 5

### 5. What growth and business development strategies would you propose to help AYSO retain and expand around the country, specifically in areas where we do not currently have programming?



**Yvette BARRETT:** My firm belief is retention starts with the coach. The coach is the primary contact for the players. For players to come back, for us to grow, we MUST develop and support our coaches. We need to change how we engage our coaches. If we can have them enjoy the journey, want the training, not feel pressured, the experience for them and the player is so much better. When a player has fun, really enjoys the game, they will come back and bring their friends. We need to collaborate with community leaders where we currently have no footprint. Whether that is through schools, community centers, local youth services, whatever. We must engage these leaders to show them who we are and what an asset we can be for their communities and children. I would like us to find sponsors who would specifically be willing to donate to help us build up underserved communities.



**Rick BUITEWEG:** Our strategies for growth and development need to focus around five main areas. These five main areas are:

- I. Help existing programs better serve their community and attract more players
- II. Re-start AYSO programs in places where we once were - focusing first on programs that closed in the last five years
- III. Working with Regions and Areas to expand their current footprint to neighboring communities
- IV. Establishing AYSO Communities in places where we are not and building a foothold where we can grow from
- V. Creating services within and outside of the AYSO Organization to provide support for the above efforts.

Any efforts need to be measured to make sure it delivers growth that we are seeking, and the program is sustainable over time. We need to ensure the entire business case makes sense for AYSO. However, we need to act sooner than later as opportunity is here right now and we need to start the journey. If we do not, our competition will seize this opportunity.

Strategies would include ways to lessen the burden on programs, using AYSO alumni in a Union Organizer type role, developing mentor programs, changing our training focus, and developing models for shrinking markets. This would be in addition to many efforts already underway.

In new markets we need to launch focused limited programs that will allow us to establish presence that we can build from and grow. We need to look at models that are different than our traditional programs such as running after school programs or pre-school programs. This will allow us to enter a market with a lower start up expense and a smaller operational footprint and help us to establish our presence in the market.

We should also look at a model where we use United to develop that foothold in a new market. This again would help us establish a presence in the market and allow us to grow into the recreational space as many of our competitors do.

Lastly, we need to look at other opportunities to partner with or provide services to other organizations. These partnerships or affiliations need to be in the best interest of AYSO. These might not fit our traditional models but still align to our goals and mission. We should continue to look at these opportunities and be willing to experiment but not count on these as our primary path for growth.



**Richard GOLDBERG:** As I mentioned in Question #3, I believe our focus needs to be on player numbers. The strategy I would promote is to focus primarily on what we currently have. We need to ensure our current regions are strong and have the player numbers they need to succeed. As a secondary focus, we can look at expansion. We have the organization. We have the systems. We have the training programs. We have the expertise. I see no reason why we can't package these items and ship them to new areas and provide support in person and virtually.



**Kris GRAFF:** Growth needs to be two-pronged to be realistic and sustainable. The first prong is finding entry level programs that can be deployed easily without overburdening our volunteers or dropping programs in the middle of nowhere without the necessary support. One vision of how to accomplish this is by packaging and promoting our Playground Program

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in a way that reaches out to those youngest players and their families not only within established regions but utilizing preschools across the country. The second prong is finding ways to grow where we are. Many of our programs have positive, mutually beneficial relationships with the communities they serve and their local Park & Rec programs, but many do not. Finding ways strengthen and develop those relationships without sacrificing who we are as AYSO, and our volunteer driven identity needs to be a top priority.



**Dan HOWALD:** This is an area I've spent a lot of time working on during my term on the Board, so apologies in advance for the long-ish answer.

For retention and/or organic growth of current Regions, one core business strategy we need to embark on (and are doing so) is to significantly enhance our digital footprints at the Regional level - our websites, our social destinations, our search engine visibility, and more. This means delivering tools and professional expertise at scale to all our Regions - a true local digital marketing effort that supplements the national tools already available. We need to address this, because the programs we compete with are in most cases highly professionalized digital enterprises, with their targets (and dollars) focused on specific markets where they operate and are aggressively looking to expand. New families considering youth soccer do their homework online, and we are not making it easy enough to find our programs, let alone persuade them why we are a better choice.

Another retention program revolves around really driving our 5U and 4U programs in Regions that don't offer these programs. The starting age of a first time "soccer" players is dropping fast, as competitors push programs for 3-year-olds or even younger. This is a threat to our historic advantage of being the first soccer experience, which we must take seriously. This means getting boots-on-the-ground support to Regions who are not offering Schoolyard or Playground due to bandwidth or other issues. The ripple effect of a declining first-time player share starts with fewer players coming in and quickly extends to fewer parents available to volunteer.

For net new growth and entering new markets, there are three key components in my view:  
Developing varied, creative ways to partner or enable

affiliation with other youth soccer providers. It's much easier to get a foothold in a place where there is some youth soccer infrastructure vs. creating one from scratch. Our strength in recreational programming, soccer curriculum, volunteer training, and even business systems, is and can be very attractive to any number of potential partners; and it allows us to offer more AYSO soccer to more kids, even if that is in partnership with another organization. It is possible to offer "AYSO soccer" inside of other entities, and we need to stay open to making these kinds of relationships flourish.

Focusing on using AYSO "soccer products" to generate interest in new markets, vs. trying to start up "new Regions" per se. We have many great alternative play concepts and models - clinics, camps, jamboree style, pick-up or drop-in soccer, after school programs, and more - that we can leverage to gauge interest in a community, begin to build relationships that can blossom into full-fledged Regions, identify potential volunteers, etc. It would be great if we could spin up a 500-player Regions with multiple teams in every division in the space of a year or two, but that hasn't happened and isn't likely to. Starting smaller and building through trial programs on a building blocks basis is a more productive way to go to market, control our investment in starting up, and prove community value.

Using data and analytics tools to identify strategic opportunities, then taking a true business development (sales) approach to getting in front of identified prospects. Gone are the days where we could wait by the phone for interested parties to inquire - we must go out and get them proactively. I know many of us do not care to think of what we do in such business-y, transactional terms, but the fact is, youth sports is a business - a very large one at that, and we need to acknowledge this by going on offense.

For what it's worth, applying core business principles in these ways in no way means we must change "who we are" as the AYSO brand, when it comes to the programs we deliver and our very soul. I would not be outlining any of these strategies if I thought it meant we had to materially alter our mission, vision, and values. It's just new ways to take those qualities to market.

## NBOD QUESTION 5 cont.



**Cathy FARLESS:** Many AYSO Sections are large geographic areas with small areas of concentration of regions, along with many regions that stand alone with no other AYSO regions within an hour or less drive. It is proven that regions that are close together survive because they can work together to get training and games scheduled predominantly with other AYSO teams. New Regions should be paired up with a more established Region that would Mentor the new RC and other board members in their first several seasons. A development program that identifies regions at risk and floods the surrounding communities with the marketing to develop other regions nearby would also be beneficial. This requires support from the nearest Regions and the Section/Area staffs to accomplish. When our National and Section development staff is talking to a prospective Region that is not close to other Regions, we need to immediately start the search for other prospects to create another area of concentration.



**Al PRADO:** I would help develop a strategy that begins with understanding the areas we are looking to retain and expand in.

We should use analytics for youth sports growth, expansion, fields, and local school numbers as well as identifying where the volunteer base would come from. I would support a simplified, and phased approach to help start and grow new regions.

I would work with local community leaders, listening to them on what they need and help them, based on their needs.

I would support a system/process that allows for a 'SWAT' team, experienced AYSO Volunteer leaders, to assist the potential new region and their new leadership, supporting them in any way possible.



## 6. Why are you running for the National Board of Directors?



**Yvette BARRETT:** Having served one term already, I see how much more we can do as a team. I would like the opportunity to continue with programs I am involved with and grow AYSO. I want to improve the coach, player and family experience. Coaches are the AYSO storefront, and we MUST commit support to them however they need it. I feel like I contribute positively to AYSO and would like to continue to serve our families.



**Rick BUITEWEG:** I am running for the NBOD to help move the organization forward. This is a continuation of the work I have been doing for the past eight years. This would expand my role beyond what I am doing today to further support the organization and to provide more leadership. My plan is to continue to aid to the organization where needed and continue to help our programs connect to their communities. I will also use my experience and knowledge to help us develop new programs while avoiding the mistakes of the past. I will continue to champion the differences in our programs and work to better support those differences without giving up the needs of the organization.

I bring a unique mix of skills and experiences in both my professional and AYSO career that will help our organization and the board. My work for National Organization and as Section Director has given me a unique insight into our total organization and operations that will help me reach the right decisions for the organization.



**Richard GOLDBERG:** I believe it is important to have a strong officiating presence at the most senior levels of AYSO. AYSO exists in a dynamic environment impacting how we protect youths and train our coaches and officials. AYSO faces a multitude of issues; legal, contractual, financial, IT, medical, educational and many more on a regular basis. I believe

the knowledge, expertise and skill sets I have developed as a military officer, district manager for a major franchise company and an IT financial analyst for a major financial institution will allow me to help AYSO analyze these issues, find workable solutions, and help move AYSO forward in a positive direction.



**Kris GRAFF:** I have spent the last 13 years as an Executive Member in this organization. During that time, I have seen many changes and challenges. The last 6 years as a Section Director I've worked with our National Board of Directors on many things including the significant challenges dealt to AYSO and all of us by the pandemic. As a Section Director my focus has been on how the changes and challenges have affected the players and volunteers of my section. I am running for the National Board of Directors to be able to have a more direct impact on how future changes and challenges will affect all AYSO volunteers and players across the country.



**Dan HOWALD:** When I stood for election in 2018, I told myself (and my family) that this would be a one term event for me, that I would ramp my AYSO commitment back down to coaching in my home Region (which I have been doing continuously since 1998). Now at the end of my term, I realize we are at a significant flashpoint in the evolution of AYSO and feel like stepping down at this time would leave so much unfinished business on the table. When I start something, I have a very hard time not seeing it through to completion.

I've been granted the privilege of being involved in crafting and shaping a roadmap forward; now that the hard work of execution has begun, I want to be there to help manage and troubleshoot it as the rubber hits the road.

If my candidacy is not successful, I will of course work with whomever is tasked with picking up on the specific workflow threads I've spearheaded as a Board Member. It's not about me, it's about what motivates me -- and that is doing the best I can to create a healthy, vibrant future for AYSO.

**Please Note:** The following responses from the candidates have been inserted as submitted by the candidate. No other alterations or edits were made.

## NBOD QUESTION 6 cont.

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**Cathy FARLESS:** Serving on the National Board of Directors has long been one of my goals in my AYSO life. I feel honored to serve in my first term and want to continue in this service and help ensure that AYSO emerges from the pandemic re-energized to bring quality youth soccer programs to the communities across the country. I have the time and resources to serve and want to represent the volunteers in all the decisions made by the Board. I want to be sure that the board is responsive to the needs of the regions, areas, and sections and that the volunteers continue to be the heart of AYSO.



**Al PRADO:** Because I know I can make a positive difference.  
My unique qualifications of being an active volunteer, with my professional leadership experience which includes 3 years at the AYSO office, would allow me to make an immediate impact. I have the business knowledge, experience, and leadership skills to hit the ground running. I know and have worked with most of the Board Members, Section Directors and have likely exchanged emails or phone calls with a vast majority of the Executive Members.



## 7. If you had a blank slate for AYSO, how would you envision it be structured?



**Yvette BARRETT:** I like our structure the way it is. I do believe we need to allow more flexibility/freedom for our Section Directors. I feel like we tell them what we are doing instead of asking what they would like to see happen sometimes. They and only they know exactly what their communities need, and we must trust them. I would like our staff to feel valued. I would like all NBOD members to be heard and feel valued.



**Rick BUITEWEG:** I believe we do not need to change the structure of AYSO as it is not what is critical to our future. We can look at the advantages and disadvantages of our current membership and single corporation status to see if there might be a better way to structure and organize but those are more for tax, banking, and legal reasons not for operations. What we need to change is making sure we have a structure that supports our current programs and our need to grow and evolve. We need to be able to grow without adding burden to our existing volunteer leadership and still respect the structure we have today. We do need to better support programs like United or any other new programs that are not part of our traditional model. We should have the ability to cross programs into and out of our traditional model as things change. I believe the current structure with some changes can support that.

The more radical change that I would make would be more to help us separate operational needs from our traditional compliance and control. This change would support one way to look at the organization for reporting, voting, and compliance and a different way to run programs or playing circuits – allowing for more natural ways for these programs and circuits to exist. Playing circuits could control their own playing rules and could belong to circuits that span across the boundaries that are setup for compliance. This would better support and reflect how things are today and allow us to better support our programs. Voting rights, EM appointments, and control right now get mixed in with the operational needs of the programs and limit our ability to organize as we need to support how our programs running. Separating these two concepts would go a long way in helping to resolve this conflict and allow us even greater flexibility.



**Richard GOLDBERG:** From a blank slate perspective, I would not envision AYSO organized too much different than what it is today. I would keep a National Office and the Section, Area and Region organizational structure. The biggest change I would make is how we work together. I see AYSO as a “silo” organization: coaches, referees, management, etc. each operating independently from each other. The reality is, many of us wear several hats and depending on the situation determines which hat we are wearing at any given time. If we envisioned ourselves more as overlapping value streams all supporting one common product, being the premier youth soccer program, we could focus more on what we have in common and make our program even stronger. As an example, we should be developing our training programs in coordination with each other rather than independently. This would ensure we are all presenting the same information the same way and maximize the limited resources that we have.



**Kris GRAFF:** If I had a blank slate to make changes to AYSO, I wouldn't focus on our structure. I believe our current NBOD/S/A/R structure is a worthwhile and solid format for our organization. It is not totally unlike other organizations even if we call the levels different things. I believe where we need to focus our efforts more is in how and when we communicate with our volunteers as well as our parents. While we do have a method of Board to Section to Area to Region (to Parents as needed) and Staff to Parents as the standards of communication, to many times the message gets lost or changed along its way. Our communication is better than it has been in years past, but there are definitely ways we can and must do better. The Board and Section Directors are currently looking at ideas and options, but it will take time and effort to not only develop appropriate and effective solutions but to implement those that are shown to be most effective.

## NBOD QUESTION 7 cont.



**Dan HOWALD:** Interesting question because coming out of the pandemic, we do have as close to a blank slate as any 58-year-old organization could ever hope to have. We've re-oriented our approach to AYSO as a business, and out of necessity stripped the National staff to a level that I for one would have never thought viable. How and what do we build, or build back? I believe that the best structure would be one aligned against the different segments of programs that we have vs. defined solely by geography. Segmentation would mean sorting our Regions into groups based on similarities in profile (size, seasonality, programs offered, proximity to other Regions, market dynamics, etc.) It's a dynamic model where Regions might migrate from one segment to another as they grow or change. Leadership would likewise be based on experience with and understanding of how these different Segments actually conduct their operations.

We would have centers of excellence supporting the core business operations that all our program segments require – registration systems, volunteer screening systems, finance, and the like; as well as centers of excellence supporting different AYSO program types in education & training, soccer programs support, and marketing. The concept is to deliver support that clusters like Regions for sharing of resources and for collective best-practice gathering based on what actually works in the field, under leadership that has skills and experience in these same areas.

The good news is, I firmly believe such a structure is possible to evolve to without blowing up our current structure entirely. Since it's based on a different mindset, I believe we can get there without causing unnecessary re-org disarray, and without sidelining or de-valuing any of the superb volunteers we have all throughout the current structure.



**Cathy FARLESS:** Since my first introduction to AYSO as a National organization, I have been impressed with the structure that made the Volunteers the leaders and decision makers. It was and still is amazing that so many people devote so much time and effort to AYSO. Our structure gives the Regions the ability to shape their programs to address the local market while maintaining accountability to the Area and the Section. One change I would consider would be to have the Region, Area, and Section Referee and Coach

Administrators have a vote, making each Region, Area, and Section have 3 votes instead of one. This is because the coaches and referees make up two thirds (or more) of the volunteers and the changes we vote on often impact both the coach and referee programs.



**Al PRADO:** This is not an easy question to answer, as there are so many variables to this question. Given all the recent changes, which I understand were required for survival, I would wait and see. Does anything need to be changed? If so, what, and why? What objective is not being met? Do we have the correct objectives and ways to measure them; what are our Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) If change is needed, I'll be happy to lead it. But we need to understand what we are changing, why we are changing and what impact any change has our children and volunteers.

Any structural changes need to be done in a manner that makes sense from an operational perspective, with a clear understanding of the organization's goals. We need to keep in mind what is best for our children, our volunteers with flexibility and adaptability for local regions.

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## 8. What specialty would you like to see on the NBOD?



**Yvette BARRETT:** I feel like anyone passionate about AYSO, without an agenda is a perfect choice for the NBOD. Specialty, not sure. Many people have areas of expertise, but they are not always utilized. We have so many amazing volunteers across this country. I feel like we do not use their knowledge and expertise at all. There may be people who would love to consult and not be on the NBOD. I think we should find a way to capture these people, their skill sets, and ask for assistance as needs/projects arise. If I had to choose, I would say, grant writer and or sponsor/fundraising expert.



**Rick BUIREWEG:** I am not sure what this question is asking, as expertise which comes with a specialty can be brought to the board in many ways. Our current operating model have commissions that brings the expertise to the board and, in cases and where there is not a commission, the NBOD can and has reached out to recruit experts to assist and give guidance and recommendations. I would prefer instead of trying to bring specialties to the board, we continue the commission model and focus the NBOD membership and its members on folks we believe can best guide the organization now and into the future and bring skills that support that. The board make-up does need to change to better reflect our membership and we need to continue with DEI initiatives to change the make-up of our leadership. This will take a dedicated effort. Part of why I am running for the board is to make sure we move these efforts along.

Board Members should be able to provide leadership and guidance to the organization. This allows for many different specialties and professional experiences in a variety of fields and will change over time. The board will continue to deal with many operational, financial, and legal concerns as well as those that come with being a sport governing body. The board is responsible not only for today but for ensuring that AYSO continues well into the future. AYSO as an organization needs to run like a business, and the business we are in is soccer. We also have a distributed model of control and delivery. The specialties that are needed right now are to help the organization capitalize on the shift in the youth sports market that AYSO is in position to take advantage of. Professional backgrounds in marketing, sales, and technology can be leveraged to

help the organization take advantage of this opportunity. Any expertise or professional experience that that can help AYSO run the organization and move it forward is the specialty I would like to see on the board.



**Richard GOLDBERG:** Per the position description, the NBOD is intended to have the primary responsibility and authority to provide leadership and guidance to the organization in all its activities. I would like to see the specialty of the well-rounded individual who has a breath of experiences in a variety of organizations, groups, positions, responsibilities, backgrounds and knowledge. Numerous studies have shown the more diversity you have in a group, the better it performs. As a national organization catering to youths of all walks of life and has volunteers from every corner of the world, we must have the most diverse group of individuals we can on the NBOD.



**Kris GRAFF:** We have a wide variety of skills and experience on our National Board. Business Administration, Childhood/Teen Education, Finance, Marketing, Sales to name a few. Two areas where we could have a more defined presence on the board are medical and legal. We do however have a legal commission and a commission chair who is present at board meetings to fill that particular gap. Even though the diversity among the board doesn't reach to all specialty areas we might want, we do have a diverse volunteer membership whom we can connect with to fill any need that might arise. Skills that I possess that would be beneficial as a member of the board are a teacher assistant for 6 years working with children Pre-K through 5th grade and office management skills including organization, communication (both verbal and written), customer database management, and collaboration.

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## NBOD QUESTION 8



**Dan HOWALD:** As we evolve AYSO and with it the makeup of our Board itself, a few key areas would be on my wish list to have colleagues that specialize in:

- Business Development/Sales background in a service model business - to offer us a perspective that I believe we need to compete in the youth sports marketplace. AYSO is under threat from sales-oriented operations that are well organized, very well (for-profit) funded, and actively targeting young families - Little Kickers, Soccer Shots, i9, etc. - and we need to mobilize a response quickly. We can't assume we'll get the first-time player by default anymore, so we need to think the way a sales professional would about this challenge.
- Grant Seeking/Grant Writing - this is a specialty that could guide us to a position where AYSO can access the kind of seed funding needed to spin up new programs, support at-risk Regions, or expand those that have opportunity but not enough resources to leverage them. We can invest in some of these items with our growth-targeted budgets as they exist today...but to really scale and deliver, having dedicated external sources of funds will get us there much faster and more broadly. We have a great story to tell and reasons why AYSO...what we don't have right now is a lot of experience on hand with insight into how to orchestrate such an effort.
- Business Technology - Business Information Systems & Data/Analytics expertise is another area we can always use strategic guidance on. The tools available to streamline processes and workflows are always evolving; if we are able to keep a strategic focus on that while having a specific subject matter expert overseeing implementation and course correction on the ground, we will help ourselves stay one step ahead of potential issues and new developments.



**Cathy FARLESS:** While a member's professional experience can be an advantage in making decisions and developing plans for AYSO, the specialties that are helpful can change depending on the issues facing the board. In recent years people with experience in human resources, marketing, customer development, and finance were instrumental in the process of keeping AYSO alive and the AYSO office supporting the regions, areas and sections. As we emerge from the

pandemic constraints and get stronger financially, we will need a broad spectrum of AYSO experience and business expertise to shape the organization to support the programs conducted in the Regions and Areas. At the same time, the dedication of the members of the National Board of Directors to the AYSO vision will be the most important factor in shaping AYSO to grow and thrive.



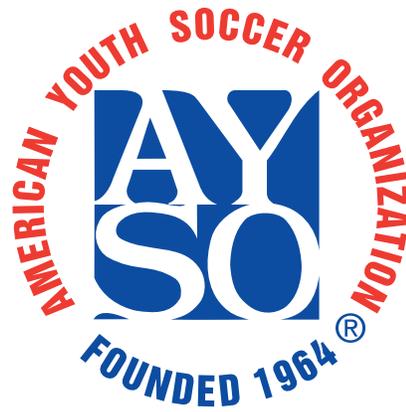
**AI PRADO:** I'd like to have a balanced representation, with different specialties that are specific to our organization.

I love to have someone who has child education background, someone who has a mental health background that can assist us with managing change (for both children and volunteers), someone who understands the business needs of the organization, like Marketing, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Like other boards, our board members need to be leaders, with current leadership and business experience not just well-intentioned long-standing volunteers.

I have a proven record, with AYSO as well as my other professional positions, as being a leader, leading by example and always kindness; understanding that as an NBOD member, I am leading and impacting 350,000 players, families and 70,000 volunteers.

**Please Note:** The following responses from the candidates have been inserted as submitted by the candidate. No other alterations or edits were made.



**Everyone Plays<sup>®</sup>**  
Balanced Teams  
Open Registration  
Positive Coaching  
Good Sportsmanship  
Player Development



# 2022 QUESTIONS TO CANDIDATES FOR NATIONAL PRESIDENT

The National President candidate was asked to respond to a set of three questions. They were notified that their responses would be distributed to all Executive Members who are eligible to vote at the 2022 AYSO National Annual General Meeting (NAGM). The candidate's biography, statement and responses to these questions are listed on the following pages. Please review them carefully in preparation for your vote in the upcoming election at the 2022 AYSO NAGM in Las Vegas, Nevada.

The questions posed to National President candidate for the candidate statement were as follows:

1. What do you feel makes you qualified to be AYSO NBOD President? Please provide information about your leadership experience and leadership style.
2. As we emerge from the constraints of the pandemic, AYSO has been pleased to see player numbers return to similar of those of 2019/20. What changes or processes would you propose to create financial stability and ensure the future success of AYSO?
3. What is your 1, 3, 5 and 10 year strategic vision for AYSO?
4. What growth and business development strategies would you propose to help AYSO retain and expand around the country, specifically in areas where we do not currently have programming?
5. Describe specific accomplishments, improvements or projects in which your involvement was instrumental and had a significant impact on AYSO at the Region, Area, Section or National level.
6. Describe the nature of your current involvement in your local AYSO Region, Area or Section programs.
7. How would you address the different needs of Regions, Areas, and Sections based on geographic differences, particularly programs located furthest from the AYSO National Office?
8. What motivated you to run for National President?

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## 2022 National President Candidate:



Yvette  
BARRETT



Michael  
KARON



***Please Note:** The following responses from the candidates have been inserted as submitted by the candidate. The text has been formatted to fit this document. No other alterations or edits were made.*



# PRESIDENT QUESTION 1

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**1. What do you feel makes you qualified to be AYSO NBOD President? Please provide information about your leadership experience and leadership style.**



**Yvette BARRETT:** I am a long-time volunteer serving at every volunteer level of this organization.

I have also been an RC, AD and SD. I know what it takes to lead at those levels and understand where these volunteers are coming from. As a leader at these levels, I looked to my team to work on projects, issues, ideas together. I am not a leader who thinks I have all the answers. I lead knowing I do not. I am extremely inclusive of my team. Everyone has something to contribute. That is why we are all here. I am very responsive to questions. When I do not have the answer, I find it. If I am elected President, the NBOD, SDS, Staff will all be on the same team. We will work together so that AYSO is the number one choice for families.

I have also been a Girl Scout Leader, PTO Fundraising Chair and President, Dance Studio Travel Coordinator.

I have owned three businesses and currently operate a business for a family. I currently manage 29 employees. I oversee every aspect of this business. HR, AR, AP, Insurance etc. I specialize in contracts and proposals. I have worked for a Transformational Consulting Company that focused on leadership. I worked as an administrator at a cultural resource management & GIS company.



**Michael KARON:** I am completing my 3rd year as AYSO National President. During this interval,

we endured the most difficult challenge in our history. Surviving the COVID crisis required me to demonstrate skills related to leadership, strategic and operational decision making, business judgement, open communication, effective teamwork and an in depth understanding of our organizational culture so that we could stay in business. We didn't get every decision right, but our team was able to learn from our mistakes, make course corrections as necessary and achieve good results. We were able to emerge stronger and better positioned than many other organizations.

## PRESIDENT QUESTION 2

**2. As we emerge from the constraints of the pandemic, AYSO has been pleased to see player numbers return similar to those of 2019/20. What changes or processes would you propose to create financial stability and ensure the future success of AYSO?**



**Yvette BARRETT:** I am not sure I would necessarily change what we are currently doing. We have a great financial team including our treasurer. We could benefit greatly if we would engage with a grant writer. We need more education to reduce risk at every level. We need to continue the path of reduced spending and not jump back on the spending train. We need to be more financially prepared for anything that may come our way. We need to build back our reserve account and not start spending unnecessarily when we feel secure. I think we all have come to realize, there are no guarantees in what may come. We must be prepared. I would like to find ways to bring in more sponsors for specific needs. I feel a big part of why we do not have more support is because we do not outline a specific want/need. In the past we have not always been clear on the needs of the organization. The success of AYSO is due to the dedication of the volunteers at every level, our families, and our very committed staff. We need to support the volunteers and staff we have and find more like them.



**Michael KARON:** Achieving financial stability and the future success of AYSO requires us to balance investments that make the experience better for the families and volunteers we currently serve (retention objectives) with outreach efforts to bring our programs to new communities who want the type of programming we provide (growth objectives).

I believe that there is no single “silver bullet” approach that will achieve our objectives. Instead, we need to create a culture of constantly trying new approaches to improve

both growth and retention, adjusting as we learn and using actual performance data to guide our decision making.

Since our financial results are better than expected and allow us to do so, we have already started to make investments in both growth and retention that target specific community needs, acknowledge the realities of being in competition with other programs and allow us to gather actionable information.

Recent examples of investments in retention programs include making the availability of The Coaching Manual free to all coaches, initiating development of an AYSO app which will allow better communication between coaches, parents and players, reducing the number steps required for player and volunteer registration, creating an online wiki and a power systems user group to help support program administrators, simplifying the appointment of new Regional Commissioners and allowing more flexibility in program types.

Recent examples of growth investments include providing seed financing for the restart of previously closed Regions, accelerating efforts to expand our United program outside of our existing AYSO Regions, developing an outsource solution for boosting AYSO Region organic search rankings, introducing an outsource display ad solution for attracting new player families, entering into a partnership agreement with a commercial partner to boost player counts in a target market area and initiating efforts to enhance the ability of the Office to directly support the roll out of growth program solutions to our member programs.

Not all these programs will accomplish what we intended. However, we will gather measurable results that we can use to make changes and modifications to improve results and invest in new initiatives, as our resources allow.

## PRESIDENT QUESTION 3

### 3. What is your 1,3,5, and 10-year strategic vision for AYSO?



**Yvette BARRETT:** Year 1, we need to continue to stabilize after what we have been through. We have asked a lot of our regions, and they need room to breathe. Years 1-3 we need to focus on growth, building financial reserves and financial stability. We need to find more sponsors to focus on specific needs. We need to build our coaches back up to give our players, families and coaches the best experience we can, to grow. By year 5 I would like to see many new programs and large growth of our existing programs. I would like to see AYSO in underserved communities become the norm. By year 10, I would love to see AYSO triple in size as far as players, volunteers, and amazing experiences. I would like to see AYSO become the number one choice for families A.S.A.P.



**Michael KARON:** A recent market study commissioned by US Soccer concluded that there are at least 10 million children in the US who could play soccer, but don't have access to programs. This number is more than twice as large as the number of children who are currently playing in US Soccer member programs such as AYSO, USYS and US Club. AYSO currently serves approximately 15% of youth soccer players who are playing in US Soccer member programs across the country. If US Soccer member programs were able to reach 50% of the addressable market of 10 million children and AYSO maintained a 15% market share, AYSO would potentially more than double the number of player registrations from our current levels. If this were to occur, AYSO would serve more families at a single time than ever before in its long history.

If we are willing to go to where the kids and their families are, I believe this is achievable over the next 7-10 years.

There are numerous benefits to achieving this milestone:

- Extending our family friendly program to more kids improves the strength of the communities we serve and allow a more sustainable approach to programming
- More children will enjoy the beautiful game in way that allows them to develop at their own pace and have a good experience
- AYSO will be able to keep our costs low and invest in more capabilities that make our programs better

At the same time, we can't expect our existing programs to take on the burden of more than doubling in size, especially in locations where we don't have programming or where the underlying population doesn't support growth.

Therefore, we must figure out a way to extend our reach and attract new participants and programs while allowing our existing Regions to do what works best for them.

We will need to start up programs in places that don't have them. In addition, we will also need to invest in new types of programs (school or parks & rec sponsored programs, drop-in and camp programs to cite a few possible examples), enhancing our business development capabilities, and entering partnerships with institutions and commercial partners that can provide us with financial and program support. While this is a different way of approaching our programming, I believe it can be complementary to our existing Regional, Area and Section based organization.

While we must prioritize our resources to focus on getting our existing programs back up to speed during the next twelve months, we are also beginning to explore some of the new programming concepts above with a view to trying out some of these ideas over the next 2 years. This would allow us to determine how quickly we can expand some of our early successes over the next several years so that we can achieve the growth goal of doubling our enrollment over a 7-10 year period.

**Please Note:** The following responses from the candidates have been inserted as submitted by the candidate. No other alterations or edits were made.

## PRESIDENT QUESTION 4

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**4. What growth and business development strategies would you propose to help AYSO retain and expand around the country, specifically in areas where we do not currently have programming?**



**Yvette BARRETT:** My firm belief is retention starts with the coach. Coaches are the AYSO storefront, and we MUST commit support to them however they need it. The coach is the primary contact for the players. For players to come back, for us to grow, we MUST develop and support our coaches. We need to change how we engage our coaches. If we can have them enjoy the journey, want the training, not feel pressured, the experience for them and the player is so much better. When a player has fun, really enjoys the game, they will come back and bring their friends. We need to work with community leaders where we currently have no footprint. Whether that's through schools, community centers, local youth services, whatever. We must engage these leaders to show them who we are and what an asset we can be for their communities and children. I would like us to find sponsors who would specifically be willing to donate to help us build up underserved communities



**Michael KARON:** We are in the process of hiring a firm to help us study those zip codes in the US that have the right demographic characteristics for successful AYSO programs using geographic based mapping. Combining this data with information about our existing programs and existing competitor programs will allow us to identify initial opportunities for expansion.

Once we have identified the opportunities we want to pursue, we would use a combination of the growth and retention strategies I describe in my answers to Questions 2 and 3.

## PRESIDENT QUESTION 5

**5. Describe specific accomplishments, improvements, or projects in which your involvement was instrumental and had a significant impact on AYSO at the Region, Area, Section or National level.**



**Yvette BARRETT:** Serving as a volunteer on every level of this organization, I feel like I have accomplished many things, along with a wonderful team, at every level. At the regional and area level we were able to build player numbers. As an RC, we were the first region in our Area to bring U5 to our families. (Way back when it was called U5) We were successful in holding training camps, bringing volunteer coach, referee, and management certifications from 15% to 98% throughout my tenor at the regional and area level. We were able to turn our Area and All-Star tournaments in to fundraising events for the Area, a reversal from them losing money. Those funds helped with training, sending volunteers to Expos, player scholarships, etc. At the Section level my team and I were able to reenergize and elevate the yearly volunteer training at Golden Gate Camp. We also held the state games in our Section twice while I was SD. We were also successful in getting volunteers trained throughout the Section. The Section received the Section of the Year Award. At the National Level I have served as the Coach council liaison since its inception. I helped create Alliance as another level of play we offer our players.



**Michael KARON:** During my past three years as National President, I led our leadership team to accomplish the following major improvements:

- Aligned AYSO revenues and expenses to survive the COVID crisis
- Created and implemented a Return to Play initiative that supported programming during the COVID crisis
- Upgraded our volunteer background systems to provide more comprehensive screening of volunteers and improve player safety
- Replaced core registration and training systems and implemented DIVVY/zipbooks to improve reliability of player registration and make it easier to manage local expenses
- Streamlined AYSO policies, reducing the amount of paperwork and making it easier to do business
- Created a framework, provided seed financing, and developed a plan for future growth of AYSO
- Secured \$1.6 million in bridge financing from AYSO members
- Achieved AYSO direct representation on the Board of US Soccer
- Postponed the need for fee increases, despite higher inflationary costs
- Stabilized AYSO finances, generating positive cash flow for the first time in almost 10 years
- Unified our strategic and operational decision making to make sure we have feedback from each Section and the Office staff

**Please Note:** The following responses from the candidates have been inserted as submitted by the candidate. No other alterations or edits were made.

## PRESIDENT QUESTION 6

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6. Describe the nature of your current involvement in your local AYSO Region, Area or Section programs.



**Yvette BARRETT:** I am a current NBOD member 4 years, NAGM Task Force 1 year, Expo Task Force 1 year, Nominating Commission 3 years, United Liaison 4 years, Coach Commission Liaison 3 years, Section 2,10,12,14 Liaison 4 years, Alliance Liaison 3 years, Soccer.com liaison 1 year.

I coached/assistant coached my grandsons 8U and 10U teams the last 3 years. I am currently the Area treasurer, to help the new AD until he can recruit one.



**Michael KARON:** I am in my 6th year as a National Board Member and 3rd year as National President of AYSO. I also serve as an advisor to my local Region.

## PRESIDENT QUESTION 7

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### 7. How would you address the different needs of Regions, Areas, and Sections based on geographic differences, particularly programs located furthest from the AYSO National Office?



**Yvette BARRETT:** We need to ask Section Directors what their communities need and LISTEN to what they say. They are the ones who know the communities they serve. AYSO is not a one size fits all. We need to identify what is working, address the needs of the regions and let volunteers run their programs. We need to be responsive to the needs of our regions, no matter where they are located or what size of program they run. As a Section Liaison I have become abundantly aware of how unique our programs are, even within the same Section. There really is no right or wrong way.



**Michael KARON:** While we all serve communities of many sizes, differing demographics and far-flung localities, we share more in common than we differ. The COVID crisis forced us to be more creative in how we serve our local programs through using a combination of virtual and in person support. We have also spent a good part of the past three years encouraging individual Regions, Areas, and Sections to take the steps necessary to offer and support programs that meet the specific needs of their communities, rather than forcing compliance with some “one size fits all” set of rules.

We need to build on this progress by continuing to simplify our rules, engage more individual experienced volunteers who can help with answers, create better tools and support for training, and allowing self-help and peer to peer support. Early examples of this approach include adding BAND channels for discussing system support questions, a wiki-based support knowledgebase this Spring, and the availability of Section sponsored training for Regional Commissioners. By connecting our volunteers with questions to other volunteers with answers, we can improve the level of support we provide.

## PRESIDENT QUESTION 8

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### 8. What motivated you to run for National President?



**Yvette BARRETT:** After serving 4 years on the NBOD, I think my leadership style could benefit AYSO as we look to grow. We must work closely together, all of us, to ensure the sustainability of AYSO for many years to come. I believe my leadership style of inclusiveness and teamwork can get us there. I understand completely that AYSO is a business. However, it is a youth soccer business, and we need to pay attention to the player's needs. We need "To Provide World Class Youth Soccer Programs That Enrich Children's Lives."



**Michael KARON:** As a motivated, but seriously mediocre soccer player, I found that AYSO made a huge difference in my life. I have also seen firsthand the way AYSO helps make communities better. It's important work. I believe I have the skills and experience to help AYSO programs thrive in the emerging competitive landscape and help bring what we do to more kids and their families.



Thank you to all our NAGM event sponsors for helping to make this year a success!

