

HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNING BOARDS

AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE FOR MEMBERS OF
COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY, AND SYSTEM BOARDS





1133 20th Street NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20036

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Printed in the United States of America

HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNING BOARDS

ii Foreword by Richard D. Legon

iv Introduction

**1 THE ESSENTIAL RESPONSIBILITIES
OF GOVERNING BOARDS**

2 The Mission of the Institution

3 Presidential Selection and Support

7 Presidential Performance Assessment
and Compensation Review

8 Strategic Planning

11 Fiscal Integrity

14 Educational Quality

17 Institutional Autonomy
and Academic Freedom

21 Institutional Policies and Processes

23 Constituency Engagement

25 Board Conduct

**31 THE GOVERNING BOARD MEMBER
AS FIDUCIARY**

32 What Is a Fiduciary?

33 The Duty of Care

34 The Duty of Loyalty

36 The Duty of Obedience

36 To Whom Are Fiduciary Duties Owed?

37 Fiduciaries within a
Shared Governance System



FOREWORD

EFFECTIVE GOVERNING BOARDS, released nearly a decade ago, has informed and guided thousands of board members who serve public and private institutions and systems. Yet as the challenges confronting higher education and its unique model of board governance have continued to grow more complex, we have recognized a need to refresh the basic guidance AGB provides for governing boards and their volunteer members.

These are, indeed, disruptive times for higher education and its nearly twenty million students. Public scrutiny of the value and affordability of higher education places an ever-brighter spotlight on the sector and its governance. In this challenging context, board members—as fiduciaries—are called upon with increasing urgency to add value to the institutions they serve and higher education as a whole. Risks associated with the few but often high-profile governance breakdowns do collective harm to our institutions and the sector. It is essential for boards to get governance right.

Intended to enhance board effectiveness, this new publication is divided into two sections. The first identifies and informs the most sacred and specific responsibilities of the governing board of any college, university, or public system—from protecting the institution or system’s mission and selecting its chief executive officer to ensuring educational quality and the ethical conduct of board members. The second section focuses on the fiduciary principles and expectations that lie at the heart of effective governance. It is striking that many boards fail to spend sufficient time providing a comprehensive review of the legal standards that define the fiduciary role of board members individually, and those of the board as a whole. AGB urges that these standards be emphasized with new board members in advance of their service and that they be addressed as a central theme of new board member orientation.

Voluntary service on the governing board of a college, university, or system can be highly rewarding. Nonetheless, it requires work and commitment. As boards respond to today’s heightened call for appropriate engagement and collaborative leadership, their members must recognize that effective board governance requires constancy, awareness, and curiosity.

I sincerely recommend that all board members—whether new to their board service or more experienced in the role—attend to this refresh of one of AGB’s foundational volumes. I also encourage you, both as board members individually and as boards collectively, to be guided in your work by *An Anatomy of Good Board Governance in Higher Education*, a companion volume recently released by AGB that clarifies the elevated expectations of effective governance in today’s environment and recognizes the vital role of board composition, collaboration, and culture as drivers of board effectiveness.

Getting governance right is a standard of board accountability that can serve as a powerful reminder of the impact boards have on institutional effectiveness. *Higher Education Governing Boards: An Introductory Guide for Members of College, University, and System Boards* and its companion, *An Anatomy of Good Board Governance in Higher Education*, can be used to educate and remind new and more experienced board members alike of their essential responsibilities. Together, they can help ensure that the sector meets its public purpose.

I wish you and your board colleagues success (and enjoyment) in meeting your responsibilities and achieving your mission.

—RICHARD D. LEGON

President, Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges

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