



Assessing Board Effectiveness

Resource Guide



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Introduction

The Board of Trustees is the College's strategic leader. According to New York State Education Law, § 6306, *The board of trustees of each community college shall adopt curricula, subject to the approval of the state university trustees, prepare a budget and, with the exception of community college regional boards of trustees, submit such budget for approval by the local legislative body or board, or other appropriate governing agency and, subject to the general supervision of the state university trustees, discharge such other duties as may be appropriate or necessary for the effective operation of the college.*

Additionally, New York State Education Law, § 6306, specifies that: *The board of trustees shall have the care, custody, control and management of the lands, grounds, buildings, facilities and equipment used for the purposes of such college and of all other property belonging to such college and used for carrying out its purposes, and it shall have power to protect, preserve and improve the same.*

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Because the role as strategic leaders is crucial, the board of trustees must regularly evaluate their work and strategies to ensure they fulfill their duties and drive the college towards achieving its mission. While steadfast commitment to stewarding the College is important, the board of trustees must also evaluate how its work is moving the institution towards meeting its mission. This is accomplished by assessing the board of trustees' effectiveness and participating in trustee education and development, to provide the skills necessary to govern well.

To evaluate its effectiveness, the board of trustees needs ongoing information on how it is doing with regard to specific roles and responsibilities—information that simply cannot be obtained through any political process. To this end, one commonly used method of assessing the board of trustees' effectiveness is to engage in regular board self-evaluation, to assess how the board is upholding commonly accepted standards of good governance and its progress towards helping the institution meet its strategic goals while upholding its mission and institutional priorities. Assessing board effectiveness involves looking at the board of trustees as a unit. While individual trustee behavior contributes to effective board functioning, a board self-evaluation

looks at how individuals collectively work together to govern the college and steward its resources. It focuses on board policies and practices related to the role of the board in representing the community, setting policy direction, working with the president, and monitoring institutional effectiveness.

Relationship to the President

Given the unique nature of the relationship between the board and president, evaluations of the board of trustees' effectiveness and the evaluation of the president are intertwined. When the board evaluates itself, it is evaluating, in part, how well the president supports the board. When the board evaluates the president, it is evaluating the direction and support the board provides for that person. The president contributes to the board's evaluation and evaluates his or her support and leadership to the board. Additionally, as the board conducts the president's

evaluation it is also looking at its own behavior in fostering the president's effectiveness and ability to serve as the college's chief administrator.

Some boards schedule the evaluation of the president and board self-evaluation discussions in conjunction with each other to capitalize on the link between them. Others do them at different times. One of the outcomes of both evaluations are priorities and tasks for the coming year, and no matter how the evaluation sessions are linked, the board and president's priorities must be aligned.

Board Responsibilities

- Adopt a board self-evaluation policy and process
- Regularly conduct a board self-evaluation
- Discuss the results of the evaluation to identify strengths and areas for improvement
- Use the results to enhance board effectiveness and set annual board goals

Board Effectiveness and the Accreditation Process

Evaluating the Board of Trustees' effectiveness is part of a broader move towards embedding administrative assessment into the fabric of Nassau Community College. While administrative assessment is both required and necessary to collect data to measure the key performance indicators (KPIs) outlined in the 2023-2028 Strategic Plan, the College's primary impetus for conducting administrative assessment is for the continual improvement of the departments at the forefront of creating and fostering meaningful experiences for our students. Nassau Community College utilizes the Administrative, Educational and Student Support (AES) framework for administrative assessment (see Figure 1 for AES assessment cycle).¹

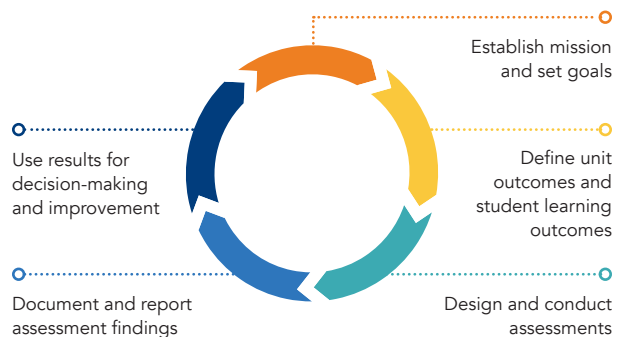
The standards of our accreditors—Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)—provide a guide for the AES assessment activities to be undertaken and has indicated in its standards that institutional assessment and periodic evaluation are integral to the institutional planning process and is central to demonstrating institutional effectiveness. Specifically, Standard VI (Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement) of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education's Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation (2023) directly pertains to AES assessment. Standard VI reads:

The institution's planning processes, resources, and structures are aligned with each other and are sufficient to fulfill its mission and goals, to continuously assess and improve its programs and services, and to respond effectively to opportunities and challenges.

To achieve this standard, institutions must clearly demonstrate thirteen (13) attributes, which include:

- Institutional and unit goals that are clearly stated, assessed appropriately, linked to mission and goal achievement, reflect conclusions drawn from assessment results, and used for planning and resource allocation;
- Clearly documented and communicated planning and improvement processes that provide for inclusive constituent participation;
- Planning that integrates goals for institutional effectiveness and improvement, including a focus

Figure 1: AES Assessment Cycle



on student achievement, educational outcomes, overall institutional improvement, and the results of institutional assessments;

- Well-defined, inclusive decision-making processes and clear assignment of responsibility and accountability for achieving institutional and unit effectiveness;
- Strategies to measure and assess the adequacy and efficient utilization of institutional resources required to support the institution's mission and goals; and
- Periodic assessment of the effectiveness of planning, resource allocation, institutional renewal processes, and availability of resources.

In addition to Standard VI, MSCHE calls for continuous and systematic assessment across its other six (6) standards, emphasizing the importance of assessment to member institutions' overall effectiveness in achieving their mission. Thus, effective AES unit assessments not only assist the College in enhancing the student learning experience but provides evidence to MSCHE to illustrate that institutionally we are committed to continuous improvement and subscribe to a comprehensive planning process.

1) Dorimé-Williams, M., Carlson, E., & Shults, C. (n.d.). *Developing systematic assessment practices for Administrative, Educational, and Student Support (AES) Units*. Retrieved from http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/documents/Assessment_in_Practice_BMCC.pdf

2023-2025 Strategic Plan: Goals and Priorities

NCC Mission

The institution's mission, which is stated below, is the linchpin in the strategic plan; all work emerging from and associated with the strategic plan is driven by the College's mission.

Nassau Community College offers students high-quality, flexible, and equitable educational opportunities, combined with co-curricular learning experiences, continuing education, and professional development opportunities. Distinguished faculty and dedicated staff provide students with a solid foundation for future success and prepare them to enrich our community, economy, and society. We are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in all that we do for all whom we serve.

Strategic Goals

To fulfill its mission and successfully meet the College's vision of transforming lives, Nassau Community College will focus on four (4) target areas, which also serve as the College's 2023-2028 Strategic Goals. In addition to providing the framework for the College's work to realize its mission, the Strategic Goals also closely align with the State University of New York's student success initiatives, as seen in Figure 2.²

Equitable Student Opportunities

To maintain an open admissions policy that ensures the availability of educational programs for traditional, non-traditional, and international students. To provide developmental programs that upgrade student skills for success in college-level courses. To create educational programs that respond to and satisfy diverse community needs. To create a multi-cultural environment that fosters the synthesis of knowledge, aesthetic appreciation, and commitment to ethical and social values.

Academic Excellence and Student Support

To encourage faculty development through programs that promote scholarship and creativity and to encourage the adoption of innovative teaching methods and technology that enhance student

learning. To provide the support services and guidance necessary for students to realize their full potential. To provide a physical environment and a technological infrastructure conducive to effective teaching, learning, and working. To provide administrative leadership that assures educational quality, furnishes adequate student support services, maintains effective budgeting and facilities management, and stimulates thoughtful planning for the future of the College.

Student Persistence and Post-Graduation Success

To provide an education that fosters critical, analytical thinking and inspires lifelong learning. To support and strengthen academic and co-curricular programs that prepare students to transfer to a four-year college or university. To offer career-focused programs, certificates, courses, and credentials that prepare students for regional as well as global employment opportunities.

High School, Community, Business and Industry Partnerships

To offer activities and cultural programs that enrich student and community life. To enhance the economic and cultural vitality of the County by promoting an educational environment that responds to the changing needs of the community. To cultivate high school, community, business, industry, and other partnerships that benefit our students, college, and community.



2) See: <https://system.suny.edu/communitycolleges/initiatives/>

Figure 2: Aligning SUNY Student Success Initiatives with NCC’s 2023-2028 Strategic Goals

Strategic Goal	SUNY Student Success Initiative
Equitable Student Opportunities	Maintain an open admissions policy that ensures the availability of educational programs for traditional, non-traditional, and international students. (SUNY Access)
	Provide developmental programs that upgrade student skills for success in college-level courses. (SUNY Access)
	Create educational programs that respond to and satisfy diverse community needs. (SUNY Access and Engagement)
	Create a multicultural environment that fosters the synthesis of knowledge, aesthetic appreciation, and commitment to ethical and social values. (SUNY Access)
Academic Excellence and Student Support	Encourage faculty development through programs that promote scholarship and creativity, and to encourage the adoption of innovative teaching methods and technology that enhance student learning. (SUNY Access and Inquiry)
	Provide the support services and guidance necessary for students to realize their full potential. (SUNY Access, Success, and Completion)
	Provide a physical environment and a technological infrastructure conducive to effective teaching, learning, and working. (SUNY Success and Completion)
	Provide administrative leadership that assures educational quality, furnishes adequate student support services, maintains effective budgeting and facilities management, and stimulates thoughtful planning for the future of the College. (SUNY Access, Success, and Completion)
Student Persistence and Post-Completion Success	Provide an education that fosters critical, analytical thinking and inspires lifelong learning. (SUNY Completion and Inquiry)
	Support and strengthen academic and co-curricular programs that prepare students for transfer to a four-year college or university. (SUNY Completion)
	Offer career-focused programs, certificates, courses, and credentials that prepare students for regional as well as global employment opportunities. (SUNY Completion)
High School, Community, Business, and Industry Partnerships	Offer activities and cultural programs that enrich student and community life. (SUNY Engagement)
	Enhance the economic and cultural vitality of the County by promoting an educational environment that responds to the changing needs of the community. (SUNY Engagement)
	Cultivate high school, community, business, industry, and other partnerships that benefit our students, college, and community. (SUNY Engagement)

The strategic goals also form the basis for our four (4) institutional priorities:

- Guided Pathways
- Community Inclusion and Engagement
- Financial Stewardship
- Campus Culture

Assessing the Board's Effectiveness: Process

Purpose and Outcomes

The primary method and tool used to assess a board's effectiveness is conducting a self-evaluation. The purpose of the board self-evaluation includes identifying areas of board functioning that are working well and those that may need improvement. It is an opportunity for an open and candid discussion about board's responsibilities, as well as their interests and desires. Board self-evaluations also present an opportunity for reflecting on one's own performance and engaging in continuous improvement. Board self-evaluation sets an example and the tone for ongoing assessment throughout the institution.

The self-evaluation also presents an opportunity for exploring the board's responsibilities, fosters communication between trustees, and can lead to a more cohesive board of trustees. Reports from boards of trustees that conduct regular self-evaluations note that they gain an increased appreciation for and understanding of their fellow trustees. Additionally, their board meetings run more smoothly having a set of priorities that guide their meeting agendas thereby increasing the time spent reviewing policies, goals and accomplishments.

The outcomes of a board self-evaluation include:

- Summarize what the board does well and its accomplishments for the prior year;
- Better understand what is needed from each trustee and the president to be an effective team;
- Assess progress on the prior year's goals and identify what needs to be completed; and
- Set goals and outcomes for the coming year related to their performance and leadership for achieving the Strategic Goals.

In addition to the general outcomes, boards may have specific needs or desires from year to year, depending on circumstances. For instance, during an accreditation self-study cycle, the board of trustees may want to focus on the accreditation standards. Or, if the board of trustees has not been functioning well, it may wish to focus on team dynamics, communication and the board's code of ethics. If the board has a significant number of new trustees, the self-evaluation may focus on the roles and responsibilities of the board of trustees.

Evaluation Process

Self-evaluation processes range from relatively informal discussions to formal, structured assessment surveys or interviews. A board evaluation, whether formal or informal, should result in a report that describes the process, summarizes the results, and identifies actions that the board intends to take as a result of the evaluation. Annual board self-evaluations are the most common and useful. Each academic year, the board sets aside time to reflect on past accomplishments and performance against pre-determined criteria, and identifies priorities and expectations for the coming academic year. Below are some common ways used to gather information for the self-evaluation.

Surveys

Surveys are by far the most common approach to gathering information about board performance. Trustees rate board performance on various criteria, and the ratings are summarized and presented to the board for discussion. The discussion of the summarized ratings and related comments is the board's self-evaluation. Using the same rating scale each year allows for comparative analysis year-to-year for the same or similar criteria.

Surveys are usually designed to assess two areas of board functioning: the progress made on achieving board goals and outcomes set the previous year and board performance on characteristics of effective board functioning (example: local policies and practice related to ethics, board meetings, delegation to the president, monitoring policy implementation).

Interviews

Another self-evaluation strategy is for someone to conduct structured interviews of all trustees, the president and other individuals identified by the board, if any. The interviewer gathers information about board performance, summarizes the results of the interviews and writes a report to the board. It is a qualitative approach to evaluation. It may be used in addition to a survey. An interview approach allows for more in-depth exploration of issues, highlights accomplishments, and identifies specific areas of concern and suggestions for improvement. This method is beneficial to be used when the board has not had an evaluation for some time, when trustees prefer this method and/or do not find survey information useful, or particularly when there are significant and/or ongoing concerns about board

functioning. Limitations to this method include the fact that it is a time-consuming, more expensive process and does not result in numerical ratings that can be compared annually. Interviews are usually facilitated by an external person.

Informal Discussions

Informal processes do not use surveys or structured interviews to gather information. Rather, the board allots time for a substantive discussion of board strengths, accomplishments, weaknesses and areas for improvement. It is recommended that such discussions be facilitated by an external person to allow the board of trustee chair an opportunity to participate in the discussion. A report of the discussion is prepared that summarizes the discussion and identifies further board action. The limitation to this method is that, unlike surveys, it does not provide numerical ratings that can be compared over time.

Who Participates in the Self-Evaluation Process?

All trustees: The expectation is that the board evaluates itself. As such all trustee should be involved in assessing board performance and in discussing the results of the evaluation. Newly elected trustees may think they do not have enough experience on the board to provide useful feedback; however, new trustees may have spent time observing the board prior to serving, and their input can be very valuable. Student trustees should be encouraged to contribute feedback and participate in the evaluation discussion.

President: The president is in a position to provide essential feedback to the board on its performance, and is key to ensuring that the board has the information and other resources to fulfill its responsibilities on many evaluation criteria. Therefore, the president should participate in some way, although the method of contributing feedback may be different than for the trustees or others. For instance, the president could provide feedback during a discussion of the results of a survey rather than completing a survey form.

College stakeholders: A number of boards provide an opportunity for college employees to complete surveys on board performance. The most common approach is to invite the college leaders who are most familiar with the board to complete a brief survey and make comments. They are usually administrators who routinely attend board meetings as well as faculty, staff, and student stakeholder group leaders. Data from these surveys let the board know how it is perceived by those who most often see it in action. If all employees are invited to provide feedback, the survey should

be constructed to identify responses from those who regularly attend (or view) board meetings and have knowledge of board performance, in order to differentiate responses from those with little experience.

Community members: A few boards seek information from select community representatives (such as those on foundation boards or advisory committees). Surveys or interviews that gather feedback from community members should include those areas that community members may know about, such as the visibility and effectiveness of the board as ambassadors for the college. These surveys are often short, usually three to six questions.

If the board evaluation process includes feedback from college and/or community, the summary of the survey or feedback should be presented separately from the board's self-evaluation data, so that the board may compare trustee perceptions with those of others.

Discussion of Results and Campus Report

The actual board self-evaluation is the discussion about the survey or interview results. Interview summaries and survey ratings provide information for the board as a basis for discussion, but are not, in themselves, the self-evaluation. The evaluation session could function as an open meeting of the board. Boards often schedule the evaluation session as a study session, workshop or retreat to allow for enough time to discuss the evaluation and identify priorities for the following year. The timing of the evaluation, particularly if it results in identifying annual priorities, should be coordinated with the college's annual review and reporting on the status of the Strategic Plan's KPIs.

The end results of the self-evaluation are a summary of the discussion and a set of goals or actions to be taken as a result of the self-evaluation. A written, follow-up report helps ensure that the results will be used and that any issues will be addressed. It is evidence that the college's board of trustees is serious about assessing its performance and that trustees are committed to being an effective governing body. The report is a public document, to be posted on the board's webpage. The goals, priorities, or action items for the coming year are usually reviewed at a subsequent board meeting and ratified or adopted.

Final Thoughts

Assessing the board of trustees' effectiveness is necessary as it allows the board to reflect on the prior year's work and plan for the coming year's work. More importantly, however, it signals to the college and community that the board is committed to its role as strategic leaders and good stewards of the institution's resources. Ideally, this process should feel like a team

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effort, as real governance changes and continuous improvement is not possible if one or more trustee(s) is a half-hearted participant or even resistant. The self-evaluation process should not be onerous or non-directional. Instead, the process should be intentional, directional and straight forward.





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