



## The Process of Getting Appointed to Boards Catherine L. Gilliss, PhD, RN, FAAN

As introduced in last month's column entitled **Degrees of Impact: An Overall Strategy for Thinking about Board Appointments** by Angela McBride, the Academy's Institute for Nursing Leadership has set a priority supporting the placement of nurses on boards. The initiative is being undertaken by the Academy in conjunction with the coalition of professional organizations known as the Nurses on Boards Coalition. The Academy's stated focus is placing nurses who are AAN Fellows on boards developing and overseeing policy broadly for health. In particular, the Academy is focusing on appointments that are state-based and often made by sitting governors as well as national boards. This second column lays out some considerations for those who believe they are ready for a board appointment.

The relationship between policy and politics can be confusing and, even when sorted out, has been known to trouble many nurses who believe that politics should not shape policy. According to Eleanor Sullivan "policy is the plan that results from political action" (Sullivan, 2013). Even the process of gaining appointment to board service is political.

Begin your thinking about an appointment by asking yourself four preliminary questions:

1. Which areas of service interest me?
2. To which areas am I able to contribute expertise, either personal or professional?
3. What is my level of resource commitment (time, talent, and treasury)?
4. What distinguishes me from others seeking this appointment?

Although you may benefit from consulting with trusted colleagues on the questions, only you can answer these personal questions which will shape your next steps. Be honest. If you do not think you can attend the weekly public meetings required of school board members, don't put your name in play. If you are not willing to make the financial contribution required to join the arts commission, look elsewhere.

Once you have answered those personal questions you will be prepared to take the next four steps:

1. Make some choices: Target 2-3 boards of interest that have upcoming openings and create a private list of your qualifications to serve ably. What's the evidence? If this is difficult, ask a colleague to help you with the list.
2. Get yourself known: Sullivan (2013) also points out that to be influential it is not about who you know but who knows YOU. If the appointing person is running for office, serve in the campaign. Establish your interest and create a network by volunteering within the organization. Give advice, time or money, but make your own commitment to the candidate or the issue obvious. Your expertise in an area may help but it is not a substitute for social capital.
3. Ask to serve: You now have a network in the field so use it to ask about upcoming appointments and what the anticipated issues will be. Express your interest in the topic and the challenges as well as your commitment to the values that the appointer will hold dear. Make your interests known.
4. Seek support: Once your name has been advanced, you will need to find people to endorse you and it may not be appropriate if they are all nurses and the position requires an inter-professional or community savvy. To do that job well, these references need information from you on your credentials, accomplishments and commitment. Prep your references on what each of them can contribute that is complementary and offers a full picture of your capacities. Provide them with details. For some appointments, you will be screened for the public positions you have previously taken as reflected by

your testimony, speeches, opinion editorials, written papers or interviews. Prepare your references and don't surprise those advancing your appointment. If the stances you took could be controversial, offer contextual information on your view.

Perhaps it goes without saying but, if appointed, say thank you to those who advanced your appointment. The best thanks will be in your capable and committed service.

Resource

Sullivan, E. (2013). *Becoming Influential: A Guide for Nurses* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.