POLICY DEVELOPMENT: A JOINT EFFORT

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN THE BOARD’S AND THE CEO’S ROLES.

BY PAMILA J. FISHER

THE FOLLOWING SHORT EXCERPT FROM THE FORTHCOMING BOOK TRUSTEESHIP IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES: A Guide for Effective Governance, briefly outlines the board’s and the CEO’s distinct roles in developing college policy. For more information about the book, or to purchase copies for your board, visit www.acct.org/publications.

Informed and visionary policymaking is a joint effort between governing boards and their chief executives. Together, they establish a systematic approach that defines the roles and responsibilities of college employees and stakeholder groups, the steps in the process, questions to be answered, the perspectives sought, and how the policy will be implemented and monitored. In fact, boards should have policies that set standards for participation in decision-making, including policy and procedure development. They then delegate authority to the CEO to manage the process on behalf of the board.
The ways policies are developed vary from college to college and to monitor policy implementation and evaluate its effectiveness.

How are Policies Developed?
The ways policies are developed vary from college to college and state to state, based on tradition, organizational culture, research capabilities, and politics. All process, though, should be clear, succinct, and allow for openness and engagement of stakeholders.

As a trustee, you want to influence your board’s policy decisions. You probably have many ideas about who the college should be serving, what the college should be accomplishing, and how staff should do their work. In addition, community members and college employees may contact you with requests for actions or policy changes. You also may feel obligated to promote the ideas of those who supported your election or appointment to the board. How can you, as a single member of the board, best influence the policymaking process and make sure your ideas are considered?

Influencing policy development involves doing your homework and understanding how “things get done.” It also involves creating allies by being a positive, supportive member of the board-CEO team. You will be more likely to gain support for your ideas if you understand the culture of your board and institution. You can be more effective when you make suggestions at the appropriate time and place and use the proper channels to present ideas. You will lose your ability to influence decisions if you work outside the system or show disrespect or attack other board members, the CEO, or college staff. Effective trustees uphold their oath of office to work on behalf of the college, and trustees do that by being a positive, contributing member of the board.

INFLUENCING POLICY

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Pamila J. Fisher, Ed.D., former chancellor of Yosemite Community College District and former interim chancellor of the City Colleges of San Francisco, has consulted with ACCT for over a decade, focusing on developing leaders, board/CEO relationships, executive coaching and equity and cultural proficiency. Dr. Fisher authored two chapters in the forthcoming second edition of Trusteeship in Community Colleges.