

# a new way to nominate

*Engaged members have limited time, so putting out an annual call for volunteers and hoping for the best is no way to attract them. A more iterative and involved process can attract the leadership talent you need and give volunteers the experience they want.* | **By Leigh Wintz, CAE**

Engaging a sufficient number of volunteers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and expertise has been a growing challenge for associations for some time. In a tough economy, members understandably focus more on livelihood and economic stability, which leaves less time, energy, and motivation to volunteer for leadership roles in the organization. This is especially problematic given that association staffs now have fewer resources at their disposal and depend even more on the member-volunteer workforce to implement vital strategies and initiatives.

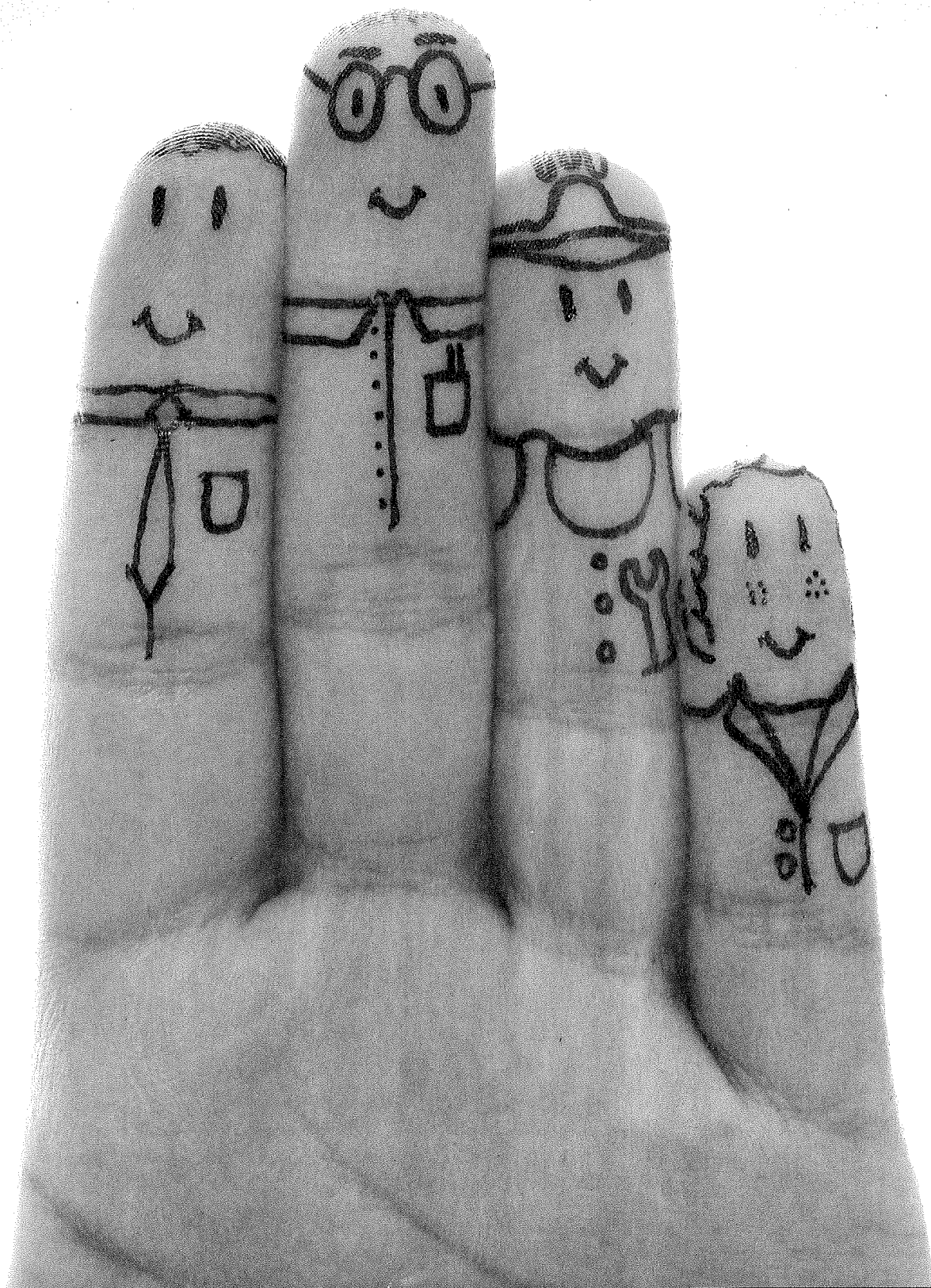
Serving on the board of directors of an association still has cachet as a resume builder and great appeal for those who want to give back to their industry, profession, or cause. However, serving on the board of directors is also perceived as an enormous commitment of time and energy (and in some cases money). Moreover, downsizing has increased members' individual workloads, making it more difficult to get, or take, time off to participate in association committees or on the board.

Successful associations have tackled these challenges by recognizing the need to change the way volunteer opportunities are managed. They understand that volunteers cannot be expected to radically change their lives to do association work. Members still want to be engaged in the work of the association, but

they are looking for shorter time commitments and opportunities for participation in ad-hoc groups or one-off projects. Members expect their associations to use technology to support their volunteer efforts and to embrace social media as an extension of the networking they enjoy as members.

These same associations have discovered the value of using the nominating committee to make the changes necessary to find and meaningfully utilize members. The traditional nominating committee convenes annually and is often composed of past top leaders, and its sole charge is to put together a slate of officer and director candidates for the coming year. The new nominating committee has evolved into a leadership-development committee, charged with cultivating and recognizing leadership within the organization in order to have an ongoing pool of diverse and qualified candidates for the board of directors, standing and ad-hoc committees, and one-off initiatives.

What does this new nominating committee look like? It takes a strategic approach in four areas of leadership development: marketing volunteer opportunities, the nomination process, personal development and education, and constant evaluation of activities.



## Marketing Volunteer Opportunities

This area is focused on a variety of activities to market the value and benefits of being a volunteer to selected audiences and to communicate to those who are willing and interested in participating about how to become a volunteer. A call for volunteers is usually sent out at least annually to all members, but a single email blast will probably not be adequate to get a sufficient number of members to actually read and complete the simplest and most attractive of online forms. In addition to several email blasts, spaced two to three weeks apart, announcements in publications, newsletters, and by leadership at face-to-face gatherings has proven to be effective.

The National Council of State Boards of Nursing has energized its leadership-development program through internal marketing using the theme "Advancing Potential: Discover the Leader Within." This year NCSBN printed a brightly colored postcard that is being widely distributed and allows members to suggest potential leaders or self-identify

(see sidebar "Call to Attention" on page 47). The cards are collected by the Leadership Development Committee, which then makes personal contact with the members.

## The Nomination Process

Associations bear a responsibility to constantly review, update, and sustain a leading-edge nomination process and to utilize the process once a year to identify talented candidates for volunteer positions that include the board, committees, and task forces. The call for volunteers should include a list of all the opportunities available and a concise description of the purpose and time commitment involved in serving. This information can reside in a section of the association website to allow interested members to peruse the available opportunities, clicking through for a thorough description of the positions of interest.

Include questions about preferred methods of involvement: teleconferences, face-to-face meetings, email, or all of the above. Some associations have the luxury of having more volunteers than positions to fill, so members may be

asked to identify an order of preference to serve if volunteering for more than one committee; perhaps they are willing to serve wherever needed.

Early engagement means higher member retention. If possible, allow members to sign up for committees or task forces throughout the year. Be sure to engage those who may be in the "holding tank" when you are looking for awards judges, survey participants, and critical readers or testers for new resources or products under development by staff. Avoid assigning "busy work" that merely appears to involve members—it's disingenuous and quickly discovered.

More members are willing to volunteer when you ask them to work on things that matter to them, demonstrate the work is making a positive difference, and provide an enjoyable experience.

Often there is no lack of candidates for board positions. The issue is usually a lack of qualified candidates—members who have the necessary qualifications to do the job. An evolved nominating committee will articulate a clear set of qualifications beyond the eligibility criteria stated in the bylaws. The Tree Care Industry Association carefully describes and defines the qualities it is looking for (see "The Right Qualifications" sidebar to the left).

There are a variety of useful matrices that help a nominating committee examine the characteristics of the ideal board based on criteria unique to your organization. Factors such as gender, occupation, legal or financial expertise, regional representation, and association leadership roles may be of different importance from one year to the next depending on who is remaining on the board and who is rotating off.

## Leadership Development and Education

The focus in this area is to constantly encourage, facilitate, and coordinate the implementation of various leadership-development training sessions and opportunities in order to prepare and grow future volunteer leaders. Examples

### THE RIGHT QUALIFICATIONS

Below is a partial list of the qualifications the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA) consults when it performs its search for board members.

**Strategic.** Focusing on the big picture.

**Visionary.** Looking to and anticipating the future. Embracing change and studying past history to learn what has been working well and why.

**Communication.** Possessing oral and written communication skills in order to communicate a broad vision to fellow board members and the membership at large, while also seeking to be a good listener.

**Integrity.** Supporting an environment of honesty and openness, following through with commitments.

**Commitment.** Dedication to the industry, professional leadership, and responsibilities of being a board member.

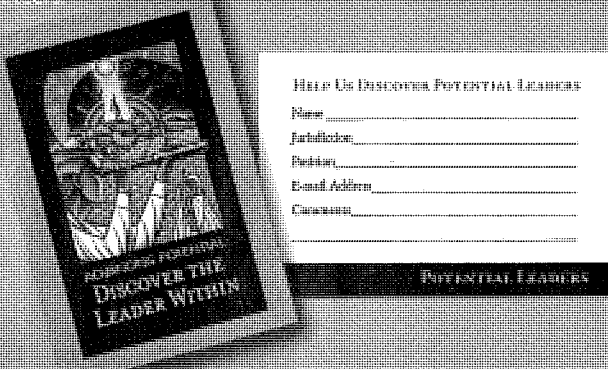
**Time.** Setting aside adequate time to participate in three board meetings annually, review monthly financial statements, engage in environmental scanning, and devote time to read at least one six- to eight-page report per month on the strategic progress of the association.

**Team orientation.** Having a collaborative spirit and being interested in coming to the best decision. Being respectful and welcoming of differing ideas and opinions but having the ability to funnel this energy to stay within TCIA's core values and mission.



## CALL TO ATTENTION

The National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) is using these protocols to attract potential volunteers.



of training include overall leadership training, informal mentoring opportunities, and board-member or committee orientation.

The evolved nominating committee gives valuable input about the leadership-development needs of the members. For instance, if the board composition lacks members with financial acumen, board orientation should emphasize understanding the association's financial statements and revenue sources. Responses in the call for volunteers may indicate a need for evening teleconferences because members are unable to receive calls during the workday. If public speaking is a necessary skill to serve as a board member or officer of the association, then resources should be allocated to ensure volunteers have or can receive the training necessary to effectively serve in the role.

### Constant Evaluation of Leadership-Development Activities

Even the best strategic approach needs evaluation to measure effectiveness and identify areas of process improvement. An evolved nominating committee constantly monitors changes in the strategic direction set by the board, seeks board feedback on future required leadership skills and training needs, and evaluates the efficacy of current training. This helps keep the leadership-development process fresh, relevant, and sustainable.

Resting responsibility for the association's leadership development with the nominating committee can give new life to an essential but often tired committee. Select members of an evolving nominating committee carefully. Assure

buy-in from current nominating committee members before implementing the change midstream. Consider seeking out those who have been unwilling or unable to volunteer due to some of the current barriers to board or committee service in order to include their perspectives. Bylaws may need to be amended before a full change can occur. Renaming the committee the Leadership Development Committee sends a message about the new purpose and scope of the nominating committee.

In civil society, associations have long played a key role in developing leaders. Former CEO and Chairman of General Electric Jack Welch once said, "Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others." Past leaders who have traditionally served on nominating committees may be eager to put their considerable knowledge about the organization to work in leadership development. They feel a renewed obligation to ensure their successors are adequately prepared to follow in their footsteps. Take advantage of that sentiment: It can speed your association's evolution from what was once a nominating committee to a leadership-development committee. **an**

*Leigh Wintz, CAE, is principal partner of Tecker Consultants, LLC, and CEO and executive director of Soroptimist International of the Americas. She is coauthor of The Will to Govern Well, now available in a revised and expanded second edition, and serves on the faculty of ASAE's Symposium for Chief Elected and Chief Staff Officers. Email: leigh@soroptimist.org*

## GETTING STARTED

Want to start transforming your nominations process fast? Here are a few tactics you can implement quickly.

- 1. Write a letter to the employers of participating members expressing appreciation for their service to the association.** It's an opportunity to get the association's name and purpose out there, and it may help your member receive recognition or financial support for their participation. Ask members for the proper name and title of the person to receive the letter and secure permission first.
- 2. Expand the reach of your call for volunteers.** Post the information on your website and allow volunteers to register their interest in volunteering throughout the year.
- 3. Streamline your bylaws, removing all but absolutely essential committees (usually finance/audit, bylaws, and nominating/leadership-development committees).** This provides flexibility for creating workgroups as needed. Describe the process for creating them in standing rules or board policy, which can be changed more readily than bylaws.
- 4. Keep committee and task force job descriptions and charges up to date.** Include expected outcomes, the time frame in which to get the work accomplished, staff and financial resources available to get the job done, and to whom the work group is accountable.
- 5. Clarify lines of accountability.** Not everyone needs to be appointed by, or accountable to, the board chair just because they are members. If volunteers are doing staff work, then the CEO should be able to seek out and appoint appropriate volunteers.
- 6. Automatically sunset all ad hoc groups, task forces, or special committees** to prevent a proliferation of volunteer work groups whose main function ends up being finding work to do.
- 7. Implement a simple evaluation system to document individual participation** in order to identify star performers as well as eliminate those who want titles every year but somehow find it impossible to participate in any assignments.