

From the RVC:

Another election cycle is over, and at the Annual Gathering a new American Mensa Committee, your national Board of Directors, will take office. Some of the members will be the same, some will be new, some may be in new positions. At the first meeting of the new AMC, one of the first duties of the Chair will be to nominate four people to hold the four appointed offices on the AMC: the Membership Officer, the Communications Officer, the Development Officer, and the Director of Science and Education. Soon after that, the Chair will be nominating chairs for a number of national committees. You can find the complete list of committee chairs in the 2011 Directory contained in the March issue of the Mensa Bulletin. Some of these appointees will wish to continue in office, and if they have done a good job the Chair will probably reappoint them, but inevitably there will be some offices that require new faces. The Chair is responsible for finding volunteers for those vacant offices.

But out of nearly 60,000 members of American Mensa, how can the Chair know who is interested in these positions, and who would make good candidates for them? The answer is, of course, that she can't. Inevitably, therefore, the people who are appointed end up being people the Chair has worked with in the past, and in whom she has confidence; in short, her friends. Elissa and her predecessors would be the first to admit that this is not a particularly fair system, nor is it particularly effective. Those who have criticized national Chairs in the past for cronyism have usually missed the point, however. The system was not intended to be unfair or inefficient — quite the reverse. The Chair has usually made every effort to make the best appointments possible. The problem is that there simply was no good way to make better appointments, because there was no way to know what other good candidates might be getting overlooked.

For this reason, some have suggested that more of these offices should be elective. That would make the process more democratic, it's true, but most of these offices are not representative in nature. Instead, they have specific responsibilities that require specific skills. The system required to fill these posts effectively is much more like a hiring process than an election, since elections, after all, frequently tend to be mere popularity contests. Consequently, I for one am opposed to creating more elective offices at the national level. However, there is an alternative. In the near future, the national office will be rolling out a new website for American Mensa. One of the features of that new site will be a sign-up area for anyone who would like to volunteer at the national level. Everyone will be able to look over the job descriptions and put their name forward for appointment to one of these offices. You will then have the opportunity to submit a resume showing how you are qualified for that particular post. Not just the Chair, but the entire AMC will have the ability to look at every volunteer's qualifications and make nominations. So when you see the announcement of the new sign-up process, please take a look at the job descriptions and ask yourself if you could be effective in one of them. Then sign up!

Roger Durham

