

Community Colleges for Iowa Trustee Handbook



Table of Contents

Welcome Letter	3
Iowa's Community Colleges	4
Foundation	4
Mission	4
Governance	5
Funding	5
Notable Programs	6
Other State Community College Systems	7
Becoming a Community College Trustee in Iowa	8
Vacancies and Appointments	9
Drawing Community College District Boundaries	11
Advocacy Process and Development of Legislative Priorities	16
How Statewide Legislative Priorities Are Developed	16
How Trustees Can Get Involved in Advocacy	17
Quorum: Legislative Advocacy Platform	17
Trustee Conference and Legislative Advocacy Training	17
Community College Day on the Hill	17
Iowans for a Skilled Workforce (ISW)	18
Additional Ways to Get Involved	18
Conclusion: The Trustee's Role in Advocacy	18
The Future of Advocacy for Iowa's Community Colleges	21
Board Management	23
Policy: Establishing a Strong Framework	23
Planning: Setting Priorities for Student and Institutional Success	23
Monitoring: Ensuring Accountability and Continuous Improvement	23
Diving Deeper	24
Guiding Questions to Set a Strategic Direction	24
Guiding Questions to Create a Culture for Change	24

Guiding Questions to Monitor What Matters.....	24
Board-CEO Relationship	25
Board v. CEO Responsibilities	25
Mission and Policy Leadership.....	25
Strategic Planning & Goal Setting.....	25
Financial Oversight and Budgeting.....	26
CEO Selection, Support, and Evaluation	26
Accountability and Performance Monitoring	26
Advocacy and Community Engagement.....	26
Institutional Operations and Personnel Management	27
Expectations and Evaluations	27
Example Evaluation Framework and Process.....	28
CEO Search Process and Onboarding	30
CEO Onboarding	32
References	34

Welcome Letter

Dear Iowa Community College Trustee,

Thank you for your service and commitment to Iowa's community colleges. Your leadership plays a vital role in ensuring our institutions continue to deliver accessible, high-quality education that meets the needs of students, employers, and communities across the state. As a trustee, you hold a position of both great responsibility and great opportunity—to help shape the future of Iowa through education, innovation, and inclusive governance.

This handbook has been developed to support you in your role. Inside, you'll find essential information about the duties and expectations of trustees, legal and ethical guidelines, governance best practices, and the broader context in which Iowa's community colleges operate. Whether you are a newly appointed board member or a seasoned trustee, this resource is designed to provide clarity, confidence, and continuity in your work.

We are grateful for your willingness to serve, and we hope this handbook helps guide your decision-making, enriches your understanding of community college governance, and connects you with the broader mission of Iowa's higher education system. Together, we can ensure that our colleges remain strong, responsive, and student-centered.

Sincerely,



Emily Shields
Executive Director
Community Colleges for Iowa

Iowa's Community Colleges

Iowa's community college system serves as a vital part of the state's education system, offering affordable tuition, dual-enrollment opportunities for high school students, and flexible learning opportunities. Over the decades, the community colleges have evolved to meet changing economic and workforce needs. Whether from healthcare to agriculture or manufacturing to information technology, Iowa relies on community colleges to train future workers as well as reskill the current workforce.

The current system is made up of 15 community colleges that serve *regions* across the state. Each college has its own locally elected board of trustees that are stewards for their communities who ensure the colleges are anchored in local needs, workforce demands, and student success. Iowa's community college trustees help shape policies, oversee financial sustainability, and advocate for accessible, high-quality education that supports both individuals and the local economy.

Foundation

In 1918, the Mason City school district established the first public, post-secondary institution in Iowa. Mason City Junior College, which became [North Iowa Area Community College in 1966](#), proved to be successful and became accredited one year after opening. By 1930, more than 32 towns had opened public junior colleges as part of their public-school systems to primarily offer the first two years of a baccalaureate program. As demand for postsecondary education grew, federal funds become more available, especially for veterans, and, in 1965, the Iowa legislature passed the Merged Area Schools Act to create a statewide system of public two-year postsecondary institutions. Through this process, the state's 15 community college system was established.

Mission

Iowa's community colleges are rooted in a mission of open access, providing affordable, high-quality education and training opportunities to all Iowans—regardless of background, age, or academic preparation. This enduring commitment ensures every learner has the opportunity to pursue postsecondary education, earn a credential, and gain the skills needed for meaningful employment and lifelong learning. By serving diverse communities across the state, Iowa's 15 community colleges play a vital role in advancing equity, supporting workforce development, and strengthening Iowa's economy.

Over time, the mission of Iowa's community colleges has evolved to meet the changing needs of students and the state's workforce. In 1983, economic development became a formal part of that mission through the enactment of Chapter 260 of the Iowa Code, which established key job training and workforce programs:

- **The Iowa Industrial New Jobs Training Program (260E)** helps businesses create new jobs by funding training for new employees, using bonds issued by community colleges and repaid through diverted state withholding taxes.
- **The Iowa Jobs Training Program (260F)** supports upskilling for existing employees through forgivable loans that offset training costs for eligible businesses.

- **The Accelerated Career Education Program (260G)** enhances Iowa’s skilled workforce by funding the development and expansion of high-demand career and technical programs in collaboration with industry partners.

Together, these initiatives ensure that community colleges remain responsive to local and regional workforce needs while driving economic growth.

Another significant advancement in access and readiness has come through concurrent enrollment (CE). Introduced in the early 2000s and formalized under the Senior Year Plus legislation in 2008, CE allows high school students to earn college credit—often at no cost—through courses taught by qualified instructors during the regular school day. CE supports the open access mission by expanding college opportunities, improving college and career readiness, strengthening partnerships with K–12 schools, and introducing students to in-demand career pathways, particularly in career and technical education. Today, concurrent enrollment represents the majority of total enrollment at Iowa’s community colleges, and the state is recognized nationally for its leadership in participation and program quality.

Governance

Iowa’s community colleges operate under a unique system of local governance with statewide coordination, ensuring both community responsiveness and alignment with state goals. Each of the state’s 15 community colleges is governed by a locally elected Board of Trustees, typically composed of five to nine members who represent specific geographic districts within the college’s service area. These trustees are responsible for setting institutional policies, approving budgets, hiring presidents, and ensuring the college remains aligned with the needs of the communities it serves. This localized governance structure empowers colleges to be agile and responsive to regional educational, workforce, and economic development priorities.

While each community college is governed locally, state-level coordination and support are provided through the Iowa State Board of Education and the Iowa Department of Education’s Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation. The State Board sets broad educational policies and provides oversight to ensure quality and consistency across the system. The Department’s Division works closely with the colleges to implement these policies, manage program approval, oversee data reporting and performance metrics, and administer state and federal funding. In addition, Community Colleges for Iowa (CCforIA)—a nonprofit association representing all 15 colleges—serves as a unifying voice, advocating for the system at the state and federal levels and supporting trustee development, policy coordination, and system-wide collaboration. Together, the local boards, state agencies, and CCforIA create a collaborative governance framework that balances local autonomy with statewide alignment and strategic advocacy.

Funding

Community colleges in Iowa are funded through a combination of state appropriations, local property tax levies, student tuition and fees, and federal and private grants. The Iowa Legislature allocates general aid and targeted funding annually to support operations, workforce training, and specific initiatives such as

adult education, career and technical programs, and concurrent enrollment. Local property taxes—authorized through the establishment of each college’s merged area—provide foundational support for facilities and operations. Tuition and fees paid by students are another significant revenue source, with rates set by each college’s board of trustees. Additionally, colleges pursue federal funding, including Pell Grants and workforce development grants, as well as private partnerships and philanthropic support. This blended funding model enables Iowa’s community colleges to remain accessible, affordable, and responsive to the evolving needs of students, employers, and communities.

Notable Programs

In addition to foundational workforce training programs like 260E and 260F, Iowa’s community colleges administer several other impactful initiatives under Chapter 260 of the Iowa Code that expand access, strengthen student success, and address workforce needs across the state.

The Accelerated Career Education (ACE) Program (260G) enhances Iowa’s skilled workforce by funding the development and expansion of high-demand career and technical education (CTE) programs. Through partnerships with local employers, community colleges align training opportunities with current labor market needs, ensuring students gain relevant, job-ready skills.

Complementing this effort, the Pathways for Academic Career and Employment (PACE) Program (260H) provides comprehensive support services to help under- and unemployed Iowans access and complete education in high-demand fields. PACE offers academic and career advising, case management, tutoring, and assistance with barriers such as transportation and childcare. This wraparound approach improves student success in earning industry-recognized credentials that lead to sustainable employment.

Many of Iowa’s community colleges have also implemented Guided Pathways, a student success framework designed to help learners explore career options, choose a clear academic path, and stay on track to completion. Guided Pathways integrates structured program maps, proactive advising, and career planning to improve outcomes and close achievement gaps.

Another major initiative supporting student access and workforce alignment is the Last-Dollar Scholarship, launched in 2018 as part of the Future Ready Iowa initiative. This scholarship covers the remaining cost of tuition and mandatory fees for students enrolling in high-demand career and technical programs after other federal and state aid is applied. It serves both recent high school graduates and adult learners pursuing certificates, diplomas, or associate degrees.

Programs eligible for the Last-Dollar Scholarship must prepare students for occupations on Iowa’s high-demand job list, which is updated annually by Iowa Workforce Development in collaboration with the Iowa Department of Education and approved by the State Board of Education. Based on labor market data and employer input, this process ensures the scholarship remains aligned with the needs of Iowa’s economy. Community colleges then submit qualifying academic programs for approval, reinforcing the system’s commitment to closing workforce gaps while expanding affordable educational opportunities.

Together, these programs reflect Iowa’s coordinated and responsive approach to workforce development, student success, and economic growth through its community college system.

Other State Community College Systems

Among Iowa's neighboring states, Nebraska and Minnesota share some similarities, though their systems lean more centralized. Nebraska's six community colleges are also governed by locally elected boards and operate with significant independence, but statewide planning and coordination are provided by the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. Minnesota's colleges are part of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system, a centrally managed entity overseeing academic programming, budget, and operations—unlike Iowa's more autonomous structure.

In contrast, states like Illinois and Wisconsin have more formal statewide coordination. Illinois community colleges are governed by local boards but report to the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), which holds substantial authority over curriculum, finance, and system-wide planning. Wisconsin's technical colleges operate under local district boards but are coordinated through the Wisconsin Technical College System Board, which ensures consistency in programs, policy, and funding. The contrast is even more pronounced with South Dakota and Missouri. South Dakota does not have a traditional community college system; instead, it operates four state-run technical colleges governed centrally by the Board of Technical Education. Missouri's community colleges have local boards but lack a formal state coordinating body.

In this regional context, Iowa's model is unique: it maintains strong local autonomy while ensuring statewide standards and accountability through oversight mechanisms rather than centralized control. This balance allows colleges to tailor programs and partnerships to their regions while contributing to Iowa's broader educational and economic goals.

Becoming a Community College Trustee in Iowa

Community college trustees in Iowa serve a vital role in shaping the policies and direction of their institutions. Trustees are elected to ensure the effective governance of the college, advocate for the institution's mission, and oversee financial and policy decisions. The process of becoming a trustee is governed by state laws and local election procedures.

Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible to serve as a trustee for an Iowa community college, a candidate must:

- Be a resident of the district they seek to represent.
- Be a qualified elector (a registered voter in Iowa).
- Not hold an incompatible office, such as an employee or contractor of the college, per Iowa Code.

Election Process

Community college trustees are elected by the public in their respective college districts during odd-numbered year elections, also known as school elections. The process includes the following key steps:

1. Filing Candidacy Papers
 - Prospective candidates must file a nomination petition with the appropriate number of valid signatures from eligible voters within their district.
 - The number of required signatures varies by district and is determined by state law.
 - Candidates must also submit an affidavit of candidacy, affirming their eligibility and intent to serve.
2. Submission Deadline
 - Nomination petitions and affidavits must be filed with the appropriate county auditor or election office within the designated timeframe, typically well in advance of the election date.
3. Election and Term Length
 - Trustees are elected to four-year staggered terms to ensure continuity in governance.
 - Elections take place in November of odd-numbered years, coinciding with school board elections.
 - The candidate receiving the highest number of votes in their district wins the seat.
4. Oath of Office
 - Newly elected trustees must take the oath of office before assuming their duties.
 - The oath is administered by the college board secretary or another authorized official.

Vacancies and Appointments

If a trustee position becomes vacant due to resignation, death, or other circumstance, the board may:

- Appoint a replacement to serve until the next regular election.
- Call for a special election if required by law or board policy.

Key Considerations for Potential Candidates

- Trustees must be committed to serving the college and the community, ensuring fiscal responsibility, and advocating for students.
- Trustees should understand their role as policymakers rather than administrators, as the college president and staff handle daily operations.
- Trustees must adhere to Iowa's open meetings laws and ethical guidelines regarding conflicts of interest.

This process ensures that Iowa's community colleges are governed by dedicated individuals who understand the needs of their institutions and communities.

Redistricting of Community College Trustee Districts in Iowa

Redistricting is the process of redrawing the boundaries of trustee districts to ensure equitable representation in alignment with population changes. In Iowa, community college trustee districts undergo redistricting every decade following the release of the federal decennial census data. This practice ensures that each trustee represents a district with a substantially equal population, maintaining the principle of "one person, one vote."

Legal Framework

The redistricting process for Iowa's community college trustee districts is governed by the Iowa Code §260C.13; §260C.5; and §260C.11.

Community College District Responsibilities

After each federal decennial census, the board of the merged area shall redraw boundary lines of director districts in the merged area to comply with current laws. The board of the merged area may change the number of directors on the board and shall make corresponding changes in the boundaries of director districts. Changes shall be completed not later than August 1 of the year of the regular school election. Additionally, the director of the Iowa Department of Education may authorize the board of directors of the merged area to levy additional taxes upon the property within the merged area, or any part of the merged area, and distribute the taxes so that all parts of the merged area are paying their share toward the support of the college.

Mapping

The SOS purchased the ESRI Redistricting Solution and is providing it at no cost to counties, cities, schools, and community colleges. If your college chooses to use it:

- Your college will be set up as a separate group.
- The Point of Contact (POC) you provide will receive an initial email from redistricting@esri.com with their username and password.
- Users will access this Solution at <https://redistricting.iowa.gov/redistricting/>.
- ESRI training materials are available on the SOS website at <https://sos.iowa.gov/elections/redistrictandrepincinct.html>.

Census Data

If you are using the Redistricting Solution provided by SOS, you do not need to worry about loading census block data. Census block data already has been loaded into the Solution.

If you are using another mapping solution and need to load census block data, the TIGER files can be obtained at www.census.gov.

Resources

The following websites have information that will be useful in this process:

- [U.S. Census Bureau](http://www.census.gov)
- [State Data Center of Iowa](http://www.idwr.state.iowa.us)
- [Legislative Services Agency](http://www.legis.iowa.gov)

Timeline for 2030 Redistricting

Date	Event	Code Cite
April 1, 2031	Congressional and Legislative Redistricting Plan Delivered	42.3(1)(a)
May 15, 2031	Temporary County Redistricting Commission Established	331.210A(1)(a)
September 1, 2031	City Precinct Boundary Changes Completed Deadline for General Assembly to Pass Congressional and Legislative Boundaries	49.7(2)(a), Iowa Constitution Article III Sec. 35
October 15, 2031	County Precinct and Supervisor District Boundary Changes Completed	49.7(2)(b)
January 15, 2032	City and County Precinct Boundaries Effective	49.7(5)
October 9, 2032	Precinct Boundary Publication Deadline	49.11(2)
November 15, 2032	Adoption of School Director District Plans Begins	275.23A(2)
May 15, 2033	Adoption Deadline for School Director District Plans	275.23A(2)
July 1, 2033	School Director District Boundaries Effective	275.23A(5)
August 1, 2033	Community College Director District Boundary Changes Completed	260C.13(1)

Drawing Community College District Boundaries

Community College Director District Requirements

All director districts in community college districts must meet the following standards:

- All boundaries shall follow precinct boundaries or school director district boundaries unless a merged area director district boundary follows the boundary of a school district which divides one or more election precincts.
- All districts shall be as nearly equal as practicable to the ideal population for the districts as determined by dividing the number of districts to be established into the population of the merged area.
- All districts shall be composed of contiguous territory as compact as practicable.
- A city shall not be divided into two or more director districts unless the population of that portion of the city within the merged area is greater than the ideal size of a director district. Cities shall be divided into the smallest number of director districts possible.
- No at-large directors. A board of directors is composed of one member elected from each director district in the area by the electors of the respective district.

The following items cannot be taken into consideration when drawing district boundaries:

- Addresses of incumbent officeholders
- Political affiliations of registered voters
- Previous election results
- Demographic information other than population head counts

Adoption by the Board

The board must define the director district boundaries and adopt the changes no later than August 1.

Final Plan Submission

Submission Deadline

Finalized district boundary plans must be submitted to the county commissioner of elections no later than August 1.

County Commissioner of Elections

As soon as possible after adoption of the boundary changes, the plans must be submitted by the merged area to the county commissioner of elections in all counties included in whole or in part in the merged area.

Important Note: The Secretary of State is not designated to receive submissions.

Director Districts After Approval

Any director district boundary changes made will take effect August 1. If the community college district lies in more than one county, send copies to the county commissioner in each county that is included in the merged area.

If more than one incumbent director resides in a district redrawn during reprecincting, their terms of office expire after the next regular school election. The seats will need to appear on the ballot at the next regular school election in November.

Important Note: If the seat was going to be on the ballot anyway, the length of term will be for four years. If the seat was not up for election his year, the length of term will be for the remainder of that term.

Vacancies on Community College Trustee Boards

Laws Related to Community College Trustee Board Vacancies

Iowa Code sections 69.12, 277.29, and 260C.11 address vacancies on community college boards of directors.

Filling Vacancies

The vacancy must be filled by appointment of the remaining members of the board until the next pending election. There is no provision allowing residents of the district to petition for a special election to fill the vacancy.

Deadline

A replacement must be appointed at the next regular meeting of the board.

Extra or Special Publication Requirements

There are no specific publication requirements related to filling vacancies on community college boards of trustees.

Key Iowa Code Provisions Impacting Community College Trustees

Community college trustees in Iowa operate within a framework by state law, primarily outlined in Iowa Code Chapter 260C. This chapter delineates the responsibilities, powers, and governance structures pertinent to community colleges and their boards. Below are some of the critical provisions affecting trustees:

Iowa Code 260C.14 – Authority of Directors

The board of directors of each community college is granted specific powers and responsibilities under [Iowa Code 260C.14](#), which include:

1. Determining Curriculum – Trustees are responsible for approving the curriculum offered at the college, subject to state approval, ensuring programs aligns with workforce needs and higher education standards.
2. Setting Tuition Rates – The board establishes tuition rates for instruction, balancing affordability for students with financial sustainability for the institution.
3. Contracting and Facilities Management – Trustees have the authority to enter contracts, maintain and protect college property, and ensure efficient operations.
4. Policy Development and Governance – The board establishes policies and rules governing the administration, faculty, staff, and students at the college, ensuring compliance with state laws and regulations.

5. Setting the Salary of the College President/Chancellor – Trustees determine the salary of the institution’s chief executive, considering regional salary trends and enrollment figures.
6. Campus Security and Traffic Regulation – The board enforces rules related to policing, traffic control, and parking on college property to ensure safety and efficiency.
7. Use of School Credit Cards – Trustees are authorized to issue school credit cards to employees for work-related expenditures.
8. Alternative Retirement Benefit Systems – The board provides eligible employees with access to alternative retirement benefit systems beyond traditional public pension programs.
9. Data Reporting and Compliance – Trustees ensure the college submits required data annually, by October 1, to the Department of Education through the management information system.

Governance and Financial Oversight

- Budget Approval and Financial Management – Trustees oversee the financial health of the institution by approving budgets, setting tax levies when applicable, and ensuring compliance with state financial reporting requirements.
- Levying Taxes – Boards may levy taxes for operational costs, equipment replacement, and program sharing, subject to voter approval and statutory limits.

Academic and Student Support Responsibilities

- Accreditation Compliance – Trustees ensure that the institution meets accreditation standards set by the State Board of Education and regional accrediting bodies.
- Faculty and Staff Development – The board is responsible for supporting initiatives that maintain high instructional quality, including implementing a Quality Faculty Plan.
- Student Success and Support Services – Trustees play a role in policy decisions that impact student retention, affordability, and overall success.

Legal and Ethical Responsibilities

- Compliance with Open Meetings and Public Records Laws – Trustees must adhere to Iowa’s transparency laws, ensuring public access to meetings and institutional records.
- Conflict of Interest Policies – Board members must avoid conflicts of interest and uphold ethical standards in their decision-making.

By adhering to these statutory responsibilities, trustees ensure the effective governance and long-term sustainability of Iowa’s community colleges. Their oversight and leadership contribute to the success of students, faculty, and the broader community, reinforcing the essential role of community colleges in Iowa’s educational and workforce landscape.

Open Records and Meetings

Transparency and accountability are fundamental principles governing the operations of community college trustees in Iowa. The state’s Open Meetings Law (Iowa Code Chapter 21) and Public Records Law (Iowa Code Chapter 22) establish the legal framework ensuring that the activities and records of governmental bodies, including community college boards, are accessible to the public.

Open Meetings Law

The Open Meetings Law mandates that meetings of governmental bodies be conducted openly, allowing public observation and participation. Key provisions include:

- **Definition of a Meeting:** A “meeting” encompasses any gathering, whether in person or via electronic means, of a majority of a governmental body where deliberation or action on policy-making duties occurs. Social or ministerial gatherings without policy discussion are excluded.
- **Notice Requirements:** Public notice of meetings must be provided at least 24 hours in advance, detailing the time, date, place, and a tentative agenda. Notices should be posted prominently and supplied to news media upon request. In circumstances where 24-hour notice is impractical, as much notice as possible must be given, and the reasons for the shortened notice must be documented in the meeting minutes.
- **Accessibility:** Meetings must be held at locations and times convenient and accessible to the public. Special accommodations should be made for individuals with disabilities to facilitate their attendance.
- **Minutes and Recordings:** Accurate minutes must be kept, recording the date, time, place, members present, and actions taken, including individual votes. These minutes are public records and must be made available for public inspection.
- **Closed Sessions:** While the presumption is for openness, certain topics may warrant closed sessions, such as discussions on personnel matters, litigation, or real estate transactions. Entering a closed session requires a public vote citing the specific legal exemption, and discussions must be limited to the stated purpose. Final actions must be taken in open session.
- **Electronic Meetings:** When members participate electronically, the public must have access to the conversation “to the extent reasonably possible.” This may involve providing a speakerphone or online streaming, ensuring transparency even when physical attendance is not feasible. Recent amendments require governmental bodies to offer electronic meeting options for members, such as hybrid or virtual meetings. However, the law does not mandate that the public be provided the same electronic access, only that public access to the conversation is ensured.

Public Records Law

The [Public Records Law](#) ensures that records of governmental bodies are open for public examination, promoting transparency in public affairs. Key aspects include:

- **Definition of Public Records:** Public records encompass all documents, regardless of form, “of or belonging to” a governmental body. This includes written documents, electronic files, emails, and other media.
- **Right to Access:** Every person has the right to examine and copy public records during customary office hours. Requests can be made in person, in writing, by telephone, or electronically. The purpose of the request need not be stated.
- **Response Time:** Custodians of records must respond promptly to requests. While some delays are permissible for good cause, they should not exceed 20 calendar days and ordinarily should not exceed 10 business days.

- **Fees:** Governmental bodies may charge fees covering the actual costs of retrieving and copying records. Fees must be reasonable and communicated to the requester in advance.
- **Confidential Records:** Certain records are exempt from public disclosure, including personal information on students, medical records, trade secrets, and records of ongoing investigations. Trustees must be aware of these exemptions to balance transparency with privacy and security concerns.

Adherence to these laws is not only a legal obligation but also a commitment to fostering trust and accountability within the community. Trustees should familiarize themselves with the specific provisions and seek guidance when uncertainties arise to ensure compliance and uphold the public's confidence in their governance.

Advocacy Process and Development of Legislative Priorities

Advocacy is a key responsibility of community college trustees, ensuring that state policymakers understand and support the mission, priorities, and funding needs of Iowa's community colleges. Trustees play a crucial role in supporting the organization's structured advocacy process, which is designed to align legislative priorities with the collective needs of all 15 community colleges in Iowa.

This section outlines how statewide legislative priorities are developed and how trustees can effectively engage in advocacy efforts.

How Statewide Legislative Priorities Are Developed

The legislative priorities for Iowa's community colleges are developed through a collaborative, data-informed process that ensures alignment with institutional needs and broader state workforce and economic development goals. The process follows these steps:

1. **Stakeholder Engagement** – Community Colleges for Iowa, in coordination with the community college Presidents and Board of Directors, gathers input on emerging challenges, policy concerns, and funding needs. This input comes from:
 - a. College leadership (presidents, administrators, faculty)
 - b. Business and industry partners who rely on community colleges for workforce training
2. **Priority Refinement** – Community Colleges for Iowa's legislative committee refines this input into a focused set of policy and funding priorities that address the most pressing needs of all 15 colleges. Factors include:
 - a. Alignment with state workforce and economic development initiatives
 - b. Feasibility of legislative action based on political and budgetary considerations
 - c. Potential impact on student success, affordability, and institutional sustainability
3. **Board Approval and Strategic Planning** – Once finalized, the legislative priorities are formally adopted by the Board of Directors, ensuring that all trustees are aligned in their advocacy efforts.
4. **Statewide Trustee Approval** – Every year at the Trustee Conference, an annual meeting is held to recap last year's legislative successes and downfalls and changes made to the statewide association. There is also a presentation regarding next year's legislative priorities which are then approved by all statewide trustees before we can begin disseminating and discussing with legislators.
5. **Legislative Engagement and Advocacy Strategy** – Community Colleges for Iowa and other stakeholders, including the statewide trustees, engage in direct advocacy through meetings with legislators, participation in public hearings, and ongoing communications to advance legislative priorities.

Statewide trustees are not expected to develop their own legislative agendas but are critical partners in advancing the unified priorities set through this process.

How Trustees Can Get Involved in Advocacy

Trustees have multiple opportunities to engage in advocacy, both collectively through Community Colleges for Iowa, and individually in their districts. The following programs and events provide structured ways for trustees to participate.

Quorum: Legislative Advocacy Platform

Quorum is an online advocacy tool that allows trustees to stay informed and engage directly with legislators. Trustees can use Quorum to:

- Send messages to lawmakers via email
- Receive action alerts when immediate advocacy is needed
- Get up-to-the-minute information on state legislation
- Track interactions with legislators

Trustees are encouraged to log into Quorum regularly and use it as a resource for legislative engagement.

Trustee Conference and Legislative Advocacy Training

The Trustee Conference is an annual event designed to equip trustees with the knowledge and skills needed for effective leadership and advocacy. The conference includes:

- Annual Meeting – During the annual meeting, there will be a legislative update, statewide organization update, and the approval of next year’s legislative priorities.
- Sessions – Many of the sessions will focus on the legality of a trustee and what is expected from them in their day-to-day role in collaboration with the Community College CEO. However, there is also usually at least one session that focuses on best practices for engaging with lawmakers, crafting effective messages, and mobilizing stakeholders.
- Networking with Peers – Opportunities to collaborate with other trustees and share advocacy strategies.

Community College Day on the Hill

Each year, Community Colleges for Iowa organizes a Day on the Hill, a high-profile advocacy event at the Iowa State Capitol. Trustees, students, and administrators come together to:

- Meet one-on-one with legislators to discuss community college priorities
- Attend key legislative hearings and committee meetings
- Participate in coordinated advocacy efforts, demonstrating broad support for community colleges

Trustees are encouraged to support their college in determining programs to showcase and guests to bring as well as attend and actively participate in this event to help strengthen community college advocacy efforts.

Iowans for a Skilled Workforce (ISW)

Iowans for a Skilled Workforce is a bipartisan political action committee. ISW was created by supporters of Iowa's community colleges – the workforce trainers of Iowa. These supporters believe that each community college plays a vital role in growing Iowa's economy by providing training to the next generation of Iowa's skilled workers. Iowa's policymakers come from all walks of life and are not expected to be experts on every issue. With the funds provided to it, ISW dedicates itself to educating our legislators and public officials. The funds you contribute help them make educated decisions. The Iowans for a Skilled Workforce Board of Directors is a seven-member board comprised of Iowa Association of Community College Trustees and Iowa Association of Community College Presidents.

Why Invest in Iowans for a Skilled Workforce?

ISW is a way to collect individual contributions and combine them to support candidates for public office. Each year Iowa's legislators consider the funding level and types of workforce training programs that will be available to Iowans. ISW allows contributors, who support sustained funding of Iowa's workforce training programs, to have a greater voice in the political process. The greater the number of supporters of Iowa's workforce training programs and community colleges, the stronger their voice with Iowa's elected officials. ISW is about your personal commitment to Iowa's workforce training programs and its workers. The ISW Board is dedicated to bipartisan support of campaigns and political parties. The ISW administration and operations expenses are covered by the Iowa Association of Community College Trustees. All contributions made to ISW are distributed to candidates for public office.

Additional Ways to Get Involved

Beyond these key initiatives, trustees can engage in advocacy by:

- Building Relationships with Legislators – Regularly meeting with elected officials to discuss community college issues.
- Engaging in Local Outreach – Attending chamber of commerce meetings, economic development forums, and community events to promote community college interests.
- Writing Letters or Op-Eds – Publishing articles in local newspapers or online platforms to raise awareness about legislative priorities.
- Encouraging Grassroots Advocacy – Mobilizing students, faculty, and business leaders to join advocacy efforts.

By actively participating in these opportunities, trustees strengthen their role as advocates and help shape policies that benefit Iowa's community colleges.

Conclusion: The Trustee's Role in Advocacy

Advocacy is a continuous, collaborative effort that requires engagement from trustees at multiple levels. By participating in Quorum, the Trustee Conference, and Community College Day on the Hill, trustees ensure that Iowa's community colleges remain a legislative priority. The structured advocacy process, guided by Community Colleges for Iowa and community college leaders, provides a clear and effective framework for

advancing policies that support student success, institutional sustainability, and workforce development in Iowa.

Advocacy Milestones and Major Accomplishments

Over the years, Iowa's community colleges have achieved significant advocacy victories that have strengthened the institutions, expanded opportunities for students, and reinforced the workforce pipeline across the state. Through persistent engagement with legislators, strategic partnerships, and unified advocacy efforts, trustees have played a critical role in advancing key policy and funding priorities. Below are some of the most notable accomplishments:

Securing Historic Investments in Community College Funding

One of the most impactful advocacy achievements has been securing increased state funding to support community colleges. Through coordinated efforts, including testimony before legislative committees and direct engagement with lawmakers, community colleges have successfully advocated for:

- Sustained growth in general aid appropriations to enhance academic programs, student services, and institutional operations.
- Increased funding for workforce training initiatives that help students gain industry-recognized credentials in high-demand fields.
- Support for Career and Technical Education programs to strengthen Iowa's skilled workforce and meet employer needs.

Passage of the Future Ready Iowa Act

Advocacy efforts played a pivotal role in shaping and passing the Future Ready Iowa Act, which expanded access to postsecondary education and workforce training. Key elements of the act include:

- The Last-Dollar Scholarship, which covers tuition gaps for students pursuing high-demand career paths at community colleges.
- Expanded support for work-based learning programs, allowing students to gain hands-on experience and develop critical job skills.
- Increased collaboration between community colleges, employers, and state agencies to align education with workforce needs.

This legislation has provided thousands of Iowans with new educational and career opportunities while strengthening the state's talent pipeline.

Expanding Access to Dual Enrollment Opportunities

Through persistent advocacy, Iowa's community colleges have successfully expanded concurrent enrollment and dual credit programs, allowing high school students to earn college credit while still in high school. These efforts have led to:

- Greater affordability and accessibility for students pursuing higher education.
- Increased partnerships with K-12 schools to create seamless pathways from high school to college and career.

- Recognition of Iowa as a national leader in dual enrollment, with one of the highest participation rates in the country.

Strengthening Workforce Training and Economic Development Programs

Advocacy efforts have led to the expansion and continued funding of workforce training programs, such as:

- The 260E Job Training Program, which supports business growth by providing funding for employee training at community colleges.
- The GAP Tuition Assistance Program, which helps nontraditional students access career training in high-demand fields.
- The Employer Innovation Fund, which promotes innovative solutions for workforce development by equipping workers with the skills needed in a rapidly evolving job market.

These programs have directly contributed to Iowa's economic development by equipping workers with the skills needed in a rapidly evolving job market.

Enhancing the Role of Community Colleges in State Policy

Through sustained advocacy, community colleges have gained greater recognition in state policy discussion. Notable achievements include:

- Representation on key state boards and task forces, ensuring that community college perspectives are included in education and workforce policy decisions.
- Advocacy for equitable funding and policy considerations, reinforcing the value of community colleges as essential higher education institutions.
- Improved data collection and reporting systems to highlight the success and impact of community colleges in Iowa.

Looking Ahead

These milestones reflect the power of strategic, unified advocacy in shaping public policy and securing resources for Iowa's community colleges. While these accomplishments have strengthened the system, ongoing advocacy remains essential to address emerging challenges, expand access, and further elevate the role of community colleges in Iowa's education and workforce landscape.

By continuing to engage with policymakers, build partnerships, and advocate for student success, trustees will play a vital role in shaping the next chapter of community college advocacy in Iowa.

The Future of Advocacy for Iowa's Community Colleges

As Iowa's community colleges continue to grow and serve a diverse student population, the advocacy landscape will evolve in response to changing educational needs, workforce demands, and legislative priorities. Trustees will play a critical role in ensuring that community colleges remain at the forefront of policy discussions, securing the necessary resources and support to expand access and opportunity for students.

Strengthening Digital and Grassroots Advocacy

Technology has transformed the way advocacy is conducted, making it more immediate, data-driven, and interactive. Moving forward, advocacy efforts will:

- Expand digital engagement through platforms like Quorum, allowing trustees and stakeholders to communicate with legislators in real time.
- Leverage social media and storytelling to highlight the impact of community colleges and generate public support.
- Increase grassroots mobilization, engaging students, alumni, and business leaders to advocate for community college priorities.

Advocating for Stable and Sustainable Funding

Securing consistent state and federal funding will remain a top priority. Future advocacy efforts will focus on:

- Ensuring long-term investment in community college funding, including operational budgets, workforce training, and financial aid programs.
- Advocating for innovating funding models that provide sustainable resources while addressing enrollment shifts and economic changes.
- Strengthening partnerships with private sector leaders, leveraging industry support for expanded program offerings and career pathways.

Expanding Legislative and Policy Influence

Community colleges are increasingly recognized as essential to Iowa's economic and workforce development. To enhance policy influence, advocacy efforts will:

- Strengthen relationships with legislators and key stakeholders, ensuring that community colleges are included in broader education and workforce policy discussions.
- Expand participation in coalitions and alliances, collaborating with industry groups, trade organizations, and education partners to advance shared priorities.
- Advocate for policies that support equity, affordability, and workforce readiness, ensuring that community colleges remain accessible and responsive to changing demographics.

Emphasizing Workforce Alignment and Innovation

The future of community college advocacy will be shaped by workforce trends, including automation, digital transformation, and shifting industry needs. Trustees and advocates will:

- Support legislation that strengthens career and technical education pathways, providing students with the skills needed for high-demand jobs.
- Advance work-based learning initiatives, including apprenticeships and employer partnerships that integrate real-world experience with classroom learning.
- Advocate for continued flexibility in program offerings, including online education, short-term certificates, and competency-based learning models.

Enhancing Trustee Engagement in Advocacy

As the advocacy landscape evolves, trustees will play an even more active role in shaping policy discussions. Future efforts will focus on:

- Providing ongoing training and resources to help trustees become more effective advocates.
- Encouraging trustees to engage directly with legislators, both at the Capitol and in their home districts.
- Creating opportunities for trustees to share success stories, demonstrating the impact of community colleges on students and communities.

Conclusion: Building a Stronger Future Through Advocacy

The future of advocacy for Iowa's community colleges is one of continued growth, collaboration, and impact. By embracing new strategies, strengthening partnerships, and actively engaging in policy discussions, trustees will ensure that community colleges remain a vital force in education, workforce development, and economic growth. Through consistent, proactive advocacy, the organization will continue to shape policies that expand access, enhance student success, and secure the resources needed to meet the evolving needs of Iowa's learners and employers.

Board Management

Policy: Establishing a Strong Framework

Effective governance by elected trustees is crucial for the success of Iowa's community colleges. Trustees oversee the institution's mission, strategic direction, and financial health, ensuring that the college meets the educational needs of the community. Boards set the direction by establishing policies that align with the college's mission and goals, providing a framework for decision-making, and ensuring consistency in operations. Policies should be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changes in laws, educational standards, and community needs, thereby guiding the administration and upholding accountability.

Key Board Responsibilities in Policy:

- Consider evidence-based policy changes that impact student success.
- Establish clear policies that support institutional effectiveness and student outcomes.
- Uphold ethical governance, confidentiality, and accountability.

Planning: Setting Priorities for Student and Institutional Success

Boards play a critical role in shaping the college's future through strategic planning. Their influence extends through the priorities they establish, the resources they allocate, and the ways they communicate those priorities. By approving a strategic plan with student success at its core, setting clear institutional goals, and ensuring a culture where the CEO can engage in courageous conversations, trustees create the conditions for long-term achievement.

Key Board Responsibilities in Planning:

- Approve a strategic plan that prioritizes student success and equitable access.
- Ensure alignment of budget and resources with student success initiatives.
- Expect a clear and limited set of priorities to drive institutional transformation.
- Foster partnerships with K-12, universities, and workforce stakeholders.

Monitoring: Ensuring Accountability and Continuous Improvement

Boards must actively monitor institutional performance to ensure the college meets its goals. This includes regularly reviewing student success metrics, monitoring progress through scorecards and dashboards, and evaluating CEO performance. Trustees should ask tough questions about progress, expect a relentless focus on student success, and provide support for the CEO to lead transformational change.

Key Board Responsibilities in Monitoring:

- Support a culture of inquiry, evidence, and accountability.
- Regularly review and discuss key performance indicators.
- Monitor progress on student success, ensuring access for all.
- Uphold ethical board practices and avoid governance pitfalls such as micromanagement, conflicts of interest, and personal agendas.

By effectively governing through policy, planning, and monitoring, Iowa's community college trustees foster a culture of continuous improvement that benefits students, communities, and the state's workforce.

Diving Deeper

Guiding Questions to Set a Strategic Direction

- Do we have a clear vision for how our college will serve Iowa's students, workforce, and communities in the coming years?
- Have we identified the biggest challenges and opportunities impacting student success and workforce alignment in our region?
- Are we regularly reviewing key student success and institutional performance metrics to ensure accountability and progress?
- Do we actively support the state's initiatives related to community college student success?
- Have we established the right policies, partnerships, and resource strategies to sustain high-quality, accessible education across Iowa?

Guiding Questions to Create a Culture for Change

- Do we stay informed on transformative trends in community colleges (e.g., guided pathways, developmental education reform) to ensure our policies support student success?
- Are we allocating and realigning resources strategically to support our top student success priorities?
- Do we actively foster partnerships with K-12, universities, and workforce leaders to expand student pathways and economic mobility?
- Are we prepared to support and advocate for evidence-based student success initiatives while maintaining proper governance boundaries?
- Do we empower our CEO to lead bold, student-centered change by providing strategic oversight and support?

Guiding Questions to Monitor What Matters

- Are we fostering a culture of inquiry, evidence-based decision-making, and accountability to drive student success?
- Have we identified and adopted a focused set of key performance indicators (KPIs) that allow us to monitor what matters most?
- Do we regularly review and understand the changing demographics, needs, and challenges of our incoming students?
- Are we receiving and discussing reports on student progression, retention, and completion in a way that informs policy and resource allocation?
- Do we periodically review leading indicators of student success, with a focus on ensuring access for all students?

Board-CEO Relationship

The relationship between the Board of Trustees and the CEO (President) is fundamental to the success of a community college. Unlike universities or private institutions, community colleges serve a diverse student population with a direct connection to local workforce and economic development, requiring a governance structure that is both strategic and responsive. The board sets the vision, policies, and accountability measures, while the CEO leads the institution, implements board directives, and manages daily operations. This partnership thrives when both entities maintain clear role distinctions, foster mutual trust, and work collaboratively to advance student success and institutional effectiveness. By striking the right balance between oversight and support, boards and CEOs ensure that community colleges remain adaptable, student-centered, and aligned with the evolving needs of their communities. (The Board-CEO Relationship, ACCT)

Board v. CEO Responsibilities

In general, it's good to remember that:

- ✓ The Board sets direction → The CEO executes it.
- ✓ The Board approves policies → The CEO administers them.
- ✓ The Board monitors outcomes → The CEO delivers results.
- ✓ The Board provides oversight → The CEO leads operations.

The board and CEO partnership is crucial to the school's success, and thus student success. Here are some key functions where the Board and CEO roles are outlined. Keep in mind that each school has its own culture and way of doing things, these are best practice and hopefully will help you and your CEO be effective collaborators.

Mission and Policy Leadership

- ✓ The Board establishes the college's mission, vision, and values
→ The CEO implements board-approved policies across the institution
- ✓ The Board adopts policies that guide institutional decision-making
→ The CEO communicates and uphold the colleges' mission in daily operations
- ✓ The Board ensures compliance with state and federal regulations
→ The CEO ensures compliance with regulations through administrative processes

Strategic Planning & Goal Setting

- ✓ The Board approves the college's strategic plan and long-term goals
→ The CEO develops and executes action plans to achieve board-approved goals
- ✓ The Board ensures the plan aligns with student success and workforce needs
→ The CEO leads faculty, staff, and administrators in implementing strategic priorities.
- ✓ The Board sets measurable goals for institutional effectiveness

→ The CEO adjusts institutional strategies as needed and reports progress to the board

Financial Oversight and Budgeting

- ✓ The Board approves the college's budget and major financial decisions
 - The CEO prepares and administers the college budget in alignment with board priorities
- ✓ The Board ensures financial sustainability and fiscal responsibility
 - The CEO manages financial resources efficiently and ensures compliance with policies.
- ✓ The Board reviews audits and financial reports to uphold accountability
 - The CEO provides regular financial updates and recommendations to the board

CEO Selection, Support, and Evaluation

- ✓ The Board hires, evaluates, and, if necessary, replaces the CEO
 - The CEO leads the institution according to board expectations and strategic goals
- ✓ The Board establishes clear expectations and performance benchmarks for the CEO
 - The CEO communicates regularly with the board on progress, challenges, and needs
- ✓ The Board provides leadership support while maintaining appropriate
 - The CEO seeks board guidance and support while managing day-to-day operations

Accountability and Performance Monitoring

- ✓ The Board reviews institutional performance using dashboards, scorecards, and key metrics
 - The CEO collects and analyzes data to track student and institutional performance
- ✓ The Board monitors progress on student success, enrollment, and financial stability
 - The CEO reports on progress toward strategic goals and student success metrics
- ✓ The Board asks critical questions about institutional effectiveness and areas for improvement
 - The CEO adjusts programs and policies based on performance data and board feedback

Advocacy and Community Engagement

- ✓ The Board advocates for the college at the local, state, and federal levels
 - The CEO represents the college in official engagements with stakeholders and policymakers
- ✓ The Board builds strategic partnerships with businesses, government agencies, and K-12 schools
 - The CEO develops partnerships that support institutional goals and student success
- ✓ The Board serves as a representative of the college within the community
 - The CEO works with legislative bodies and agencies to secure funding and resources

Institutional Operations and Personnel Management

- ✓ The Board establishes policies that govern hiring, employee relations, and organizational structure
 - The CEO hires, manages, and evaluates faculty, staff, and administrators
- ✓ The Board Ensures ethical and transparent employment policies
 - The CEO oversees daily operations, academic programs, and student services
- ✓ The Board monitors institutional effectiveness but does not engage in daily operations
 - The CEO ensures policies are implemented effectively within the institution

Expectations and Evaluations

Evaluating the CEO is one of the most important duties of a community college Board of Trustees, ensuring strong leadership and institutional effectiveness. A successful evaluation process begins with the board clearly defining expectations for the CEO, including specific performance goals aligned with the college's mission and strategic plan. While informal feedback occurs naturally through regular board-CEO interactions, a structured, formal evaluation should take place annually to assess progress toward these expectations. The primary goals of this evaluation are to improve performance, clarify direction, reinforce recognition, and provide accountability. To be effective, the evaluation process and criteria should be mutually agreed upon by the board and CEO, ensuring alignment with institutional priorities and expectations.

Boards must also recognize the complex challenges CEOs face, including competing demands, resource constraints, and shifting institutional priorities. Progress toward long-term goals may take time, and performance evaluations should not be solely influenced by short-term perceptions or popularity. Instead, they should be data-driven and focused on measurable progress in areas such as student success, financial management, and institutional leadership. By setting clear performance benchmarks and accountability measures, the board ensures that the CEO has both the guidance and support necessary to lead effectively. A formal, written evaluation should be completed each year, serving as the basis for the board's review of the CEO's contract. This document should be securely maintained in the CEO's personnel file, accessible only to board members and the CEO, ensuring confidentiality and accountability (Boggs, 2006).

Example Evaluation Framework and Process

The purpose of the president’s evaluation is to:

- Assess performance relative to institutional goals.
- Support professional growth and development.
- Align leadership efforts with the college’s mission, vision, and strategic plan.
- Provide clear feedback and promote shared accountability.

Evaluation Principles

- Annual & Consistent: Conducted annually with mid-year check-ins if needed.
- Goal-Oriented: Tied directly to strategic priorities and agreed-upon annual goals.
- Multi-Faceted: Includes both quantitative results and qualitative input.
- Confidential but Collaborative: Results are shared between the board and president, with summary outcomes reported institutionally as appropriate.
- Improvement-Focused: Includes opportunities for growth, support, and leadership development.

Evaluation Timeline

Timeframe	Activity
July-August	President and board establish performance goals for the upcoming year, aligned with the strategic plan.
January	Mid-year check-in to review progress and adjust goals if necessary.
May-June	President completes self-assessment and submits supporting materials.
June	Trustees complete individual evaluations using the adopted instrument.
Late June	Board conducts collective review and meets with the president for final evaluation discussion (be careful to follow open meetings law).
July	Board finalizes summary and sets new goals. Results may be shared publicly as appropriate.

Evaluation Components

1. Strategic Leadership

- Progress on key institutional goals and initiatives
- Implementation of strategic plan priorities
- Innovation and responsiveness to community/industry needs

2. Student Success

- Enrollment, retention, completion rates
- Equity in access and outcomes
- Support for student services and learning environment

3. Institutional Effectiveness

- Budget management and fiscal health
- Accreditation and compliance

- Organizational culture and performance
4. External Relations & Advocacy
- Engagement with stakeholders (business, community, legislative)
 - Fundraising, partnerships, and public visibility
 - Leadership in statewide or national initiatives
5. Board Relations
- Communication and transparency with the board
 - Responsiveness to board direction
 - Support for effective governance practices

Evaluation Tools

- President's Self-Assessment: Narrative overview with evidence of progress.
- Trustee Evaluation Survey: Structured rubric with ratings and comments.
- 360 Input (Optional): Feedback from executive team, faculty leadership, or community partners.
- Dashboard/Performance Metrics: Institutional data aligned to strategic goals.

Post-Evaluation Follow-Up

- Written evaluation summary signed by board chair and president.
- Public board meeting acknowledgment (non-confidential elements).
- Goal-setting session for the upcoming year.
- Professional development plan (optional).

CEO Search Process and Onboarding

The search for a community college CEO is one of the most critical responsibilities of the Board of Trustees, as the institution's success depends on strong, visionary leadership. A well-structured search and selection process ensures that the board identifies a leader who aligns with the college's mission, strategic goals, and community needs. Beyond selecting the right candidate, an effective onboarding process is essential to set the CEO up for success, providing the necessary institutional knowledge, stakeholder introductions, and clarity on board expectations. A smooth transition fosters early alignment between the board and CEO, strengthens leadership stability, and ensures continuity in advancing student success and institutional priorities.

CEO Search Process

A structured, transparent CEO search process ensures that the Board of Trustees selects a leader who will guide the college forward, foster student success, and strengthen community impact. By carefully planning each step—from determining interim leadership to onboarding the new CEO—the board ensures a smooth leadership transition and long-term institutional stability. Searches generally take 12-18 months.

Step 1: Establish an Interim Leadership Plan (1-2 Months)

- Determine if an Interim CEO is Needed – If the outgoing CEO leaves before a successor is named, appointing an interim CEO ensures stability.
- Consider Internal vs. External Interim Candidates – An internal leader may provide continuity, while an external interim CEO may offer fresh perspectives.
- Set Clear Expectations – Define the interim CEO's role and authority, ensuring they maintain stability without making long-term commitments.

Step 2: Define Search Process & Governance (Estimated 1-2 Months)

- Decide on a Search Firm vs. Internal Search
 - *Hiring a Search Firm* – Provides expertise, expands candidate outreach, ensures confidentiality, and streamlines logistics.
 - *Handling the Search Internally* – The board manages the process, saving costs but requiring more trustee involvement.
- Form a Search Committee
 - Should include trustees and possibly key stakeholders (faculty, staff, community members).
 - Define roles and responsibilities to ensure a fair, transparent process.
- Set a Search Timeline
 - Define key milestones, such as candidate recruitment, interviews, and final selection.

Step 3: Define Leadership Criteria & Job Description (1 Month)

- Identify Institutional Priorities – What challenges and opportunities should the next CEO address?
- Develop a Leadership Profile – Identify the skills, experience, and qualities needed for success.
- Draft a Clear Job Description – Include minimum qualifications, key responsibilities, and expectations aligned with college needs.

Step 4: Recruit & Screen Candidates (3-4 Months)

- Conduct a National, Statewide, or Local Search – Advertise broadly to attract a diverse and highly qualified candidate pool.
- Ensure Confidentiality in Early Screening – Many candidates may not want their interest in the role public.
- Screen Applicants Based on Established Criteria – The search committee should use a consistent, structured evaluation process.

Step 5: Conduct Interviews & Finalize Selection (2-3 Months)

- Hold Initial Interviews – Identify top candidates through structured interviews, stakeholder meetings, and reference checks. (1 month)
- Facilitate Campus Visits – Finalists should visit the college to engage with trustees, faculty, staff, students, and community members. (1 month)
- Conduct Final Board Interviews – Trustees should assess leadership vision, decision-making approach, and alignment with college values. (1 month)
- Make the Final Selection & Negotiate a Contract – The board should formally vote to appoint the CEO and finalize contract details.

Step 6: Implement a Strong Onboarding Plan (3-6 Months Post-Hire)

- Clarify Expectations Early – Provide a written set of board expectations for leadership, student success, and institutional priorities.
- Facilitate Key Introductions – Help the CEO connect with faculty, staff, students, business partners, and local/state policymakers.
- Schedule Regular Check-Ins – The board should provide support, not micromanagement, ensuring the CEO is positioned for success.

CEO Onboarding

A well-structured onboarding process is essential for setting a new community college President/CEO up for success. Trustees play a critical role in ensuring a smooth transition by providing clear expectations, institutional insights, and strategic support from day one. Effective onboarding includes establishing a shared vision, introducing the CEO to key stakeholders, and ensuring alignment on board policies, governance expectations, and institutional priorities. Trustees should schedule regular check-ins during the first year to provide guidance and feedback while allowing the CEO the autonomy to lead. By fostering a collaborative, transparent, and supportive environment, the board helps ensure the CEO can focus on student success, institutional stability, and community impact.

First 30 Days: Foundational Orientation & Relationship Building

- Introduce the CEO to Key Stakeholders – Arrange meetings with trustees, faculty, staff, students, and key community leaders.
- Provide a Governance & Policy Overview – Review board policies, strategic plans, accreditation requirements, and financial reports.
- Review Iowa’s Community College Governance Structure – Ensure the CEO understands the role of the Iowa Department of Education’s Division of Community Colleges, the Community Colleges for Iowa organization, and other state regulatory bodies.
- Familiarize with College History & Culture – Conduct campus tours and share institutional history, traditions, and major initiatives.
- Clarify Board Expectations & Priorities – Hold a one-on-one meeting between the board chair and CEO to discuss leadership expectations.
- Engage with Community Partners – Introduce the CEO to business leaders, K-12 partners, elected officials, and workforce organizations.
- Schedule Initial Listening Sessions – Encourage the CEO to meet with faculty, staff, and students to understand institutional strengths and challenges.

First 3-6 Months: Deeper Engagement & Strategic Alignment

- Establish a Strong Leadership Presence – Encourage the CEO to be visible on campus and in the community.
- Conduct a Financial & Enrollment Review – Work with the CFO and board to review budget priorities, funding streams, and enrollment trends.
- Develop a Communications Strategy – Assist the CEO in shaping messaging for internal and external audiences.
- Assess & Align with Institutional Goals – Ensure the CEO has a deep understanding of student success initiatives, workforce development programs, and accreditation requirements.
- Encourage a Leadership Retreat – Facilitate a board retreat with the CEO to refine strategic direction and governance processes.
- Provide Mentorship & Peer Support – Encourage participation in statewide and national CEO mentoring networks.

First Year: Long-Term Integration & Leadership Development

- Encourage Professional Development – Support the CEO in attending ACCT, AACC, and Iowa-specific leadership programs.
- Conduct a Six-Month Progress Review – Board members should provide feedback and ensure alignment with strategic priorities.
- Strengthen External Partnerships – Facilitate connections with state policymakers, local employers, and philanthropic partners.
- Support Institutional Change Management – Work collaboratively to navigate challenges and implement long-term initiatives.
- Schedule an Annual Performance Review – Conduct a formal evaluation to assess progress and refine goals for the next year.

Ongoing Board Support

- Maintain Open & Regular Communication – Ensure ongoing check-ins between the board chair and CEO.
- Provide Strategic Guidance, Not Micromanagement – Trust the CEO’s leadership while focusing on oversight and policy-setting.
- Advocate for the CEO’s Success – Support them in legislative advocacy, community relations, and institutional transformation.
- Invest in Their Development – Ensure that the CEO has the funds and support to travel to conferences and participate in peer learning and growth opportunities throughout their tenure.

References

- American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) & Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT). (2018). Executive Leadership Transitioning at Community Colleges. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED585607.pdf>
- Ashford, E. (2018, May 1). Successful onboarding requires honesty, transparency. *Community College Daily*. Retrieved from <https://www.ccdaily.com/2018/05/successful-onboarding-requires-honesty-transparency/>
- Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT). (n.d.). Governance Services. Retrieved from <https://www.acct.org/governance-services>
- Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT). (n.d.). The Board-CEO Relationship. Retrieved from <https://www.acct.org/trustee-education/board-ceo-relationship>
- Boggs, G.R. (2006). Handbook on CEO–Board Relations and Responsibilities. American Association of Community Colleges. ISBN: 9780871173706.
- Community College Association of Texas Trustees. (n.d.). *Trustee Handbook*. Texas Association of Community Colleges.
- Friedel, J.N., Killacky, J., Miller, E., & Katsinas, S. (2014). Fifty State Systems of Community Colleges: Mission, Governance, Funding, and Accountability.
- Friedel, J.N., Salinas, C., & Thornton, Z.M. (2015). Iowa’s Community Colleges: A Collective History of Fifty Years of Accomplishment
- King, J.E. (Ed.). (2020). *Trusteeship in Community Colleges: A Guide for Effective Governance* (2nd ed.). Association of Community College Trustees.
- McClenney, K., & McClenney, B. (2010). Board leadership for student success: Engaging trustees to improve student success and institutional effectiveness. Association of Community College Trustees.
- Polonio, N.A. (n.d.). CEO Search Process. Association of Community College Trustees. Retrieved from <https://www.ohlone.edu/sites/default/files/documents/imported/02b-acctsearchpresentation.pdf>
- Smith, D.A. & Thornton, Z.M. (2022). Best Practices for Orienting New Community College Trustees. Retrieved from https://www.ccforiowa.org/media/cms/Best_Practices_for_Orienting_New_Co_8831AF952409B.pdf
- Varner, J. (2006). Forty Years of Growth and Achievement: A History of Iowa’s Community Colleges.