

# **A Strategic Approach to Senior Member Elevations**

BY ALEXEI BOTCHKAREV

*Past chair, IEEE Toronto Section  
Adjunct professor, Ryerson University, Toronto*

Boosting the number of senior members in the Toronto Section was an important strategic initiative for our section in 2008 and 2009. To be eligible for [senior-member status](#), IEEE members must have been in professional practice for at least 10 years and shown “significant performance” over a period of at least five of those years.

An important component of any strategic initiative is a clearly stated, quantifiable goal. Ours was to elevate 50 members each year to the senior member grade, the highest grade for which IEEE members can apply. But our goal was not so easy to achieve. The section’s annual number of elevations was usually around 25.

We organized our activities as a campaign—which helped project a sense of urgency among our members to produce results. We relied on two processes: identifying potential candidates and obtaining the required three references from IEEE senior members or Fellows.

## **FINDING CANDIDATES**

Identifying candidates was a two-step process. Members of the section’s executive committee and its technical chapter chairs were asked to review their personal IEEE contacts. Usually such a search—especially if it’s performed year after year—does not generate many candidates; the quality of the candidates discovered is relatively high, however, because of the established relationships, and there is a better understanding of whether their backgrounds qualify them. Perhaps the limiting factor of this approach is that each Executive Committee member knows relatively few people personally, and this approach did not unearth enough candidates for our purposes.

To throw a wider net, we examined the section’s list of approximately 3500 members to find people who might qualify based on such criteria as education and duration of membership. (The length of time someone has belonged to IEEE is a way of estimating the candidate’s years in the profession.)

## **A LETTER GOES OUT**

We then sent a letter of invitation to each of our candidates, explaining the requirements for senior member and offering to guide the candidates through the elevation process. Importantly, the letter promised that we would find them references. Acquiring the three required references on one’s own can be daunting. It might deter someone from applying or delay the application submission.

The response to our invitation was strong; each year we heard from dozens of members who were looking forward enthusiastically to applying for elevation. We verified with each one that they met the requirements, and were pleased to find that most went well beyond the minimums.

## **FINDING REFERENCES**

Delivering on our promise required hard work. The section chair nominated all the candidates on behalf of the section—which counted as one reference. The nomination has two positive aspects: It doesn’t require writing an actual reference, just a statement of nomination, although evaluating

each candidate's eligibility is involved. In addition, the section receives a financial perk of US \$10 from IEEE for each senior member it nominates.

But finding the other two references for each applicant is no trivial task when the number of candidates is as many as 100. To smooth the process, we held two "on the spot" senior membership elevation events in 2008 and 2009 at Ryerson University which provided computer rooms with Internet access. We invited our candidates to submit their applications online, and we had about 10 executive committee volunteers who did double-duty as references.

Candidates are required to complete an online senior member application, and along with it submit their résumé, references, and other supporting materials such as a list of publications.

The application form includes a critical section on "significant performance," which enables reviewers to determine whether a candidate meets the qualifications. It may very well be that the candidate's activities as described are outstanding but the duration of the projects and the candidate's role in them is unclear.

The Toronto Section developed a guide to help candidates document their contributions. It includes a "significant performance" table in which a candidate details his or her accomplishments along with their dates and the positions held. Accomplishments include such things as publication of engineering or scientific papers, books, or inventions; technical direction or management of important scientific or engineering work with evidence of accomplishment; recognized contributions to the welfare of the scientific or engineering profession; development or furtherance of important scientific or engineering courses that fall within IEEE's designated fields of interest; and contributions in an area such as technical editing, patent prosecution, or patent law, provided the contributions served to advance progress in IEEE's designated fields.

The table is a source of information for the applicant. Its main advantage is that it can be used to spell out in detail the candidate's significant performance—which candidates otherwise tend to present in a paragraph or two with insufficient detail. The candidate's résumé is included with the application and may have more detail. But the résumé usually has been prepared for a different purpose and has no direct references to the requirements for an IEEE senior member. Our table can be found in the November online edition of [\*IEEE Canadian Review\*](#).

Preparing the significant performance table requires time, but it's worth it. Its use saves a lot of time for reviewers, making their decisions more objective and accurate. It also helps avoid delays in approving the application because there are fewer requests for additional supporting information. And the table helped the Toronto Section resolve issues with several applications that were initially rejected.

This campaign approach worked well for us. We elevated 63 senior members in 2008 and 47 in 2009.

The overarching result of our campaign is that there are now more than 100 happy, newly elevated senior members whose professional achievements finally got them the recognition they deserved.

**The Institute, November 2010**

[http://www.theinstitute.ieee.org/portal/site/tionline/menuitem.130a3558587d56e8fb2275875bac26c8/index.jsp?&pName=institute\\_level1\\_article&TheCat=2201&article=tionline/legacy/inst2010/nov10/featuresenior\\_member.xml&](http://www.theinstitute.ieee.org/portal/site/tionline/menuitem.130a3558587d56e8fb2275875bac26c8/index.jsp?&pName=institute_level1_article&TheCat=2201&article=tionline/legacy/inst2010/nov10/featuresenior_member.xml&)