

Supporting Underrepresented Nurses for Successful Board Service

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In the effort to eliminate health inequities, collaboration by professional nursing associations is needed to support underrepresented nurses on community boards, councils, and workgroups. Nursing leaders must prioritize diverse board representation to move this trend in the right direction and effect positive change.

With the increasing complexity and pace of changes in our world, all organizations should consider the direct implications on board composition and risk management.

For far too long, the same demographic has led most national as well as community boards. If we want to improve the social determinants of health (SDOH) and structural racism, boards must embrace a more diverse profile. Though it does appear that some progress is beginning to occur, we are far from where we need to be. (Harper & Brewington, 2022, p. 47)

Governance boards must evolve to keep pace with societal issues and initiatives. “As boards of all types are attempting to diversify their board composition, nurse leaders at all levels are uniquely and ideally suited to contribute to the collective effectiveness and impact of a variety of boards, appointments, and commissions” (Harper & Benson, 2023, p. 477). Now is the time for nursing leaders to prioritize diverse board representation, which is essential to continue to move this trend in the right direction, or things will never change.

The Future of Nursing 2020-2030: Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity Committee concluded that all nurses could lead efforts to address the social determinants of health (SDOH) and health equity. Collaborative efforts by professional nursing associations promote ethnic

minority nurse leadership through the development of education, mentorship programs, and resources. These collaborative efforts provide the needed support for underrepresented nurses to join community boards, councils, and workgroups that help eliminate health inequities (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2021).

A qualitative study of nurses registered in the Nurses on Boards Coalition (NOBC) (2023) database validated nurses’ influential role in the strategic thinking of boards.

Nurses reported leveraging expert knowledge of healthcare and caring wisdom to influence strategic thinking to meet stakeholder needs. Participants recounted how their clinical practice experiences and knowledge, combined with personal and professional nursing values, are leveraged to influence board relations, processes, and outcomes. (Sundean et al., 2022, p. 108)

The study further identified themes of how nurse knowledge was used, such as systems thinking, evidence-based inquiry, leveraging earned public trust, consensus building, fostering collaboration, modeling mission-centered service, optimizing health care experience toward policy-making, and using empathy and affirmation to build relationships (Sundean et al., 2022).

Nurses’ perspectives contribute to board effectiveness and positively impact board decision-

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making. Every nurse, regardless of the care setting, is poised to serve as a role model in promoting health equity and meeting the needs of the underserved (NASEM, 2021). In addition, it is our collective responsibility to prepare nurses to develop the competencies and confidence necessary to contribute to boardroom discussions, and ultimately, influence decisions being made regarding the health of our communities, nation, and globe.

Support for Underrepresented Nurses

A partnership between NOBC and ethnic and minority nursing associations in the United States was formed to increase representation and successful participation on boards, commissions, and appointments across the country, bringing us closer to ultimately achieving health equity for all. NOBC is proud to have been awarded an innovative grant from the American Nurses Foundation. This grant, which runs from October 1, 2022, to December 31, 2023, catapults our ability to first understand, then break down barriers to board service, specifically for underrepresented nurses.

The grant-approved project, *Supporting Underrepresented Nurses for Successful Board Service*, aims to identify and address gaps and barriers preventing underrepresented nurses from pursuing, joining, serving, and/or having positive experiences on boards. It closely aligns with NOBC's key strategies by furthering the goal to secure a voice for populations who have not been proportionately heard and those with a significantly higher incidence of poorer health outcomes (NOBC, 2023).

Furthermore, the project supports the work of the American Nurses Foundation. Kate Judge, Executive Director of the American Nurses Foundation, stated:

This project directly aligns with the work of the Foundation and the ANA Enterprise's participation in the Commission to Address Racism in Nursing. We believe that the collaboration between NOBC and these seven specialty nursing associations will support thousands of

nurses along their journeys to board service. We're grateful to the Rita & Alex Hillman Foundation for making this possible. (K. Judge, personal communication, March 8, 2023)

Debra Toney, PhD, RN, FAAN, President of the National Coalition of Ethnic Minority Nurse Association (NCEMNA), believes:

The National Coalition of Ethnic Minority Nurse Associations (NCEMNA) members play a crucial role in healthcare. I serve as the Executive Liaison on this grant and believe diverse representation on boards is critical for ensuring that the needs of ethnic minority patient populations are met. Research has shown that ethnic minority nurses bring unique perspectives and experiences to the table, which can help to improve healthcare outcomes for all patients. (D. Toney, personal communication, May 28, 2023)

NCEMNA (2023) includes the Asian American/Pacific Islander Nurses Association, Inc. (AAPINA), National Alaska Native American Indian Nurses Association, Inc. (NANAINA), National Association of Hispanic Nurses (NAHN), National Black Nurses Association (NBNA), and Philippine Nurses Association of America, Inc. (PNA). NCEMNA gives voice to 350,000 minority nurses (NCEMNA, 2023). The *Supporting Underrepresented Nurses for Successful Board Service* project supports NCEMNA's strategy to increase the number of minority nurses raising their leadership voices in the boardroom. Other organizations collaborating with NOBC on this project include the American Association for Men in Nursing (AAMN), with 900 members, and Chi Eta Phi Sorority, Inc., a professional organization of over 8,000 registered professional nurses representing many cultures and diverse ethnic backgrounds. A Steering Committee led by Dr. Toney is overseeing the design and implementation of the program.

In March 2023, Deborah Stamps, EdD, MBA, MS, RN, GNP, NE-BC, facilitated focus groups, utilizing the World Café methodology encouraging an open, honest dialogue to identify

and address gaps and barriers preventing underrepresented nurse members from pursuing, joining, serving, and/or having positive experiences on boards. The virtual World Café Method employs the use of breakout rooms to host simultaneous small group discussions. The participant groups rotate to different breakout rooms at specific time intervals until all participants have visited each breakout room. This format creates rich discussions and generates themes from diverse perspectives (The World Café, 2023). Dr. Stamps stated:

This was efficient in that one session was held with six breakout rooms with hosts to take notes. The World Café enabled 24 diverse participants from 7 underrepresented member organizations to establish relationships and trust, which is foundational to collaboration from various organizations, with various experiences. The engagement was electrifying; participants wanted the session to last longer; each participant in a small group was able to share their experiences, offer recommendations, and validate or build upon previous groups' feedback. (D. Stamps, personal communication, May 29, 2023)

NOBC has analyzed the initial findings and resulting themes from the virtual World Café process regarding perceived barriers to successful board preparation, placement, and success. The next step is to conduct an extensive survey of the memberships of each of the seven participating nursing organizations. Based on survey feedback, the team will create and implement a multipronged educational strategy that includes methods to address gaps and barriers identified in the data collection.

After the customized plan for educational programming is in place, under the leadership of Dr. Toney, Executive Liaison to the project, and Dr. Stamps, Focus Group Facilitator and IRB Principal Investigator, NOBC will again hold discussions with the minority and ethnic nursing organizations to monitor the effectiveness of the programming, as well as continuously monitor the

increase in the number and percentage of nurses from minority and underrepresented groups who identify themselves by registering in the NOBC participant database and reporting their board service.

Allison Nordberg, Program Director, American Nurses Foundation, shared:

As a founding member of NOBC, the Foundation has been committed to ensuring that nurses' voices are present at all tables where decisions are made. This project will not only identify, but also address the gaps and barriers underrepresented nurses encounter and ensure that more nurses of color take their needed, deserved, and essential seats at the table (A. Nordberg, personal communication, March 8, 2023)

Summary

NOBC, along with our nursing colleagues, are grateful to the American Nurses Foundation for their generous grant support and for their leadership role since the founding of NOBC. As a result of their thought leadership and philanthropy, NOBC can make a significant and lasting impact in breaking barriers for underrepresented nurses and increasing the number of underrepresented nurses serving on boards in the communities where they live, work, worship, and play.

What barriers are holding you back from board service? The first step is to identify them. Once identified, face them head-on, clear a path, and move forward with confidence. Locate resources available to you and never underestimate your value to boards. Together, we can remove barriers and take action that moves us all in the direction of fulfilling our personal and collective missions, as we strive to improve health for all. \$

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