



Community College Governing Boards

As members of a governing board, trustees help ensure that colleges add value to their communities. Community colleges take pride in providing access to higher education to all in an environment that supports and produces student learning. Community colleges prepare students to pursue a baccalaureate degree, to become a part of the highly skilled workforce required by today's businesses and industries, and to contribute to civic leadership. Most colleges also serve as economic development and cultural centers for their communities.

The board's role is threefold:

- Create strong ties to the community, the better to represent community interests.
- Develop policies that establish the general direction of the college's programs and services, quality standards, and legal, ethical and prudent parameters for college operations.
- Monitor performance of the institution to ensure that it is meeting current community needs and anticipating future trends.

Eligibility

You are eligible to be a member of the governing board if you are at least 18 years of age, a California citizen, a registered voter, not disqualified by other laws to hold public office, and a resident of the community college district. In districts where trustees are elected by area, you must be a resident of the area from which you will be elected.

Ideal Qualifications

In addition to the above basic eligibility requirements, the best board members:

- Are committed to the value of education,
- Reflect an attitude of community service,
- Desire to improve the entire community in which they live,
- Have an open mind,
- Are optimistic about the future,
- Love learning, and
- Seek knowledge about their trustee responsibilities.

The Trustee Role

As a member of the governing board, you will:

- Contribute to the board's functioning as a team;
- Bring ideas and maintain an open mind;
- Seek to learn about and understand all interests in the community, and help buffer the college from single interests;
- Learn about community colleges and your governing responsibilities;
- Adhere to the standards of practice and ethics adopted by your board;
- Avoid conflicts of interest; and
- Advocate for the district in the community, state and nation.

What Being a Trustee is Not

You have no personal authority as an individual trustee. Individual power is expressed as one member of a board through personal influence, persuasion and knowledge. Individual trustees do not direct college staff or programs.

Being a trustee is not a paying job, although state law permits a stipend for board service. Trustees rarely have offices; staff support is for the board as a whole. Being a trustee is a public service—a gift of individual talent, experience, knowledge, energy and time. Conflict of interest laws prohibit trustees from using their positions for personal economic benefit.

Trustees should not use the board to focus on single interests or the needs of employee groups. While those interests are important, trustees are there to represent the common public good. The board is not a platform for individual campaigns for future public office. Trustees will earn a reputation for success if your college is an effective institution that contributes to the vitality and health of its communities.

What You Will Need to Know

You need to know about your community. What are the different needs; who are the different groups who should be served; and what are the economic, social and demographic trends in the community that have implications for education?

You need to know about the college district. What are its mission and goals? What are the major issues facing the college? Are its educational programs meeting community needs? Is it a stable, growing organization with strong leadership? Often, the information you need is available from the district's annual reports, accreditation studies and college catalogs.

You also need to know what it means to be a member of a governing board. What are the roles and responsibilities? What standards of practice or ethics will you be asked to adhere to? How can you avoid conflicts of interest? All districts provide some orientation to the governing board role. In addition, many opportunities for [trustee education](#) are offered by state and national associations, including the Community College League.

California's Community Colleges

There are 72 community college districts in California, each with its own locally-elected governing board. Fifty-two of the districts are single college districts, 20 have multiple colleges. The districts comprise the California Community College System, headed by the Board of Governors, which is charged with setting broad policy direction for the colleges and adopting regulations that implement legislative mandates. Members of the Board of Governors are appointed by the governor and the board is responsible for the work of the California Community College Chancellor's Office.

The community colleges' policy of open access offers the opportunity of higher education for all who are able to profit from instruction. Over 1.5 million students attend 108 colleges, with credit and non-credit enrollments ranging from 1,150 to 86,000 students. Almost all colleges have comprehensive programs that prepare students to transfer to universities, enter the workforce in professional and technical fields, and upgrade their academic and workforce skills. Colleges also engage in partnerships with business and community agencies, offer community services and cultural activities, and provide leadership in their communities.

Please contact the League at cclc@ccleague.org if you would like more information.

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