

INSIDE THE EQUITY ACTION AGENDA

BY MARK TONER

THE NEWLY APPROVED AGENDA REPRESENTS A STARTING POINT FOR BOARDS TO BECOME MORE INTENTIONAL ABOUT INCLUSION.



Benjamin H. Wu

THE EQUITY ACTION AGENDA FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE GOVERNANCE WAS RECENTLY RATIFIED by the ACCT Board of Directors, after approval from the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee. The Agenda is a tool to help community college leaders "take the first steps" towards the development of more comprehensive policies and initiatives, says Benjamin H. Wu, the committee's chair.

The Agenda was created with the input of trustees, college presidents, ACCT leaders, and others. Available at www.acct.org/resources, it is structured to help trustees and college leaders engage in productive discussions about equity and better understand the board's role in shaping and supporting diversity goals, policies, and procedures to promote inclusion.

The Agenda provides a guidepost for trustees in areas ranging from the college's mission statement to hiring CEOs to resource allocation. It also includes action items for policy development, accountability, and community engagement, as well as next steps to help trustees guide a college's focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Trustee Quarterly spoke to Wu, a trustee at Montgomery College in Maryland, about the agenda's importance and usefulness.

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Q: What needs does the Equity Action Agenda help address?

Our committee heard from many trustees and presidents who recognize the importance of being more proactive in addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion. While they have interest, many have confessed they just don't know where or how to begin at their institutions.

The Equity Action Agenda is both a conversation starter and a plan forward. It provides a helpful template to answer key questions, so that those who are interested in taking action can begin preparing the necessary first steps to implement an initiative.

The Agenda guides trustees through preliminary issues to consider as they advocate for new equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives. Trustees know that, despite their importance, such initiatives will have to compete with other significant budget and policy priorities, so it's critical to have a good foundation for the best chance of success.

Q: Why is it important for community college boards to think about developing equity agendas?

When you look at the national demographics for community colleges, there's a greater understanding of how to meet the emerging needs of our diverse 21st Century student bodies. This sentiment has been heard both by our ACCT Board and the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee. We're also seeing this demand coming from within our colleges — students, faculty, and the communities we serve.

As overseers of our institutions, trustees need to be able to recognize and discuss these equity and inclusion issues. Whether it's now or in the future, trustees would be well served to address these issues and consider the initiatives that can best be used to respond to them.

Q: How can the Agenda help boards develop these structures?

It provides trustees with a roadmap of their role, their leadership, and key questions. It gives guidance in policy development, accountability for continuous improvement, and community engagement. It offers best practices in governance and next steps to help make diversity, equity, and inclusion a hallmark of their institutions. And it allows trustees, administrators, and other leaders to take the first steps and answer essential questions that can evolve into initiatives at their institutions.

Q. How has your own institution addressed equity issues?

Montgomery College is one of the most diverse community colleges in the country. Cultural and ethnic diversity is a point of pride, with the diverse members of our 23,000-strong student population growing 22 percent since 2001, and more than 170 countries represented.

For us, recognizing diversity is a necessity and our future. Accordingly, diversity, equity, and inclusion best practices are fully integrated into our college's strategic plan. Serving as the committee chair has given me the opportunity to share our school's experiences with other trustees.

While we can look to institutions like Montgomery College as models for new initiatives, the reality is there just isn't a one-size-fits-all solution for each community. Each institution and community is different. Ultimately, the Equity Action Agenda is designed to begin the necessary dialogue at institutions across the country. If it does that, it will have served its purpose.

Q: Now that the Agenda has been released, what are the next steps?

We've begun to educate and inform trustees about the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion at their colleges. We've created this template and we hope to aggregate best practices and lessons learned to help guide and shape future initiatives. One of the best ways is to showcase outstanding programs and initiatives, such as through the ACCT Charles Kennedy Equity Award on the regional and the national levels.

We also are working to get a better data breakdown of where the diversity of colleges may not be reflected — from the student body, trustee representation, faculty, and top administrative personnel including presidents — to highlight the need for more attention to increased diversity. The data can help demonstrate where there is a compelling case for greater representation.

The data is out there, but it first needs to be effectively compiled and then disaggregated to be really effective. Data also makes for a more compelling case to create and support initiatives in communities that don't yet have a diversity, equity, and inclusion agenda.

Download the ACCT Equity Action Agenda or email acctinfo@acct.org to request printed copies for distribution to your entire board.