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# **ASSESSING BOARD EFFECTIVENESS**

Resources for Boards of Trustees  
Self-Evaluation

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*By Cindra Smith, Ed. D.  
cindrasmith@comcast.net  
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## INTRODUCTION

Successful colleges require effective leadership and governance. Success is a result of highly qualified and skilled people serving in leadership positions. Highly qualified people learn their roles, embrace their responsibilities, and continually improve their performance. Effective governing boards are comprised of trustees who are committed to excellence in performing their duties.

Students, communities, college staff, the public, media, government, and the accrediting commission have the right to expect and deserve a high degree of professionalism and performance from trustees of California community colleges.

How do governing boards assure they are effective? One way is through ongoing board and trustee education and development, to provide the skills necessary to govern well. Another is through regular board self-evaluation, to assess how the board is upholding commonly accepted standards of good governance.

While it is true that the public “evaluates” board performance when it re-elects (or not) trustees to the board, the political process provides only “yes” or “no” feedback, and it is not always clear what the reason is for the vote. To assess and improve its performance, a board needs ongoing information on how it is doing on specific roles and responsibilities – information that simply cannot be obtained through the election process.

Assessing board performance involves looking at the board as a unit. While individual trustee behavior contributes to effective board functioning, a board self-evaluation looks at how individuals collectively work together to govern the district. It focuses on board policies and practices related to the role of the board in representing the community, setting policy direction, working with the CEO, and monitoring institutional effectiveness.

### Relationship to CEO Evaluation

Given the unique nature of the relationship between the board and CEO, the evaluations of the board and the CEO are intertwined. When the board evaluates itself, it is evaluating in part how well the CEO supports the board; when it evaluates the CEO, it is evaluating the direction and support the board provides for that person. The CEO contributes to board evaluation and evaluates his or her support and leadership to the board. The board conducts the CEO evaluation and looks at its own behavior in fostering CEO effectiveness.

Some boards schedule their CEO evaluation and board self-evaluation discussions in conjunction with each other to capitalize on the link between them. Others do them at different times. One of the outcomes of both evaluations are priorities and tasks for the coming year, and no matter how the evaluation sessions are linked, the board and CEO priorities must be aligned.

### BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES

- Adopt a board self-evaluation policy and process.
- Regularly conduct a board self-evaluation.
- Discuss the results of the evaluation to identify strengths and areas for improvement.
- Use the results to enhance board effectiveness and set annual board goals.

## Accreditation Standard

The importance of regular board self-evaluation is underscored by the Western Association's Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges. Standard IV.C.10 (2014 Revision) states:

*“Board policies and/or bylaws clearly establish a process for board evaluation. The evaluation assesses the board’s effectiveness in promoting and sustaining academic quality and institutional effectiveness. The governing board regularly evaluates its practices and performance, including full participation in board training, and makes public the results. The results are used to improve board performance, academic quality and institutional effectiveness.”*

The district's accreditation self-study report should include evidence that boards have a policy and procedure, have conducted regular self-evaluations, and have used the results to improve how they are governing their district. Evidence includes survey results, annual reports from the evaluation discussion, and board meeting minutes that include review and/or ratification of board goals resulting from evaluations. The results of the evaluations are made public by posting them on the district's website and/or adopting or affirming them at a public board meeting.

## PURPOSE AND OUTCOMES

The purposes of the board self-evaluation include identifying areas of board functioning that are working well and those that may need improvement. It is an opportunity for an open and candid discussion about board and trustee responsibilities, as well as trustees' interests and desires. Board self-evaluations also model the value of reflecting on one's own performance and engaging in ongoing improvement. They set an example for ongoing improvement throughout the institution.

Exploring board and trustee responsibilities fosters communication and leads to more cohesive board teams. Reports from trustees on boards that regularly conduct self-evaluations include that they gain an increased appreciation for and understanding of their fellow trustees. Their board meetings run more smoothly and they receive better information. They have a set of priorities that guide board agendas and workshops. And, they increase the time they spend on policy, goals and accomplishments.

The outcomes of a board self-evaluation include:

- a summary of what the board does well and its accomplishments for the prior year
- a better understanding of what is needed from each trustee and the CEO to be an effective board and board/CEO team
- an assessment of progress on the prior year's goals and identification of what needs to be completed
- goals and tasks for the coming year related to board performance and its leadership for district goals

In addition to the general outcomes, boards may have specific needs or desires from year to year, depending on circumstances. For instance, during an accreditation self-study, the board may want to focus on the accreditation standards. Or, if the board has hired a new CEO in the past year, the evaluation may focus on the board/CEO relationship. If a board has not been functioning well, it may wish to focus on team dynamics, communication and the board's code of ethics. If the board has a significant number of new trustees, the evaluation may focus on the roles and responsibilities of the board and trustees.

## EVALUATION PROCESS

Self-evaluation processes range from relatively informal discussions to formal, structured assessment surveys or even interviews. A board evaluation, whether formal or informal, should result in a report that describes the process, summarizes the results, and identifies actions that the board intends to take as a result of the evaluation. The self-evaluation process and results are public information under California's Brown Act.

Annual board self-evaluations are the most common and useful. Each year, the board sets aside time to reflect on past accomplishments and performance against pre-determined criteria, and to identify priorities and expectations for the coming year.

Boards may choose specific areas to review more often. For instance, some boards will quickly assess the board meeting discussion and agenda content at the end of each meeting, which provides immediate feedback. Other examples are boards assessing how they oriented and integrated newly elected trustees, or the process of hiring a new CEO, after those events occurred.

Following are some common ways to gather information for the self-evaluation.

### Surveys

Surveys are by far the most common approach to gathering information about board performance. Responders rate board performance on various criteria, and the ratings are summarized and presented to the board for discussion. The discussion of the summarized ratings and related comments is the board's self-evaluation.

Survey instruments ask responders to rate performance on the items in the survey, usually using a numeric scale. The sample surveys included later in this guide include suggested rating scales. The ratings are provided as raw data and/or are summarized in some way (averages, charts, graphs, etc.)

Using the same rating scale from year to year allows average ratings to be compared to prior years for the same or similar criteria. Using the same rating scale for trustee and constituent surveys allows for easy comparison between the two sets of results.

Surveys are designed to assess two areas of board functioning:

- The progress made on achieving board priorities and tasks set the previous year.
- Board performance on characteristics of effective board functioning.

*Annual Board Priorities and Tasks.* Survey instruments that assess achievement on board priorities are unique to each board. Annual priorities, related to the board's governance role for institutional goals, will vary from district to district (and from year to year within the same district). In addition, the board may identify specific areas related to board performance to address in the coming year. Some examples are included in the next section on criteria and in Sample 1 on page 16.

*Board Functioning.* There are two primary types of instruments that assess board functioning. The first involves using a generic survey based on criteria that reflect commonly accepted standards of board effectiveness. The second involves developing a survey using criteria in local board policy and practice related to ethics, board meetings, delegation to the CEO, monitoring policy implementation, and other board roles. See the Evaluation Criteria chapter in this guide for more detail as well as the survey samples provided later in this document.

## **Interviews**

Another evaluation strategy is for someone, usually a consultant, to conduct structured interviews of all board members, the CEO and others (if any) identified by the board. The interviewer gathers information about board performance, summarizes the results of the interviews and writes a report to the board. It is a qualitative approach to evaluation. It may be used in addition to a survey.

An interview approach allows for more in-depth exploration of issues, highlights accomplishments, and identifies specific areas of concern and suggestions for improvement. It is beneficial to use when the board has not had an evaluation for some time, when trustees prefer this method and/or don't find survey information useful, or particularly when there are significant and/or ongoing concerns about board functioning. Drawbacks include that it is a time-consuming, more expensive process, and does not, in itself, result in numerical ratings that can be compared from year to year.

## **Informal Discussion**

Informal processes do not use surveys or structured interviews to gather information. Rather, the board allots time for a substantive discussion of board strengths, accomplishments, weaknesses and areas for improvement. It is recommended that such discussions be facilitated by an external person or consultant to allow the board chair ample opportunity to participate. A report of the discussion is prepared that summarizes the discussion and identifies further board action.

Boards with members who have been together a number of years, along with a long-term CEO, may use this approach. The drawback is that, unlike surveys, it does not provide numerical ratings that can be compared over time.

# **DESIGNING THE EVALUATION PROCESS**

## **Board Policy**

Boards should have a policy on the self-evaluation, and may have a procedure. The League's Policy and Procedure Service provides basic language in BP 2745: almost all boards have added to that language to reflect their own processes. There may be an accompanying procedure that includes the survey form and describes how the data will be gathered and summarized. Periodically, the board should review the policy and process to ensure it continues to be useful. Examples of board policies may be found on most districts' websites.

The policy states the purpose and value of the board self-evaluation, either describes the process or states how it will be determined (by a committee of the board or other method), indicates when the evaluation will take place, may state if constituency feedback will be sought, and commits the board to using the results to enhance board performance. It reflects the decisions of the board discussed below.

A few boards have a standing or ad hoc committee to review the criteria and conduct the process. If a board hasn't had a process or wishes to significantly revamp the process and criteria, a subcommittee of the board is usually asked to develop a recommendation. The CEO and executive assistant provide support to the committee. Alternatively, the board may ask the CEO and his or her staff to research and recommend a self-evaluation process to the board.

Decisions for the board include: the specific purposes of the evaluation, whether or not the evaluation will include a survey and/or interviews, who will participate, which criteria will be used, consultant roles (if any), how the results will be shared and discussed, and who will write the report. Designing the process involves answering the following questions:

- Will the board evaluation be conducted through an evaluation discussion, survey, interviews, or a combination of approaches?
- Who will be asked to evaluate the board?
- Who will gather the information and compile the results?
- When will the results be discussed by the board
- How will the results be made public?

### **Who participates in the board's self-evaluation?**

*All board members.* The expectation is that the board evaluates itself. Each and every publicly elected trustee should be involved in assessing board performance and in discussing the results of the evaluation. Newly elected trustees may think they don't have enough experience on the board to provide useful feedback; however, virtually all new trustees have spent time observing the board prior to being elected, and their input can be very valuable. Student trustees may be encouraged to contribute feedback and participate in the evaluation discussion.

*CEO.* The CEO is in a position to provide essential feedback to the board on its performance, and is key to ensuring that the board has the information and other resources to fulfill its responsibilities on many evaluation criteria. Therefore, the CEO should participate in some way, although the method of contributing feedback may be different than for the trustees or others. For instance, the CEO would provide feedback during a discussion of the results of a survey rather than completing a survey form.

*College constituents.* A number of boards provide an opportunity for college employees to complete surveys on board performance. The most common approach is to invite the college leaders who are most familiar with the board to complete a brief survey and make comments. They are usually administrators who routinely attend board meetings as well as faculty, staff, and student constituency group leaders. Data from these surveys let the board know how it is perceived by those who most often see it in action. An example of a survey suitable for employees is Sample 3 on page 20.

A few districts provide opportunities for all employees to complete a board evaluation, which reflects the board's openness to broad feedback. However, the information gathered from these surveys is of questionable value due to the lack of knowledge that many employees have about board roles and responsibilities and/or the differing perceptions of the board's role.

If all employees are invited to provide feedback, the survey should be constructed to identify responses from those who regularly attend (or view) board meetings and have knowledge of board performance, in order to differentiate responses from those with little experience.

*Community members.* A few boards seek information from selected community representatives (such as those on foundation boards or advisory committees). Surveys or interviews that gather feedback from community members should include those areas that community members may know about, such as the visibility and effectiveness of the board as ambassadors for the college. These surveys are often short – three to six questions, such as:

- The Governing Board for [Community College District] has a reputation for effective governance and positive leadership for the colleges.

- [Community College District] board members are effective ambassadors for the community colleges.
- The Governing Board for [Community College District] ensures that community interests and needs are reflected in decisions affecting the colleges.

If the board evaluation process includes feedback from college and/or community, the summary of the survey or feedback should be presented separately from the board's self-evaluation data, so that the board may compare trustee perceptions with those of others.

## **Evaluation Discussion**

The actual board self-evaluation is the discussion about the survey or interview results. Interview summaries and survey ratings provide information for the board as a basis for discussion, but are not, in themselves, the self-evaluation.

Survey ratings identify areas where the board is doing well; high scores should be celebrated, and lower scores explored to see how the board might improve. Items where trustees had differing ratings may be addressed to explore the differing perceptions. The process of exploring what “excellence” looks like contributes to board effectiveness.

The evaluation session is an open meeting of the board. Boards often schedule the evaluation session as a study session, workshop or retreat to allow for enough time to discuss the evaluation and identify priorities for the following year.

The timing of the evaluation, particularly if it results in identifying annual priorities, should be coordinated with the district's annual goal setting cycles.

## **The Report**

The end results of the evaluation are a summary of the discussion and a set of goals or actions to be taken as a result of the evaluation. A written follow-up report helps ensure that the results will be used and that any issues will be addressed. It is evidence for the public and college community that the board is serious about assessing its performance and that trustees are committed to being an effective governing body. The report is a public document, usually posted on the district's Web page for the board of trustees. The goals, priorities, or action items for the coming year are usually reviewed at a subsequent board meeting and ratified or adopted.

## **Conducting the Survey**

Most districts have research personnel who are skilled in survey development and using survey software to collect responses. The raw data of the results may be provided, but it is very helpful to summarize the data in some way (averages, charts, and/or graphs) to help the board make sense of the data.

## **Role of Consultants**

Consultants and facilitators are often helpful to boards in developing and conducting an evaluation. They can provide an independent, non-biased influence to help keep board discussions focused and productive. They may help prepare the survey form, summarize data, and provide follow-up reports. They allow the board chair, who would normally chair the discussion, to participate fully.

## EVALUATION CRITERIA

Boards may use a variety of types of criteria to assess performance, and may use a combination of approaches. A good practice is to combine assessing progress on board priorities with criteria related to effective board practice.

1. Progress on annual board goals or priorities established by the board, including board roles (tasks) in furthering the strategic goals of the district;
2. Commonly accepted standards for community college boards of trustees, including but not limited to Accrediting Commission standards for governing boards; and/or
3. Criteria gleaned from the board's own policies (e.g. the code of ethics, board responsibilities and duties, delegation to the CEO).

### Annual Board Priorities and Tasks

Each year, boards should discuss progress on the district's goals and plans, identify the most important priorities for the coming year and the board's role (tasks) in governing and furthering those priorities. *Board priorities are developed in conjunction with the CEO and complement the CEO's annual goals and priorities.*

Annual priorities clarify where board and CEO resources and time should be spent in the coming year. They comprise steps toward strategic and long-range goals and clarify what the board should be doing. The priorities lead to tasks or roles for the board and answer the question, "What does the board need to do in order to accomplish the specific priorities?"

Common board roles or tasks related to the goals include "setting expectations," "monitoring progress," "reviewing and approving plans or policies," "advocating for the district," and the like. The priorities and tasks inform the development of board meeting agenda items and workshop topics.

The priorities and implementing board roles (or tasks) are criteria in the board's annual self-evaluation for the following year. Specific benchmarks or measures may be established to help the board define expectations for itself and the members.

Following are just a few examples of district goals, board priorities, and related tasks, and a possible benchmark. There are countless possibilities: priorities and goals will vary from district to district and year to year. A caveat is not to have too many: most boards have between eight and twelve areas to address.

Board goals may be lofty, such as "provide leadership to ensure educational quality through fostering innovation." This type of statement lets the college know the Board is vitally interested in educational quality and will be expecting reports. It is helpful to identify specific tasks or roles for the board in providing such leadership, e.g. "review a comprehensive report of program reviews in the career-technical areas, and monitor implementation of plans to improve programs where indicated."

#### Example 1. District Strategic Goal: Improve Student Success

*Board Priority:* Expect and monitor progress on establishing and assessing student success.

*Board Task:* Participate in workshop that educate board members about the metrics and reports used by the district to monitor student achievement.

### **Example 2. District Strategic Goal: Maintain the Fiscal Stability of the District**

*Board Priority:* Ensure that all board members are knowledgeable about the district's fiscal condition.

*Board Task:* Hold board study sessions on state and other revenues, long-range budget projections. Support trustee education on understanding budgets, financial statements and audit reports.

*Board Priority:* Maintain a 8% unrestricted general fund balance.

*Board Task:* Expect that the budget presented for review will include a 8% unrestricted general fund balance.

### **Example 3. District Strategic Goal: Promote a college culture that fosters innovation, excellence, and commitment to education.**

*District Objective:* Strengthen professional and leadership development opportunities for all staff.

*Board Priority:* Ensure there is a program for leadership development to address retirements and turnover in administration.

*Board Task:* Expect and review a report on leadership development within the administration.

*Board Task:* Expect that the budget will include resources for professional and leadership development.

These examples barely scratch the surface of possible criteria. Governing boards and CEOs will have their own approach and language to describe goals, objectives, priorities and/or tasks. Other examples are in Sample 1 on page 16.

To help trustees (and others) respond to this type of survey, the instrument may describe what the board did to fulfill its role. For instance, the survey may list the board meetings or workshops where the board addressed certain topics, or activities the trustees engaged in to further their own development or represent the district.

### **Board Development Goals**

In addition to priorities related to achieving institutional goals, effective boards will set goals related to improving their own performance as a governing body. These goals may reflect areas that respond to current conditions (such as passing a bond election or hiring a new CEO), foster board leadership, and/or respond to accreditation recommendations or areas that were not rated highly in a board self-evaluation. Examples include:

4. *Board Priority:* Strengthen the board's connections with school district board(s) and knowledge of K-12 trends and issues.

*Board Task:* Participate in a joint workshop with local K-12 boards of trustees.

5. *Board Priority:* Ensure that board meetings are positive and productive.

*Board Task:* Revise the board meeting agenda to include a consent agenda on routine items to allow more time to discuss issues.

*Board Task:* Maintain respectful, inclusive and professional attitudes and language during board meetings.

6. *Board Priority:* Strengthen the board's policy role.

*Board Task:* Approve an updated board policy manual by the end of the academic year.

*Board Task:* Uphold the principle that delegation to the CEO is only through the board as a unit.

Again, see Sample 1 later in this guide for additional examples.

## **Board Performance Standards**

A common approach to board self-evaluation is to use a survey based on commonly accepted criteria for effective boards. Sample Surveys 2 and 3 on page 18 and 20 are based on the following standards.

*District Mission and Planning:* Does the board understand the role and mission of community colleges? Does the board regularly review the mission? Does the board provide leadership for planning through setting broad policy direction and standards for planning processes?

*Board Policy Role:* Does the board understand and fulfill its policy role? Is the board policy manual up to date? Does the board clearly differentiate between its role and the role of the CEO? Is the board focused on the future direction of the district?

*Board/CEO Relationship:* Is there an open, respectful partnership and good communication between the board and the CEO? Does the board clearly delegate to and set clear expectations for the CEO? Is there an effective CEO evaluation process? Does the board create an environment that supports CEO success?

*Board/Community Relationship:* Does the board represent the community that it serves? Is the board knowledgeable about community trends and needs? Does the board help promote the image of the college in the community? Does the board effectively advocate on behalf of the college?

*Educational Programs and Quality:* Does the board understand the educational programs and services? Does the board monitor student success and educational quality? Does the board focus on the students of the future and their needs?

*Fiduciary Responsibilities:* Does the board ensure that the district is fiscally healthy? Does it approve a budget that supports educational and strategic goals? Does it effectively monitor fiscal management? Does it assure that district facilities meet student and employee needs?

*Board/Staff Relations & Human Resources:* Does board policy and direction foster respect and support for employee excellence? Does the board provide leadership and clear parameters for the collective bargaining process? Does the board refrain from micromanaging staff work? Does board policy and practice support faculty, staff, and student participation in decision-making?

*Board Leadership and Behavior:* Does the board understand and uphold its role and responsibilities? Does it have and adhere to a code of ethics and policies on conflicts of interest? Does the board deal effectively with perceived ethical violations? Do board members work together as a unit for the good of the district? Do board members respect each other's opinions? Do board members "do their homework" and contribute effectively to board discussions?

*Board Meetings and Agendas:* Do meeting agendas focus on key policy issues and board responsibilities? Does the board have the information it needs to make good decisions? Are meetings conducted in such a manner that the purposes are achieved effectively and efficiently? Do board members adhere to all aspects of open meetings laws?

*Board Development:* Does the board have its own goals and objectives for the year and evaluate itself on how it has achieved them? Do new board members, including the student trustee, receive an orientation to the roles and responsibilities and to the district's mission and policies? Are all board members encouraged to engage in ongoing education about college, state and federal issues? Do board members receive and review information about education policy? Does the board continually explore how it be a cohesive team that engages in rich discussions that create an environment that fosters excellence?

### **Standards of Practice and Local Board Policy**

One of the purposes of self-evaluation is to answer the question, "Are we doing what we say we are going to do?" A board may decide to use board effectiveness criteria derived from its local policies. The code of ethics and policies on board roles, meetings, delegation to the CEO, and how the board monitors policy implementation are all rich sources of criteria. A benefit of this approach is that the board reviews its policies during the course of the evaluation.

Using this approach requires a board committee and/or staff to develop a customized survey instrument. The following are examples of items found in various board policies:

7. Individual trustees have no legal authority outside the meetings of the board; they shall conduct their relationships with the community college staff, the local citizenry, and all media of the community on the basis of this fact. (From a board code of ethics policy)
8. The board delegates to the CEO the executive responsibility for administering the policies adopted by the board and executing all decisions of the Board requiring administrative action. (From a board policy on delegation to the CEO)
9. Board members shall not communicate among themselves by the use of any form of communication (e.g., personal intermediaries, e-mail, or other technological device) in order to reach a collective concurrence regarding any item that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the board. (From a policy on communication among board members)

## **LEGAL AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Education Code 70902 states the authority and responsibilities for community college boards of trustees. Governing boards fulfill these responsibilities through adopting relevant policies and exercising their authority at board meetings. Evaluating a board's performance of these responsibilities is addressed through the other criteria described in this chapter, including that the board has an up-to-date policy manual, complies with its policies, and is satisfied with their board meeting agendas and discussion.

## Accreditation Standards

Every six years, colleges undergo the reaccreditation process, which includes a comprehensive self-study. As part of the self-study, boards must assess whether or not they are meeting the specific standards in ACCJC's Standard IV.C (2014 Revision). This assessment should be done the year prior to or early in the self-study process to allow the board time to correct any deficiencies.

The Commission appoints teams that visit colleges to confirm the self-study and review compliance with all standards. They review evidence that boards uphold Standard IV.C, including that they have regularly evaluated themselves. Self-evaluation policies, annual evaluation sessions, written results, and evidence of how boards have used the results to improve board performance ensure boards meet the standard.

See Sample 4 on page 22 for a survey form that reflects the accreditation standards. Please note that Samples 2 and 3 also include accreditation standards as criteria.

## INDIVIDUAL TRUSTEE PERFORMANCE

As stated at the beginning, board self-evaluation focuses on how the board, as a unit, is functioning. The focus is on board accomplishments, dynamics, and practices. However, effective board functioning depends on the contributions of individual trustees—boards benefit when their members are skilled and knowledgeable about their roles and the issues they face. Communication skills, critical thinking, a focus on the future and the ability to consider broad policy goals and values are all important.

Boards may wish to provide an opportunity for individuals to assess their knowledge and skills required to be an effective, contributing trustee. The responses to these individual self-assessments can be used to identify trustee development activities, including board study sessions, attendance at conferences, reading materials, and on-line seminars. See page 29 for a tool to help individual trustees identify learning needs, “Assessing Trustee Knowledge.”

The Community College League of California offers conferences, webinars, consultants and written resources to help trustees gain the skills and knowledge they need to be successful. The brochure, “Trusteeship, Tasks, Knowledge & Skills” outlines those skills and knowledge. The *Trustee Handbook* explores these and other issues in depth. There are numerous other resources, including *Board Focus* issues on ethics and micromanagement, *Introduction to Fiscal Responsibilities*, and *Assessing the Performance of Your CEO*. These and other resources are available at [www.ccleague.org](http://www.ccleague.org) (click on Leadership Development). Finally, the Excellence in Trusteeship program provides a structure and opportunities for trustees to strengthen their capacity and ability to govern well.

In addition to assessing the need for training, boards may provide an opportunity for individual trustees to assess their performance as a trustee, using criteria related to being an effective member of the team, being a good ambassador for the college, upholding the code of ethics, and the like. A few boards have a process that provides for feedback between trustees on these characteristics to help board members strengthen their skills.

## SUMMARY

This resource guide is intended to help boards of trustees design a self-evaluation process that meets specific board needs and cultures. The information should help boards determine the approach they will use, which criteria will provide the best information for the board, who will be asked to evaluate the board, and how the results will be used.

Governing boards that engage in the self-evaluation process and thoughtfully consider and use the results to improve their performance provide excellent leadership for their communities and colleges. They are embracing their responsibilities and ensuring that board members have the skills and knowledge to lead and govern. High performing boards of trustees add value to their districts, thereby ensuring that their colleges make a difference in the lives of students and for the community.

## **SURVEY SAMPLES**

In addition to being in this guide, the sample surveys that follow are available in Word format from the League's Website, [www.ccleague.org/kcresources](http://www.ccleague.org/kcresources).

Sample 1 provides example criteria only, and each governing boards must define its own criteria related to the District's strategic direction and goals. Samples 2 through 4 reflect accepted standards of board effectiveness; however, boards should review them to assure that the criteria reflect their needs.

## Sample 1: Evaluation of Progress on Board Priorities and Tasks

Annual board priorities and tasks are established each year and define the board's role in furthering the goals of the district. They

1. Are aligned with the major categories of district goals or directions. These tasks usually reflect board responsibilities for policy, delegation to the CEO, and monitoring institutional performance. They are developed in conjunction with the CEO.
2. Identify specific tasks for the board to focus on or improve its functioning as an effective governing board.

Board-identified priorities and tasks become criteria for the board self-evaluation. The board rates itself on how well it performed the task or role.

Board priorities are set annually and are unique to each board. Therefore the criteria are different for each board and often vary from year to year. Usually, there are one to three board priorities and tasks related to each district direction or goal.

*The following example is for illustrative purposes only. The criteria for this type of evaluation must be derived from the District goals and board/CEO discussion.*

A suggested rating scale for this type of survey is:

- |     |                                     |
|-----|-------------------------------------|
| 5   | Outstanding progress or performance |
| 4   | Good progress or performance        |
| 3   | Performance met acceptable standard |
| 2   | Poor progress or performance        |
| 1   | No progress or performance          |
| N/A | Unable to evaluate                  |

In the examples below, the headings in bold are examples of goals from a district's strategic plan. The numbered items indicate a possible board role, the bulleted items are the specific tasks the board would do to fulfill the role.

### **District Direction: Student Access, Learning and Success**

1. Continue the ongoing Board focus on student success, including progress on closing the "achievement gap."
  - Examples of board tasks include workshops or discussions at board meetings on programs targeting underachieving student groups; monitoring implementation of the student equity plan, etc.
2. Strengthen the Board's capacity to use metrics to monitor district progress on student success.
  - Examples of board tasks include board workshops on various accountability reporting systems, how to use data as information for decision-making.
3. Strengthen the relationship with local high schools.
  - Examples of board tasks include joint meeting with school district boards, reports on outreach efforts, reports on the success of students from local high schools, etc.

### **District Direction: Fiscal Stability and Vitality**

4. Monitor the fiscal health of the district; expect that the board receives accurate and timely fiscal reports.
  - Examples of board tasks include: discussing monthly or quarterly fiscal reports, participating in a study session on the findings and response to the annual audit.
5. Ensure that the District has resources to meet long-term needs.
  - Examples include: Expect and approve plans to fund retirement benefits and fund long-term liabilities.

### **District Direction: Community and Economic Development**

6. Ensure that district career and technical programs meet community and regional workforce needs.
  - Examples of board tasks include: review and discuss reports on the alignment between regional workforce needs and college programs, student achievement, and/or program review processes and how they are used to improve programs.

### **District Direction: Organizational Effectiveness**

7. Ensure that communication and decision-making processes throughout the district are inclusive and function efficiently and effectively.
  - An example of a board task would be to review and discuss reports on these processes.
8. Ensure that district technology plans and services are up-to-date in terms of supporting student success.
  - An example of a board task is to review and approve an updated technology plan that addresses the relationship to student success.

### **Board Functioning**

*Priorities and tasks in this section are specific to each board, as it identifies areas for improvement. The following are just three examples.*

1. Board members will strengthen their knowledge of principles of effective boardsmanship.
  - Tasks could include participation in the League's Excellence in Trusteeship Program, attendance at conferences, and/or participation in relevant board retreats/workshops
2. Board members will uphold trustee communication protocols related to the community, college employees, and the media.
  - Board tasks may be to have a workshop to review and develop communication protocols, or provide media training to board members.
3. Participate appropriately in the accreditation self-study.
  - Board tasks may include a board workshop on the board's role in accreditation, receiving regular reports on self-study progress, active involvement in responding to Standard IV C, and approving the self-study report.

### ***Relationship with Other Surveys***

In addition to these criteria, boards may wish to add items related to general board functioning (see Sample 2), accreditation criteria (see Sample 3), and/or a few open-ended questions (see page 24). Items from the board's code of ethics, communication protocols, or delegation to the CEO policy may also be added as desired.

## Sample 2: Board Performance Standards

The following set of criteria reflect key characteristics of effective governing boards. Results from this survey form may be used to provide a basis for discussion of overall board functioning. Boards may add or substitute items more pertinent to their specific needs. See the item bank (page 25) for suggestions. This survey should be accompanied by open ended questions and/or opportunity to comment on items.

The sample survey for employees includes many of the items from this form. Responses from employees may be compared to the board's self-evaluation.

Rating scales ask respondents to either rate their level of agreement with an item (strongly agree to strongly disagree), or rate how the board performs on the criterion (outstanding to poor). Rating scales are generally either 5 or 4 point scales. Respondents should be provided an opportunity to indicate "unable to evaluate."

### CRITERIA

1. The Board understands its policy role and differentiates its role from those of the CEO and district/college employees.
2. The board is committed to, regularly reviews the district's mission and goals, and monitors progress toward achieving the mission and goals.
3. The board assures that there are effective planning processes and that resource allocation support institutional plans.
4. The board adheres to its policies; the board's policies are regularly reviewed and up-to-date.
5. The board delegates responsibility and authority to the CEO, and supports the CEO's leadership.
6. The board maintains an excellent working relationship with the CEO, including honoring established protocols for communication.
7. The board sets clear expectations for and effectively evaluates the CEO.
8. Board members represents the interests and needs of the communities served by the District.
9. The board supports and advocates District interests to local, state, and federal governments.
10. Board members represent the District well at college events and in the community.
11. The board reflects a commitment to student success in its deliberations and decisions.
12. The board effectively monitors the quality and effectiveness of educational programs and services to ensure student success.
13. Board members are sufficiently knowledgeable about the district's educational programs and services.
14. Board decisions assures the fiscal stability and health of the district.
15. Board members understand the budget and provide effective oversight for fiscal operations.

16. The board ensures that plans for facilities and maintenance are current and monitors their implementation.
17. Board human resource policies and union contracts protect the district and effectively set standards for quality, fairness and equity.
18. The board respects faculty, staff, and student participation in college decision-making.
19. Board members refrain from attempting to manage or direct the work or activities of employees.
20. Board members understand and fulfill their roles and responsibilities.
21. The board expresses its authority only as a unit; members understand they have no individual authority.
22. Board members maintain confidentiality of privileged information.
23. The board regularly reviews and adheres to its code of ethics, and avoid conflicts of interest and the perception of such conflicts.
24. Board meeting agendas reflect board responsibilities and include sufficient information for decision-making.
25. Board meetings are conducted in an orderly, respectful manner; there is adequate time to explore and resolve key issues.
26. The board understands and adheres to the Brown Act.
27. Board members work together and with the CEO for the good of the District.
28. The new member orientation process effectively educates new members about board roles and the institution.
29. Board members are committed to their own professional growth and participate in trustee development activities.
30. The board evaluation process helps the board enhance its performance.

### **Sample 3: Evaluation Criteria for College Constituents**

A survey form would include an introduction such as “The Board of Trustees is seeking information on its performance from college employees who regularly attend board meetings. Please rate your level of agreement with the following criteria of board effectiveness.”

If the board uses the survey in Sample 2, the same rating scale would be used for the survey of constituents in order to be able to compare responses. Constituents should also be able to indicate “unable to evaluate.”

#### **CRITERIA**

1. The Board understands its policy roles and differentiates its role from those of the CEO and college staff.
2. The Board provides leadership for, regularly reviews the district’s mission and goals, and monitors progress toward the District mission and goals.
3. The Board assures that there are effective planning processes and that resource allocation supports institutional plans.
4. Board policies are regularly reviewed and are up-to-date. They effectively guide college operations.
5. The Board clearly delegates responsibility to and supports the CEO as the institutional leader.
6. The Board maintains an excellent working relationship with the CEO.
7. Board members represent the interests and needs of the communities served by the District.
8. The board supports and advocates District interests to local, state, and federal governments.
9. Board members represent the college well at college events and in the community.
10. The Board communicates a commitment to student success.
11. The Board effectively monitors the quality and effectiveness of the district’s educational programs and services.
12. Board decisions assure the fiscal stability and health of the district.
13. Board members understand the budget and provide effective oversight for fiscal operations.
14. The Board respects faculty, staff, and student participation in college decision-making.
15. Trustees refrain from attempting to manage or direct work or activities of college employees.
16. The Board expresses its authority only as a unit; members understand they have no individual authority.
17. Board members adhere to the Board’s code of ethics or standards of practice. Board members avoid conflicts of interest and the perception of such conflicts.
18. Board meeting agenda topics reflect board responsibilities and tasks, and include sufficient information for Board decisions.

19. Board meetings are conducted in an orderly, respectful manner; there is adequate time to explore and resolve key issues.
20. Board members work well with each other; trustee behavior sets a positive tone for the district.

In addition, constituents should be invited to comment on strengths of the board and to suggest areas for improvement, as open-ended questions.

## Sample 4: Accreditation Standards as Criteria

Every six years, colleges undergo the reaccreditation process, which involves a self-study of colleges' compliance with accreditation standards and a visit by an accreditation team that results in recommendations from the Accrediting Commission. As part of the self-study, the board may wish to use the standards that apply to the board as criteria in an evaluation instrument. Following is a sample instrument, using criteria from Standard IV.C and other standards that reflect board roles.

A suggested rating scale is:

- 3 The board fully meets the standard
- 2 The board partially meets the standard
- 1 The board does not meet the standard

Results with less than a three indicate areas for remediation prior to the team visit.

### CRITERIA

1. The institution has a governing board that has authority over and responsibility for policies to assure the academic quality, integrity, and effectiveness of the student learning programs and services and the financial stability of the institution.
2. The governing board acts as a collective entity. Once the board reaches a decision, all board members act in support of the decision.
3. The governing board adheres to a clearly defined policy for selecting and evaluating the CEO of the college or the district/system.
4. The governing board is an independent policy-making body that reflects the public interest in institution's educational quality. advocates for and defends the institution and protects it from undue influence or political pressure.
5. The governing board establishes policies consistent with the college/district/system mission to ensure the quality, integrity, and improvement of student learning programs and services and the resources necessary to support them.
6. The governing board has ultimate responsibility for educational quality, legal matters, and financial integrity and stability.
7. The institution or the governing board publishes the board bylaws and policies specifying the board's size, duties, responsibilities, structure, and operating procedures.
8. The governing board acts in a manner consistent with its policies and bylaws. The board regularly assesses its policies and bylaws for their effectiveness in fulfilling the college/district/system mission and revises them as necessary.
9. To ensure the institution is accomplishing its goals for student success, the governing board regularly reviews key indicators of student learning and achievement and institutional plans for achieving institutional quality.
10. The governing board has an ongoing training program for board development including new member orientation.

11. Board policies and/or bylaws clearly establish a process for board evaluation. The evaluation assesses the board's effectiveness in promoting and sustaining academic quality and institutional effectiveness. The results are used to improve board performance, academic quality and institutional effectiveness.
12. The governing board has code of ethics and conflicts of interest policies, and individual board members adhere to them. The board has a clearly defined policy for dealing with behavior that violates its code and implements it when necessary.
13. The governing board delegates full responsibility and authority to the CEO to implement and administer board policies without board interference and holds the CEO accountable for the operation of the district.
14. The governing board is informed about Accreditation processes and standards and participates in the evaluation of governing board roles and functions. It supports through policy district efforts to excel.
15. The board regularly reviews and approves the mission to assure that programs and services are aligned with the mission, and that it guides decision-making and planning.
16. The board adopts policies on academic freedom and responsibility, honesty and academic integrity.
17. The board has adopted personnel policies that are available for information and review. Such policies are equitably and consistently administered.
18. The board has a written policy providing for faculty, staff, administrator, and student participation in decision-making processes.
19. The board has policies that create and maintain support for diverse personnel.
20. The board has policies that provide for administrator, faculty, and staff participation in decision-making processes, which specify how individuals bring forward ideas and work together.

## Open-Ended Questions

The previous samples include items that require an evaluative rating and provide quantifiable data. Rating scale surveys should also include an opportunity for respondents to comment and to answer a few (2-4) open-ended questions.

Following are some examples of questions that may be asked either on a survey or in an interview process. A board may develop other questions that address specific issues and concerns.

1. What are the board's greatest strengths?
2. What are the major accomplishments of the board in the past year?
3. What are areas in which the board could improve? (An alternate way to ask this is "In order for our board to become a high performing board we need to \_\_\_\_\_.")
4. I recommend that the board has the following goals for the coming year:

Alternatively, or in addition, a board committee may decide to focus on specific areas or topics.

Examples of such questions are:

- What issues have most occupied the Board's time and attention during the past year? Were these closely tied to the mission and goals of the District and the Board?
- Is the board functioning as a team as well as it should? Why or why not?
- What does the board do to maintain a positive relationship with the CEO? What does the board need to change, if anything?
- Do the agendas and conduct of the meeting effectively meet the purposes of board meetings? Why or why not?
- Has the board clearly defined expectations and protocols for trustees communications with each other, the CEO, employees and community members? Do all board members understand and follow these protocols?

## **Board Effectiveness Criteria Item Bank**

The sample forms provided in this appendix include a relatively limited number of items in various areas of board functioning. The following item bank includes items that may be used in addition to or instead of those provided in the samples. Boards may review these to identify if certain items are more pertinent to their needs than those in the samples.

### **I. Mission and Planning**

1. Board members are knowledgeable about the culture, history, and values of the district.
2. The board regularly reviews the mission and purposes of the institution.
3. The board spends adequate time discussing future needs and direction of the district and community. They are able to identify opportunities and challenges.
4. The board assures that there is an effective planning process and is appropriately involved in the process.
5. The board assures that district plans are responsive to community and student needs.
6. The board has adopted and monitors the implementation of the district's strategic and educational and facilities master plans.
7. The board sets annual goals or priorities in conjunction with the CEO and monitors progress toward them.

### **II. Policy Role**

8. The board clearly understands its policy role and differentiates its role from those of the CEO and college staff.
9. The board is an independent policy-making body that reflects the public interest.
10. The board assures that the district complies with relevant laws, regulations and accreditation standards.
11. The board's policy manual is up-to-date, relevant to the college mission, comprehensive, and useful.
12. The board relies on board policy in making decisions and in guiding the work of the district.

### **III. Board–CEO Relations**

13. The board maintains a positive working relationship with and supports the CEO.
14. The board clearly delegates the administration of the district to the CEO.
15. The board communicates clear expectations for CEO performance and provides support and feedback.
16. The board regularly evaluates CEO performance.
17. The board periodically reviews the CEO contract to assure appropriate compensation and conditions of employment.

18. The board recognizes that only the board as a whole (not a single trustee) can direct the CEO.
19. Board members adhere to the principle of “no surprises,” informing the CEO and the Board Chair when needed.

#### **IV. Community Relations & Advocacy**

20. Board members act on behalf of the public and citizens in the district when making decisions.
21. Board members consider the perspectives of various interests in the community when making decisions.
22. Board members are active in community affairs.
23. The board advocates on behalf of the district to local, state, and federal governments.
24. The board actively supports the district’s foundation(s) and fundraising efforts.

#### **V. Educational Quality and Student Success**

25. The Board exhibits a high priority for student success.
26. The Board fosters and supports a climate of academic excellence.
27. Board members are knowledgeable about the educational programs and services of the district.
28. The board is knowledgeable about current and future educational and workforce training needs in the community.
29. The board monitors the quality and effectiveness of the programs and services of the district
30. The board supports and is appropriately involved in the accreditation process.
31. The board understands and protects academic freedom.

#### **VI. Fiduciary Role**

32. The board assures that the budget supports priorities in the district’s plans.
33. Board policies assure effective fiscal management and internal controls.
34. The board regularly receives and reviews reports on the financial status of the institution.
35. The board reviews the annual audit and monitors responses to recommendations.
36. The board adopts and monitors the implementation of a facilities master plan.
37. The board has provided appropriate direction for seeking external funding.
38. The board maintains an adequate financial reserve.

## **VII. Human Resources and Staff Relations**

39. The board's human resources policies provide for fair and equitable treatment of staff.
40. The board has established and follows clear parameters for collective bargaining.
41. The board has and follows protocols regarding communication with college employees.
42. Board members refrain from attempting to manage employee work.
43. The board expects and supports faculty, staff, and student participation in college decision-making.
44. The board expects and fosters excellence and quality in employee performance.
45. The board expects and supports professional development programs for all employees.

## **VIII. Board Leadership**

46. The board understands and performs well its roles and responsibilities.
47. The board provides visionary governance leadership for the mission of the college.
48. The board expresses its authority only as a unit.
49. Board members understand that they have no legal authority outside board meetings.
50. The board regularly reviews its code of ethics or standards of practice and has a policy on addressing violations of the code.
51. Board members uphold and comply with the board's code of ethics.
52. Board members avoid conflicts of interest and the perception of such conflicts.
53. Once a decision is made, board members uphold the decision of the board.
54. Board discussions and relationships reflect a climate of trust and respect.
55. Board members exhibit integrity and professionalism in fulfilling their role.

## **IX. Board Meetings**

56. Board meetings are conducted in an orderly, efficient manner.
57. Board meetings and study sessions provide sufficient opportunity to explore key issues.
58. Agenda items provide sufficient information to enable good board decision-making.
59. The board understands and adheres to the Brown Act.
60. The board maintains confidentiality of privileged information.
61. Board members clearly understand how the agenda is developed and have an opportunity to contribute to that development.

## **X. Board Education and Evaluation**

62. New members participate in a comprehensive orientation to the board and district.
63. Board members participate in trustee development activities.
64. Board members participate fully in study sessions, workshops, and retreats in order to improve their knowledge.
65. The board evaluation process helps the board enhance its performance.
66. The board measures its accomplishments against board goals.
67. The board has a process for and is willing to address trustees who are not fulfilling their responsibilities.

## **Assessing Trustee Knowledge and Skills**

Individual trustees may be asked to assess their knowledge and skills in the following areas to determine needs for trustee education and development.

A suggested rating scale is 3 – I am very confident in my knowledge and skills, 2 – I have some knowledge and skills, 1 – Need more information and resources

### **I. Board Member Responsibilities**

1. Board and trustee roles and responsibilities for California's community colleges
2. Working collaboratively on the board; what it means to be "a unit."
3. How to contribute ideas and influence board direction
4. Board self-evaluation requirements and processes
5. Brown Act provisions, including open and closed meeting requirements
6. Rules for running and participating in meetings (basic parliamentary procedure)
7. Board agendas and how to place items on the agenda
8. Differentiating between board policy and administrative procedure
9. Understanding board policy development; the policy making process
10. Defining and avoiding micromanagement
11. Identifying policy implications and values in issues
12. Laws and regulations related to conflicts of interest
13. Local codes of ethics/standards of practice for trustees
14. Upholding the Board's code of ethics and addressing violations

### **II. Board and CEO Relationships**

15. The differences between board and CEO roles and responsibilities
16. How to effectively delegate to the CEO
17. CEO compensation and contract provisions
18. CEO evaluation tools and processes
19. Maintaining a positive relationship and providing support for CEO's leadership
20. Communication protocols with the CEO

### **III. Community and State Relations**

21. Social, economic, and business trends and needs in the communities
22. Connecting with key community and business leaders and other external stakeholders
23. Connecting with legislators and the political process
24. Advocacy role and strategies
25. Communication protocols with community members
26. Representing the District with the media

### **IV. Mission and Student Success**

27. Role and unique nature of community colleges
28. History and culture of the college(s)
29. District mission, vision, and values
30. Board role in mission and setting priorities
31. Student success definitions, goals and metrics
32. Board policy on academic affairs and student services
33. Board policy and processes that assure the quality of educational programs
34. Accreditation standards and The board's role in accreditation
35. District and college plans (e.g. long-range, master, educational plans)
36. Program review processes and use in planning
37. How planning and budgeting are integrated
38. How to use data and information to make decisions (operate in a "culture of evidence")

### **V. Employee Relations and Human Resources**

39. Organizational structure and lines of accountability/responsibility
40. Laws regarding participation of faculty, staff, and students in decision-making
41. The district's local decision-making process and structure
42. Board policies and roles related to human resources
43. Protocols for communicating with employees
44. Collective bargaining processes, parameters, and constraints
45. General compensation and contract provisions
46. Long range implications of employee group contracts on budget
47. Hiring, evaluation and other human resources policies

## **VI. Fiscal and Facilities Responsibilities**

48. Board responsibilities for financial stability
49. Long-range financial planning
50. Board policies in business and fiscal services
51. State constraints and requirements for district budgets
52. The state budget development process
53. Understanding the district's budget development process and document
54. Revenue sources and expenditure categories
55. Understanding reserves
56. Reading and evaluating financial statements
57. Understanding the audit report
58. District's accountability to state government
59. District foundation
60. Grants and other external funding resources
61. Facilities policy development and monitoring
62. Funding for facilities (current and planned) including bonds
63. Maintenance and operation needs and plans
64. Property acquisition and management,
65. Building design and construction

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

The Community College League of California provides consultants skilled in helping boards design and evaluation process, conducting self-evaluations and facilitating the self-evaluation discussion. [www.ccleague.org](http://www.ccleague.org)

The Association of Community College Trustees has information on board self-evaluation on its website, and provides consultants to assist boards in the process. [www.acct.org](http://www.acct.org)

The Association of Governing Boards for Colleges and Universities provides consultant services and sample criteria, which may be adapted to fit community colleges. [www.agb.org](http://www.agb.org)

BoardSource is dedicated to increasing the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations by strengthening their boards of directors. [www.boardsource.org](http://www.boardsource.org)

