The 2016 Professional Board Staff Network Workshop

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ACCT will host its Annual Congress in New Orleans in October. Nicknamed “The Big Easy,” the city is home to the New Orleans Saints, the French Quarter, Mardi Gras, Lafayette Cemetery, Chef Emeril Lagasse, bestselling authors Anne Rice and Tennessee Williams, and of course, the blues.

And what better place than B.B. King’s Blues Club to hold our annual reception? Located at 1104 Decatur St., the club’s location provides the perfect venue for the Professional Board Staff Network’s (PBSN) annual Meet & Greet. Hosted this year by Hillsborough Community College, the reception will take place immediately following the opening general session on October 5, and all professional board staff are invited to attend. Make plans to stop by, enjoy the cuisine, and meet the guest speakers for the PBSN workshop. As the date gets closer, I will post an invitation on our Facebook page and send out a Microsoft Outlook invite. Mark your calendars and bring your appetite, as B.B. King’s Blues Club also boasts some of the best barbeque in the city!

The PBSN will get down to business on October 6 at 2 p.m. with the annual workshop. This year’s agenda, which is available on the PBSN Facebook page, offers a departure from past workshops. With a wide range of panels, discussions, and guest speakers, it is sure to offer something for everyone.

Panel – Freedom of Information Act (FOIA): With seemingly endless ways of sharing information, it is important to know what to keep and what to discard. What type of information falls under FOIA? Are text messages between board members a violation of sunshine laws? How long do we have to keep emails? ACCT General Counsel Ira Shepard and Dipa Shah, attorney and Hillsborough Community College trustee, will answer these and other questions and shed light on the origins, mysteries, and myths surrounding FOIA.

Panel – Engaging the Trustee: Prince George’s Community College Trustee Oretha Bridgwater-Simms, Hillsborough Community College Trustee Dipa Shab, and Seminole State College President Jim Utterback will discuss best practices and protocols when communicating with board members from varying backgrounds and with different personalities.

Heart Healthy – Presented by Humana: It has been said, “The food you eat can be either the safest and most powerful form of medicine or the slowest form of poison.” It is more important than ever to take steps, literally and figuratively, to stay active at work. Humana representative Brittany Abadie will discuss low-impact exercises that we can do around the office to help fight the battle of the bulge.

Active Shooter Response and Survival Guide: In 2015 alone, there were at least ten shootings on higher education campuses across the country. Jeff Copeland, director of...
risk/emergency management for Hillsborough Community College, discusses active shooter protocols, safety tips, and how to survive the unthinkable. With increasing violence on college campuses, regardless of whether these events are triggered by political tensions, social unrest, or mental health reasons, now is the time to have this discussion. Learn how to prepare for the unimaginable, respond in the immediate aftermath, and prepare for the journey to recovery.

You and Your New President… Building a Great Team: As board staff, one of the most daunting tasks we face is transitioning from one president to the next. The best way to ensure a smooth transition and symbiotic relationship is to assist with their acclimation. This open discussion will cover the best methods for meeting their needs and yours. Alonia Sharps, chief of staff at Prince George’s Community College, will lead this discussion as we share ideas and methods to help facilitate a smooth transition.

Minute Mayhem — Techniques for Writing Clear and Concise Minutes: Rear Admiral Grace Hopper once said, “The most dangerous phrase in the language is ‘we’ve always done it this way,’” but what is the best method for taking and transcribing minutes? My predecessor used shorthand; I transcribe from a digital audio file; some may even use transcription software for both speed and accuracy. I will lead this discussion, which will cover a variety of ways to best format and detail minutes for documents that anyone can easily read.

It is the PBSN Executive Committee’s hope that, after reviewing this agenda, you will consider attending this year’s workshop. We understand funding is tight and travel budgets are lean, but this is the one time of the year that board staff members can come together, collaborate with peers, and share ideas that will enhance their knowledge and skillset.

Moreover, while traveling at the behest of our respective colleges, it is also important that we take a few moments to appreciate our surroundings. New Orleans is a city steeped in history and culture, and it has many a lesson to teach us if we will only listen. Take a ride on a streetcar, stroll along the banks of the Mississippi, or just listen to a street musician playing a soulful tune. For as sure as attending this conference will enrich your mind, this city of mystery will most certainly enrich your soul.

INDIVIDUALS EMBRACE THE ROLE OF TRUSTEE ON community college boards understanding that advocacy is one of their many responsibilities. The trustees are representatives of our communities and our students, and as such, it is imperative that they understand the needs of both, because this understanding is critical in the role of “advocate.”

Institutions have an expectation that board members will advocate for them with legislators and the community at large. Board members are passionate, credible, and knowledgeable experts in their communities. To legislators, board members also are constituents, campaign donors, volunteers, and community leaders. Their opinions matter, and their voices are influential. While our college presidents are most knowledgeable about our campuses, the voices of our trustees often have just as much, if not more, impact on results. Legislators like to hear from community advocates.

These attributes are invaluable to community colleges. However, colleges must recognize that our board members are volunteers, and for this reason, their time and energies should not be taken lightly. We must value their time. Moreover, as support staff, we can lighten the load of our board members in their roles as advocates.

First, let’s take a look at legislative advocacy. Board members may be engaged with legislators and elected officials at three different levels: county or district, state, and federal. In most instances, board members advocate for funding for our institutions. Members of the Professional Board Staff Network (PBSN) can be a critical link to legislative advocacy. We may be asked to make appointments for board members to meet with legislators, but how can we prepare our board members for those meetings? Board members should always have a packet of information to share and to
leave with a legislator after an appointed meeting. Some of the items to include are:
- A fact sheet about the college
- A copy of the most recent annual report
- Evidence of institutional successes
- Lists of institutional challenges and opportunities
- A written statement about the purpose of the visit

If some of these items do not already exist, it is our responsibility as board liaisons and support staff to gather the information and transform it into a document that can be helpful to our board members.

Second, what is the expectation of board advocacy in the community? We have said it before — our board members are the community. They live, and in many cases work, in the community. They are community leaders. Additionally, most board members attend community events such as those sponsored by chambers of commerce, civic associations, fraternal organizations, business groups, and the like. They sometimes are asked to speak at meetings of service organizations. The board liaison and support staff are critical to this work. We keep our board members informed about opportunities. When needed, we purchase sponsorships or tickets for events. At times, we even draft talking points. Board members should always have a fact sheet about the college when attending community events. The fact sheet should be something that can be folded, or be the size of a business card for ease of use when attending an event.

To reiterate, board members embrace their role as advocates for community colleges. Likewise, PBSN members must make every effort to ensure that the role is not burdensome, but rather one that is readily accepted and enjoyed throughout each board member’s service to our colleges.