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## Snippet #177 Nominating Committees

At a perfect meeting of a perfect association under perfect conditions, members with perfectly pure interests in what is best for their perfect association nominate perfect candidates from the floor, and the election proceeds perfectly. Or, there's reality.

Recent trends in association governance have seen a shift from conducting elections at a meeting (where, by the way, some problems are more easily solved), to a ballot of the full membership, whether delivered by paper or electronically. There's also lot of buzz about creating "competency-based boards." It's a worthy goal and a lofty ideal; the devil is in the details. How is this achieved? Who should be on the board? More often than not, the answers describe intangibles: leader, visionary, team player, ethical, strategist, to name a few. But how are these things measured? One important characteristic of a board is diversity of thought, but such directors may be labeled outliers (or dissidents). Traditionally, this diversity was reached by naming directors from defined geographical areas such as regions or districts, but those boundaries have faded in the Internet age.

In an attempt to set minimum standards for board service, associations have adopted eligibility requirements. These might include length of membership, previous leadership experience, or prior board experience. While ensuring certain experiences, they also limit the candidate pool. For example, if being a chapter or state president is required, it sets up the expectation that serving on the national board of directors is comparable, and might have the opposite effect: a tactical rather than strategic orientation.

This seemingly impossible task – to put together a group of candidates who will lead the association – falls to the nominating committee. If this weren't difficult enough, nominating committees have widely varying levels of authority and responsibility. Some perform only the clerical function of checking eligibility requirements, while others have final authority over the slate with no possibility of appeal. One remedy for the latter is to adopt a petition process for anyone not slated, which means that a candidate who obtains x number of signatures is placed on the ballot. This provides a degree of checks and balances for the nominating committee.

And how is the nominating committee selected? It might be designated by the bylaws, appointed, or elected regionally or at large. For many associations, the chair of the nominating committee is designated in the bylaws as the past president. On the positive side, the past president supposedly knows a lot of members, has served on the board, is no longer involved, and understands the strategic plan. What could possibly go wrong? Consider that the past president is the one person in the entire organization with a legacy to protect and, therefore, is more likely to be biased. Would a past president really nominate someone with whom he or she disagreed? For that matter, a nominating committee appointed by the board has some of that same conflict. The other alternatives (election regionally or at large) have their own problems. Regional elections often see very few voters making this important choice. At-large elections might result in several people from the same region (or the more powerful ones) populating the committee.

For these reasons, it's important to carefully consider the composition of the nominating committee. What size should it be? This might depend on the workload. If the committee is checking the eligibility requirements or references, many hands make light work. Common sense dictates at least five members. How are the members chosen? Perhaps a hybrid might work best, with some elected by the membership and others elected by the board. Having staggered terms (a portion of the committee is elected each year) can provide experience and continuity. For example, a six person committee could have three chosen each year for two year terms, or two chosen each year for three year terms. Who should chair? Rather than risking a political appointment, let the committee choose its own chair. Let the committee have the flexibility to operate in the best interest of the association, within the boundaries of the bylaws. And provide checks and balances, just in case.