NCURA Vice President/President-Elect Candidate Qualifications Statement

Barbara Gray

(Director of Sponsored Programs, East Carolina University)

I am honored and excited to be a nominee for NCURA Vice President/President-Elect for 2016. I have accepted nomination after much deliberation and a determination that this is the right time in my research administration and NCURA careers to step into this leadership position should the membership so desire. Quite frankly, I would not have survived as a research administrator without the support of my NCURA colleagues, and it is my involvement in NCURA that has kept me enthusiastically engaged in our profession all these years. I would embrace the opportunity to “give back” to the organization that has given me so much—knowledge, skills, confidence, leadership ability, a professional network, good friends, and great fun—so that NCURA will continue to provide positive professional and personal experiences to its members far into the future.

Twenty-five years ago, after unintentionally falling into my first university research administration job, I attended my first NCURA annual meeting. I was initially overwhelmed...more than a thousand people and I didn’t know a soul! But I was immediately welcomed into conversations and lunch and dinner groups and invited to my region’s hospitality suite. By the end of the meeting, I had not only acquired knowledge from workshops and sessions that would help me on my new job, but I had also developed the beginnings of a professional network that would prove invaluable throughout my university research administration career.

Since that first meeting, NCURA has been, and continues to be, an integral part of my professional life. I “grew up” as a research administrator in small institutions where I had no supervisors or mentors with research administration expertise. My NCURA colleagues filled that role, giving me the content, the skills, and the support—not to mention all the sample policies, procedures, and forms—that made my work easier and allowed me to be successful in my career. I came back year after year to the annual and regional meetings to learn more and renew acquaintances. Along the way, professional colleagues became good friends, and becoming part of the team that makes the organization do what it does so well became a calling.

A few years after I joined NCURA, I was approached by a member of my region who later went on to serve in a national leadership role. I remember her words well: “You need to get more involved in this organization. You have the potential to be a leader.” It was this bit of encouragement that started me on a path of volunteering, first at the regional level and then at the national level. I first served in Region III as Secretary-Treasurer, Chair-Elect/Program Committee Chair, and Chair. This experience gives me an understanding of the important role our regions play. Regional meetings serve as a birthing ground for new volunteers, a gentle proving ground for new presenters, and an incubator for the future leaders of the organization. Also, because of their smaller size, they encourage quicker development of professional networks, a particularly important benefit for new members. In recent years, we have made great strides in improving communication and collaboration between the national leadership and the regions. We must continue this open dialogue and coordination so that NCURA operates in tandem at both levels to accomplish its common purpose and most effectively serve its members.
As I became increasingly involved in regional activities, program committee members began asking me to present concurrent sessions, and senior members began asking me to co-present workshops. I know firsthand how nerve-wracking those first few speaking experiences are, but I also know the kind of supportive environment NCURA offers. I was eased into the speaking role and eventually presented and taught independently and then “paid it forward” by inviting colleagues with less experience to co-present with me. My presenting and teaching roles would not have progressed without the informal mentoring I received from many individuals. A tremendous amount of this informal mentoring, both NCURA-related and job-related, goes on between NCURA members on a daily basis. We need to celebrate and nurture these vital connections. We need to stay true to our core values of inclusiveness and collegiality so that any member who wishes to develop as a presenter, a teacher, or an organizational leader has the opportunity and the support to do so. And we need to constantly scan our membership for potential leaders and then give that little nudge that says, “You have the potential...” There’s no telling what might result!

My first taste of national committee service was as the PUI track coordinator on an annual meeting program committee. Shortly thereafter, I co-chaired one of our special topics conferences (Electronic Research Administration IV). Later, I served again on the annual program committee as the Senior track coordinator. Over the years, I have also participated numerous times in regional meeting planning. These experiences have prepared me well for the vice presidential responsibility of planning the 2016 Annual Meeting. Each year, our annual meeting program gets stronger. If elected, I will recruit highly-qualified program committee co-chairs and members who will reach out to ensure a quality, varied offering by diverse individuals so that this positive trend continues and so that members’ needs will be met on the broadest scale.

I have had the honor of serving as a member of the NCURA Board of Directors four different times (as a regionally-elected member, an at-large member, a presidential appointee, and national secretary), for a total of seven years of Board service. As secretary, I also served on the Executive Committee for two years. As I contemplate another three-year term on the Board and Executive Committee, and particularly the presidential year, I realize that my past service has given me unparalleled insight into the operations of NCURA, and particularly into our knowledge-based governance structure. I understand our visioning and strategic planning processes and how we implement our plan to ensure that we make real progress in achieving our goals. Given the phenomenal successes NCURA has had since reorganizing and adopting a strategic approach to planning and implementing, I am committed to continuing on that course.

Of course, we must periodically re-strategize to ensure that we keep up with the changing landscape and are positioned to take advantage of unanticipated opportunities. This is a Board responsibility, so we must ensure that all Board members have freedom of expression and that we respect individual opinions as we work toward consensus. Establishing a respectful and open environment, ensuring full consideration of all ideas and concerns, encouraging identification and examination of alternatives, and leading discussion to consensus are crucial responsibilities of the officers and especially the president. My work at management levels in the research administration profession, my experiences working with the Board and others in NCURA, and my personal ethics prepare me with the interpersonal and group leadership skills and the commitment to fair play necessary to be effective in this governance role.
To continue our success as the most widely recognized professional development organization for research administration professionals, we will face many challenges. I expect that, over the next few years, the Board and our committees and task forces will continue to tackle questions about best ways to recruit and match volunteers with opportunities; to develop and keep fresh educational offerings that address an increasingly complex and global field; to assist members in developing “soft skills” that are essential to career success; to keep our networks and information sharing alive and useful; to increase the recognition of research administration as a profession; to prepare individuals for key leadership positions in NCURA and their universities; and to utilize technology in meeting these challenges. Knowledge-driven creative solutions will be necessary, and so it is important that the Board and committee and task force members be encouraged to seek broader input from the membership when necessary and to think "outside the box." Through my sponsored programs work, and especially from my experience working with faculty in project planning, I have learned how to encourage creative thought, often with the result of turning a rather mundane project idea into an innovative and exciting plan. I would bring that skill, as well as a reasonable tolerance for risk in trying new ideas, to the NCURA leadership team.

I realize that, in addition to being a tremendous honor, leading such a dynamic organization is a serious commitment of time, energy, and brain power. With the full support of East Carolina University, our Office of Sponsored Programs team, and my family, and knowing that our phenomenal NCURA staff, the Board, and our many volunteers stand ready to assist, I am ready to make that commitment. If elected, I will use my best skills and abilities to ensure the continued viability and vibrancy of the organization that has contributed so greatly to my professional success and to the professional success of so many others.

Thank you for your consideration and for your vote.