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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 (see “Standard 4: Governance and Decision-Making”). 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.

The **Accreditation Standards** are 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>.

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.