



**BEST-PRACTICE  
GUIDELINES FOR  
THE CONTINUING  
ENGAGEMENT  
OF FORMER  
BOARD MEMBERS**



ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNING BOARDS OF UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES



# BEST-PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR THE CONTINUING ENGAGEMENT OF FORMER BOARD MEMBERS

ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNING BOARDS OF UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES



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## INTRODUCTION

**Governing board members devote years of their time and, in many cases, generous allocations of their personal wealth to the institutions of higher education they serve.** When their board service ends, whether because they choose to retire or because of term or age limits, many hope to maintain a close relationship with their institutions. Moreover, when a member leaves, the board may be apprehensive about the resulting loss of professional expertise, institutional memory, philanthropic support, or access to corporate and government relationships. For these and related reasons, it is sensible for governing boards to find ways to keep former members engaged with their institutions. One especially effective way is through a program specifically tailored for this purpose. The animating principle of the most effective programs holds that former board members are a resource that merits sustained cultivation.

Whether or not their institution has such a program for former members, many boards recognize outstanding service by awarding emeritus or some other honorary status to select members upon retirement. Fully 80 percent of independent boards, and nearly 30 percent of public boards, currently have one or more emeritus members.\* While this practice can be an effective way to honor exceptional members, keep them engaged after their board service ends, and encourage their continuing support, it is nonetheless fraught with potential to undermine good governance and, therefore, should be used sparingly and judiciously. All board members should have a clear understanding of the nature and limits of their ongoing involvement with the institution, if any, following the end of their board service. However, it is especially important for the board to set clear expectations for those former members who are awarded emeritus or some other honorary status.

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\*Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, *Policies, Practices, and Composition of Governing and Foundation Boards 2016* (Washington, DC: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 2016), 24.