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Secure Higher Education's Promise

Guiding Questions for Board Self-Assessment on Independence and Fiduciary Responsibility

These guiding questions are designed to help board members critically examine their role in safeguarding institutional independence, fulfilling fiduciary duties, and upholding the core values of higher education. They invite reflection on whether the board fully understands and embraces its responsibility to remain independent from external influence, maintain strong accountability standards, and protect academic freedom while ensuring alignment with accreditation requirements. By engaging with these questions, board members can deepen awareness of their governance obligations, jointly affirm their independence, and reinforce their commitment to sustaining the mission of the institution, maintain the integrity of the board, and preserve stakeholder trust in the board.

☐ Why is the concept of board independence increasingly important in today's higher education environment?

☐ Does our board fully understand and commit itself to remaining independent; and do we have a comprehensive understanding of what that implies for each of us as board members and for the board as a whole?

☐ Do all board members have a thorough awareness of our fiduciary duties as well as a clear understanding as to whom and what we are responsible?

☐ Does the board have sufficient standards in place to hold each board member accountable to maintaining the board's independence?

☐ Are we each prepared to put "independence" for our governance processes ahead of any external efforts to intrude in that essential fiduciary responsibility?

☐ Are each of us sufficiently aware of the concepts of (and distinctions between) academic freedom and freedom of expression? Are our related policies appropriately supportive of each of these core values; should each of these be strengthened?

☐ Are we familiar with how our accreditor monitors board independence and institutional autonomy; are we appropriately engaged in the accreditation process and able to demonstrate our independent governance?