


# Educating Governing Boards

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## Board Responsibilities

- ◆ Set, clarify, and/or approve institutional mission
  - ◆ Approve institutional long-range plans
  - ◆ Approve new, or changes to existing educational programs
  - ◆ Ensure well-being of faculty, students, and staff
  - ◆ Hire and evaluate president's performance and set president's compensation
  - ◆ Approve personnel actions as appropriate
  - ◆ Ensure strong financial management and stewardship
  - ◆ Assist in fund-raising and development
  - ◆ Consistently promote university with appropriate publics
  - ◆ Approve legal actions
  - ◆ Serve as body of final appeal
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## Public Institution Trustees

- ◆ Colleges and Universities “owned” by public; trustees act on behalf of public.
- ◆ Issues for trustees?
  - How to protect mission
  - How to delegate authority, not responsibility
  - How to finance (competing needs, political agenda)
  - Values to be understood by trustees?
    - Academic freedom
    - Institutional independence
    - Consultation
  - Need for Transparency

## Independent Institution Boards

- ◆ Act on behalf of institutional founders and citizens...uphold tradition, mission and values
- ◆ Independent? Yes, but...
  - Direct / Indirect government support?
  - Tax-exempt status?
  - Generally larger boards; self-selecting membership.

## Board Members and Student Issues

- ◆ Views of students & student issues may be limited by perceptions developed as former students or on hearing anecdotal stories.
- ◆ Board members usually graduated over 10, 20, 30 years ago and may not be familiar with student learning theory or importance of a co-curriculum.
- ◆ May think they are “natural” experts about students. Board members may not know or appreciate the literature and research specific to holistic student development and learning.
- ◆ Often desire to be involved with students for obvious intrinsic rewards; may not understand or be interested in issues such as financial aid, diversity, safety and security, mental health.
- ◆ Because of this lack of understand they may not understand student affairs or consider non-faculty activities as important.

## Good Board Members are...

- ◆ Asked to make decisions about proposed policies that will affect the student body.
- ◆ Interested in students’ experiences, both curricular and co-curricular.
- ◆ Concerned about student access and affordability.
- ◆ Encouraged to realize that most institutions are judged on admissions, retention, and graduation data.
- ◆ Asked to understand the linkage between enrollment and retention and the financial stability of the institution.

## Board members can have an impact by...

- ◆ Representing students' needs and interests in policy-making activities
- ◆ Ensuring that co-curricular programs have adequate resources
- ◆ Staying current with changes in student demographics and student needs, and
- ◆ Ensuring inclusiveness and a holistic approach to campus community.

## Keys to Helping the Board Fulfill Its Purpose

## **Key #1: Understand The Mission and Purpose of The Board**

Provide Context – Help the Board understand the culture & norms of the institution

- Help Board focus on matters that call for analysis and strategic visioning
- Create opportunities for Board education on critical issues and developments
- Expose Board to different points of view
- Create opportunities for the Board to be with key constituencies
- Alert Board to potential problems so they can act before matters become urgent

## **Key #2: Understand the Governing Culture that Has Been Created by the Board and Your President**

- How is the Board composed? Are internal constituencies represented?
- How long has the president served?
- What is the president's relationship with the Board's chair?
- What is the balance between new and long-time Board members?
- What is the state of the Board's collegiality?
- What are the norms about contact and communication with Board members?

### **Key #3: Learn to View Your Work through the Board's Prism**

- How many Board members are alumni? From what classes?
- What are their professions?
  - Business Executives, Bankers, Doctors, Investors, Lawyers, Educators, Clergy, Real Estate Developers, Professional Volunteers, etc.
- How many are retired and have a lot of time on their hands?
- Where do they live and work?
- What do they read? [AGB's Trusteeship magazine]

### **Key #4: Inform and Engage Board Members on Cutting Edge and Emerging Issues**

- Inform Board about Emerging Developments
- Share Benchmark Best Practices
- Provide Context for Controversial Issues
- Engage Board Members

# Resources

1. Chait, Richard P., William P. Ryan, and Barbara E. Taylor. Governance as Leadership: Reframing the Work of Nonprofit Boards. Wiley, 2004.
  2. Chait, Richard P., Thomas P. Holland, and Barbara E. Taylor. Improving the Performance of Governing Boards.
  3. Ingram, Richard T. Effective Trusteeship: A Guide for Board Members of Public Colleges and Universities.
  4. Beeny, Claudia K, et al. "Student Affairs and the Board of Trustees: Representation, Support, and Advocacy." NASPA Journal 45.2 (2008): 173-191.
  5. Association of Governing Boards at Universities and Colleges (AGB) [www.agb.org](http://www.agb.org)
  6. Trusteeship Magazine, AGB
  7. Hoyle, Cyril, Governing Boards, Jossey Bass
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