GUIDE TO ACCREDITATION FOR GOVERNING BOARDS

A Publication of the

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges,
Western Association of Schools and Colleges

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Introduction

The *Guide to Accreditation for Governing Boards* is designed for use by college governing board members as an introduction to regional accreditation and the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACCJC) and as a guide to their roles and responsibilities in accreditation. Governing boards have leadership responsibilities for the college mission, institutional quality and improvement, institutional integrity, and, ultimately, student success. Accreditation Standards recognize the important role of governing boards in student success, holding them accountable for their leadership role. Governing boards carry out their responsibilities primarily through policy development and delegation of responsibility for institutional operations to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), holding the CEO accountable for implementing governing board (Board) policies. Defining the policy role of governing boards and distinguishing that role from the delegated role of institutional operations is a fundamental principle that informs Accreditation Standards. This *Guide* is both supplement and companion to other guides and manuals published by ACCJC, all of which are cited in the last section.

Section one of this *Guide* begins with general information on regional accreditation, including history, purpose, and organizational structure. It describes the goals of accreditation. This section also introduces the purposes and structure of ACCJC.

Section two introduces Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards and Commission policies (together Commission's Standards), as well as an overview of ACCJC procedures and processes.

Section three focuses on the roles and responsibilities of governing boards in accreditation. This section looks at ACCJC Accreditation Standards and processes through the lens of governing boards and their distinct roles in college governance and leadership. The section emphasizes the leadership role governing boards play in defining college mission and policy, as well as their leadership roles in quality assurance, student success and governance.

Section four provides questions and answers (Q&A) on effective practices for governing boards.

Section five presents a list of ACCJC guides, manuals, and other resources that are important to accreditation, and offers governing board members comprehensive information on all aspects of regional accreditation and ACCJC.

The Appendices include the *ACCJC NEWS* publication entitled *Twelve Common Questions and Answers about Regional Accreditation* (Appendix A), the complete Eligibility Requirements for Accreditation (Appendix B) and Accreditation Standards (Appendix C).

1 Regional Accreditation and ACCJC

1.1 Regional Accreditation: History, Purpose and Structure

In the United States, accreditation is the primary process for assuring and improving the quality of institutions of higher education. Accreditation of approximately 3,000 colleges and universities is carried out through a process known as "regional accreditation": seven commissions operate in six geographic regions of the country through nongovernmental, nonprofit voluntary associations. The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) chose to have two higher education accrediting commissions, one for institutions primarily awarding associate degrees, and one for colleges and universities that award primarily the bachelor's degree or graduate degrees. The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACCJC/WASC) is one of the seven regional accrediting agencies and one of the two higher education accrediting agencies in the Western Region. The Senior College and University Commission (WASC SCUC) is the other higher education accreditor in the WASC region, and accredits baccalaureate and graduate degree-granting institutions.

Accreditation in the United States is a based on a peer review process in which professional educators and persons representing the public interest evaluate an institution using rigorous standards for institutional good practice. These standards are developed with input from the higher education institutions affiliated with that commission. While each regional accrediting commission develops its own standards and policies, the ideas and content of standards are broadly shared across the national higher education community, and lead to general acceptance of institutional credits and degrees across the country. Colleges are evaluated within the context of their institutional mission, and accreditation standards are written to be broadly applicable to a variety of institutional missions. Following a review by a team of peers, accrediting commissions determine the accreditation status of the institution and use may require follow up reports on institutional compliance, as needed. Colleges seek reaffirmation every seven years, and are also required to undertake a more limited review when they seek approval for substantive changes to the institution's mission, programs, location, mode of delivery or population served.

All regional accrediting agencies are recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and undergo a federal recognition review every five years. The USDE also sets regulations for institutional quality; some of these are incorporated in the accreditation standards of all recognized accrediting agencies, while others are enforced on institutions through the federal financial aid process.

Regional accreditation, which can trace its roots to 1885, is the proven method for assuring the public that a higher education institution meets established standards of quality and awards degrees, certificates or credits that students and the public can trust. The granting of accreditation by any regional accrediting commission enables an institution to qualify for federal grants, contracts, and to distribute federal financial aid.

Accreditation is a voluntary system for the regulation of higher education quality. Institutions agree to join an association and to uphold the accrediting association's standards of quality and its policies. Regional accreditors conduct a comprehensive

evaluation of an accredited institution on a regular basis, which varies from seven to ten years among regional accrediting associations.

While the standards of each regional accreditor might be organized differently or use different wording, the seven regional accrediting commissions follow very similar processes and have very similar standards of quality. Today's accreditation enterprise is based on decades of experience and refinement, both leading and reflecting the evolution of American higher education. Today's accreditation standards go beyond the historical emphasis on inputs and processes. *There is growing emphasis on student outcomes as a measure of quality*. Over the past decade, regional accrediting commissions have been leaders in assisting colleges and universities to develop valid and useful ways to measure what and how students are learning, as well as the rate at which students complete programs and degrees. Accreditors are also helping institutions to develop ways to use such information on student outcomes improve institutional effectiveness.

1.2 Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC)

The purposes of the ACCJC are to evaluate educational quality and institutional effectiveness and integrity and to promote institutional improvement. The ACCJC accreditation process assures the public that member accredited institutions meet the Commission's Standards which include the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards and Commission policies. These ensure that the credentials earned at the institutions are of value to the students who earned them; of value to employers and trade or profession related licensing entities; and of value to other colleges and universities.

The ACCJC accredits public, private non-profit, and private for-profit associate degree granting institutions in California, Hawai'i, the Territories of Guam and American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of Palau, the Federated State of Micronesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

The 19 Commissioners of the ACCJC make decisions on the accredited status of institutions and set policies and Accreditation Standards. Commissioners represent the interests of the public and the Commission's member institutions. Commissioners are elected by the membership for three-year terms and generally serve two terms. The Commission is led by a Chair who serves for two years. If elected to an officer position, a Commissioner may serve the time necessary to complete the officer role(s). The work of the Commissioners is part-time and voluntary.

The ACCJC staff manage and support the accreditation activities mandated by federal regulations, ERs, Accreditation Standards and Commission policies. The President of the ACCJC is an employee of the Commission, and is responsible for the administrative and support staff who serve the Commission and its institutional members. The President and the Chair of the Commission are the spokespersons for the Commission to institutions and the public.

2 Eligibility Requirements (ERs), Accreditation Standards and Commission Policies and Processes

2.1 ERs, Accreditation Standards and Commission Policies

The Accreditation Standards form the core of the accreditation process. The Commission's Standards, including the Eligibility Requirements (ERs), Accreditation Standards and Commission policies are developed, adopted, evaluated and revised by the Commission, with input from member institutions and outside experts in higher education. They are informed by effective practices derived from years of experience of member colleges, as well as sound educational research and practices across the nation. The Standards and Commission policies are also informed by federal regulations. All member institutions must maintain compliance with all the Commission's Standards at all times.

The four Accreditation Standards for ACCJC are:

1. **Standard I: Mission, Academic Quality and Institutional Effectiveness, and Integrity**
    - focus on mission and purposes of each institution and institutional effectiveness achieving the mission
    - focus on data-driven assessment and continuous quality improvement and student achievement and learning
    - focus on the clarity, accuracy and integrity of institutional information and processes
2. **Standard II: Student Learning Programs and Services**
    - focus on quality and rigor of instruction, student support, learning services
3. **Standard III: Resources**
    - focus on capacity of human, physical, technological and financial resources to support achievement of mission and maintain institutional integrity
4. **Standard IV: Leadership and Governance**
    - focus on decision making roles and responsibilities and the capacity of leadership to support and achieve mission and student success
    - focus on the effectiveness of the governance structure, the CEO and the governing board, including leadership roles and responsibilities in multi-college districts or systems

In addition to the Accreditation Standards, ACCJC member institutions must also comply with the ERs and Commission policies at all times. The ERs are required by the USDE of all regional accreditors. The 21 ERs, which are largely derived from the Standards, are a prerequisite to eligibility for accreditation. Ongoing compliance with ERs is validated as part of the seven year institutional reaffirmation process. Assurance of the continued compliance with the ERs must be included in the Institutional Self Evaluation Report.

Commission policies can be found in the *Accreditation Reference Handbook*. Policies describe additional ACCJC requirements and procedures related to the Standards,

federal regulation, Commission actions and Commission operations. The Commission reviews and if necessary or revises its policies regularly in response to federal regulation, judicial action, or other Commission actions or findings. It is important to note that member institutions are held accountable for compliance with all Commission policies. Of particular note for governing boards in multi-college districts is the "Policy and Procedures for the Evaluation of Institutions in Multi-College/Multi-Unit Districts or Systems," which is relevant to many member institutions.

Discussion of the Standards specifically related to the roles and responsibilities of governing boards is found in Section 3.

2.2 Accreditation Processes

2.2.1 Obtaining Initial Accreditation

The process to obtain Initial accreditation begins with an eligibility review to establish compliance with the Commission's Eligibility Requirements. If the institution meets the ERs, it will be declared eligible to prepare an Institutional Self Evaluation Report for application for Candidacy status. If the institution meets the Commission's Standards, it will be granted Candidacy status for at least two years and for no more than four years. During that time, the institution will prepare a second Institutional Self Evaluation Report in application for Initial Accreditation. Initial Accreditation is granted after a comprehensive institutional evaluation that demonstrates that the institution is in compliance with the ERs, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies. When granted an Initial accreditation, the institution is subject to ACCJC monitoring and reporting requirements and must be fully evaluated again within a maximum seven year accreditation cycle. Once accredited, an institution is eligible for federal student financial aid and well as federal grants and contracts.

2.2.2 Comprehensive Review

ACCJC member institutions undergo a comprehensive evaluation every seven years to determine whether they meet the Commission's Standards. In addition, the review process validates that institutions are engaged in sustainable efforts to improve educational quality and institutional effectiveness. The review process has four steps: self evaluation, external evaluation, Commission review and accreditation action, and institutional continuous quality improvement.

For accredited institutions, the review begins when the institution conducts a self evaluation using the Commission's Standards. The outcome of the institutional self evaluation process is the Institutional Self Evaluation Report (ISER), which is submitted to the ACCJC. The Institutional Self Evaluation Report provides analysis and evaluation, supported by evidence, that the institution meets the accreditation Standards. The Report also includes Actionable Improvement Plans for future actions to meet requirements or improve and a Quality Focus Essay that discusses two or three areas the institution identified, during the self evaluation process, for study and improvement to enhance academic quality, institutional effectiveness and student outcomes.

The Commission appoints a team of trained peer evaluators which can include members of governing boards. All members of an evaluation team are selected on

the basis of their professional expertise in higher education, areas of specialization and willingness to apply standards objectively to the institution they'll evaluate.

The team examines the Institutional Self Evaluation Report, visits the institution to examine educational quality, and writes an evaluation team report that evaluates the institution's compliance with the Commission's Standards. The evaluation team report may also make recommendations to come into compliance with Standards or for improvement, and provide commendations for excellent practice when appropriate. The team makes a confidential recommendation to the Commission on the institution's accredited status based on its evaluation of the institution. After the institution has had an opportunity to correct any errors of fact that it finds in the draft report, the chair of the evaluation team submits the evaluation team report to the Commission. The Commission evaluates the Institutional Self Evaluation Report, the evaluation team report and the institution's historical performance in accreditation reviews, and makes a decision on the accredited status of the institution. The Commission may also give the institution additional recommendations and direction for improvement. The Commission may impose a sanction and define deadlines for the institution to resolve any noted deficiencies. (See the "Policy on Commission Actions on Institutions" in the *Accreditation Reference Handbook*.)

The Commission communicates its decisions on the status of accreditation via an action letter to the institution and public announcements from the Commission within 30 days following the Commission's January or June meetings. Member institutions are required to share the evaluation team report, the Institutional Self Evaluation Report and the Commission action letter with the college community and the public by posting these documents on the institution's website.

The final and ongoing step in the comprehensive review process is continuous quality improvement. The Commission requires the institution to resolve any deficiencies cited by the recommendations in the evaluation team report within a maximum of two years. The Commission's standards also require institutions to implement processes for Internal Quality Assurance by practicing ongoing, evidence-based assessments of institutional effectiveness, and making improvements to quality as needed.

2.2.3 Other Reports and Evaluation Visits

The ACCJC requires institutions to submit a Midterm Report in the fourth year after the comprehensive evaluation team visit. The Midterm report includes an update on the status of the institution's action projects described in the Quality Focus Essay and an institutional analysis of the data trends from the Annual Reports and the Annual Financial Reports. The report also reports on the progress, including timelines for completion and responsible parties, that the institution has made on the self-identified Improvement Plans from the Institutional Self Evaluation Report.

Institutions are required to remain in compliance with the Commission's Standards at all times. If an institution is out of compliance with any of the Commission's Standards, the Commission may require a Follow-Up Report and/or another evaluation team visit, at intervals determined by the Commission. The Commission

may impose a sanction and deadlines for the institution to resolve noted deficiencies.

Federal regulations require institutions to submit applications and receive approvals for substantive changes if they wish to make changes to mission, scope of programs, nature of student constituency, location (or geographical area serves), control of the institution, content of courses or programs (when changes are significant departure from current status), credit awarded for program or course completion or any other change the Commission deems substantive. A Substantive Change Proposal is submitted in accordance with the Commission's "Policy on Substantive Change." (See *Substantive Change Manual*.)

3 Roles and Responsibilities of Governing Boards in Accreditation

3.1 Governing Boards and ACCJC Standards

As noted in the first section of this *Guide,* the purpose of regional accreditation is to assure and improve the quality of higher education to support student success. Governing boards have a primary leadership role and responsibility for guiding institutions to achieve the mission of student success and to assure academic quality, integrity, and effectiveness. Governing boards fulfill this responsibility through institutional policies and by delegating responsibility for implementation of policies and pursuit of mission. Governing boards hold the CEO accountable for policy implementation and for fulfillment of the college mission. By extension, governing boards set policies that hold all constituencies of the institution accountable for performance relating to implementation of policies and pursuit of mission. While the governance role of the Board is centered on policy and delegation to the CEO and other institutional leaders and constituencies, the Board has responsibilities beyond governance – responsibilities for the mission and, ultimately, for the success of students.

The four Accreditation Standards describe the educational and institutional practices, organizational structures, resources, and institutional decision-making processes that are necessary conditions for a high quality institution and for student success. Standards I and IV describe some of the specific roles of governing boards in assuring that the institution produces high quality educational services and works to achieve and improve student success. However, the Board's responsibility for institutional effectiveness is exercised through its policy making role and the delegation of policy implementation to college staff through the CEO. The governing board is responsible for adopting policy language that directs the institutional employees to good practice, and for examining how well the institution is meeting its goals for educational effectiveness and for student achievement and learning.

The governing board is also responsible for the fiscal integrity of the institution. The Board exercises its responsibility in fiscal matters through policy and by its review of the annual external audit and approval of the institution's annual spending plans. The governing board is responsible for developing the expertise needed to make sound budgetary decisions that support educational quality, including an understanding of an institution's current and projected revenues and expenditures, and the institution's long term obligations created through contractual agreements, borrowing or plans for institutional expansion.

The governing board should set policies that hold all leaders and constituencies accountable for performance. For example, such accountability would include faculty for work on data driven program review, faculty and others responsible for SLOs and assessment, the chief financial officer for sound fiscal management, and the Board itself for avoiding fiscal or policy commitments that could jeopardize institutional effectiveness, integrity or stability. The governing board is expected to engage in professional development activities to improve its capacity for high performance in the conduct of its own work.

Accreditation Standard IV.C defines expectations for the roles and responsibilities of governing boards. The governing board has authority over and responsibility for policies to assure the academic quality, integrity, and effectiveness of the student learning programs and services and the financial stability of the institution. The primary role of the governing board is policy leadership, and the primary responsibility of the Board is to create the policy environment that supports educational effectiveness. The governing board assures itself of strong institutional performance through its review of reports demonstrating how well the institution is achieving its mission. The Board holds the CEO and, as appropriate, other leaders and constituencies responsible for organizing and implementing the processes that accomplish mission. That accountability is manifested through Board policies that request information and data on institutional performance. Through policies, the Board should ask the institution to establish key metrics, or measures, by which the institution can assess and demonstrate – to the Board and to the public - achievement of its mission.

Setting standards of excellence and measuring performance tied to the mission of the institution connect the governing board with all four Accreditation Standards. For example, the Board is responsible for the mission of the institution, and the Standards require regular review of the institutional mission (Standard I.A). The Board is not concerned just with the review of the wording of the mission; it should be concerned with the institution's achievement of the mission. That assessment requires data on the outcomes achieved by the students defined in the mission. Similarly, the mission broadly defines the scope of programs and services offered by the institution, and the Standards require institutions to conduct regular program reviews of all programs and services to assess their effectiveness (Standard I.B). The governing board should have a policy on program review and require regular institutional reports on assessment results and on decisions for improvement based on program review and integrated planning.

By focusing on the *what* – mission, quality, outcomes, and improvement – and not the *how* – operations and means to outcomes – effective governing boards demonstrate their policy-and mission-directed leadership role and responsibility for institutional effectiveness and student success. The ACCJC promotes the use of common measures of institutional effectiveness, including course completion, persistence, completion of certificates and degrees, transfer and job placement, and mastery of learning outcomes. In addition, the Commission requires colleges to set of Institution-Set Standards for student achievement, appropriate to its mission, and assesses how well the college is achieving them in pursuit of continuous those standards. Focusing on the *what*, governing boards should expect information and data that allow them to assess institutional effectiveness and achievement of mission. Thus, governing boards have roles and responsibilities related to the four Standards realized through policy and monitoring of policy implementation, and holding the CEO and, through the CEO, other college leaders and constituencies accountable for institutional quality, improvement, integrity, stability, and student success.

3.2 Governing Boards and ACCJC Processes

Standard IV. C stipulates that "the governing board is informed about the Eligibility Requirements, the Accreditation Standards, Commission policies, accreditation

processes, and the college's accredited status." Governing boards should receive training about the accreditation process and the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards and Commission policies. In addition, the Board participates in the evaluation of governing board roles and functions in the accreditation process. The Board should receive regular reports on the progress of the review process and development of the Report and the Board should give direct input on those areas of the Standards affecting the Board directly, e.g., Standard IV.C.

The governing board should be informed of institutional reports submitted to the Commission and of communication from the Commission to institutions, including recommendations given to their institutions. With knowledge of the Accreditation Standards, governing boards should act to demonstrate commitment to supporting and improving student outcomes through planning and resource allocation, as reflected in the Standards. In the end, Board action should indicate a commitment to implementing institutional improvement that has been planned as part of the institutional self evaluation and accreditation processes. Those improvement plans should take their place among important institutional priorities that the Board ensures are addressed and adequately resourced.

In multi-college/multi-unit districts or systems, the governing board has responsibility for institutional mission(s) and for policy, just as the governing board has in a single-college district/system. In a multi-college/multi-unit district or system, the CEO of the district or system is directly responsible to the governing board, while CEO's of the colleges/units within the district or system are responsible to the district/system CEO. In addition, the district/system has clearly defined roles of authority and responsibility between the colleges/units and district/system, and the district/system acts as liaison between the colleges/units and the governing board. In a multi-college/multi-unit district or system, the governing board should maintain and review policies that clearly articulate the delineation and distribution of responsibilities and authorities between the district/system and the colleges/units.

It is important to note that the Commission evaluates based on the Commission's Standards regardless of organizational structure. All governing boards are required to meet Accreditation Standards, and to support the quality of the institutions they govern; all institutions are evaluated on the basis of their governing board's compliance with Accreditation Standards.

3.3 Governing Boards and Effective Leadership and Governance

The Standards delineate the roles and responsibilities of governing boards and the following principles summarize the expectations defined by the Commission for effective Board leadership and governance:

- **Governing Boards Act as a collective entity** – The Board is a corporate body. It governs as a unit with one voice. This principle means that individual Board members have authority only when they are acting as a Board. They have no power as individuals to act on their own or to direct college employees or operations.
- **Governing Boards Represent the Common Good** – The Board exists to represent the public or, in the case of private institutions, its owners. The Board is responsible for balancing and integrating a wide variety of interests and needs

into policies that benefit the common good and the future of its constituencies.

- **Governing Boards Set Policy Direction** – The Board establishes policies that give direction and guidance to the CEO and staff of the institution. A major Board responsibility is to define and uphold an institutional vision and mission that clearly reflect student and community expectations, as well as a realistic assessment of institutional resources necessary to accomplish the mission and related goals.
- **Governing Boards Employ, Evaluate and Support the CEO** – The successful Board fosters a good relationship between the Board and the CEO.
- **Governing Boards Set Policy Standards for Institutional and Board Operations** – The successful Board adopts policies that set standards for quality, ethics, and prudence in institutional operations and in the operation of the Board itself. Once institutional policy standards are established, the Board delegates authority to the CEO, allowing the CEO and college staff the flexibility they need to exercise professional judgment.
- **Governing Boards use Resources to Achieve Mission** – The successful Board assures that the institution's mission is periodically evaluated and adequately funded. The successful Board also assures that its policies and resource allocations are linked and align with the educational priorities defined through the institutional mission and plans.
- **Governing Boards have Responsibility for Financial Integrity** – The successful Board regularly monitors financial performance and policy. The Board should require institutional leadership to maintain adequate reserves and to quickly address any issues discovered through external audits and reviews.
- **Governing Boards Monitor Performance** – The successful Board holds institutions accountable for student success and institutional effectiveness. The Board adopts the institution's direction and broad goals as policy and then monitors the progress achieving those goals. Board policy should set expectations for the use of sound student outcome data in program and institutional reviews and planning. For example, if the Board adopts a policy goal that the institution will train workers for a particular industry, the Board should receive regular reports on progress toward that goal.
- **Governing Boards Create a Positive Climate** – The successful Board sets the tone for the entire institution. Through the behavior of Board members and the Board's policies, the successful Board establishes a climate in which learning is valued, including learning by Board members, assessment and evaluation are embraced, and student success is the most important goal. Effective Boards are ethical and act with integrity, which also promotes a positive climate. The Board must have a code of ethics and a policy for dealing with behavior that violates its code.

4 Q&A on Effective Governing Board Practices

4.1 Questions and Answers on Issues of Specific Interest to Governing Boards

As noted in earlier sections of this *Guide*, governing boards have roles and responsibilities that relate to all aspects of accreditation, and yet the Accreditation Standards specify both the scope and limits of those roles and responsibilities. Board members often pose questions to the Commission about appropriate roles and responsibilities, and the following question and answer section of this *Guide* features answers to some of the commonly asked questions.

1. **What is the appropriate scope of policy responsibilities for governing boards?**

   The governing board has responsibility for institutional outcomes and for limits on the means by which staff pursues outcomes. In addition, the governing board uses policy to define its relationship with the CEO and to define its own governance processes. The Board's most important policy role is to create a mission for the institution that defines the constituencies served, the programs and services offered to them, and the desired outcomes for them. Thus, the governing board uses policy to define the ends, or outcomes, for the institution. However, the Board also sets limits through policy on the means by which the institution operates. The limits are manifested through policies on principles of prudence and ethics that form a boundary of staff practices, activities, circumstances and methods. The Board also sets policies about how it relates to staff, which link the Board to the CEO. The CEO is the Board's link to staff, and the Board-CEO relationship is defined through policies on the CEO's role, delegation and accountability. Finally, the Board uses policy to define its own operations – its structure, its meeting protocols and the standards by which it operates, reflecting the Board's responsibilities for providing vision and ethical leadership.

2. **How does a governing board act on its policies?**

   The governing board holds itself, CEO and, as applicable and appropriate, other institutional leaders and constituencies accountable for Board policies. Recognizing that the Board is responsible for the 'what' of ends and outcomes and not the 'how' of means and operations, the Board asks for regular institutional reports and data on the status of achieving the institution's outcomes. In addition, the Board evaluates and revises its policies on a scheduled basis. By acting on its policies in this manner, the Board fulfills its leadership responsibilities.

3. **How does a governing board demonstrate integrity in its operations?**

   The governing board has responsibility for institutional outcomes and for limits on the means by which staff pursues outcomes. In addition, the governing board uses policy to define its relationship with the CEO and to define its own governance processes. The Board's most important policy role is to create a mission for the institution that defines the constituencies served, the programs and services offered to them, and the desired outcomes for them. Thus, the governing board uses policy to define the ends, or outcomes, for the institution. However, the Board also sets limits through policy on the means by which the

institution operates. The limits are manifested through policies on principles of prudence and ethics that form a boundary of staff practices, activities, circumstances and methods. The Board also sets policies about how it relates to staff, which link the Board to the CEO. The CEO is the Board's link to staff, and the Board-CEO relationship is defined through policies on the CEO's role, delegation and accountability. The Board uses policy to define its own operations – its structure, its meeting protocols and the standards by which it operates, reflecting the Board's responsibilities for providing vision and ethical leadership. Finally, the Board evaluates its processes to ensure quality and effectiveness.

4. **How does the governing board monitor institutional mission, goals, and plans?**

   The governing board is responsible for the institutional mission, and, as required by the Standards, the institution must review its mission on a regular basis. It is important to note that review of the institutional mission is not simply a matter of reviewing and revising the mission statement. Regular review of the institutional mission involves monitoring of institutional outcomes to determine whether or not the institution is fulfilling its mission. Such monitoring includes regular reporting to the Board on outcomes relating to institutional goals and measures of student success, including institution-set standards, and to implementation and evaluation of institutional plans. Again, the Board is responsible for the 'what' of institutional performance, not the 'how' of operations. Through regular monitoring of the status and outcomes relating to mission, goals, and plans, the Board appropriately fulfills its primary responsibility for the institutional mission and student success.

5. **Are roles and responsibilities of the governing board different in multi-college/multi-unit districts or systems?**

   ACCJC Standard IV.D and ACCJC "Policy on the Evaluation of Institutions in Multi-College/Multi-Unit Districts or Systems" define accreditation requirements and expectations for multi-college/multi-unit districts or systems. In such districts or systems, the governing board has responsibility for institutional mission(s) and for policy, just as the governing board has in a single college district/system. In a multi-college/multi-unit district or system, the CEO of the district or system is directly responsible to the governing board, while CEO's of the colleges/units within the district or system are responsible to the district/system CEO. In addition, the district/system has clearly defined roles of authority and responsibility between the colleges/units and district/system, and the district/system acts as liaison between the colleges/units and the governing board. In a multi-college/multi-unit district or system, the governing board should maintain and review policies that clearly articulate the delineation and distribution of responsibilities and authorities between the district/system and the colleges/units. It is important to note that the Commission evaluates based on the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards and Commission polices (together Commission's Standards) regardless of organizational structure.

6. **What is a 'conflict of interest' policy for a governing board?**

   The governing board should have a policy on 'conflict of interest" that ensures the Board's personal and professional interests are disclosed and that those interests do not conflict or interfere with the impartiality of governing board

members or outweigh the greater duty to secure and ensure the academic quality and fiscal integrity of the institution. The policy should reflect the Board members' commitment to resist temptation and outside pressure to use their position to benefit themselves or any other individual or agency apart from the interests of the institution.

7. **How does the governing board execute its responsibilities for fiscal integrity of the institution?**

   ACCJC Standard III.D defines expectations for maintaining the fiscal integrity of institutions, including adequacy and use of resources and the policies and processes employed to manage those resources with commitment to mission and integrity. The governing board adopts policy on institutional budgeting and it adopts institutional budgets that are balanced and focused on student success, reflecting institutional goals and priorities. The Board receives and reviews regular financial performance reports, and it validates fiscal accountability through review of annual financial audits.

8. **How does the governing board build a sense of teamwork?**

   Governing boards are corporate boards – individual Board members do not have individual authority for governance or policy. As a corporate entity, the governing board is most effective when its members work together. Critical to Board members becoming an effective team is maintaining a climate of trust and respect. The institutional CEO is also a part of the team, and the effective Board team adheres to its role so that the CEO and staff can perform their roles. Board member professional development is needed to hone skills and knowledge, and to develop and maintain Board relationships that lead to effective Board performance.

9. **How does the governing board grow from good to great?**

   A good Board assures that the institution's core mission is periodically re-evaluated and is adequately funded. A good Board protects its core mission by not creating unfunded liabilities for the institution. A great Board assures that its policies and budget allocations are linked and correspond to the educational priorities in the institutional mission and plans.

4.2 Twelve Common Questions and Answers about Regional Accreditation

Although this *Guide* covers many aspects of regional accreditation, the ACCJC has developed a publication entitled *Twelve Common Questions and Answers about Regional Accreditation* to provide basic information about regional accreditation purposes, principles, and practices. This information first appeared in the Special Edition February 2011 ACCJC Newsletter and is also available at the "New on the Website" section of the ACCJC homepage at: http://www.accic.org.
(See Appendix A.)

5 ACCJC Resources on the Website

5.1 ACCJC Website

The ACCJC maintains a website at: www.accjc.org. The website contains all important reference documents and resources listed below. It also provides a calendar of upcoming accreditation related training events and copies of presentations made at some prior events. Board members are encouraged to explore the website as the best source of up to date reference documents.

Accreditation Basics is an online course available on the ACCJC website through the "Accreditation Basics" link in the "New on the Website" section of the home page. The 90-minute course focuses on the purposes of accreditation, the process used to accredit institutions, and the particular Standards used by the ACCJC to measure the educational quality and institutional effectiveness of member institutions. First-time evaluation team members are required to complete the Accreditation Basics course. However, it is also a useful resource for individuals involved in accreditation at their institutions wishing to learn more about the process, and those wanting to increase their understanding of the basic principles of accreditation. The online course can be paused at any time and resumed to fit the scheduling needs of users. Quizzes assess the user's progress at regular intervals throughout the course, and an end-of-course exam must be completed at 90% mastery to be considered successful in the course. A certificate will be issued to all who qualify.

This *Guide* frequently cites the ACCJC Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards and Commission policies (together Commission's Standards), which form the foundation of regional accreditation. (See Appendix B and C.)

ACCJC also publishes a number of manuals, guides and other resources, all of which are available online through the ACCJC website at: www.accjc.org. Current ACCJC publications are listed below.

5.2 Eligibility Requirements (ERs) and Accreditation Standards

The ERs and Accreditation Standards are found on the ACCJC website on the Eligibility Requirements & Standards page at: www.accjc.org/eligibility-requirements-standards. The ERs, Accreditation Standards and all Commission policies can also be found in a single publication, the *Accreditation Reference Handbook*, which is found on the ACCJC website on the Publications & Policies page at: www.accjc.org/publications-policies.

The ACCJC publishes several manuals that are used by institutions preparing the Institutional Self Evaluation Report and by the peer evaluation teams that visit an institution. The manuals listed below can be found on the ACCJC website on the Publications & Policies page at: www.accjc.org/publications-policies.

5.3 Guides and Manuals

- *Accreditation Reference Handbook*
- *Eligibility, Candidacy, and Initial Accreditation Manual*
- *Guide to Evaluating and Improving Institutions*

- *Guide to Preparing Institutional Reports to the Commission*
- *Manual for Follow-Up and Special Visits*
- *Manual for Institutional Self Evaluation*
- *Substantive Change Manual*
- *Team Evaluator Manual*

5.4 Other Resources

The ACCJC has published some supplementary materials used in institutional evaluations that are also found on the Publications & Policies page on the ACCJC website including:

- Institutional Financial Review and Resources
  - Required Evidentiary Documents for Financial Review
  - Explanatory Matrix of Auditor's Opinions
  - Sample Schedule of Financial Trends Analysis
- Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness

5.5 ACCJC Newsletter

The ACCJC also publishes a newsletter, *ACCJC NEWS*, which provides important current information about institutional quality issues. All issues of *ACCJC NEWS* can be found on the ACCJC website on Newsletter page at: www.accjc.org/newsletter. Please see the cover article from *ACCJC NEWS* Summer 2012 for important information regarding accreditation and governing board roles and responsibilities.