

## **Characteristics of High Performing Board Members**

High performing board members:

1. Seek to be fully informed about the college or university or university system.
2. Support the mission of the institution or university system.
3. Speak one's mind at board meetings but support policies and programs once established.
4. Understand that the board's responsibility is policymaking and not involvement in administration or the management process.
5. Strengthen and sustain the chief executive while being an active, energetic, and probing board member exercising critical judgment on policy matters.
6. Communicate promptly to the chief executive or board chair any significant concern or complaint.
7. Defend the autonomy and the independence of the university or university system.
8. Maintain an overriding loyalty to the entire university or university system rather than to any individual part of it or group within it.
9. Represent all the people of the state and no particular interest, community, or constituency.
10. Help enhance the public image of the university or the university system and the board.
11. Recognize that authority resides only with the board as a whole and not in its individual members.
12. Recognize that the president or chancellor is the primary spokesperson for the university or the university system and that the chair of the board is the only other person authorized to speak for the board.
13. Foster openness and trust among the board, the administration, the faculty, the students, state government, and the public.
14. Maintain a courteous respect for the opinions of one's colleagues and a proper restraint in criticism of institutional officers.
15. Maintain the highest ethical standards, never allow any personal conflict of interest nor make any request or demand for action that violates the written policies, rules, and regulations of the board or of the institution or system.
16. Support positive change within the institution or system while cognizant of tradition, culture, and the need for long-term stability.
17. Understand the responsibilities of the institution or system for addressing the public interest and public good, and its place in the overall state higher-education policy agenda.

# Taking it to the Next Level: Distinguishing Characteristics of High Performing Boards

## GOOD BOARDS

Enjoy positive recognition for institution

Approve strategic plans

Accept incremental improvement

Ensure adequate finances

Possess an over-reliance on anecdotes

## HIGH PERFORMING BOARDS

Hold high, realistic aspirations

- Seek regional, national or international distinction and distinctive brand
- Support positive institutional change
- Make tough calls

Engage in strategic thinking and ensure plan alignment

- Engage in plan development and monitoring of implementation
- Get buy-in from stakeholders
- Align plan with state needs
- Have upstream discussions of major strategies/initiatives/risks/problems

Seek substantial improvement

- Play active role in quality and educational effectiveness
- Know what student success looks like
- Galvanize others to act

"Use a "strategic finance" approach \*

- Align budget with mission, plan and vision
- Encourage innovation and entrepreneurship
- Support cost management strategies
- Understand net revenues, cross-subsidies, and new markets

Measures what matters

- Use comparative metrics
- Benchmark institutional performance
- Govern with transparency

Have full or near full meeting attendance

Seek meaningful engagement

- Have discussions between meetings
- Direct attention to top priorities
- Provide fresh perspectives on old problems

Defer to chief executive officer

Practice Integral Leadership \*\*

- Have shared goals with CEO
- Maintain distinct but complimentary responsibilities
- Conduct meaningful assessments of CEO
- Act as “thought partners” with CEO

Cordial board meetings are the norm

Welcome dissent and discussion

- Meetings are constructive
- Members come to meetings informed and well-prepared

Open to change

Open to rigorous self-evaluation

- Both the board and individual members are open to change
- Use multi-year comparisons of performance

Responsive when asked

Leverage Relationships/Connections

- Use social/political connections to advocate
- Provide advice on political and other consequences
- Generate financial and other support

\* **Strategic Finance:** This approach to the oversight of finances is more than balancing the expenses and revenues. It’s about knowing which programs and activities are net revenue generators and which are net revenue losers. It is thinking strategically about new markets, and making reallocations to areas of strength and necessity.

\*\* **Integral Leadership:** An approach to executive leadership whereby the president exerts a presence that is purposeful and consultative, deliberative yet decisive, and capable of course corrections as new challenges emerge. Integral Leadership aligns the president, faculty, and the board together in a well-functioning partnership purposefully devoted to a well-defined, broadly affirmed, institutional vision.

“What Distinguishes High Performing Boards from Good Ones?” is based on research conducted by Terrence MacTaggart for an AGB book on leading change.