

**Applying for Fellowship in the
American Academy of Nursing:
The Nitty Gritty**

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Dedicated to the over 3,200 FAANs worldwide

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Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to provide information about and to highlight the mission and vision of the American Academy of Nursing (AAN). It provides a practical, detailed overview of the Fellow American Academy of Nursing (FAAN) application procedure as a guide to approaching this significant step in your career. Suggestions for and thoughts about navigating the application process are included and are based on the experience of the authors as applicants, applicant sponsors, and advisors as well as their experience serving on the Fellow Selection Committee (FSC). One author (Beal) also chaired the FSC. Recent Fellows and sponsors have been asked to share their recommendations for applying. The information presented in this document has not been reviewed or approved by the AAN. We are excited to share our perspectives with the hope that you will consider applying to the AAN and advance its critical mission.

What is the American Academy of Nursing?

“The AAN is an honorific society. The members, called Fellows of the Academy, are selected through a rigorous application, sponsorship, and review processes. Under the auspices of the American Academy of Nursing, the FAAN designation is awarded to nurses who have demonstrated “substantive, sustained, and outstanding contribution(s) to health or health care at the national/international level or state/regional work demonstrating potential for scalable impact.” Applications must provide data to support the impact of their work. Areas of impact may include service, practice, education, advocacy, policy, government, military, research, or other.

Note: All references to Academy information and FAAN application can be found at www.aannet.org

The Mission of the AAN is to “improve health and achieve health equity by impacting policy through nursing leadership, innovation, and science”.

The Vision of the AAN is: “Healthy Lives for all People”.

The Values guiding the AAN include: “Equity, Inclusivity, Inquiry, Integrity, Courage.”

Who are the Fellows of the American Academy of Nursing?

- The American Academy of Nursing’s over 3,200 Fellows are nursing leaders in education, management, practice, and research.
- Once inducted, Fellows may use the initials “FAAN” as part of their professional identity.

Note that the American Academy of Nursing also accepts international applications; the specific requirements for this cohort are identified on the Academy’s website. International applications are not specifically addressed in this document.

Fellowship Application Overview

I’m thinking of applying to be a Fellow

Congratulations! This is a significant step in your career and one that will present the opportunity to reflect on your many contributions and accomplishments and their impact. This section gives you information about what steps you should consider in this phase.

- Visit the Academy’s website (www.aannet.org) to review the information provided about the application process. There is also a very helpful self-assessment tool that you should complete in advance of undertaking the application. In addition, you will find information about the deadline so you can identify when you will need to begin your application should you decide to apply. Because

the application is a reflective process, it is our recommendation that you begin your application at least 4 months before the deadline.

- Think about why you are interested in applying to the Academy. You are likely to have very personal reasons for applying for Fellowship. And, while Fellowship in the Academy is one of the highest honors a nurse can achieve, you will want to identify how you will contribute to its mission. FAAN is not simply another set of letters to put next to your name or on your CV, you will be expected to participate in advancing the Academy's mission... and should be excited about that involvement.

Application Self-Assessment – The Academy Website

- Assess your impact and hone your responses to the application questions.

As noted, the application is founded on significant contributions that you have made to nursing and healthcare at the international, national, and regional levels. Local contributions may be considered if they have the potential to be expanded to broader application. Also critical to the application is a clear articulation of the impact or outcomes of your contributions and their dissemination.

- Self-Assessment Tips
 - Consider what YOUR contributions are, their impact and the evidence of that impact. Think about their sustainability and how you have disseminated that.
 - This is a good time to review your CV and bring it up to date as needed. Note that format and perfection are not key considerations at this stage. However, you should begin thinking about ensuring that the impact and dissemination of your contributions are clear in your CV. As the application comes together, you will want to make sure there is a close

correlation with and support of your application by your CV.

Think of this as a customized version of your CV that aligns with your accomplishments and their impact.

- Talk with a current Fellow (or more than one) about your interest and ask for candid feedback about what you need to consider as you decide to pursue this goal.
- Be aware that applying for Fellowship is a reflective and iterative process. The application will require ongoing refinement. This also means that it will take TIME – yours and your sponsors – as well as ego and a financial commitment of the application fee and subsequent induction fee.
- A second Application Preparation Grid, developed by one of the authors (Bower), is provided in the appendix of this document. It is designed to assist you in concisely identifying and prioritizing your most significant contributions and related data.
 - Summarize your significant individual contributions on the national/international level or describe a state/regional effort demonstrating potential for scalable impact. It is strongly recommended that you prioritize no more than 2-3 contributions to include in your application.
 - It is important to note that you may have one highly significant and impactful contribution that has been disseminated widely or has the potential to be.
 - Briefly describe the substantive, sustained, and outstanding impact of your contributions that are the focus of your application. Include your potential for significant continuing contributions in this area to health or health care. Be as specific as possible, providing data to support the impact of your work.

- Outline how your significant contribution(s) advance the mission of the AAN which is to “improve health and achieve health equity by impacting policy through nursing leadership, innovation, and science.”
- Fellows who used this tool testify that it helps to focus one’s impactful accomplishments and to narrow them down to two or a maximum of three.
- Discuss your assessment with potential sponsors.

Core requirements of the application

- Current membership in the American Nurses Association. Note that this is national membership requirement, not solely membership at the state level.
 - Specific requirements are outlined for international applicants.
- Completion of the application on line through the Academy’s established portal by the stated deadline.
- Sponsorship by two Fellows in good standing within the Academy.
- Payment of the application fee.
- New Fellows must be present for the induction ceremony that occurs during the annual Health Policy Conference in Washington, D.C, which is usually held in the fall. This includes paying the registration fee and travel expenses.

Application components: An overview

- This section provides a high-level overview of the AAN application. More information about each section will be provided in a subsequent section.
- It is extremely important for the applicant and their sponsors to work closely together on the application. Because of the word limits, it is essential to focus on describing contributions explicitly but economically.

- Four narrative statements
 - “Summarize your individual contributions on the national/international level or describe a state/regional effort demonstrating potential for scalable impact.” This segment has two components:
 - A summary of your individual contributions.
 - A description of the context in which your contributions occur.
 - Briefly describe the substantive, sustained, and outstanding impact of your contribution that is the focus for this application. Include your potential for significant continuing contributions to this area to health or health care.
 - How does your significant contribution(s) advance the mission of the American Academy of Nursing which is to “improve health and achieve health equity by impacting policy through nursing leadership, innovation and science.”
- Curriculum Vitae: Applicants are required to use a template provided in the application portal; it can be found on the Academy’s webpage. This is not your typical CV or resume used by academics or clinicians. Rather your demonstrable impact is listed under each section of the CV.

I’ve decided to apply....GREAT!!!!

Information about the rigorous review of every application

- Every application is reviewed by members of the Fellow Selection Committee who are an elected and appointed body of current Fellows.
 - The committee undergoes training to eliminate unintentional bias.
 - They receive an overview of the process before beginning reviews.

- International applicants are reviewed by a sub-group of the Committee.
- Before the review stage, Committee members are provided a list of applicants for their review. If any committee member has sufficient knowledge of an applicant that would bias their judgment, they are *required* to recuse themselves from reviewing that applicant.
- There is no limit to the number of applicants who are accepted as Fellows in any given year.
- If you are not accepted, there is no limit to the number of times you can apply in subsequent years. The Review Committee will not have information about your previous application(s).
- Your application is not judged in view of other applicants. It is reviewed solely based on alignment with the application criteria.
- Your application stands on its own. Additional information – such as links to websites, articles, Google searches etc. – will not be included in the review. Do not include this in your application. This is one reason why the application must be so well crafted.
- Check – and check again – that your narratives are within the established word count. The word counts are firm.
- Once you submit your application to the Academy, it undergoes a rigorous multi-level review by the Fellow Selection Committee members and chairs.
- The decision of the Committee about accepted applicants are forwarded as a group to the Academy Board of Directors for their information and final approval.
- Acceptance or rejection decisions by the Committee are final. Applicants receive a letter telling them of the Committee's decision, generally in June or July. There is no additional information or

explanation about the decision provided to the applicant or their sponsors.

First Steps

- Carefully read (and re-read) information outlined on the Academy's website about the application process. The website provides a great deal of vital information. It also details what is required of the application and how it is to be submitted.
- The Fellow application process generally opens in January and extends into February. The exact dates are posted on the Academy's website. Because this is an iterative process, it is advised that you begin it by September of the previous year.
- Ask Fellows you know if any are willing to share a copy of their applications (or if they know of someone you could approach) to give you a sense of what information is presented and how it is written. How contributions and related information are presented are a significant influence on the application review.
- Complete the application grid (see appendix). The purpose of this grid is to help you focus on honing in on your priority, *significant* contributions as well as their impact, evidence, sustainability, and dissemination.
 - You can highlight as many contributions in the grid as you want. However, there are stringent word counts for each section of the application and you should plan to narrow your focus down to 1-2 primary contributions to ensure staying within those counts.
- Consider who you will ask to be your two sponsors.
 - Being a sponsor is a crucial role. Sponsors are charged with supporting you throughout the application process and each will write a letter in support of the content of your application and this, ideally, augments that content.

- Your sponsors must be current Fellows in good standing. Each Fellow may sponsor only two applicants in a given year. Keep this in mind and consider approaching potential sponsors early in your decision to apply. A directory of current Fellows can be found on the Academy's website.
- Sponsors need sufficient knowledge of your work and contributions to guide you in writing the application, then confirming and/or amplifying your contributions in their letters. It is very important that you select sponsors who know you well enough to either speak to your contributions or advise you to wait to apply at a later date. Ideally, they can draw out information about your contributions, impact and dissemination that augment your application. Sponsors amplify your work; they are not writing job references.
 - Note that the names of sponsors are blinded in the application provided to the Review Committee. Committee members will not have information about who they are.
- As you approach potential sponsors:
 - Explore their willingness to act in this role as well as their availability to commit the time, mentoring, and collaboration required to sponsor an applicant.
 - Talk with them about what you believe are 1-2 contributions that support your application and their impact, evidence of that impact, dissemination, and sustainability.
 - Provide them with a copy of your current CV and completed application grid, acknowledging that these documents will undergo significant revision during the process.

- Confirm their commitment to being your sponsor and agree on the timeframe and next steps.
- Note to potential sponsors
 - Realistically consider this commitment in view of your available time and competing priorities.
 - If you do not currently have the time or capacity to focus on sponsoring the individual - or if you do not feel you know the potential applicant well enough to be effective - say so. Help the applicant identify other potential sponsors if possible.
 - Review and/or interview the potential applicant and make your assessment of their readiness to move forward.
 - Again, if you do not believe the individual is sufficiently ready to move forward with a successful application, say so.
 - Provide insights into why you believe they are not at the readiness stage and help explicate what is needed to reach that stage. If you are invested in this person (or willing to be), offer to coach them as they progress.
 - Keep in mind that applying for Fellowship is an individual's (and your) investment of time, money, and ego.
 - You have the right to decline sponsoring a potential applicant - or suggest that the applicant delay submission to another year - and in some cases, that is the most appropriate decision. Your honesty is one of the kindest gifts you can give a potential applicant.
- Once two sponsors have committed to you as an applicant:
 - Establish a first meeting and a timeline with target dates.

- Many sponsor-applicant teams find it helpful to schedule meetings on a regular basis.
 - Determine how you will begin and proceed. Example:
What will you focus on first?
- The role and value of a reader(s)/advisor(s).
 - This falls under the category of great to have but not required.
 - A reader/advisor is someone (ideally a Fellow) who will be part of your team – or may only review your application along the way, including just prior to submitting it. They are NOT one of your sponsors; your sponsors are your primary source of information about moving your application forward. This person does not necessarily know you or your contributions but can provide valuable feedback to you about how your information is being presented, articulated, and received.
 - You may have more than one person acting in this role but it is suggested that you limit the number to minimize confusion and conflicting information.

Writing Your Application

- As previously noted, read, and re-read the application questions several times to ensure you thoroughly understand what each question is really asking.
- In the beginning do not obsess on the word count, rather focus on shaping the content. Focusing on word count at the very beginning can be time consuming, frustrating, distracting, and delaying.
 - Budget time to condense narratives at the end of the application preparation process. Many sponsors are quite adept at supporting editing for conciseness.
- Where to begin

- Consider question 1a an abstract of question 2. Then decide where to begin based on how you prefer to organize your professional writing. Most begin either with question 1a or question 2. Note that if you begin with question 1a, it will likely be revised many, many times throughout the process as question 2 is refined.
- Expect to revise, update, and refine the narrative statements several times – remember this is an iterative process.
- Look at the word count for each section of the application. As noted earlier, those word counts are absolute.
- As content is refined and approaches final the stage, focus on editing to the stated word count.
- The written word
 - Focus, focus, focus. Include 1-2 of your most significant contributions in your application. Do not present a scattered application.
 - This is not the time to be modest. Identify and own your contributions and their impact/outcomes and dissemination. This is a critical component of the application. Simultaneously, do not over-own.
 - The narrative responses to the questions are not meant to be a recitation of the activities and roles presented in your CV. Remember that you must articulate the *impact/outcomes* of your major contributions as well as their dissemination.
 - You will be writing about yourself and highlighting YOUR accomplishments. This does not come easy to most.
 - Some find it helpful to think about writing the application as though about someone else whose work you know very well.

- Others have found it less stressful to talk out highlights of the application with a trusted colleague who can interview you for key points in your application and reflect them back to you.
 - While tempting and commonplace in other situations to hire a writer to assist you, remember that you know your work better than anyone else and can tell your story with conviction.
- You are presenting yourself to colleagues on the Fellow Selection Committee who do not know you and who can only come to know you through your application and CV.
 - Focus on clarity about your contributions, including their impact, evidence, and dissemination.
- Eliminate words that do not add value or clarity. For example, rather than saying “I have led”, say “I led”.
- Use “I” not “we”. Again, this is NOT the time to be humble.
- Some applicants will begin with an outline to guide their content. Others create drafts to ensure that the content flows in a logical direction and that your key points are clearly included.
- As you write your application, share the drafts with your sponsors frequently. They and any readers you have are a rich source of ensuring clarity and content.

Anatomy of the FAAN Application

- At its core, there are 5 major components to the FAAN application.
 - The narrative section has 4 components
 - Your Curriculum Vitae creates the fifth component.
- A review of each component – The narratives

- “Question 1. Summarize your individual contributions on the national/international level or describe a state/regional effort demonstrating potential for scalable impact.
 - Question 1a. Based on the above question, summarize the primary area(s) of impact (100-word limit). It should give the reviewers an introduction to what you will be presenting as your major contributions and their impact.”
 - As noted earlier, 1a can be considered an abstract of question 2.
 - Be bold but truthful in your opening sentences. This is your chance for an introduction that captures the reviewer.
 - Be strategic – what is the most compelling and impactful contribution you want to present?
 - “Question 1b. Describe the context in which your impact occurs. (200-word limit).”
 - This section can be a bit confusing. It is not meant to be a place where you can add more information or repeat your CV. Rather, what roles or events in your professional career enabled you to undertake your contributions and in what way?
- “Question 2. Briefly describe the substantiative, sustained, and outstanding impact of your contribution that is the focus for this application. Include your potential for significant continuing contributions to this area to health or health care. (600-word limit)”
 - This is the core focus of your application and where you have the best opportunity to explicate the

contribution(s) you have chosen to present. It is where you make your case. Here is where you strongly link impact, evidence, and dissemination to your contributions for the reviewer's consideration.

- Question 3. How does your significant contribution(s) advance the mission of the American Academy of Nursing, which is to “improve health and achieve health equity by impacting policy through nursing leadership, innovation and science.” (200-word limit)
 - In this section, you are challenged to align your contributions to the Academy's mission, expressing that relationship as descriptively and specifically as you can. Your response can explore both how your contributions currently advance and align with the mission and how you envision expanding that alignment in the future.
 - It is helpful to explore the Academy website, specifically information about the various Expert Panels. These give you insight into your potential ability to contribute your expertise.
 - Again, this is not the place to add more contributions. This is where you focus on aligning your contributions with the Academy's mission.
- A review of the Curriculum Vitae section of the application
 - Applicants are required to use a template provided in the application portal. Each section has a word limit: educational history, certifications, professional background, additional leadership positions, selected written work, speaking engagements, awards and honors, and additional experiences that demonstrate impact. A maximum look

back of 15 years is recommended by the Academy unless earlier work highlights contributions and does not exceed word limit.

- This required CV is not that typically used for many professional occasions. Rather your demonstrable impact should be incorporated into your professional background, leadership positions, written work, speaking engagements, awards, and honors. Statements of impact in the CV must match and support those of your narratives and those of your sponsors.
- Ensure that your CV reflects and supports the statements you make in your application, particularly their impact/outcomes and dissemination. The reviewers will look for this relationship as they consider your application.

The Critical Nature of Explicating the Impact of Your Contributions

We have used the terms “contributions and impact” throughout this document because it is a core of your application. Specifying the impact or outcomes related to applicants’ significant contributions is an essential component of every application. It is also a component that is often very difficult for applicants to translate into their written document.

Impact... The direct effect that an action has. For AAN applications, impact seeks the specific, quantifiable results of your contributions. Your contributions and impact need to be above and beyond your work setting. Contributions with impact at the international and national levels are typical but state or regional contributions can be included if they have potential for larger, more scalable impact.

- Think about how your contributions changed, shaped, or created significant changes in practice, research, academia, or policy.
- How sustainable are the contributions?

- Consider what changed because of your contributions. Was it unique and did it have a major influence?
- Think about... “When I did this, the following resulted/happened/occurred.”
- Successful applications will not merely provide a *list* of what you have done. They provide details about what you did – did!
- It is important to be as specific and data-oriented as possible.
- Your CV and narratives as well as narratives of your sponsors need to document these significant and sustainable contributions with impact.
- Use data, examples, and specifics to document impact.... For instance: How many individuals or institutions saw change as a result of your contribution? How many publications or presentations do you have that demonstrate your impact and distribution? How has your work expanded/grown in other states, settings, institutions? Have you developed a model or made contributions that have been replicated in other settings or situations?

Tips for Success

- Begin early. Applications are generally due in February. Aim to begin in September or at least early October. Although it feels like a long way away, time has a way of disappearing during the application process.
- We have used the terms *contributions, impact, evidence, and dissemination* throughout this document. Keep them uppermost in your mind as you work through the application because they are at its core.
- Focus on contributions outside of your workplace. Your contributions may have begun there but impact needs to be broader and more far reaching.

- Most nurses work in teams and that is true of those applying for the Academy Fellowship. When describing your work in teams, it is important to articulate your role on the team. Did you lead it? Did you contribute a major part to the outcome of the project? What would the outcome have been if you had not been part of the team? It is essential to create a balance between giving *all* the credit to the team and identifying your specific role within it. This is not the time to be humble. Use “I” versus ‘we.’
- Be prepared to create many iterations of your application – it does get more concise and specific as you move forward in the process.
- If you get stuck, consider asking a colleague to interview you using the application questions. For some, it is initially easier to think about their contributions, impact, and dissemination verbally.
- Write your application with a focus on providing sufficient information and clarity to allow the reviewers to fully understand the scope, importance, and dissemination of your contributions. Use data in your CV and narratives to describe impact.
- If your sponsors are concerned about your readiness, talk it out. Ask them to assist you in identifying what needs to occur to be successful in a subsequent application year.
- And not to cast a negative thought, if your application is not successful, you do have the opportunity to apply another year. There is no penalty for an additional application and the reviewers will have no knowledge of a previous application.
- Remember that your application stands on its own with the reviewers; they may not use any additional information in reviewing your application.
- DO NOT WAIT until the last minute to place your application into the prescribed format in the portal. You do not want to risk a late

application because you have experienced a glitch in working in the portal. Remember that the deadline is FIRM.

- Finally, do not make the Fellow Selection Review Committee members work. In your application, focus on clarity, focus, word conservation, and cohesion. Make it easy for them to see how you meet the criteria.

End Notes

Best wishes as you navigate your journey to FAAN. Use this time and process as an opportunity to reflect on your professional nursing career with pride; it is a rare opportunity to think about what you have contributed to nursing and health care.

Note: Several colleagues responded to our request to review this document and provided excellent suggestions. We are grateful for their assistance.

Appendix: Application Preparation Grid (Bower, 2025)

Name:

What is your most outstanding contribution to nursing/healthcare at the national and/or international levels. Please identify at least 1 and no more than 3.	Describe the outcomes/impact of each contribution in specific terms at the regional, national and/or international levels.	Provide substantive evidence of the impact of each contribution, its dissemination, and its sustainability.

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