



## Navigating AORN's Fellowship Sponsor Process

Individuals who have achieved FAORN designation have demonstrated a commitment to the advancement of perioperative practice and its linkage to AORN's mission, vision, and values.<sup>1</sup> These individuals have the privilege and obligation to serve as sponsors for future FAORN applicants. Existing Fellows provide guidance for navigating the process of becoming an FAORN for future and potential applicants through coaching and mentoring. The purpose of this document is to provide useful tips to enhance the process of sponsoring an FAORN applicant.

### Becoming a Sponsor

Congratulations on becoming a Fellow in the Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN). As a fellow, you now have the privilege of coaching, mentoring, and advising future, potential, and current applicants on the process of becoming a fellow. Sponsors hold a unique professional relationship with those they sponsor. Sponsors and applicants build a lifetime connection, a prestigious fellowship in which there is mutual professional growth.

Sponsorship Responsibility Guidelines are provided in the Fellowship Application Guide located at <https://www.aorn.org/docs/default-source/education/individuals/faorn/FAORN-Guidelines-Instructions-Webpage-060223.pdf>.<sup>2</sup> You will want to review these guidelines for specific information on the responsibilities of both the sponsor and the facility leader. Additional information can be found in the document entitled: Navigating AORN's Fellowship Process located at <https://www.aorn.org/docs/default-source/education/individuals/faorn/Navigating-AORN's-Fellowship-Process.pdf>.<sup>3</sup>

Becoming a sponsor begins when an applicant reaches out to a potential sponsor to start an exploratory conversation. The contact information and expertise of those individuals who are available to sponsor can be found at <https://www.aorn.org/get-involved/fellowship/sponsors>.<sup>4</sup> Sitting members of the AORN Board of Directors, AORN staff, and current members of the Fellowship Selection Committee are not eligible to sponsor fellows during their tenure.<sup>3</sup> Biographies of current fellows are displayed on the AORN website located at [https://www.aorn.org/get-involved/fellowship/fellows-of-aorn-\(faorn\)](https://www.aorn.org/get-involved/fellowship/fellows-of-aorn-(faorn)).<sup>5</sup> Biographies can provide further information for applicants to determine best fit for selecting a sponsor based on the applicant's interests and strengths. It is important for sponsors to feel comfortable in developing a partnership with potential applicants. This initial conversation is pivotal to making the decision to sponsor.

### Assessment Phase

After the initial conversation with the potential applicant, and before accepting sponsorship, the review and assessment of the applicant's curriculum vitae, contributions and impact of

contributions begins. The AORN Fellowship is reserved for those perioperative nurses who have demonstrated significant and sustainable contributions that advance the profession of perioperative nursing and go beyond the local setting and have clear linkages to the mission, vision, and values of AORN.<sup>2</sup>

The assessment phase is particularly important as you will want to ensure a successful outcome for the potential applicant. Honest feedback as to whether the potential applicant would be successful should occur prior to advising completion of the application and acceptance of sponsorship. For those individuals you feel are not quite ready to apply, discussion of areas in which the potential applicant can devote time and energy should occur. Coaching and mentoring conversations not only benefit the potential applicant but help the potential sponsor transition from a novice to an expert sponsor.

Finally, if the sponsor deems the potential applicant ready to apply for fellowship, and there is a good fit between the applicant and sponsor, the conversation transitions to what the partnership will look like going forward. A schedule of meetings should be set up to ensure deadlines and deliverables are met for the application process.

## **Planning the Work and Working the Plan**

To be successful, the applicant must adhere strictly to the application guidelines. The applicant must complete all components of the application. Sponsors provide guidance, feedback, and coaching. If applicants choose not to accept this guidance, the sponsor must determine if the application still meets the criteria for submission.

Coaching applicants is a skill required for an experienced person to support a learner in achieving a specific personal or professional goal by providing training and guidance.<sup>6</sup> Although there are differences between coaching and mentoring, both coaching and mentoring are essential to the sponsor/applicant relationship. The focus of both coaching and mentoring is to assist the applicant in developing a plan and guiding the applicant through the implementation of the plan.

Developing a plan of action to complete and submit an application requires consensus on how the sponsor and applicant will work together to achieve the goal. Discussion to reach consensus and resolution is essential when there are conflicting perspectives in the process of preparing the application. When consensus is not achieved, if the sponsor feels the applicant's success in attaining the goal is at risk, there should be honest and direct communication. Failure to heed coaching advice damages the sponsor/applicant relationship and the relationship may need to be terminated at this point. Decision as to future partnership, should the potential applicant return for further discussion and resolution, would be left to the judgment of the sponsor. The bond between applicant and sponsor can last long after the application is submitted, and the decision is made by the Fellowship Selection Committee. A continued professional and mentoring relationship for future career development may organically occur as a continuing result of the initial sponsor/applicant coaching relationship.

## Submitting the Application

Once all the requirements are met and the application is deemed ready for submission, the sponsor proceeds to compose the sponsor letter. The sponsor letter should amplify the applicant's contributions with measurable outcomes demonstrating impact beyond the local level to regional, national and/or international implications to perioperative nursing. The letter of support should not reiterate the applicant's contributions.<sup>2</sup>

The applicant is responsible for completing the application in its entirety and paying the corresponding application fee. Sponsors may not apply on behalf of the applicant. The applicant is also responsible for reaching out to a facility leader or other leader who is familiar with the applicant's contributions and outcomes, who will provide the second letter in support of the application<sup>2</sup>.

## What's Next?

The FSC conducts a rigorous and unbiased review of all applications to identify those applicants who meet the criteria for the FAORN designation. When the decision has been made, applicants are notified.

The newly selected FAORNs are recognized at the next AORN Surgical Conference & Expo. Celebration of achieving the FAORN designation can now occur in person with the individual you sponsored. Sponsoring is an honor and seeing the person you sponsor get the recognition they deserve is priceless.

## References

1. AORN. *About AORN: This is What We Believe in*. AORN, Inc. 2023. <https://www.aorn.org/about-aorn>
2. Fellowship Application FAORN; Guide & Instructions. AORN, Inc., 2023. <https://www.aorn.org/docs/default-source/education/individuals/faorn/FAORN-Guidelines-Instructions-Webpage-060223.pdf>
3. AORN. Navigating AORN's Fellowship Process. AORN, Inc., 2023. <https://www.aorn.org/docs/default-source/education/individuals/faorn/Navigating-AORN's-Fellowship-Process.pdf>
4. AORN. Fellow of AORN Sponsors. AORN, Inc., 2023. <https://www.aorn.org/get-involved/fellowship/sponsors>
5. AORN. Fellows of AORN (FAORN) Bios. AORN, Inc., 2023. [https://www.aorn.org/get-involved/fellowship/fellows-of-aorn-\(faorn\)](https://www.aorn.org/get-involved/fellowship/fellows-of-aorn-(faorn))
6. Wikipedia. Coaching. 2024. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coaching>