

Board Roles and Responsibilities

Community college boards of trustees are responsible for ensuring that their colleges are integral parts of their communities and serve ever-changing needs. They are accountable to the community for the performance and welfare of the institutions they govern. Effective boards consist of people who come together to form a cohesive group to articulate and represent the public interest, establish a climate for learning, and monitor the effectiveness of the institution. Boards of trustees do not do the work of their institutions—they ensure that colleges have outstanding presidents. They establish standards for the work through the policies they set. Their specific responsibilities are to:

Act as a Unit

The board is a corporate body. It governs as a unit, with one voice. This principle means that individual trustees have authority only when they are acting as a board. They have no power to act on their own or to direct college employees or operations.

In order for boards to be cohesive and well-functioning units, trustees must work together as a team, toward common goals. Boards should have structures and rules for operating that ensure they conduct their business effectively and efficiently. Board agendas are clear and informative and board meetings are run in an appropriate manner.

The power of governance is expressed through one voice. As individuals, trustees make no commitments on behalf of the board to constituents, nor do they criticize or work against board decisions.

To be effective trustees and boards must:

- l Integrate multiple perspectives into board decision-making
- l Establish and abide by rules for conducting board business
- l Speak with one voice; support the decision of the board once it is made
- l Recognize that power rests with the board, not individual trustees

Represent the Common Good

Boards of trustees exist to represent the general public. They are responsible for balancing and integrating the wide variety of interests and needs into policies that benefit the common good and the future of their region.

Therefore, board members learn as much as they can about the communities they serve. They gain this knowledge by studying demographic, economic, and social trends, by being aware of issues facing the community, and by talking with other community leaders and members of other boards. They use what they learn to make decisions that respond to community interests, needs, and values.

Boards discuss multiple viewpoints and issues in public, and have strategies to include the public in the policy-making process. Effective trustees and boards:

- l Know community needs and trends
- l Link with the community
- l Seek out and consider multiple perspectives when making policy decisions
- l Debate and discuss issues in public
- l Serve the public good

Set the Policy Direction

Governing boards establish policies that provide direction and guidance to the president and staff of the college. A major board responsibility is to define and uphold a vision and mission that clearly reflect student and community expectations. This responsibility challenges boards to think strategically, concentrate on the “big picture,” and focus on the future learning needs of their communities. It requires that boards consult widely with community groups as well as the administration, faculty, staff, and students of the college. Trustees engage in exciting, creative, thoughtful discussions as they explore the future and envision what they want their communities to be. They:

- l Are proactive, visionary, and future-oriented
- l Learn about and communicate with many different groups
- l Focus on community needs and trends
- l Establish the vision, mission and broad institutional goals as policy
- l Employ, evaluate and support the Chief Executive Officer

Successful governance depends on a good relationship between the board and the chief executive officer (CEO). The chancellor or president is the single most influential person in creating an outstanding institution. Therefore, selecting, evaluating, and supporting the CEO are among the board's most important responsibilities.

The CEO and board function best as a partnership. The CEO implements board policies, while the board depends on the CEO for guidance and educational leadership. This occasionally paradoxical relationship works best when there are clear, mutually agreed-on expectations and role descriptions. The partnership thrives on open communication, confidence, trust, and support. To be effective, trustees and boards must:

- l Select and retain the best CEO possible
- l Define clear parameters and expectations for performance
- l Conduct periodic evaluations; provide honest and constructive feedback
- l Act ethically in the relationship with the CEO
- l Support the CEO; create an environment for success

Define Policy Standards for College Operations

Successful boards of trustees adopt policies that set standards for quality, ethics and prudence in college operations. Once policy standards are established, boards delegate significant authority to the CEO, allowing the CEO and staff the flexibility they need to exercise professional judgment. The policies:

- l Define expectations for high quality educational programs
- l Define expectations for student achievement and fair treatment of students
- l Require wise and prudent use of funds and management of assets
- l Set parameters to attract and retain high quality personnel and ensure fair treatment of employees

Create a Positive Climate

Boards set the tone for the entire system or institution. Through their behavior and policies, successful boards establish a climate in which learning is valued, professional growth is enhanced, and the most important goals are student success and adding value to the community. Alternatively, boards fail their institutions when they act in such a way that they create a stifling, negative, or dysfunctional atmosphere.

Boards of trustees create a positive climate when they look to the future, act with integrity, support risk-taking, and challenge the CEO and college staff to strive for excellence. Effective boards and trustees:

- l Model a commitment to learning and to students
- l Focus on outcomes
- l Support professional growth
- l Seek consultation in developing of policy
- l Are ethical and act with integrity

Monitor Performance

Boards are responsible for holding colleges accountable for serving current and future community learning needs. The board adopts the college direction and broad goals as policy, and then monitors the progress made toward those goals. For instance, if a board adopts a policy goal that the college programs will result in skilled employees for area business, then the board should ask for periodic reports on how that goal is being met. Boards also monitor adherence to their policies for programs, personnel, and fiscal and asset management. They receive periodic reports from staff and review reports by and for external agencies, such as accreditation, audit, and state and federal accountability reports. All monitoring processes culminate in the evaluation of the CEO as the institutional leader.

A board's ability to monitor its institution is enhanced when it defines the criteria and standards to be used well in advance of when reports are required, so that the CEO and staff are clear about what is expected. Effective boards and trustees:

- l Monitor progress toward goals
- l Monitor adherence to operational policies
- l Use pre-established criteria for monitoring
- l Schedule a timetable for reports

Support and Be Advocates for the College

Trustees are essential links with their communities. They govern on behalf of the public and ensure that the college meets the needs of external constituents. They are also advocates and protectors of the college. They promote the college in the community, and seek support for the college from local, state, and national policymakers. They support the college foundation in seeking community contributions.

Competent boards protect the college from undue pressure on the institution from political and special interests. They support the professional freedom of administrators and faculty to create quality learning environments that incorporate many different perspectives. They protect the ability of the college to fulfill its mission and promise to their communities. Effective trustees and boards:

- l Promote the college in the community
- l Foster partnerships with other entities in the community
- l Advocate the needs of the college with government officials
- l Support the foundation and fundraising efforts
- l Protect the college from inappropriate influence

Lead as a Thoughtful, Educated Team

Good trusteeship requires the ability to function as part of a team, and a team functions best when all members are encouraged to contribute their unique strengths and are committed to working together.

Effective boards are thoughtful and educated. Trustees on those boards listen well, ask good questions, analyze options, think critically, and clarify their most important values and priorities. They explore issues thoroughly and make policy decisions based on thorough deliberation and comprehensive understanding.

The best boards are future-oriented. They recognize that today's world requires flexible institutions and personnel who are willing to adapt and grow in response to the changing needs of society. Trustees who act with vision, with intelligence, with curiosity and with enthusiasm create a board that is an agent for positive change. Effective boards and trustees:

- 1 Engage in ongoing learning about board roles and responsibilities
- 1 Are curious and inclusive
- 1 Are positive and optimistic
- 1 Support and respect each other