



Valerie Etcharren Arrechea has been part of NABO (North American Basque Organizations) for many years and is deeply familiar with the long tradition of female leadership within the federation. Raised in a family actively involved in Basque community life in the United States, she has witnessed how women from different generations have sustained and guided the organization since its beginnings.

1. Since when has the Euskal Etxea had women in leadership roles such as the presidency or vice-presidency? How has this influenced the role women have played—and continue to play— within the organization, particularly in decision-making and management?

Since the creation of NABO, women have held leadership positions and have been an active part of building the organization. From the earliest decades—in the 1970s and 1980s—there were female delegates and leaders who helped shape the direction of the federation. One of them was Janet Inda, the first woman to serve as president, whose term opened the door for others.

In my case, I grew up watching my mother serve as secretary during one of the presidencies, so I have always had female role models in organizational leadership. Throughout our history, practically every position has been held by women at some point: secretary, treasurer, vice president, and president. Our internal structure—in which the outgoing president later serves as vice president—has also contributed to a constant and natural female presence.

For that reason, in NABO there has never been a clear “before” and “after” regarding gender equality in decision-making: women have always been there, leading.

2. Once your Euskal Etxea began having women in leadership roles, were any programs, work plans or specific initiatives developed to incorporate gender equality? How does this contribute today to promoting values of equality?

In reality, NABO has never needed to create specific gender-equality programs because, in many ways, equality was already built into our way of working. If you look at the board of directors and the body of delegates, the balance is clear: at least 50% are women.

Even so, we wanted to revise our bylaws to ensure that the language was neutral and inclusive—not only regarding men and women, but also non-binary identities. It is a recognition that how people identify is evolving, and we want everyone to feel welcome.

So, although it may sound unusual, we have never experienced conflicts related to gender equality within NABO. That sense of equity has always been a natural part of our organizational culture.

3. What challenges does the Euskal Etxea face in terms of equality? How do you plan to address these challenges and the opportunities that may arise in the future?

The main challenge is maintaining an active awareness that gender equality matters. Today we have a strong balance, but if at any moment that balance were to shift, we would need to respond.

It is often emphasized —and rightly so— that women’s voices must be heard. But it is also possible that one day men’s representation could decrease, and in that case, we would need to ensure that their voices are also included. Real equality requires that everyone feels comfortable, represented, and able to participate in community projects.

The challenge, then, is to preserve that balance in a changing context.

4. What message would you like to share with other women who, like you, help build community in the Euskal Etxeak?

Never lose your voice.

It is essential for women to maintain their ability to speak up and be heard. That is the message we must pass on, especially to younger generations: all voices matter equally, and we must have the confidence to use them.