ACCT’s Board Self-Assessment and President Evaluation Services

Why?

Community colleges have increased visibility and credibility, and are important players in the economic and political arena of the communities they serve. They are recognized as key contributors to the health and well being of the community. Boards operate in increasingly complex environments, often with competing interests and shrinking financial resources.

The result is that there is greater demand being put on the leadership role of the board. Boards are increasingly expected to work in partnership with the president to raise money, to approve long-range planning, to actively seek political and civic support for the college, manage communication with the media, and preserve institutional autonomy.

ACCT acknowledges that community college boards are committed to continuous self-improvement. The value of an experienced external consultant to the board and president is that this process can defuse internal issues, reassure their responsibility and accountability to their communities, and create a culture of transparency and effective communication.

Annual assessment is a powerful tool to show actual change on important issues that forms a foundation for dialogue between the board and president.

What?

Evaluation of the board and president provides an opportunity to take stock of contributions, establish a learning agenda around emerging issues and needs, and strengthen the board/president relationship. A mutually agreeable evaluation process creates a proactive forum where the leadership needs of the institution, and the new and emerging leadership role for the board and president, can be considered.

ACCT’s role is to give encouragement, constructive challenges, and impartial advice to boards and presidents as they strive to best serve their institutions, grow professionally and communicate effectively.

How?

- ACCT’s innovative process creates a customized survey that tackles the challenges and issues of the board/CEO leadership in a streamlined format
• Strict attention to confidentiality and integrity
• ACCT coordinates a fair and confidential process to distribute and tabulate quantitative and qualitative data from trustees and the president
• Impartial and fair reporting
• ACCT analyzes assessment data and identifies areas of strength and concern for boards and/or presidents.
• The summary report sets the stage for strategic improvements and establishing performance goals
• The “Third Voice” is a critical advantage
• Multi-year comparison to follow progress and improvements
• A facilitated customized board retreat in conjunction with the summary report gives the board and president an opportunity to engage in constructive dialog on how to close the “gaps” between expectations and performance
• ACCT can facilitate either a board self-assessment or presidential evaluation individually, or combine the two evaluations into one process. A summary report of findings is prepared and presented to the board either by a retreat consultant, or simply sent with our written recommendations/comments.

The goals of the evaluation and self-assessment process should be:

• Establishment of goals and priorities for next period
• Assessment of the most recent performance of the President and the Board and serve as a mechanism for constructive consideration of strengths and weaknesses
• Encouragement for the Board and the President to recognize superior performance and the need for constant improvement
• Enhancement of Board and CEO relationship and their unique leadership partnership
• Set standards and heightened morale on campus by setting an example

Comments from one of our Trustees:

“The process and service provided by ACCT is an outstanding and efficient means to handle our yearly evaluation for both our President and Self Evaluation of the Board. The electronic format is quick and easy to complete.

By far the best feature with this technology is that trustees were able to complete their forms no matter where they were (some were out of state on business) and submit them in a timely fashion. As the Chairman of the HR Committee I was able to receive all evaluations and quickly transmit all forms to ACCT with a few clicks of my mouse! It was absolutely painless! It sure beats flipping through multiple forms and manually tabulating answers, which is very time consuming! “

Alicia Hupp, Trustee & HR Chair, Clark State Community College, 2006
Board Self-Assessments

Why Should Boards Engage In Self-Evaluation?

- Effective boards engage in a continuing process of self-assessment or evaluation of their performance. They do so in order to identify where they are performing well as a board, and where they might improve.
- Discussion about board roles and responsibilities can strengthen communication and understanding among board members. The discussions can lead to stronger, more cohesive working groups.
- Boards’ willingness to engage in self-assessment is a model for the rest of the institution. It indicates that board members take their responsibilities very seriously.
- Their interest in self-improvement sets a tone for others in the college to engage in an ongoing review of how education is delivered.

What Should We Expect From a Self-Evaluation?

Well-conducted board self-assessments lead to better boards. The results include:

- a summary of board accomplishments
- a better understanding of what it means to be an effective board
- clarification of what trustees expect from each other and themselves
- improved communications among trustees and between the board and CEO
- strengthening the Board/CEO relationship
- identification of problems, potential issues, and areas to improve
- an opportunity to discuss and solve problems that may hurt board performance
- identification of strategies to enhance board performance
- renewed dedication to the board
- agreement on board roles and trustee responsibilities
- identification and preparation of board goals and objectives for the coming year
- clarification of fiduciary responsibilities

Evaluating the performance of the board is not the same as evaluating individual trustee performance. The purpose of the evaluation is to look at the board as a whole, although a side benefit may be that individual board members gain appreciation for the roles and responsibilities of trusteeship.

How Should Boards Evaluate Themselves?

The process of self-evaluation may be formal or informal. ACCT recommends the process should provide useful information for the board members.
Formal processes involve the use of *self-assessment instruments*. The results of these instruments coupled with the use of outside consultants who interview each board member, the CEO, and others named by the board, become the basis for discussion.

Other processes include discussions of ideal board practices and how the board’s own practices compare. Case studies or scenarios may be used as the basis for exploring effective approaches. Observing boards which have positive reputations may be helpful. Usually, a committee of the board is appointed to design and propose the process and criteria.

**Who Should Be Involved In The Evaluation?**

Each and every board member should participate in the self-evaluation by completing a board self-assessment instrument, and be involved in the discussion.

The CEO is also an important resource. Varying levels of involvement by the CEO are appropriate, from being a full participant in the process, to contributing advice and support for the process, to providing comments on the board/CEO relationship. Some boards conduct the board and CEO evaluations in tandem, since the success of one entity in the partnership depends on the effectiveness of the other.

Consultants and facilitators are often helpful to boards in developing and conducting an evaluation. They can provide an independent, non-biased influence to help keep board discussions focused and positive. ACCT’s Board Leadership Services arranges for consultants to assist in the process.

**How Often Should Boards Evaluate Themselves?**

Formal self-evaluations and/or a special session to discuss board performance should occur annually. Getting into the habit of regular evaluations makes the process part of the board and college culture, and lessens resistance to self-assessment.

New boards, or boards with a significant number of new members, may wish to hold an informal session more often as the members are learning to work together as a team. A few boards have adopted a practice of selecting and quickly commenting on a particular standard of performance at the end of each meeting related to the interaction and content of the meeting.

The evaluation session should be scheduled as a special workshop or retreat. State open meeting laws will guide whether or not the evaluation discussion must take place in an open session, or may be held in a closed session. If it is allowed, closed sessions provide an opportunity for board members to speak more freely.
What Criteria Should be Used?

A basic self-evaluation question is: “Are we doing what we said we will do?” If the purpose of the evaluation is to answer that question the criteria used in the self-assessment process includes what the board has defined as its roles and the policies the board has for its own operations and behavior. Self-assessment instruments generally have 30-50 items. Boards should select statements that are most useful to them.

Another question is: “How does the board rank itself against commonly accepted standards of boardsmanship?” In this case, the criteria used may be those established by national and state associations.

In either case, some possible categories are listed below.

- Board Organization
- Community Representation
- Policy Direction
- Policy Role
- Board–CEO Relations
- College Operations
- Student Success
- Monitor Institutional Performance
- Diversity
- Board Behavior/Leadership
- Advocacy
- Board Education
- Open-ended Questions

How Should We Use The Results of a Board Self-Assessment?

The average ratings on a board self evaluation instrument, a summary of interviews, or key points in a group discussion identify the strengths of the board and areas for improvement.

The strengths should be celebrated and boards should congratulate themselves on their good work. The strengths are used to help the board improve.

Areas of improvement should be explored to identify the dynamics that contribute to any problems or weaknesses. Strategies to address the issues may include board retreats or workshops on a specific topic, study sessions or reading in an area where knowledge or clarification is needed.
Three to six board goals or activities for the coming year may be established, based on the evaluation and performance on prior year goals. These goals become the basis for the board’s long-range or annual agenda.

**Should the Board and CEO Evaluations be Linked?**

The board and CEO work together in leading the institution – the board governs, and the CEO leads and administers on a day-to-day basis. It is difficult to evaluate the board without reference to the CEO’s contributions, and vice versa. ACCT recommends conducting the board and CEO evaluation concurrently; holding first a session on the board self-assessment followed by the CEO evaluation.

Boards should recognize that when evaluating the CEO, their support of the CEO is an important contribution to the success of the CEO. Conversely, when conducting self-assessments, the CEO’s support and advice contributes to board success.

**Presidential Evaluation**

Hiring, firing and evaluation the CEO of the institution is one of the central functions of the Board of Trustees. Beyond this, the evaluation process can be a constructive and rewarding experience. The goal of the evaluation should not only be on assessing the president’s performance, but also working as a team to serve the best interest of the institution. Other goals of regularly evaluating the president include:

- Supporting the office of the President
- Making the evaluation a rewarding experience
- Strengthening and building a harmonious Board/CEO relationship
- Clarifying expectations of Board and President
- Learning as a team
- Fulfilling contractual obligations
- Developing a positive climate for growth

When designing the presidential evaluation process, there are a number of important points to consider. These include:

- Any parameters or expectations of the CEO Contract
- How often and how quickly should the process be completed?
- Who should be involved in the process?
- Data and documentation should be provided with the instrument
- Discussion, information sharing and consensus around the process
- Formal agreements and next steps
As with the Board Self-Assessment, the President’ performance should be evaluated against and established set of criteria. In this case, the criteria used may be those established by national and state associations. Possible categories are listed below.

- Representation of the Institution
- College Operations
- Administrative & Management Skills
- Fiscal Management
- Personal Attributes
- Policy Implementation
- Board–CEO Relations
- Institutional Performance
- Fundraising
- Communication
- External and Internal Relationships

There are a variety of different ways boards go about evaluating their presidents. Some different approaches include:

- An instrument becomes the basis for evaluation
- Board gathers feedback from college staff and community
- Delegated to the Chair of the Board or small group of trustees
- Hire a consultant to conduct interviews and report to Board
- Review President’s self-report
- “Leave well enough alone”

ACCT recommends a more comprehensive process involving both the entire Board and the President. This process includes written reports by the President and a report on the trustees’ evaluation of the President.

The President prepares:
- Self-assessment of performance based on goals and priorities previously established with the Board
- Annual goals/objectives and strategic initiatives established jointly by the President and Board
- State of the College – status report on the College on key indicators such as enrollment, fundraising, overall functioning and stability of the institution, status of strategic plans, etc.

Trustees complete:
- Survey form on president’s performance.
- ACCT prepares summary of trustees’ surveys
Retreat/Workshop

- President to present both self-evaluation, state of the College, and questions and answers (Q&A) with the board. Board will have an opportunity to meet (without President), and discuss evaluation before meeting with the president.
- Distribute and discuss the summary findings from the completed surveys on the president’s performance. Board will have an opportunity to meet (without President), and discuss evaluation before meeting with the president.
- Discuss accomplishments and items needing further attention by the president, the board and individual trustees
- Set goals and priorities, and the time frame, for the next evaluation process.
- After discussion, board should present formal and unified message to the president.

Methodology

Designing an Instrument

The first step in designing an instrument is to identify what the board wants to get from the evaluation. If the major question is “Are we doing what we said we will do?” then whoever is designing the instrument (a board committee or other designee) needs to review board policies, practices and other statements that set out expectations.

For instance, if the board has a policy or practice that the board represents the community in its policy discussions, the evaluation instrument or checklist may include items that read:

1. The board has a comprehensive understanding of community educational needs.
2. The board considers the interests and needs of the community in its policy discussions.

Therefore, those who are designing the instruments should review all of the board’s policies and practices and develop statements that will be rated by trustees (and others involved).

On the other hand, if the major question is “How do we compare with state or national standards for governing boards?” then the instrument will be based on other standards, including the ACCT code of ethics and Standards for Effective Governance. See the Board Self-Evaluation Item Bank for a list of items that are based on local, state, and national standards.

Sample Structures: Rating Scales

Trustees and others doing the evaluation will rate statements on an instrument according to how well they perceive the board performing. Every college has staff members who can assist with setting up rating scales. Following are a few examples of rating a statement on the effectiveness
of the board self-assessment process. Respondents would be asked to circle or write the letter of the response.

**Agreement**
The assessment process provides useful information on board performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Performance**
The quality of information the assessment process provides on performance is:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Excellent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

To get numerical averages, respondents might be asked to rate the statement according to a scale, e.g.: The quality of information the assessment process provides on performance is:

| 5 | Excellent |
| 4 | Good      |
| 3 | Adequate  |
| 2 | Marginal  |
| 1 | Poor      |

**Meets Standards**
Respondents may be asked to simply state “yes” or “no” in response to a standard.

1. Yes / No The assessment process provides useful information on performance.
2. Alternatively, respondents may be asked to use the following scale:
   a. Exceeds expectations
   b. Meets expectations
   c. Needs improvement
   d. Unable to evaluate
Process

How to Start Designing and Implementing the Evaluation Process

1. ACCT will provide the board with materials to introduce the evaluation process and help it design a survey instrument(s) that most suits its needs and concerns. This may just be a draft survey, as the board and president may want to review and make changes.

2. At the board meeting information can be presented to the board and president about the what, how and why of the assessment process. ACCT’s Board Leadership Services specialist can walk the board through this. The board will “fine tune” the survey instrument.

3. ACCT will coordinate the surveys and insure a confidential, fair and balanced process. ACCT will tabulate the results and prepare a confidential summary report for the board and president to be discussed at the next board meeting or retreat.

4. ACCT can facilitate a retreat for the board and president to review the summary data and open the dialogue between the trustees and president to discuss the findings.

   OR

4. ACCT can review the findings with the board and president in a conference call.

5. (For a presidential evaluation) ACCT will assist the board in preparing a letter for the president confirming their agreed goals and priorities for the next review period.
   (For a Board self-assessment) The board will record the results of their review and discussion of the summary report and commit to goals and priorities for the next review period.

Results:
- If all goes well, this process will energize the Board and President, and an informed dialogue can move everyone to a higher level.
- The college’s stakeholders will have confidence that the process has been impartial and the results productive.
- Goals can be set based on survey results and discussions.
- Boards dedicated to the continuous renewal of their college’s stewardship, find that annual self-assessment and evaluation of the president is a healthy process that benefits all stakeholders, when done with professionally controlled methods.

ACCT is here to help. If the board wants to proceed with "baby steps", it can be secure in knowing that it is at least moving in a good direction.