

## A GUIDE TO: ADVANCING MISSION-CENTRIC DECISION MAKING

Your board has a crucial role to play in maintaining the mission of your institution, advancing its future, and safeguarding its independence. These responsibilities are essential to student success and must be prioritized regardless external pressures. Establishing clear roles before your service on the board ensures that these aims become the cornerstone of all decision-making. Understanding your board's role can significantly impact the direction of your institution. Whether it is obvious or not, your board is helping or hindering your institution in important ways. We have identified 5 roles higher education boards actively or passively play in higher education.

### WHICH ROLE WILL YOUR BOARD PLAY?



INITIATOR



CATALYZER



BYSTANDER



INHIBITOR



BARRIER



## AN INITIATOR

- **Definition:**
  - An Initiator board proactively leads efforts to enhance the institution's mission.
- **Key Questions:**
  - Has your board spearheaded policies or practices that maximize mission-centric work?
  - Are there specific initiatives aimed at advancing student success that your board has launched?
- **Example Actions:**
  - Develop evaluations of the president/chancellor that center advancing institutional aims.
  - Implement mission-centric plans that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion.



## A CATALYZER

- **Definition:**
  - A board works as a catalyzer when it supports and amplifies the efforts of others to foster mission-centric work.
- **Key Questions:**
  - Has your board followed the lead of community groups, campus staff, or leadership in enhancing mission-centric efforts that improve, advance and support this work?
  - Are you collaborating with stakeholders to promote initiatives that align with your institution's mission and strategic plan?
- **Example Actions:**
  - Set aside funding for those initiatives that further the institutional mission.



## A BYSTANDER

- **Definition:**
  - A bystander board observes without taking action, leading to stagnation in mission-centric efforts.
- **Key Questions:**
  - Does your board fail to engage in important mission-centric initiatives and simply observe the status quo?
  - Does your board neither intentionally advance nor impede mission-critical work of inclusivity and improved student outcomes?
  - Is this work viewed as the responsibility of the administration, faculty, or staff alone?
- **Example Actions:**
  - Reflect on where your board can become more intentionally involved and identify opportunities to actively support existing mission-centric initiatives.



## AN INHIBITOR

- **Definition:**
  - An inhibitor board actively slows or diverts efforts aimed at promoting the mission.
- **Key Questions:**
  - Has your board slowed, diverted, or problematized necessary decisions rooted in the institutional mission?
  - Has your board prioritized or see other issues as more critical to institutional vitality?
- **Example Actions:**
  - Assess decision-making processes for biases that may hinder mission-centric initiatives.
  - Engage in reflection to understand the motivations behind resistance to change or making changes that are counter to the mission.



## A BARRIER

- **Definition:**
  - A barrier board creates policies or practices that directly challenge mission-centric efforts.
- **Key Questions:**
  - Has your board implemented policies that negatively impact student success?
  - Is your board responding to fears about inclusive practices in ways that hinder progress?
- **Example Actions:**
  - Review existing policies to identify and amend those that create barriers to success.
  - Foster an inclusive culture that embraces change rather than fearing it.

The role your board plays in governance significantly influences the mission and future of your institution. By recognizing whether your board is an initiator, catalyzer, bystander, inhibitor, or barrier, you can better align your actions with the mission-centric goals that enhance student success. Engage in open discussions and board assessments to determine how your board can evolve and commit to being a proactive force for positive change in higher education, progressing toward being an initiator board. If your board is not currently enacting the role it should fulfill, you can be intentional about changing it. Conversely, if your board is making the decisions that uphold your mission, how might you double down on certain mission-critical beliefs and resist pressures to change that run counter to your institutional aims?