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Roles & Responsibilities for Governing Boards in Accreditation

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Introduction

ACCJC Accreditation Standards emphasize the important roles and responsibilities of high-functioning and effective governing boards for the overall quality and stability of the college/district/system they represent. Governing boards assume leadership responsibilities for the college mission, institutional quality and improvement, institutional integrity, fiscal health, and, ultimately, equitable student success. High-functioning governing boards develop policies and goals and delegate responsibility to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to implement its policies and goals and manage the internal operations of the institution.

See ACCJC's [Accreditation Handbook](#), available on the ACCJC website (accjc.org), for information about:

- Accreditation in the United States
- The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC)
- The ACCJC Accreditation Standards, Eligibility Requirements, and Commission policies
- Path to ACCJC Membership and Accredited Status
- The Accreditation Cycle: Ongoing Tasks and Activities
- Comprehensive Peer Reviews
- Commission Actions on Institutions

Roles and Responsibilities of Governing Boards in Accreditation

Effective Leadership and Governance

The governing board has ultimate responsibility for educational quality, legal matters, and financial integrity and stability of the institution. The governing board's **responsibility for institutional effectiveness** is exercised through its policy-making role and the delegation of policy implementation to the institution's Chief Executive Officer (CEO). It is through the governing board's authority over and responsibility for policies that it assures the academic quality, integrity, and effectiveness of the student learning programs and services and the financial stability of the institution.

By establishing policies and goals that focus on the *what* (mission, quality, outcomes, and improvement) and not on the *how* (operations and the means to achieve outcomes, which is the responsibility of the CEO), high functioning and effective governing boards demonstrate their mission-directed leadership role.

Effective boards hold institutions accountable for student success and institutional effectiveness. The board adopts the institution's direction and broad goals as policy and then monitors the progress in achieving those goals. These policies should set expectations for the use of sound disaggregated student outcome data in program and institutional reviews and planning.

The board should also be informed about institutional reports submitted to the Commission and of communication from the Commission to its institution, including recommendations for compliance or improvement. Board action should indicate a commitment to implementing institutional improvement that has been planned as part of the institutional self-evaluation processes. Those improvement plans should take their place among important institutional priorities that the board ensures are addressed and adequately resourced.

The governing board exercises its **fiduciary responsibility** through policy development, review of the annual external audit, and approval of the institution's annual budget and spending plans. In performing its fiduciary responsibility, the governing board is responsible for developing the expertise needed to make sound budgetary decisions that support educational quality. This includes an understanding of an institution's current and projected revenues and expenditures, as well as the institution's long-term obligations created through contractual agreements, obligations for retirement funding, borrowing, or plans for institutional expansion.

High functioning and effective governing board act as an independent, policy-making body that reflects the public interest in the institution's educational quality. The board advocates for and defends the institution and protects it from undue influence or political pressure. Depending on the nature of the institution, governing board members are either elected in a local election, appointed by an oversight body, or recruited and vetted by the existing board through a board development committee. Once elected, it becomes the responsibility of each board member to serve the public good at large, and the interest of the college/district of which they represent, and not that of any constituent person or organization. As such, governing board members do not *represent* specific constituencies in the sense of taking board actions in favor of their interests. All governing board members, appointed or elected, have a fiduciary responsibility to the institution and are expected to bring to board deliberations a broad understanding of the college's role in serving all students and the institution's multiple stakeholders.

There must be no implied obligation for any governing board member to serve the interests of a specific constituency over the interests of the broad mission of the college.

In multi-college/multi-unit districts or systems, the board carries the same responsibilities for institutional mission(s) and for policy as the board in a single-college district/system. In these districts or systems, the district or system CEO is directly responsible to the governing board, while CEOs of colleges within the district or system are responsible to the district/system CEO. The district/system has clearly defined roles of authority and responsibility between the colleges and district/system, and the district/system acts as liaison between the colleges and the governing board. In these district/system configurations, the governing board should maintain and review policies that clearly articulate the delineation and distribution of responsibilities and authorities between the district/system and the colleges/units.

It is important to note that the Commission evaluation is based on ACCJC's Standards, regardless of organizational structure. All boards are required to meet Accreditation Standards and to support the quality of the institutions they govern.

Effective boards set the tone for the entire institution. Through the behavior of board members and the board's policies, the successful board establishes a climate in which learning is valued (including learning by board members), where assessment and evaluation are embraced, and where student success is the most important goal. Effective boards are ethical and act with integrity, which also promotes a positive climate.

ACCJC Standards for Governing Boards

The role and responsibility of governing boards is emphasized in the Accreditation Standards. These Standards provide a framework for best practices that will lead to achievement of the institution's mission and improving educational quality. Similar roles and responsibilities are also reflected in publications of the Association of Governing Boards (AGB) and the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT).

Standard 1: Institutional Mission and Effectiveness

Ultimately, the governing board is responsible for the mission of the institution. In general, Standard 1 stipulates that the institution has a clearly defined mission that reflects its character, values, organizational structure, and unique student population. The mission outlines the institution's explicit commitment to equitable student achievement and serves as a guiding principle for institutional planning, action, evaluation, improvement, and innovation.

High functioning boards ensure the institution's mission is periodically evaluated and adequately funded. Effective boards also ensure its policies and resource allocations are linked and align with the educational priorities defined through the institutional mission.

The board's approval of the mission is an important aspect of Standard 1. Required documentation for this Standard ask for documentation of the governing board's approval of the institutional mission.

Standard 4: Governance and Decision Making

The primary roles and responsibilities of governing boards are articulated in Standard 4, which deals with the institution's effective governance practices that support the achievement of its mission.

Standard 4.4 - Acting through policy, the governing board takes responsibility for the overall quality and stability of the institution, and regularly monitors progress towards its goals and fiscal health.

The board adopts policies that set standards for quality, ethics, and prudence in institutional operations and in the operation of the board itself. A major board responsibility is to define and uphold an institutional vision and mission that clearly reflect student and community expectations, as well as a realistic assessment of institutional resources necessary to accomplish the mission and related goals.

This responsibility requires the board to regularly monitor the institution's progress in achieving its mission, including monitoring its fiscal stability and health. Boards should require institutional leadership to maintain adequate reserves and to quickly address any issues discovered through external audits and reviews. The short- and long-term fiscal sustainability of the institution is a primary board responsibility and is particularly critical at times of financial stress.

The **review criteria** for this Standard, which is used by the college and peer review teams when determining if this Standard is met, stipulates:

- The institution has appropriate policies that delineate the governing board's accountability for academic quality and achievement of equitable outcomes.

- The governing board regularly reviews key indicators of student learning and achievement and institutional plans for improving academic quality and equitable outcomes.

- The institution has a policy manual or other compilation of policy documents that delineates the governing board's role and responsibility in ensuring the financial stability of the institution.

- The governing board regularly reviews key fiscal information and documents regarding the stability of the institution.

- The governing board has a system for evaluating and revising its policies on a regular basis.

Standard 4.5 - The governing board selects and evaluates the institution's chief executive officer (CEO). The governing board gives the CEO full authority to implement board policies and ensure effective operations and fulfillment of the institutional mission.

Through policy, the board gives direction and guidance to the CEO and staff of the institution. A high-functioning board maintains a good relationship with the CEO. The board empowers the CEO to oversee the operations of the institution and avoids intruding into those operations.

The **review criteria** for this Standard, which is used by the college and peer review teams when determining if this Standard is met, stipulates:

- The governing board sets clear expectations for regular reports on institutional performance from the chief administrator.

- The governing board has policies outlining the delegation of administrative authority to the institution's chief administrator.

- The governing board adheres to its policies for delegation of administrative authority to the institution's chief administrator.

Standard 4.6 - The governing board functions effectively as a collective entity to promote the institution's values and mission and fulfill its fiduciary responsibilities. The governing board demonstrates an ability to self-govern in adherence to its bylaws and expectations for best practices in board governance.

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

Furthermore, the board exists to represent the public as a whole or, in the case of private institutions, its owners. The board is responsible for balancing and integrating a wide variety of interests and needs into policies that benefit the common good and the future of all its constituencies.

The **review criteria** for this Standard, which is used by the college and peer review teams when determining if this Standard is met, stipulates:

- The institution's governing board outlines its expectations for working as a collective unit in support of the mission.

- The governing board demonstrates the ability to act in the best interest of the institution, independent from undue influence.

- Once a collective decision has been reached, board members, individually, demonstrate their support for board policies and decisions.

- The institution's governing board has documented procedures for self-governance and/or addressing behavior that does not align with its policies.

- The governing board improves its own effectiveness through orientations, professional development, and regular board self-evaluation.

Additionally, Standard 4 has the following **required documentation**:

- Governing board policies/procedures for selecting and regularly evaluating its chief executive officer

- Governing board policies/procedures/bylaws related to board ethics

- Governing board policies/procedures/bylaws related to conflict of interest

Conclusion

The roles and responsibilities of the governing board is articulated in the Accreditation Standards and closely related to the goals of the accrediting commission as both entities fulfill their commitment to support strong and effective institutions, on behalf of their students.

Governing boards are ultimately responsible for educational quality and monitoring of institutional performance, including student success, planning, implementation of plans, and participation in accreditation processes. The institution's governing board should be kept informed of the progress of the self-evaluation process. When the self-evaluation has been completed, the board should have an opportunity to read the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) prior to its submission to ACCJC. The board must sign the ISER's certification page to certify that there has been broad involvement in the process and that, to the best of its knowledge, the ISER accurately represents the nature and substance of the institution.

Other Resources

Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT): https://www.acct.org/trustee-education/board-basics

Association of Governing Boards (AGB): https://agb.org/knowledge-center/board-fundamentals/board-roles-responsibilities/

Accreditation and Governing Boards Workshop: Provided by the institution's ACCJC Staff Liaison.

Appendix A: ACCJC Accreditation Standards

The **Accreditation Standards** included below are also available on the ACCJC website: https://accjc.org/wp-content/uploads/ACCJC-2024-Accreditation-Standards.pdf.

For the **Accreditation Standards with Review Criteria and Suggestions for Evidence**, please visit: https://accjc.org/wp-content/uploads/ACCJC-2024-Accreditation-Standards-with-Review-Criteria-Evidence.pdf.

ACCJC | ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES

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Accreditation Standards   *June 2023*

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Standard 1: Institutional Mission and Effectiveness

The institution has a clearly defined mission that reflects its character, values, organizational structure, and unique student population. The mission outlines the institution's explicit commitment to equitable student achievement and serves as a guiding principle for institutional planning, action, evaluation, improvement, and innovation.

1.1.   The institution has established a clearly defined mission that appropriately reflects its character, values, structure, and unique student demographics. The institution's mission articulates its commitment to ensuring equitable educational opportunities and outcomes for all students.

1.2.   The institution establishes meaningful and ambitious goals for institutional improvement, innovation, and equitable student outcomes.

1.3. The institution holds itself accountable for achieving its mission and goals and regularly reviews relevant, meaningfully disaggregated data to evaluate its progress and inform plans for continued improvement and innovation.

1.4. The institution's mission directs resource allocation, innovation, and continuous quality improvement through ongoing systematic planning and evaluation of programs and services.

1.5. The institution regularly communicates progress toward achieving its mission and goals with internal and external stakeholders in order to promote understanding of institutional strengths, priorities, and areas for continued improvement.

Required Documentation – Institutional Mission and Effectiveness

Within the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report, the institution will provide narratives and a variety of evidence sources to describe and demonstrate alignment with each Standard. Institutions must also include documentation of the required items below. This documentation can be included as supporting evidence for the Standard narratives if appropriate, or they may be provided as stand-alone files. Peer Review Teams will confirm these items during the comprehensive review process using a checklist.

- Institutional procedures/practices for periodic review of mission/mission-related statements, including provisions for revision (if/when revisions are needed) that allow for participation of institutional stakeholders, as appropriate for the character and context of the institution

- Documentation of the governing board's approval of the institutional mission

- Procedures/processes for setting institutional goals, including provisions for the inclusion of input from relevant institutional stakeholders, as appropriate for the character and context of the institution

- Documentation that the institution has established standards and goals for student achievement (i.e., institution-set standards) in accordance with Commission policy and practices for monitoring institutional performance, including standards and goals for course success, degree and certificate attainment, transfer, job placement rates, and licensure examination pass rates

Standard 2: Student Success

In alignment with its mission, the institution delivers high-quality academic and learning support programs that engage and support students through their unique educational journeys. Academic and learning support programs promote equitable student success, and the institution evaluates student learning and achievement data to inform improvements and advance equitable outcomes.

2.1. Academic programs at all locations and in all modes of delivery are offered in fields of study consistent with the institution's mission and reflect appropriate breadth, depth, and expected learning outcomes.

2.2. The institution, relying on faculty and other appropriate stakeholders, designs and delivers academic programs that reflect relevant discipline and industry standards and support equitable attainment of learning outcomes and achievement of educational goals.

2.3. All degree programs include a general education framework to ensure the development of broad knowledge, skills, and competencies related to communication, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, information literacy, civic responsibility, and the ability to engage with diverse perspectives.

2.4. The institution communicates clear, accurate, and accessible information regarding programs, services, and resources that foster success in students' unique educational journeys.

2.5. The institution holds itself accountable for students' success by scheduling courses in a manner that ensures degree and certificate programs can be completed in the expected period of time.

2.6. The institution uses delivery modes and teaching methodologies that meet student and curricular needs and promote equitable student learning and achievement.

2.7. The institution designs and delivers equitable and effective services and programs that support students in their unique educational journeys, address academic and non-academic needs, and maximize their potential for success. Such services include library and learning resources, academic counseling and support, and other services the institution identifies as appropriate for its mission and student needs.

2.8. The institution fosters a sense of belonging and community with its students by providing multiple opportunities for engagement with the institution, programs, and peers. Such opportunities reflect the varied needs of the student population and effectively support students' unique educational journeys.

2.9. The institution conducts systematic review and assessment to ensure the quality of its academic, learning support, and student services programs and implement improvements and innovations in support of equitable student achievement.

Required Documentation – Student Success
Within the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report, the institution will provide narratives and a variety of evidence sources to describe and demonstrate alignment with each Standard. Institutions must also include documentation of the required items below. This documentation can be included as supporting evidence for the Standard narratives if appropriate, or they may be provided as stand-alone files. Peer Review Teams will confirm these items during the comprehensive review process using a checklist.

- Policies and/or other documentation regarding transfer of credit into and out of the institution
- Documentation of minimum degree requirements (60 units for AA, 120 units for BA)
- Policies/procedures related to program discontinuance, demonstrating that the institution provides enrolled students with opportunities for timely completion in the event of program elimination
- Policies related to catalog, communication, recruiting, enrollment, admissions, etc.
- Documentation that the official catalog provides information regarding the purpose, content, requirements, and expected learning outcomes of degree and certificate programs
- Policies/processes for student complaints, demonstrating how the institution communicates process to students and handles complaints with due process

- Verification that student records are stored permanently, securely, and confidentially, with provision for secure backup

- Policies/practices for release of student records

- Documentation of alignment with *ACCJC Policy on Institutional Compliance with Title IV* (if applicable)

- Documentation of agreements with other external parties regarding the provision of student and/or learning support services, if applicable

- Documentation showing how the institution distinguishes pre-collegiate curriculum from college-level curriculum (if applicable)

- Documentation of compliance with Federal standards for clock-to-credit hour conversions (if applicable)

- Policies and/or other documentation related to expectation of conformity with specific codes of conduct, worldviews, or beliefs (if applicable)

- Policies and/or other documentation related to credit for prior learning and competency-based credit (if applicable)

- Documentation and/or other evidence demonstrating alignment with *ACCJC Policy on Distance Education and on Correspondence Education* (if applicable)

Standard 3: Infrastructure and Resources

The institution supports its educational services and operational functions with effective infrastructure, qualified personnel, and stable finances. The institution organizes its staffing and allocates its physical, technological, and financial resources to improve its overall effectiveness and promote equitable student success. The institution actively monitors and assesses resource capacity to inform improvements to infrastructure and ensure long-term health and stability.

3.1. The institution employs qualified faculty, staff, administrators, and other personnel to support and sustain educational services and improve student success. The institution maintains appropriate policies and regularly assesses its employment practices to promote and improve equity, diversity, and mission fulfillment.

3.2. The institution supports its employees with professional learning opportunities aligned with the mission and institutional goals. These opportunities are regularly evaluated for overall effectiveness in promoting equitable student success and in meeting institutional and employee needs.

3.3. The institution evaluates its employees regularly, using clear criteria that align with professional responsibilities and reflect the institution's mission and goals.

3.4. The institution develops, maintains, and enhances its educational services and operational functions through the effective use of fiscal resources. Financial resources support and sustain the mission and promote equitable achievement of student success.

3.5. The institution's mission and goals are the foundation for financial planning. Financial information is disseminated to support effective planning and decision-making and provide opportunities for stakeholders to participate in the development of plans and budgets.

3.6. The institution ensures the integrity and responsible use of its financial resources and regularly evaluates its fiscal outcomes and financial management practices to promote institutional mission fulfillment.

3.7. The institution ensures financial solvency. When making short-range financial plans, the institution considers its long-range financial priorities and future obligations to ensure sustained fiscal stability.

3.8. The institution constructs and maintains physical resources to support and sustain educational services and operational functions. The institution ensures safe and effective physical resources at all locations where it offers instruction, student services, and/or learning supports.

3.9. The institution implements, enhances, and secures its technology resources to support and sustain educational services and operational functions. The institution clearly communicates requirements for the safe and appropriate use of technology to students and employees and employs effective protocols for network and data security.

3.10. The institution has appropriate strategies for risk management and has policies and procedures in place to implement contingency plans in the event of financial, environmental, or technological emergencies and other unforeseen circumstances.

Required Documentation – Infrastructure and Resources

Within the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report, the institution will provide narratives and a variety of evidence sources to describe and demonstrate alignment with each Standard. Evidence sources will vary from institution to institution. Institutions must also include documentation of the items below. These required items can be included as supporting evidence for the Standard narratives, or they may be provided as stand-alone files. Peer Review Teams will confirm these items during the comprehensive review process using a checklist.

- Written policies and procedures for human resources, including hiring procedures
- Employee handbooks or similar documents that communicate expectations to employees
- If applicable, written code of professional ethics for all personnel including consequences for violations
- Annual financial audit reports (3 prior years, including any auxiliary organizations)
- Practices for resource allocation and budget development (including budget allocation model for multi-college districts/systems)
- Policies around Title IV including the most recent three-year student loan default rates
- Policies guiding fiscal management (e.g., related to reserves, budget development)
- Any agreements that fall under ACCJC's policy on contractual relationships with non-accredited organizations
- Policies, procedures or agreements (e.g., AUAs) related to appropriate use of technology systems

Standard 4: Governance and Decision-Making

The institution engages in clear and effective governance practices that support the achievement of its mission. Governance roles and responsibilities are delineated in widely distributed policies, and institutional decision-making processes provide opportunities for meaningful participation and inclusion of relevant stakeholders.

4.1. The institution upholds an explicit commitment to principles of academic freedom, academic integrity, and freedom of inquiry.

4.2. Roles, responsibilities, and authority for decision-making are clearly defined and communicated throughout the institution. The institution's structure for decision-making provides opportunities for stakeholder participation and ensures the inclusion of relevant perspectives.

4.3. The institution's decision-making structures are used consistently and effectively. Institutional decision-making practices support a climate of collaboration and innovation that advances the mission and prioritizes equitable student outcomes.

4.4. Acting through policy, the governing board takes responsibility for the overall quality and stability of the institution, and regularly monitors progress towards its goals and fiscal health.

4.5. The governing board selects and evaluates the institution's chief executive officer (CEO). The governing board gives the CEO full authority to implement board policies and ensure effective operations and fulfillment of the institutional mission.

4.6. The governing board functions effectively as a collective entity to promote the institution's values and mission and fulfill its fiduciary responsibilities. The governing board demonstrates an ability to self-govern in adherence to its bylaws and expectations for best practices in board governance.

Required Documentation – Governance and Decision-Making
Within the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report, the institution will provide narratives and a variety of evidence sources to describe and demonstrate alignment with each Standard. Institutions must also include documentation of the required items below. This documentation can be included as supporting evidence for the Standard narratives if appropriate, or they may be provided as stand-alone files. Peer Review Teams will confirm these items during the comprehensive review process using a checklist.

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- Governing board policies/procedures/bylaws related to Board Ethics
- Governing board policies/procedures/bylaws related to conflict of interest

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