

Board Role in Planning

Successful colleges have strategies for planning and decision-making that engage the entire institution and ensure that its direction is shaped by the future learning needs of the communities it serves. This chapter reviews the importance of planning and the role of the board of trustees, including its responsibilities to establish an overall policy direction and ensure that the institution engages in planning.

Change is a given. The rapid and ongoing rate of change means that colleges must be more nimble and proactive in determining how to allocate time and resources. Colleges engage in planning in order that environmental factors such as student characteristics, community needs, demographic shifts, workforce patterns, the global economy, technology, changing lifestyles, and social attitudes are incorporated into the direction of their educational programs. These trends create and change learning needs, and require colleges to constantly adapt. These “big picture” factors are catalysts for ongoing innovation, change and renewal.

Board Responsibilities

- Be aware of societal, demographic, economic, and technological changes influencing the college.
- Expect and model a culture of inquiry for ongoing planning and evaluation.
- Adopt a mission, vision, and strategic plans that put student success at the center.
- Insist on a limited number of clear priorities each year; set ambitious but realistic expectations.
- Monitor institutional progress and effectiveness.

Planning

The importance of planning is reflected in state law and accreditation standards:

- Education Code Section 51008 (a) states, “The governing board of a community college district shall establish policies for, and approve, comprehensive or master plans which include academic master plans and long range master plans for facilities. The content of such plans shall be locally determined, except that the plans shall also address planning requirements specified by the Board of Governors.”
- Title 5 regulations require that institutions have plans for programs and processes such as deferred maintenance, matriculation, equal opportunity, student equity, vocational program review, staff development, and technology and telecommunications.
- The importance of planning is referenced throughout the standards published by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, which all colleges must meet. The standards require that planning is ongoing, systematic, and integrated and addresses and assures student learning.

Effective planning accomplishes many purposes, including:

- Provide clear, shared direction for action.
- Allocate resources effectively.
- Communicate shared information.
- Provide opportunities for teamwork and collaboration.
- Maintain currency and relevance.
- Anticipate change, future opportunities, and trends.
- Strengthen organizations.
- Provide accountability to public.
- Ensure fulfillment of goals and objectives. (RP Group, 1997)

Policies that require planning may include some or all of the following concepts and values:

- Commitment and inclusion. Policy statements might set standards for commitment and participation in planning by the CEO, faculty, classified leadership, and department and division administrators. All employees should understand and be committed to the value of planning. Key personnel at all levels should have the opportunity to contribute to the vision, ends, mission and goals, and are responsible for developing related department and unit goals, and designing and implementing related activities to achieve the goals.
- Integration with mainstream of decision-making. Policy may require that existing participatory mechanisms are used in the planning process, that different planning efforts are linked, and that budgeting is tied to planning.
- Clear understanding of mission and focus on student success. Planning must be framed by a clear understanding of the institution's mission to improve student success and the goals required to fulfill that mission, vision, and policy ends. Governing board and CEO leadership is key to ensuring that the entire campus community supports the mission and goals.
- Commitment to act, change, and improve. Policy statements should recognize that planning is dynamic and ongoing. Trustee attitudes and behaviors should reflect the willingness to evaluate, plan, change as needed, and constantly improve performance.

Set the Policy Direction

A second role for boards is to provide visible, persistent leadership for student success and to define and clarify the difference they expect their colleges to make for students and their communities. They do this at the beginning of a planning process. They articulate what the college contributes to the public good – the college's reason for being – the results or “ends” for which the college should be striving. This proactive role requires boards to focus their time and attention on student success, external issues and community trends.

By adopting vision, mission, and student success and other goals as policy, boards affirm and set the policy direction for the institution. This direction then frames all internal planning processes. Staff members have the authority and responsibility to develop internal college goals and objectives, establish action plans, and identify targets, outcomes, and benchmarks to evaluate progress. Plans for specific areas, such as facilities, matriculation, staff development, etc., should be linked to the strategic and master plans.

Monitoring

The third role of the board in the area of planning is to monitor the progress of the college in fulfilling its mission and achieving its goals and student success. The board receives regular reports that allow it to assess the effectiveness of the institution in meeting student and community needs.

The board's monitoring role also includes being aware of changes and trends to enable the board to assess where the college should be headed in the future. In addition, boards should engage in regular reviews of the vision, mission and goals. A more complete discussion on the board's monitoring role is included in the chapter, “*Monitoring Institutional Effectiveness.*”

Trustee Responsibilities

To effectively participate in establishing an environment for planning, setting the vision, mission, and direction for the college, and monitoring progress, individual trustees must be knowledgeable and educated. They understand the nature of community colleges and the culture, values, and traditions of their colleges as academic institutions. They are committed to the mission and to student success. They promote a “culture of inquiry” in the colleges by engaging in discussions to refine institutional priorities and direction.

Because they are elected to represent their communities, trustees must be aware of the diverse interests in their communities and knowledgeable about current and future social, educational, and economic needs. They must also be aware of state, national, and global trends that may affect their colleges. CEOs and college staff ensure that trustees have the information they need for effective policy-making. The reports that boards receive should be clear, succinct and targeted to their role as policy-makers.

Trustees will help their colleges be flexible and responsive if they are visionary, oriented toward external trends and needs, and seek out and integrate diverse perspectives. Trustees who are willing to anticipate future trends study how proposals are related to policy goals and how student success data is used in the planning processes. Visionary boards create an environment in which planning is valued and integrated into the culture of the organization.

Long range and strategic plans and related board policies provide the direction and parameters for designing and implementing programs and activities. Since it is important that plans are “owned” by those who must do the implementing, it is important that staff at all levels are involved in assessing needs, contributing to the development of the policy direction, and designing and implementing strategies to meet needs and achieve policy goals.

Planning is a Process

Planning is an ongoing process that continually incorporates new information about program effectiveness and changes in the external environment into the programs and services of the college. Good plans are not documents that remain on shelves, but are used and continually revised. The culture of the college should be one in which planning is an integral part of the functioning of the institution.

Effective planning is a part of a cycle of planning, implementation, and evaluation. The cycle includes planning to plan, conducting research, writing plans, implementing them, and evaluating their effectiveness. Usually, a planning team or committee coordinates roles and responsibilities, timelines, information needs and flow, and follow-up systems.

The information that guides planning is generated from many sources and involves environmental scanning, research and analysis, and evaluation of current programs and services. A planning culture is established when people continually assess needs, scan for future trends, evaluate how well current programs meet current and future needs, and adjust programs as necessary.

Board Role

Boards are responsible for ensuring that colleges anticipate and are responsive to the future needs of their communities and changing social, political, economic, and technological trends. Their role in planning is to:

1. establish an environment in which effective planning can occur;
2. adopt the vision, mission and goals; and assure that student success is at the core of all planning;
3. monitor institutional progress toward goals contained in the plans.

Boards are involved early in the planning process in the discussions of mission, vision and goals. They set priorities for institutional direction and student success. The plans are then developed through internal processes and brought back to the board for approval. While trustees are not involved in those internal process, they usually receive periodic reports on the status of the planning processes.

Boards are required by law or regulation to approve facilities and educational master plans, as well as some internal, subject-matter plans, such as matriculation and staff diversity. Approval should be contingent upon these conditions:

- criteria for effective planning have been met;
- the plans have been driven by mission, vision, and strategic goals;
- the plans are fiscally responsible; and
- they meet legal requirements and accreditation standards.

“The most important work of any governing board is to create and re-create the reason for organizational existence.” –

John Carver, 1990

Ensure that Planning Occurs

First, boards ensure that planning occurs by adopting policies that establish standards for and require planning, guide their own behavior and roles, and set priorities for the CEO and staff. Board policies may establish a general schedule for planning and monitoring of progress. By stating that planning is required and is important, and by establishing standards for planning processes, the board creates an environment conducive to planning.