

**AGB**

**Effective  
Committee  
Series**

# **The Facilities Committee**

*by Harvey H. Kaiser*



# Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Section 1: <i>Preserving and Enhancing America's Campuses</i>	4
Section 2: <i>Purpose and Role of the Committee</i>	7
Section 3: <i>Committee Responsibilities</i>	12
Section 4: <i>Committee Composition</i>	22
Section 5: <i>Tips for Effective Facilities Committees</i>	25
Section 6: <i>Key Trends and Special Issues</i>	30
Section 7: <i>Pitfalls to Avoid</i>	37
Section 8: <i>Conclusion</i>	41
Appendix A: Sample Facilities Committee Charter (Independent Institutions)	44
Appendix B: Sample Facilities Committee Charter (Public Institutions)	46
References & Resources	48
About the Author	50

# *Effective Committees*

---

This publication is part of an AGB series devoted to strengthening the role of key standing committees of governing boards. While there is no optimum committee system for institutions of higher education, certain principles, practices, and procedures prevail. The best practices outlined below support the objectives of board committees: focused effort, informed decision making, and self-management.

### **A. FOCUS THE WORK OF COMMITTEES**

The work of boards should be grounded in the work of its committees. Working in tandem, committees enhance the purpose and advance the productivity of the full board.

1. Committee charters should clearly declare the governance purpose of each committee.
2. Committee work should be aligned with the institution's strategic vision, goals, and priorities.
3. Committees should translate their charges into annual goals and work plans that align with the board's governance responsibilities and the institution's strategic plan.
4. Committees should focus on monitoring the institution's strategic progress and the committee's accomplishments.
5. Committee meeting agendas should be concise, developed in consultation

with the committee chair and designated staff member, clearly state desired meeting outcomes, and they should be distributed—with appropriate supporting documents—well in advance.

6. Committee members should strike an appropriate balance between “too much” and “too little” information. They must guard against requesting overly detailed information to avoid becoming embroiled in administration or overburdening staff. At the same time, they need sufficient supporting materials to make sound recommendations and ensure adequate oversight.

## **B. FACILITATE INFORMED AND PARTICIPATORY DECISION MAKING**

Committees are responsible for recommending decisions and actions to the full board. They should serve as models of good governance, where issues are debated and recommendations are framed openly, inclusively, and with full transparency.

1. Committees should deliberately include constituents whose voices have legitimate bearing on the topics under consideration.
2. Board members and constituents should have an active and reciprocal understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities within the institution’s governance structure.
3. Through committees, board members and the institution’s constituents should engage in a dialogue that demands facts and explores critical issues within the appropriate boundaries. Jointly and based on mutual trust, they should learn to ask the right questions that honor governance prerogatives and advance the institution’s strategic direction.
4. When making formal recommendations to the full board, committees should present conclusions that summarize relevant data and findings, including constituent voices and diverse perspectives.

## **C. ORGANIZE THE WORK OF COMMITTEES**

While board bylaws often define the committee structure, the needs of each committee vary depending on the committee’s purpose and the institution’s changing circumstances. Within the division of labor between committees and the board, committees have responsibility for managing their own policies and practices.

# *Preserving and Enhancing America's Campuses*

---

Membership on the facilities committee is a coveted assignment, and with good reason: it offers board members an opportunity to be part a process that yields a concrete and tangible outcome. Facilities committees help their institutions achieve their missions by ensuring that the necessary infrastructure is in place for academic, residential, extracurricular, and co-curricular programs and services. Facilities committees help shape the physical character of their institutions by ensuring that campuses are functional, attractive, and well maintained. And committee members tackle the challenging work of helping to update the campus master plan and developing harmonious relationships between buildings, open spaces, landscaping, and the interior circulation of vehicles and pedestrians.

The work of the facilities committee ranges from the big-picture to the mundane as it seeks to integrate the intellectual purposes of the institution to its physical setting. The committee provides oversight of long-range physical planning, supports the board in providing strategic direction related to buildings and grounds, serves as a sounding board during large-scale projects and ongoing campus improvements and upkeep, and offers valuable subject-matter expertise and counsel on facilities issues.

## FACILITIES STEWARDSHIP

*An investment in facilities, the college or university's collection of classrooms, laboratories, offices, living and habitation space, exists only to support the mission of higher education. They provide the "place" in which the education and research process can be pursued. They are like any investment, made to pursue the goals of life or society.*

– William A. Daigneau<sup>1</sup>

The stewardship of an institution's capital assets—its buildings, grounds, and infrastructure—is one of a governing board's fundamental responsibilities. After all, capital assets represent a large share of total institutional assets—sometimes an even greater share than that represented by the endowment. The facilities committee has a voice in the key decisions that guide the physical identity and environment of the institution, but facilities stewardship is a shared responsibility of the committee, the full board, the president, and senior administrative staff.

Strong facilities stewardship sustains the legacy of past generations and ensures their preservation for the benefit of future generations by “ennobling the past, enhancing the present, and providing for the future by balancing continuity and change.”<sup>2</sup> In the words of Theodore Roosevelt, the buildings and grounds of an institution must be treated “as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased; and not impaired in value.”<sup>3</sup>

The “institutional value” of a campus's facilities refers, of course, to their financial value. But the notion of “value” has broader meanings, too—including the role of campus features in supporting teaching and learning and attracting students and faculty; the continued utility of buildings and grounds; and the importance an institution ascribes to the protection of its symbolic campus features and physical identity.

The board should be guided by the following concept of facilities stewardship, with the facilities committee helping the board carry out its responsibility:

---

1. Daigneau, William A., ed. *Planning and Managing the Campus Portfolio*. Washington, DC: APPA/NACUBO, 2003.

2. Dober, Richard. *Building in the Grove of Academe*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996.

3. From a quotation of Theodore Roosevelt, 26th president of the United States, inscribed in the American Museum of Natural History, Roosevelt Rotunda, New York, NY.

# Purpose and Role of the Committee

Facilities committees go by many names: buildings and grounds, property and real estate, landscape and buildings, physical plant, campus development, and maintenance committees among them. At some institutions, it is a standing committee. (See Exhibit 1, below.) How it functions varies depending on institutional history, community context, and strategic priorities. For example, the facilities committee of a large public university might focus on developing a master plan with systemwide standards that takes into account the different needs of its multiple campuses. The facilities committee of a young and growing community college might focus on how to make the campus more accessible to the local community. The facilities committee of a small private college that is experiencing unexpected growth might focus on innovative ways to reconfigure current buildings.

Exhibit 1: Percent of Higher Education Boards With Facilities Committees<sup>5</sup>

Independent institutions	51.9%
Public institutions	35.4%
Related foundations of public institutions	29.0%

5. AGB. *Policies, Practices, and Composition of Governing Boards of Independent Colleges and Universities* (2010); *Policies, Practices, and Composition of Governing Boards of Institutionally Related Foundations* (2011); and *Policies, Practices, and Composition of Governing Boards of Public Colleges, Universities, and Systems* (2010).