

A Primer on CEO Selection Process

by Maria Neves-Perman, Governing Board Member and
Serafin A. Zasueta, Ph.D., Superintendent/President

One of the challenging tasks a Governing Board faces is that of selecting a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who will contribute to the effectiveness of the college community, both on and off the campus. Adding to this challenging task is the “Participatory decision-makings” process desired by college employees, students, and community members and such questions as whether the CEO should be male or female, a member of an underrepresented group, someone internal, or even someone from out-of-state.



Serafin Zasueta, Ph.D.
Superintendent/President
Southwestern College



Maria Neves-Perman
Governing Board Member
Southwestern College

You might ask yourself, is it possible to hire an effective CEO given all the nuances of advocacy groups that express concerns relating to who the potential selected individual will be? The answer is simple. Select the person who is the “best fit” for the job and the college. It is the process of selecting the “best fit” that presents the greatest challenge.

The process begins with the college defining its strengths and weaknesses. The accreditation process often refers to this step as a self-evaluation. Beyond the obvious (i.e., the demographics, budget, student population, city, and number of employees) the real question to answer is what are the challenges and opportunities that will be expected of the new CEO. The following are examples of leadership expectations and challenges for the new CEO:

- Fostering a balance between transfer and workforce preparation programs; strengthening linkages with business and industry to ensure understanding among faculty and students of the changing nature of the business world; and positioning the college as a key community resource in its international border/Pacific rim location.
- Developing and implementing a comprehensive technology plan for the college and district that upgrades the technological support and related skills of all staff and provides a leading-edge preparation of students for transfer and employment.

Positioning the college as a key contributor to the economic development of the district and to the employability of its graduates and enrollees.

An outside consultant can often assist a Board in the process of a college defining itself. Hence, an early major decision that a Governing Board will make is whether or not to hire a search consultant to assist and objectively facilitate the process. The recommendation of the authors is to hire a search consultant. The external objectivity that a search consultant provides can often provide a perspective that may be overlooked by those too close to the process.

Another early step in the process is for the Board to define the membership of the CEO Search Committee and determine its responsibilities. You can count on many people wanting to participate. The selection of committee members should include those individuals who can assess the candidates’ strengths as they relate to the challenges

CONTINUED on PAGE TWO

A Primer on CEO Selection Process

CONTINUED from PAGE ONE

and opportunities the college has identified as part of the self-evaluation. Committee members must be able to judge whether or not the job skills of the CEO extend beyond surface knowledge. The CEO search committee usually includes representatives from the following groups:

- College personnel, both academic and classified:
 - Administrative staff
(*academic, student services, and fiscal*)
 - Governance groups
(*academic and classified senates*)
 - Bargaining representatives
(*academic and classified*)
- Student organization
- Community members

In addition, a member or members of the immediate support staff that work with the CEO should be included as voting member(s) of the committee. Should board members serve? This is a great opportunity for selected Board members to listen to the needs and challenges of college employees. The symbolic presence of a couple of board members engaged in the process clearly states that you respect the input from those you represent. (On the other hand, trustees who serve on the committee must recognize the decision ultimately rests with all board members.) Community members should reflect a cross section of the community at large. Often Foundation members, Chamber of Commerce representatives, service clubs, or vocational advisory groups provide a strong pool of community representatives.

As the process unfolds, there can be as many as four levels of interviews in order to provide all constituent groups with enough information on each candidate's "best fit." The first level interview is conducted by the search committee. The committee, after deliberation, forwards a list of finalists for consideration to the Governing Board. A tremendous amount of responsibility is placed on the college committee by the college community; hence, Board members will want to publicly acknowledge the outstanding efforts of the group completing this assignment.

The second and third interviews are usually conducted on the same day. The second level consists of a series of forums with the larger college community. The format will consist of an open dialogue and a series of questions from various groups on campus. The culmination of the day segues into the third level interview with the Governing Board. The third level interview can occur over a dinner or as a meeting with the candidate. Board members and candidates should be given ample time to ask questions, respond to questions and discuss issues. We recommend that a dinner meeting be part of the final interview to assess the social skills of the candidate, given that the CEO will be on the speaking and dinner circuit, especially during the first year. If the spouse is included customary protocol is to invite the spouse to participate in an alternate activity, i.e., a guided tour of the campus.

An aspect of the candidate evaluation process may be a site visit. A team of committee members is selected to visit the work site of the finalist. The basic question the team is seeking to answer: is there alignment with what the candidate has stated and their present job performance? Keep in mind that the site visit is not designed to seek out hidden information or agendas. The hidden agenda should have already been taken care of by the search consultant and reference audits which are completed prior to the board interviewing the final candidates.

The next critical step in the process, after a contract has been signed, announcements made, and introductions completed, is for the Governing Board to clarify job expectations and performance measures for evaluating the CEO. It is helpful if the Governing Board formats this session as a workshop where an exchange of expectations, challenges, and working protocols can be established between the Governing Board and the CEO. A good start for identifying performance standards and expectations is to reference the challenges and opportunities developed as

part of the college's earlier self-evaluation process. This is especially helpful for a new CEO in that it creates an open proactive relationship right from the start of employment. An open, respectful relationship is important as all Board members and the CEO often work on very critical issues in order to advance the college agenda of educational excellence and student success. Foremost in this open relationship is that it becomes the initial building block of a trusting working relationship.

The next and final step in the process is for the Governing Board and CEO to evaluate the first year's performance 11 to 12 months after the employment date. While there are many different assessment tools that are used, it is advisable to use a combination of objective and narrative assessment instruments. Both of these tools allow for objectivity as well as anecdotal comments. If clarity is established on the expectations for performance at the outset of employment, the parameters to review and discuss will bring objectivity to the process. A reciprocal exchange of information, performance measures, attained goals, and aspects of the working relationship are key elements to this meeting. At the conclusion of this meeting a plan or goals for the subsequent year are produced in the form of an action plan.

In summary, most CEO searches end with the signing of the contract. However, if the relationship between the Governing Board and the Chief Executive Officer is to be dynamic and fruitful, it is imperative that a forum for reciprocal dialogue be established early. Clearly, the first step of institutional self-examination is key through each step of the process. Will people want to be involved? Yes, they will, hence a simple but powerful statement, "what's best for the institution," can serve as the guiding beacon throughout each stage of the process.



Board-CEO teamwork critical when developing meeting agenda

Building a board meeting agenda is a cooperative effort between trustees and the district chief executive officer, say board presidents from several well-respected colleges.

“We let our college president develop the agenda but we make suggestions for items and he’s very cooperative,” says Ruthe Foster of the Fremont-Newark CCD Board of Trustees. “We feel he is in the best position to carry out the directions of the board and do what’s right for the community.”

Fremont-Newark’s board agenda is developed by the CEO and his staff. If board members have an item for consideration, they raise the issue during a board meeting and the board can direct CEO Floyd Hogue to schedule it for a subsequent meeting. Members of the public seeking to put items on the board agenda take the same route. Each board meeting includes a “communication from the audience” section that allows the public to address the board with issues that may or may not require board action.

At Imperial CCD, agenda items must be submitted nine working days before a meeting. This gives CEO Gilbert Dominguez and his vice presidents time to do the appropriate preparation for an effective board discussion and decision on the item.

Board members typically discuss potential future agenda items at meetings and decide whether they merit official board action at a subsequent meeting. Says board president Romauldo Medina, “If you bring an issue out in the open and let everyone have input, the discussion will eliminate trivial matters and result in an agenda that is more meaningful.” The Imperial board has a regular item on its agenda for such discussions by trustees.

The Riverside CCD board of trustees will frequently put items on the agenda, says Mary Figueroa, board president, by calling CEO Salvatore Rotella. “In that way, if we need any research and briefing material, the staff has time to do the back-up work.” A call to the CEO also allows the staff to answer questions or concerns trustees may have that do not necessarily require further board discussion or action.

The biggest challenge, reports Figueroa, is to make it clear to the public that there is a procedure that needs to be followed to get items on the agenda. “The process flows smoothly but I spend a lot of time explaining to the public our procedures and why the law requires they be followed. The key is to have a system that is open and that the public believes is accessible.”

San Jose-Evergreen CCD board president Nancy Pyle works closely with CEO Geraldine Evans on the board’s agenda. Pyle, who sits on several community boards, believes strongly the “CEO must develop the agenda. Board members are not tuned in enough to the organization to do it ourselves. I have complete trust and faith in her judgment.”

When a member of the board requests an item be placed on the agenda, Pyle says it’s important to distinguish between those of interest to only one member and those of interest to the entire board and the college. She works with members to determine the best approach of



Ruthe Foster
Board President
Fremont-Newark CCD



Romauldo J. Medina
Board President
Imperial CCD



Mary Figueroa
Board President
Riverside CCD

addressing their issues. "Our board works well together. They feel their requests have been acknowledged and accepted and that there is a common goal of addressing student-related issues in a timely manner."

John Zumwalt, the board president at Sequoias CCD, says trustees on his five-member board go through CEO Kim Badrkhan to get items placed on the agenda. "We have a belief that no matter how bright or dumb a trustee is, the only qualification for being a good trustee is to work well together. We would never block a trustee from getting an item discussed because in order for a board to be effective we have to get along with each other. And if you get high-handed with your fellow board members, you start having problems. Now, in the end we may vote it down but we never deny discussion on an item."

Says Foster, the board president at Fremont-Newark, "Our board is a very cooperative board and we work well together. We trust the staff and what they are doing and the information they are giving us and that attitude facilitates better board meetings."



John A. Zumwalt
Board President
Sequoias CCD



Nancy Pyle
Board President
San Jose-Evergreen CCD

How Riverside CCD handle's agenda requests from the public

The Riverside Community College District's regulation on meeting agenda items includes the following:

- Persons who wish to place a district matter of concern on the agenda must notify the President of the college's office in writing at least one week before the regular meeting.
- The notification should contain the name, address and telephone number of the intended speaker. If the speaker is representing an organization, the name of that organization should also be included.
- Each request may state the topic, may contain a

brief outline of the speaker's position, and can indicate any action expected from the board of trustees.

- The board recommends that citizens first attempt to secure action, or resolve problems, through consultation with the academic senate, the appropriate college community advisory committee, or conferences with appropriate deans, department heads or counselors.




**COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEAGUE
OF CALIFORNIA**

Published three times yearly to provide locally-elected governing board members with information and strategies for effective boardmanship.

David Viar, Executive Director
Ray Giles, Editor

COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEAGUE OF CALIFORNIA



2017 O Street
Sacramento, California 95814

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit #730
Sacramento, CA