

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.



Governing boards have the following responsibilities in the policymaking process:

- Be alert for the possible need for new board policy or changes in policy.
- Establish a thoughtful and public policymaking process.
- Analyze policy proposals in light of ethical and legal standards.
- Seek out multiple perspectives and consider their implications for policy.
- Adopt broad policies that both provide visionary direction and establish clear parameters.
- Monitor policy implementation.
- Assess the effect of policies on students, the community, and the institution.
- Ensure that policy is periodically reviewed and updated.
- Respect written policy as the voice of the board.
- Identify the policy implications of issues that come before the board.

The chief executive officer, as the board's chief advisor:

- Alerts the boards to a possible need for new policy or a change in past policy.
- Assists the board in defining an appropriate level of policy.
- Helps define and manage a thoughtful and public policymaking process.
- Provides succinct policy analyses and presents alternatives for board discussion.
- Alerts the board to the political ramifications of proposed policy alternatives.
- Includes appropriate references to existing board policy in board meeting agenda items.
- Ensures that procedures identify who implements policy.
- Provides information that enables the board to monitor policy implementation.
- Ensures that the board regularly evaluates and updates its policies.
- Helps the board to clarify the policy implications of their discussions.
- Provides new trustees with an orientation to board policy.

College staff are essential contributors to policy development. They are aware of changes in student populations and community needs that might influence policy. They see the need for policy changes as they perform their day-to-day duties. College staff members are in an excellent position to assess the impact of proposed policies on their programs and provide that information as part of policy analysis. They develop the data that help boards monitor policy. Since they are the ones who implement the policies, their input obviously needs to be a component of policymaking.

Effective boards adopt, live by, and then monitor their own policies. CEOs help boards adhere to their own policies by including appropriate references to existing policy statements in agenda items. CEOs provide boards with the information they need 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

INFLUENCING POLICY

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.

capabilities, and politics. All process, though, should be clear, succinct, and allow for openness and engagement of stakeholders.

As strange as it may sound, the first order of business is that each college or college district should have a policy on policies, as it is more critical than one might initially think. The policy should describe the process for policy development, who can initiate it, the opportunity for constituent input, the roles of different players, and how and when a decision is made. It reaffirms the expectation for transparency and involvement but also makes it clear the board makes the final decision. This policy should reference the CEO's role in developing procedures, including collaborating with constituents where that is appropriate. It may make a distinction between the board having a primary role in the development of both policy and procedures related to board operations and a secondary, albeit final, role in the development of some college operational procedures.

Pay close attention to your policy on policies, as some caveats are in order. The board's policy on policies, while generally deferring to the CEO to develop procedures, should clarify that the board retains the right to review all procedures if it becomes concerned that perhaps they are not consistent with the intent of the policy they approved. Additionally, while constituent participation is valuable, be sure that neither policies nor procedures are adopted that confer significant decision-making powers to any constituent group, except where prescribed by law.



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