

# **RENEWING THE DEMOCRATIC PURPOSES OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**AN INFORMATION BRIEF  
FROM THE AGB GUARDIANS INITIATIVE™**

“The honor to serve as a trustee of an American college or university carries with it a fiduciary obligation to guarantee the public purposes of higher education—perhaps first among them the vitality of our democracy. ... Today’s trustees are called, as they have been for nearly 400 years, to help the American people achieve their highest potential.”

## **American higher education supports a healthy democracy. Board members should be prepared to discuss a few takeaways from *Renewing the Democratic Purposes of Higher Education*.**

- **Colleges and universities act as community anchors.**  
Through engagements with governments, businesses, nonprofits, and individual citizens, colleges and universities often have a major impact on local employment, training, purchasing, and infrastructure, and in helping local and regional communities address key challenges. (p. 7)
- **Higher education institutions are engines of democracy.**  
Colleges and universities are responding to student demand and delivering programs in high-wage fields such as business, healthcare, and STEM while remaining committed to developing general skills employers have traditionally relied upon, such as critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving. (p. 7)
- **Preparing students for civic life holds real challenges.**  
College provides opportunities for students to cultivate civic values such as political participation and community service. But campuses are both more diverse and more connected than ever before. Students now face the prospect of exercising their citizenship in the public spotlight. (p. 6)