
Statement on Appointment to Governing Boards of Public Systems and Public Institutions of Higher Education

Introduction. The New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) accredits all public institutions of higher education in the six New England states. The Commission understands and appreciates both the importance of public higher education to the states and the key role of the governing boards in ensuring institutional success and therefore the success of students and graduates¹. This statement is designed as a resource for Governors in consideration of appointments to the governing boards of higher education institutions and systems.

Considerations when appointing members of higher education governing boards

Public higher education is one of the most important investments a state can make to ensure the economic success and well-being of its citizens and of its economy and civic life. Appointing persons of stature to the board communicates this importance. Appointing persons with a diverse set of expertise and backgrounds who understand their responsibilities in this key role can provide the governing board with the capacity to ensure the effectiveness and integrity of the state's public institutions of higher education.

1. Collective composition of the board. Overall, the board should:

- Include individuals with executive level experience in complex organizations in the private, public, and voluntary sectors.
- Broadly represent the population to be served, including economic and demographic diversity
- Include alumni/ae of the institution(s) as well as those with different higher education experiences.

2. Expertise of individuals. The board should include a mix of individuals with high-level expertise in:

- Law
- Finance, including strategic finance
- Complex systems
- Higher education
- Risk management
- Human resource management
- Strategic planning
- Evaluation, including program assessment
- Public policy
- Economics and workforce development
- Communications and crisis management
- Mission-related fields (e.g., research, arts, maritime affairs)
- Legislative affairs

¹ The Commission's standard on *Organization and Governance* includes its expectations for governing board and can be found here: https://www.neche.org/resources/standards-for-accreditation/#standard_three

- Major business sectors
- K-12 education

3. Responsibilities of board members. Board members should:

- Understand and assume the fiduciary responsibilities of the governing board:
 - Duty of care: to prepare for, attend, and actively participate in board and committee meetings.
 - Duty of loyalty: to operate in the interest of the system or the institution, and not in one's self-interest.
 - Duty of obedience: to understand and accept the responsibility to operate within relevant law and board governing documents.
- Understand the responsibilities of the board to: establish the mission of the institution(s) or system consonant with legislative statute and intent; serve as the legal owner of the institution's/system's assets with all attendant legal and governance responsibilities; select, support, and evaluate the chancellors and presidents; set board policies within statutory authority; approve major institutional decisions such as strategic plans and new degree programs; approve and audit system and institutional budgets; and ensure the integrity and educational effectiveness of the institution(s)/system.
- Accept the broad responsibility of the governing board to serve the state, avoiding partisan or overly parochial interests.
- Discuss challenging topics in public sessions, being open to varying perspectives.
- Support the system or institution through influence in the community, fund-raising, and as ambassadors for public higher education.

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