



## Supporting Boards and Commissions Candidates in Getting Seated

This guide is a working document for determining strategy for supporting boards and commissions candidates in getting seated.

Political appointments are made for a variety of reasons:

- The appointee fills a technical knowledge or skill gap left by the departure of a previous commissioner or as articulated by the current commission as a need.
- The appointing official is striving to show inclusive appointments and the appointee fills a demographic or political affiliation gap identified on the commission.
- The appointee has been identified by the community and her or his appointment will signal to the community that the elected is attempting to be responsive to community concerns/demands.
- The appointing official has a project moving forward and is attempting to ensure commission-level endorsement or protections for the project, and the appointee seems likely to fill this role.
- The commission has had difficulty making quorum, and the appointee seems likely to be a strong attender due to either a lack of work obligations or control of their own schedule.
- The appointment is about patronage; the appointee helped the appointing individual become elected to office or hired to an elected's staff.

While these trends mostly hold over time and geography, we know that appointment decisions are complex. While it's important to uncover the particulars of getting appointed in any given jurisdiction, what follows is a summary of the five best practices for supporting participants in getting seated, based on learning from the boards and commissions programs developed thus far.

## 1. Understand the System

### UNDERSTAND THE APPOINTMENT PROCESS GENERALLY.

Be clear on the appointment process as stated in the municipal code and in the charters of each of the targeted bodies.

- Determine the role of any written applications and interviews with appointing electeds, understand the confirmation process, and have a protocol for working with your candidates through each step of the process.
- Keep an eye on seats in which the current individual will soon be terming out.
- Understand the unstated or cultural nuance of the appointment process. Under what circumstances is the confirming body likely to fail to confirm an appointee? Under what circumstances is the appointer likely to remove someone from a board or commission?



### UNDERSTAND THE APPOINTMENT PROCESS FOR A PARTICULAR DECISION MAKER.

Assess the relative importance for an appointing elected of such features as:

- Balanced demographic representation.
- Relationships with powerful local influencers (trades union, chamber of commerce, developers, etc.).
- Desire to avoid appearing partial to previous allies or political roots.
- Ambitious project/policy plans.
- Track who has the appointing elected's ear for influencing appointments – both inside the governing office and externally, including both individuals and organizations.

## 2. Use the Right Frame with the Right People

### FRAME THE PROGRAM DIFFERENTLY FOR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES.

Without jeopardizing your integrity or the integrity of the program, flex the framing of work so that it most resonates with those who might support or impede your outcomes.

- When having conversations with various influencers, think carefully about how you frame the program. What frame will most resonate with them? What frame might trigger defensiveness or concern? Be careful about calling the program a “political advocacy program” to insiders/influencers who might be suspicious of your strategic angle – try “educational program” instead, for instance.
- With social justice organizations with whom you will engage in various ways (recruitment, technical assistance, member turnout at confirmation hearings, etc.), frame the program in ways that highlight your common agendas.
- With funders, focus on the ultimate theory of change and the program’s contribution to the broader social justice field.

## MAKE SURE THAT STAFF, WORKGROUP MEMBERS, AND GRADUATES ARE CONSISTENT IN THEIR MESSAGING ABOUT THE PROGRAM.

Ensure that those representing the program understand the importance of framing and are equipped to flex the frame for appropriate audiences. Be consistent in the way that you talk with them about the program. Have clear conversations about framing with them and give them written talking points when appropriate. Work with them to prep for conferences and other public appearances to make sure they are on point.



## PUT THE WORD OUT TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE.

Promote the program through sit-downs with individuals who are likely not only to influence appointments but also to contribute to the success of your incoming advocate commissioners.

In addition to talking with those in the current or incoming administrations, consider also spending time with elected officials' political staff members, staff members of individual commissions, agency heads, and others who will help to determine the success of the project. Frame these conversations as "informational interviews" that will support you in designing a strong learning experience for potential commissioners. Ask them to tell you what they think you should be offering commissioners during training so that they can perform their duties as deliberative decision makers better. Keep track of their concerns and key issues.

Meetings with insiders and influencers are an important part of building good will for the project and of projecting transparency and attentiveness to the existing structure to insiders. You are also building your placement network.

## 3. Build Capacity to Influence the System

### LEVERAGE EXISTING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS.

Develop a specific internal guide to influencing appointment decisions. Who among your workgroup has influence or knows someone who does? Who does the Mayor listen to? Who do those people listen to? Build an initial inventory, but keep the "chatter" going among staff, steering committee, and graduates as individual opportunities arise.



### FILL IN THE GAPS AS NEEDED BY CULTIVATING NEW RELATIONSHIPS.

If you're targeting seats that are deeply influenced by individuals/organizations outside of your current network, even if they are folks with whom you normally wouldn't build, consider embarking on some strategic relationship-building.

- Think about how you might collaborate and combine resources to move an agreed-upon individual into a seat via a new strategic relationship.
- If agreeing is not possible, think how you might facilitate a tradeoff that doesn't compromise your values or strategy, so that at least your candidate is not getting blackballed.



### KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION CONSISTENTLY OPEN THROUGH ONGOING NETWORKING AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING.

Keep in mind that this is a long-term project. Staff, steering committee members, and graduates should all be thinking about how they can add to the overall network to support the project and future candidates.

Make sure that everyone knows who to pass this kind of information onto and through what means. Who is the point person for network for this project and how do they manage the network? Keep an internal contact list/database that can be accessed by level and type of influence. Clean it frequently to make sure it's up to date.

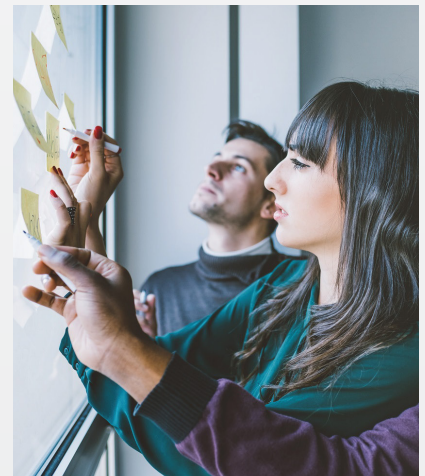
### CHECK IN WITH SEATED GRADUATES TO GET THE SCOOP ON WHO IS GOING OFF THEIR COMMISSION AND WHAT KIND OF REPLACEMENT WILL BE LIKELY.

Tap graduates or other program allies serving on appointed boards to touch base with newly seated commissioners who were not formerly in your network but who would be good fits for your social justice agenda. Bring them into the training program if possible – either into the cohort or through other program events that are open to the broader network.

### COLLECT THE KIND OF DATA ON YOUR POTENTIAL CANDIDATE POOL THAT WILL HELP YOU MAKE A TIMELY RECOMMENDATION.

Make sure that you have a pool of folks "waiting in the wings" for placement, whether they have gone through the formal cohort training process or not.

While priority should go to placing your cohort, you also want to maintain your credibility as the "go to" organization for putting forth recommendations for appointments. Keep a database of potential appointees that you can draw from when you get that call that the elected is looking for "a progressive Chinese American landlord" or "an African American woman who understands the technical aspects of zoning."



**BE PREPARED TO REACH OUT TO MOVE A NAME FORWARD.**

When contacted to put forth an appointment with particular qualifications and you don't have one in mind, reach out to your network quickly so that you can be responsive. But when you get a name through network channels, vet the candidate before you put their name forward – and be sure to contact them first as part of that process.

- Are they really interested in serving?
- Do they really have the technical skills needed?
- Are they politically viable, given your strategy?
- Is there anything about them that would keep them from getting appointed?

**CHECK IN WITH SEATED GRADUATES OF YOUR PROGRAM TO RECRUIT THEIR COMMISSION COLLEAGUES.**

Program and individual cohort capacity benefit from having a few newly seated commissioners in the mix, along with those who are still seeking appointment. Recruiting already-seated commissioners also helps with your stats when you are reporting results to potential donors. But most importantly, tapping in a second (or third) commissioner from a given commission moves you toward “critical mass.” Having two or more of five commissioners on a board who are strongly networked and who have an articulated shared set of community values will help them move on equitable outcomes for projects and policy.

**4. Maintain Credibility with Solid Recommendations****DON'T RECOMMEND INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE NOT A GOOD FIT. DON'T RECOMMEND INDIVIDUALS WHO MAY UNDER-PERFORM. DON'T RECOMMEND INDIVIDUALS WHO DON'T WANT THE APPOINTMENT.**

To protect your own reputation and the reputation of the communities you serve, only put individuals forward if they are appointable, prepared, and willing to serve.

- If you haven't touched base with a candidate in a while, reach out to them to double-check that they are ready and willing to serve before putting their name up.
- Any time you put a name forward, make sure beforehand that the individual truly understands the nature of the commission and the lift/hours entailed.
- Try to avoid putting individuals forward if they have not observed a meeting of the targeted commission.
- When possible, accompany a potential candidate to a target commission meeting and unpack it together after to determine together whether or not it would be a good fit.



## PLACE UNSEASONED PARTICIPANTS ON BODIES WHERE THEY CAN LEARN THE ROPES, INCLUDING ON CACS WITH LITTLE OR NO AUTHORITY.

If you aren't sure if an individual is ready to serve or if they are reasonably insecure about their capacity to serve – but they are able to make a time commitment – try them out on a Citizen Advisory Committee or other advisory body. Keep in contact with them, attend a meeting as an observer, and determine what the most strategic political trajectory is for them.

## 5. Support Candidates to Make Strong Applications

### ASSIGN A PREP TEAM TO EACH CANDIDATE THAT YOU MOVE FORWARD.

This team should include a point person, a communications support person, and a technical expert whose expertise is matched to the targeted commission. For politically competitive appointments, consider adding a political expert to the team as well.

The point person should work with the prep team to develop a strategic approach. Once the plan is set, develop a checklist to track progress as the candidate moves through the process of preparing for placement. Generally, a kick-off call with the team will be sufficient to generate the strategic approach. On this call, the point person will ask the team to provide guidance for what should and should not be included on the written application, what topics to anticipate for the interview and how to handle them, what type of outreach should be done both by the candidate and on behalf of the candidate by the team and other network members, and whether or not public support should be rallied for the confirmation date.

### PREPARE APPLICANTS TO SUBMIT STRONG WRITTEN APPLICATIONS.

For candidates, including those in the cohort and those not, offer to work with them on their written applications, using the guidelines generated by the team. After the kick-off call, ask the candidate to share their draft application. Provide feedback and ask them to share the final with you.

In some cases, it may be advantageous to provide particular influencers with a final version of the application to forward to the mayor – as determined in your customized strategic approach. For instance, an allied commission member who is in good standing with the mayor might put the application forward with the suggestion that the candidate would be a strong, collaborative colleague on the commission. Or perhaps a trusted agency staff member would be willing to put the application forward, indicating to the mayor that this candidate will work well with agency staff.



### PREPARE APPLICANT FOR INTERVIEWS.

Candidates should be prepped for interviews, preferably by undergoing a mock interview with their prep team, not only so that they are successful but also so that they reflect well on the program. The prep team should attempt to anticipate technical and political questions that will be put to the candidate and help the candidate develop solid answers that will enhance the likelihood of their names being moved forward. “Hot button” topics should be noted and work-arounds developed for issues that might keep the candidate from being placed.



The interview prep is a key opportunity for all members of the team to combine their expertise to support the candidate. The process can also be an influential model for the candidate in terms of how they can continue to work with your network once they are seated.

### SUPPORT THE APPLICANT IN NETWORKING AND GENERATING SPECIFIC SUPPORT AS NEEDED.

Part of the strategic approach for each candidate is determining which influencers should be tapped and to what degree and by whom. Try to determine the potential obstacles to appointment and address them. Examples include:

If there's reason to believe the Labor Council might block the candidate, set up a meeting between the candidate and the Secretary-Treasurer and/or ask a respected steering committee member to call the Secretary-Treasurer on behalf of the candidate.

If you have reason to believe there might be a failure to confirm in the City Council, set up time with the candidate and Council fence-sitters or their trusted staff members.

If you have heard that appointments to a certain committee are often vetted through a powerful sustainability nonprofit, reach out to them and/or set up time with the candidate. Tag also for the candidate influencers to avoid if you feel that particular conversations might be deal-breakers.

### RALLY BACKGROUND OR PUBLIC SUPPORT AS WARRANTED.

While you are growing your program and moving toward your first placements, observe the local confirmation process to determine best practices for turning out citizens in support of candidates. Understand whether or not a strong show of support will work in favor or against the candidate for a particular appointment, and strategize appropriately.

Insiders can also give you important information for making this decision. The following are some potential characteristics of confirming committees, but keep in mind that what is “typical” might not apply to your candidate and political context for any single appointment.



- In some communities, confirmation bodies typically make up their minds about confirmations based on public testimony at the actual confirmation hearing.
- In some communities, confirmation decisions are made well before the hearing and the proceedings have little to do with the outcome.
- In some communities, coordinated public support at confirmation meetings typically determines the positive outcome of confirmation.
- In some communities, mass public support can work against a candidate but background support and strategy is a powerful indicator of success.



### DEBRIEF WITH ALL CANDIDATES.

No matter what the outcome, make sure that the point person debriefs with each candidate put forward through your program. Keep good records/notes and pause and reflect on your strategies and protocols frequently to sharpen your saw. through program evaluation with pre-pilot and piloting boards and commissions training programs.

