



A BLUEPRINT FOR AGB

**A Summary of the Strategic Plan of the
Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 2006-2011**

INTRODUCTION

In August 2005, the Board of Directors of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) approved the launch of a 12-month strategic planning process. This process, timed to coincide with the appointment of AGB's fourth president, was rigorous and intentionally designed to gather advice and opinions from a host of individuals inside and outside of the association. The goal was to develop a five-year plan to guide the association as it reasserts itself as the leading resource on, and advocate for, higher education governance, a vibrant organization offering membership services that are timely, highly responsive to member needs, and perceived by current and prospective members as extremely valuable.

The timing of this planning process was important, not only for the association but also for higher education. Connecting with the membership and the higher education community at a point of presidential transition was helpful in drawing attention to the leadership change and alerting members and others to the association's new planning endeavor. However, even more important to the process has been the current environment for higher education and governance. More than at any previous time, higher education today is facing a serious erosion of public trust. There is pressure for greater board accountability on a range of governance issues, including presidential compensation, cost and price, quality, and fiduciary oversight. These pressures have resulted in a need for boards to engage in a new level of work, with more diligence and independence, and greater understanding of and attention to their duties. The changing expectations of boards require AGB to respond.

Certainly there is no denying the strength of American colleges and universities, which are the envy of the world. Yet, serious challenges face the enterprise, such as questions about the academic preparation of graduates, the need for greater internationalization of the educational experience, the changing demographics of college students, and the need for increased access to high-quality education and the support structures that will ensure success. Failure to address these and other equally difficult challenges will weaken higher education

and undermine America's economic base, its social systems, and its future. Central among those who have the credibility, authority, responsibility, and commitment to strengthen higher education are the 50,000 volunteers who serve as trustees and regents of our 4,000 colleges and universities. Thus, in seeking strategies for expanding and enhancing its core work with trustees and governing boards, AGB has also sought ways to contribute to the public good by strengthening the future of higher education.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, THREATS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

In its planning process, AGB engaged more than 800 practitioners, higher education thought leaders, members, directors, staff, and friends in conversation about AGB's promise, challenges, and future. Through focus groups, surveys, interviews, commissioned white papers, self-reflection, and structured conversation, AGB has developed a picture of itself now and as it needs to be in the future.

AGB has an 85-year history of service to higher education through its work with presidents and chancellors and their boards on matters of institutional and, more recently, foundation board governance. AGB's operational environment is characterized by stability, with a record membership of nearly 1,200 boards and a retention rate of 96 percent. The association is known as a good resource for information on higher education governance, chiefly through its publications; its primary audiences—presidents and chancellors, board chairs, and board professional staff—have consistently good opinions of the value that their membership adds to their work. AGB has a positive reputation with a strong sense of purpose.

However, surveys and conversations also revealed that AGB's member services need updating in order to meet the demands of trustees, boards, and presidents who face rapid change in higher education, intense public scrutiny, and mounting political pressures.

It is clear that AGB has many opportunities to strengthen its work, its visibility, and its value to members. Thought leaders have identified critical needs

facing higher education that AGB can effectively address. Members have pointed to changes and innovations they require. It is essential for AGB to respond with new work, a renewed commitment to serving members, and a reaffirmation of the belief that our system of citizen trusteeship is still the best guarantee of institutional vitality and strength in service to our nation.

The following plan, focusing on member services, research, and advocacy, identifies AGB's strategic priorities and goals for the next five years. It directly addresses the urgent and ongoing need to strengthen higher education governance, to serve as an advocate for citizen trusteeship, and to provide excellent member services. This plan will be "evergreen," updated and refreshed annually to provide AGB with a roadmap for building on its strengths, delivering on its mission, and anticipating future needs of boards.

PRIORITY ONE: AGB will develop and implement a robust research agenda that will inform the association's services to members and position the association as the primary source of information on higher education governance.

Key Initiatives

1. Establish a research function to ensure that information and current data inform the association's communications, publications, and programs.
2. Develop an annual research-based report on governance.
3. Develop a cadre of senior scholars who contribute to the knowledge, experience, and credibility of AGB through their research, writing, and speaking as AGB representatives.

Additional Strategic Goals

4. Enhance the Web site and the Zwingli Resource Center to make information easily available to members.
5. Develop strategies for gathering feedback on governance from members and others.
6. Create The AGB Press to publish and brand the association's research and raise the profile of publications.

PRIORITY TWO: Membership in AGB will be highly valued and essential for university and college boards and presidents because of new and strengthened programs and services.

Key Initiatives

1. Develop a governance institute, co-branded with a highly selective private university, that will offer a range of programs for presidents and trustees: an academy for presidents, offering programs focused on governance, finance, and related topics; a mentoring program for new presidents on governance-related issues; workshops for board members focused on governance issues; and a research function focused on higher education governance.
2. Develop consulting services and create greater flexibility in existing board education programming.
3. Develop and implement a new communications strategy for the association using print and electronic vehicles to enhance AGB's brand recognition, add value to membership, strengthen messages, and provide useful, timely information to current and prospective members and other important constituencies.

Additional Strategic Goals

4. Develop a special program for boards of highly selective institutions.
5. Develop an annual schedule of short meetings for public and private members.
6. Build on the success of AGB's work with foundations to enhance programming, services, and research initiatives.
7. Extend the work of the Ingram Center for Public Trusteeship and Governance by developing new programs and contributing to the research agenda of the association.
8. Create and market a "call in" service for presidents and board chairs needing quick, confidential phone consultations.
9. Make valuable information available to members at no charge through the Web site, the Zwingle Resource Center, and electronic communications.
10. Ensure that *Trusteeship* remains the leading association publication in the area of governance, serving as a key benefit of membership by becoming more timely, content-rich, responsive to current needs, and focused on emerging issues and trends.
11. Continually strengthen the National Conference on Trusteeship to ensure that it serves members well and continues to grow in attendance and reputation.

PRIORITY THREE: AGB will be the national advocate for citizen trusteeship of colleges and universities. It will be the leading voice on issues related to higher education governance with state and federal policymakers.

Key Initiatives

1. Establish and utilize the AGB Trustee Advocacy Network on those public-policy issues appropriate to AGB's mission.
2. Build partnerships and collaborations with other organizations and associations where appropriate to advance AGB's public-policy agenda.
3. Promote the recommendations of AGB's Task Force on the State of the Presidency in American Higher Education, calling upon state public-policy makers to strengthen public trusteeship.

Additional Strategic Goals

4. Monitor state and national legislation, policy changes, and public dialogues affecting higher education governance.
5. Use the Ingram Center to extend AGB's work on a trustee reform agenda into targeted states, working in partnership with other organizations, where necessary.
6. Broadly disseminate the Board of Directors' forthcoming statement on accountability. Educate governing boards about its contents, purposes, and relevance to the new work of boards.

PRIORITY FOUR: AGB's internal operations and practices will be strengthened to ensure the success of the overall plan.

Key Initiative

1. Implement an organizational structure that aligns functional areas with strategic objectives.

Additional Strategic Goals

2. Improve communications, entrepreneurship, and problem solving within AGB so the first three priorities can be successfully achieved.
 3. Ensure that AGB has a diverse and able staff focused on the association's core values.
 4. Continue to seek appropriate balance in the pricing of services and membership in order to provide necessary revenue while remaining sensitive to member needs.
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ADDENDUM

As the strategic planning process developed, association leaders re-evaluated statements that define the organization in fundamental ways. Those statements follow:

Mission Statement

The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges strengthens and protects this country's unique form of institutional governance through its research, services, and advocacy. AGB is committed to citizen trusteeship of American higher education.

Guiding Value

AGB is guided by its support for the men and women who hold higher education in trust, with respect for what has come before and high expectations for what will come in the future.

Core Values

- ❖ Dedication to higher education and its system of citizen trusteeship
- ❖ Responsive and high-quality service to members
- ❖ Respect for members and colleagues in all interactions
- ❖ Teamwork and collaboration within AGB and with other organizations
- ❖ Effective, accurate, and timely communication within AGB and with constituents
- ❖ Commitment to research to undergird AGB's services, advocacy, and communication



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