

## **Roles and Responsibilities of a State Grassroots Liaison**

### *A Brief History*

In 2004, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) created the State Grassroots Liaison (SGL) program. This program was initiated to build a stronger grassroots network for the AACN membership. In its first year, a single Dean/Director from each state volunteered for this important role and agreed to serve as an SGL for two years. As an SGL, the Dean/Director assisted the Government Affairs Committee (GAC) and Government Affairs (GA) staff by bridging connections between the national association and their Members of Congress. SGLs were responsible for arranging Senate visits for their state colleagues during the AACN Spring and Fall meetings as well as encouraging them to make visits with their House Representatives. The program has since expanded and many states currently have two SGLs who help meet the advocacy needs of the organization.

### *SGL Length of Term and Support*

SGLs will be selected on one or more of the following criteria to ensure diversity among SGLs within each state: size of school, geographic distribution, past participation in Capitol Hill visits, and past participation in AACN Action Alerts. SGLs are asked to serve one, two-year term and are welcome to serve multiple terms. During their terms, SGLs have support from the GAC and GA staff. The decision to continue at any time during the two year period is at the discretion of the SGL.

When an SGL retires or decides to step down, it is the responsibility of the SGL to notify the GA staff. The staff will then inform the GAC Chair of the SGL opening. Staff will work with the GAC Chair and remaining co-liaison (if applicable) to select a new SGL based on the criteria outlined above. Once a decision is made, the GAC Chair will contact the potential SGL. If the individual declines, a new candidate will be selected. If there is only one liaison for the entire state or both liaisons leave the program, the GAC Chair, in consultation with the staff, will work to fill the position(s). Suggested names of potential replacement SGLs will be considered.

### *Roles and Responsibilities of an SGL*

AACN's GAC strongly believes that the SGL role is essential in the organization's ability to advance nursing education and research on Capitol Hill. These Deans/Directors, who have committed their time as an SGL, understand the importance of strengthening relationships between their Members of Congress and AACN. Personal connections to congressional districts and states are paramount in AACN's ability to have Members of Congress support and introduce nursing education legislation.

The following describe the roles and responsibilities of current SGLs:

## **1. Coordinate AACN member visits to their Senators during the Fall and Spring annual meetings.**

One month prior to the AACN Spring and Fall meetings, the SGL contacts the offices of their Senators and arrange for the Deans/Directors of their state to meet with the health legislative assistants (LAs). The GA staff send out reminders regarding this responsibility. SGLs should refer to AACN's Guide to Scheduling Hill Visits document for general direction on how to initiate contact with Congressional office and scheduling a visit.

The SGL then communicates the time of the meetings to their state colleagues and coordinates the trip to the Hill. The SGL collects the names of the Deans/Directors who will be attending the visit so this information can be passed along to the Senate health LAs. The GA staff will have held a quarterly SGL conference call in advance to review the process for scheduling visits and for disseminating information about Senate office visits with their state delegation. Email reminders will also be sent.

Please note that GA staff will only consider requests for assistance in scheduling Senate office visits that directly come from SGLs. This is to help ensure that duplicate meetings are not made with a single office, for it may be the case that an SGL has already secured a meeting. However, if an individual AACN member's SGL(s) is/are not present at the Fall or Spring Meeting, GA will assist in scheduling a Senate office visit for that state delegation."

The day of the Senate visits, the SGL gathers the AACN lobbying packets from the GA staff. It is the responsibility of the SGL to ask the GA staff if there are any specific advocacy messages that should be communicated to either of their Senators.

The SGL coordinates the message that will be delivered to the Senators' staff by referring to the AACN talking points and ensuring that members of the group contribute to the discussion by addressing a specific point and/or provide examples of how their schools of nursing have benefited from specific federal programs, ie. Title VIII.

After the Senate visits, the SGL completes the online Advocacy Activity Form that can be accessed from <http://capwiz.com/aacn/lrm/feedback.tt>. It is their responsibility to submit this form within one week after completing their visit.

## **2. Encourage Deans/Directors in their states to make visits to their House Representatives.**

The SGL is also responsible for encouraging their state colleagues to make House visits during the Spring and Fall meetings. It is at the discretion of the SGL, but this can either be done by sending an email to their AACN colleagues in the state or by making personal phone calls.

It is the role of the SGL to answer questions regarding Hill visits and refer to AACN's GA staff for specific support or guidance. If an individual AACN member is experiencing difficulty with securing a House office visit, they should first confer with their SGL(s). However, if further assistance is needed, GA staff will facilitate scheduling a meeting with a House office for that

individual member. Additionally, SGLs are asked to encourage their Deans/Directors from their state to complete the online Advocacy Activity Form if they made House visits during the Spring and Fall meetings.

**3. Mentor less experienced Deans/Directors about making Capitol Hill visits.**

SGLs are viewed as AACN advocacy experts. They are prepared to answer questions about making Hill visits, AACN action alerts, and the legislative positions of AACN. When asked questions by less experienced Dean/Directors, SGLs are the top state resource.

**4. SGLs Communicate known scheduled Hill visits (Senate and House) to AACN GA staff and whether they will be present at Spring/Fall Meetings.**

SGLs will notify GA staff of any Hill visits that have been secured prior to the Spring/Fall Meeting, if possible. If an SGL does not anticipate being present at the upcoming Spring/Fall Meeting, the SGL will notify GA staff, and should also alert their state delegation. Please note that SGLs who do not plan to attend a Spring/Fall Meeting should still make every effort to schedule Senate visits for any members of their delegation who will be in Washington, DC, or coordinate with another AACN member in their state to schedule them.

**5. Encourage their AACN state colleagues to participate when an Action Alert is circulated.**

In many cases, SGLs will receive a notification the day before an Action Alert is released so they are prepared to encourage their state colleagues to act. However, given the nature of Congress, this may not always be possible. Therefore, SGLs must be vigilant to the time-sensitive nature of AACN action alerts. When they are received, SGLs should follow-up with state colleagues by sending an email or making a personal phone call.

*SGLs must respond to all AACN action alerts by contacting their own personal Representative or Senators depending on the specific advocacy request.*

**6. Keep the GAC and GA staff informed of state legislative issues related to nursing education and research.**

Every two years the GAC circulates a state survey for the SGLs to complete. This survey collects information on successful state initiatives that are targeted specifically to nursing education. It is the responsibility of the SGL to complete this survey by collaborating with colleagues in their state or state centers for nursing.

When an SGL is notified of a significant state legislative issue of interest to AACN, the SGL will inform the GA staff.

**7. Advise the GAC and GA staff on the advocacy needs of the AACN membership.**

SGLs are on the frontlines of AACN advocacy. They maintain regular communication with their state colleagues and know what support is essential to assist AACN with its advocacy efforts.

Therefore, it is important that SGLs communicate their observations to the GAC and GA staff so that AACN's advocacy methods and procedures can be enhanced to yield effective results.