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BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES WITH A MISSION-CENTRIC FOCUS

Higher education boards play a pivotal role in safeguarding the mission, values, and future of their institutions. Independent of ever-changing political climates, board responsibilities must go beyond compliance and tradition—they must center the mission of the institution, the well-being of its stakeholders, and opportunity for all. The following 1-pager reframes nine essential board roles to ensure mission alignment and inclusive excellence.

MISSION ALIGNMENT

1

- Boards are responsible for ensuring the institution's mission explicitly commits to equity, especially in times of heightened scrutiny or resistance.
- When the mission falls short, boards must lead efforts to realign institutional goals, policies, and practices to promote safety, success, and opportunity for all.



CEO SUPPORT & ASSESSMENT

2

- Boards must support and evaluate institutional leaders based on their commitment to advancing mission-centric goals and mitigating harm across all stakeholder groups.
- They should publicly back leaders who champion inclusive strategies and advocate for transparent reporting on progress, even amid external resistance.



STRATEGIC PLAN OVERSIGHT

3

- Boards must ensure that equity and stakeholder well-being are embedded in the strategic plan as core, measurable priorities—not just aspirational goals.
- They should require disaggregated metrics and hold the institution accountable for progress.



FISCAL INTEGRITY & OVERSIGHT

4

- Boards must align financial decisions with the institution's commitment to advancing its mission and supporting the success of all campus stakeholders.
- Boards should carefully review budgets and investments to remove barriers and prioritize resources for underserved communities, regardless of external pressures.



EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

5

- Boards should support inclusive curricula and pedagogies that reflect diverse experiences and perspectives.
- Boards should uphold academic excellence by ensuring equitable learning environments that foster academic growth. This includes access to learning, addressing disparities, and ensuring equitable outcomes for all.



6

INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY & ACADEMIC FREEDOM

- Boards must firmly protect academic freedom, especially amid growing attacks on discussions of controversial or divisive topics.
- The Board's defense of faculty and academic leaders in their scholarship and teaching is vital to preserving a healthy and inclusive intellectual environment.



7

POLICY & PRACTICE ALIGNMENT

- Boards must regularly review and update policies to ensure they promote equitable access to opportunities across hiring, admissions, promotions, and campus climate.
- Boards must ensure that policies are clearly understood and consistently implemented, so that success and well-being become tangible experiences for the campus community.



8

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- Boards should foster ongoing, honest engagement with all stakeholders.
- Boards should listen to and address concerns on controversial issues, maintaining dialogue despite potential external opposition.



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BOARD GOVERNANCE & SELF-ASSESSMENT

- Boards must maintain high standards of strategy, transparency, and accountability, regularly evaluating their support for mission-centric initiatives.
- Boards should ensure diverse board composition and model inclusive governance committed to the success and well-being of all campus stakeholders.



QUESTIONS BOARDS SHOULD ASK THEMSELVES:

- Does our mission inspire equity-driven decision-making?
- Are our financial and strategic choices aligned with stakeholder well-being?
- Do we transparently track progress on mission-centric goals?
- Are we defending academic freedom and institutional independence?
- Are all constituencies engaged and heard?
- Are we holding ourselves accountable to the same standards we expect from others?

Bottom Line:

Mission-centric governance demands that the institutional mission not be a siloed initiative, but a core, enduring principle that guides all decisions. Boards must lead with clarity, courage, and accountability to uphold their institutions' highest values at all times.

Still Interested?

Read our full GUIDE TO: MISSION-CENTRIC GOVERNANCE

These nine board roles and responsibilities were adapted from AGB's Board Responsibilities for Equitable Student Success curriculum created by Rall, Morgan, Schwartz, & Brown. These revisions emphasize the importance of boards proactively supporting and defending diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts amid growing national challenges, positioning equity as a guiding principle in all aspects of governance. (The Center for Strategic and Inclusive Governance, 2024)