

Welcome to the Board

2010

**A Manual for
New Jersey
Community College
Trustees**

**C** NEW JERSEY COUNCIL OF
County Colleges



“Our community colleges can serve as 21st-century job training centers, working with local businesses to help workers learn the skills they need to fill the jobs of the future.”

*~Barack Obama
President of the United States of America*

“This is really community colleges’ day in the sun. They are increasingly being seen as the valued jewel in higher education.”

*~Arne Duncan
Secretary of Education, United States of America*

“Community colleges have an important role to play in making certain we have the skilled workers ready to help businesses take advantage of all the opportunities in the Digital Age.”

*~ Bill Gates
CEO, Microsoft*



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Welcome

This booklet discusses your responsibilities as a member of a New Jersey community college board of trustees. We hope you find it informative.

As a newly appointed trustee, you are embarking on an exciting undertaking that will make you a part of the life of your community college, and your community college very much a part of your life. Serving as a community college trustee will involve you in an institution that improves the lives of the people of your community. It is an important responsibility. You are to be commended for your willingness to donate your time for the good of your fellow citizens.

“A public office is a public trust” is a maxim that underscores the title of the office you now hold. You are an official who holds the resources, property, and future of a local community college in trust for the citizens of your community.

Although in a strict financial sense you will not be compensated for your job as a trustee, in a larger sense you will get enormous dividends from your service to the college. As a trustee of a learning institution, you too will learn and grow in many ways, along with the students.

The new trustee faces a challenging period of orientation to the board, the college, and the art of trusteeship. The New Jersey Council of County Colleges, the state association for New Jersey’s 19 community colleges, represents the colleges at the state level and exists, in part, to help you be the very best trustee you can be. We look forward to a long and mutually beneficial relationship between you and New Jersey’s community colleges.

Dr. Lawrence A. Nespoli
President
New Jersey Council of County Colleges

Some History

Community colleges are still viewed by many as “the new kids on the block.” Compared to some private colleges and universities that were founded over 400 years ago, our history is quite recent. The public community college movement in the United States started in the years after World War II.

In 1962, the New Jersey Legislature created the framework for a statewide system of public community colleges*. Both the state and the counties in which they are located provide financial support.

The first four community colleges began operations in fall 1966, and 10 more opened their doors before the end of the decade. Three were established during the 1970s, and the last two in 1982.

Today, the state’s 21 counties operate 19 community colleges. In two cases, two counties jointly sponsor one college (Atlantic and Cape May sponsor Atlantic Cape Community College; Hunterdon and Somerset sponsor Raritan Valley Community College).

An Overview of New Jersey’s Community Colleges

THE COMPREHENSIVE MISSION: While some states have either vocational institutes or transfer-oriented junior colleges, New Jersey has embraced the principle of comprehensive community colleges. This is a statewide mandate for all community colleges to respond fully to the educational, cultural, and community needs of their respective counties.

New Jersey’s comprehensive community colleges prepare students to enter four-year institutions, train them to assume skilled positions in New Jersey’s workforce, and offer many other programs that enrich the quality of life for county residents. The colleges offer a wide variety of associate degree programs including both transfer and occupational curricula, and certificate programs in various occupational fields, as well as noncredit courses that serve students’ careers or general interests.

Community service and cultural programs are also part of the comprehensive community college mission.

* Note: In New Jersey, “community college” and “county college” are interchangeable.

ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY: New Jersey’s community colleges are open-access institutions, permitting anyone with a high school diploma or its equivalent or anyone over the age of 18 to enroll. As such, community colleges have played the key role in expanding higher education opportunities throughout the state.

When the Legislature created New Jersey’s community colleges, the goal was to keep tuition as low as possible to provide educational opportunity to economically disadvantaged students.

Our community colleges have done a good job of holding the line on tuition increases. The statewide average New Jersey community college tuition is about half of the tuition charged by New Jersey public four-year colleges and universities.

ENROLLMENTS: Community colleges are the fastest growing and by far the largest provider of higher education in the state. They now enroll over 230,000 credit students each year plus an additional 120,000 students in noncredit programs plus over 50,000 employees in customized training programs – for a total annual enrollment of over 400,000 New Jerseyans throughout the state.

STUDENT PROFILES: While New Jersey’s community colleges enroll many older part-time students, in recent years, our colleges have become the “college of first choice” for a large number of “traditional” students. Traditional students are defined as students who attend college directly out of high school. Many reasons exist for this demographic shift – including the affordability of a community college education and the increasing popularity of the New Jersey Student Tuition Assistance Rewards Scholarship program (See NJ STARS under Student Financial Aid on page nine for more details). Today, 67 percent of community college students are age 17 to 24.

With nearly 90 percent of community college students attending their home-county colleges, these institutions serve primarily local populations. Students who enroll at community colleges outside their county generally do so only when they want to pursue programs not offered at their home campus.

INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS: New Jersey community colleges offer more than 450 programs leading to the Associate in Arts (A.A.), Associate in Science (A.S.), or Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) degree, as well as more than 300 certificate programs.

In instances where a particular program is unavailable in the home county, state law permits a system of “charge back”

whereby the home county provides funding so that the student may enroll in that program at a neighboring college at the in-county tuition rate.

Many community college degree and certificate programs are in occupational/technical fields. These programs prepare graduates for immediate employment. Other community college programs provide college credits for transfer to a senior institution and further study.

Community colleges also offer hundreds of continuing education (noncredit) professional and certification programs. Examples include Real Estate Appraisal and Green Buildings, Computer Networking, Financial Literacy, and Management.

Community colleges also offer customized training to businesses large and small throughout the state – that is, the colleges customize the training based on what businesses need for their employees. In short, through customized training, community colleges develop whatever programs the companies need, and they deliver the training at locations convenient to the employees.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT: Investing in community colleges is good for students, good for taxpayers, and good for the state. Students who complete an associate degree will earn nearly \$400,000 more in additional lifetime income over the course of their careers. And a recent statewide economic impact study found that for every dollar of tax money invested in New Jersey’s community colleges, over \$18 in overall benefits are returned throughout the state. Stated another way, the rate of return on tax money invested in community colleges is an impressive 14 percent. In short, the state actually makes money by funding community colleges – that is, the colleges put more money back into the state treasury than they take out.

Statewide Community College Programs

For more than a decade, New Jersey’s community colleges have developed a proven track record in working together as a statewide team to deliver statewide programs and priorities. Some of these outstanding programs include:

NEW JERSEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE CONSORTIUM FOR WORKFORCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

The Workforce Consortium is one of our proudest accomplishments. The Consortium was created in 2004 to connect community colleges to the state's economic development programs, and better meet the training needs of businesses in New Jersey. It also provides ways for community colleges to increase their revenue generated through customized training programs. To date, the Workforce Consortium has greatly strengthened our relationship with the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, it has provided training to nearly 30,000 employees at over 1,200 companies throughout the state, and it has returned over \$5 million in training revenue to our community colleges. The Consortium has been recognized by the New Jersey Business & Industry Association, the state's largest and most prominent business advocacy association, for the outstanding training programs it provides to businesses large and small throughout the state.

NEW JERSEY VIRTUAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE CONSORTIUM:

Created in 1999, the NJ Virtual Community College Consortium (NJVCCC) started as primarily a seat exchange program through which students at any one of New Jersey's 19 community colleges could take online courses at other community colleges. Now that most community colleges offer their own Web-based courses, the NJVCCC has evolved into a more robust consortium that secures deep discounts for community colleges through several statewide leases with major software companies to support our collective online efforts.

NEW PATHWAYS TO TEACHING IN NEW

JERSEY: Working with the New Jersey Department of Education, community colleges developed New Pathways to Teaching in New Jersey, which is an alternate route teacher certification program. Career changers who want to become teachers can now go to their local community college for this new continuing education program. Upon successful completion of the program, individuals can earn their teacher certification with the Department of Education. And those who want to pursue graduate education can earn up to 15 credits toward a Master of Arts in Teaching at New Jersey City University.

NEW JERSEY COUNTY COLLEGE JOINT PURCHASING CONSORTIUM:

The NJ County College Joint Purchasing Consortium was created in 1999 for our colleges to pool their considerable purchasing power for goods and services. Participating colleges have saved millions of dollars over the years through a variety of joint purchasing agreements. Savings through joint contracts for

gas and electricity have been especially impressive.

NEW JERSEY PATHWAYS LEADING APPRENTICES TO A COLLEGE EDUCATION

(NJ PLACE): NJ PLACE is a statewide program developed to award college credit for graduates of participating registered apprenticeship programs. NJ PLACE recognizes college-level learning taking place in registered apprenticeship programs and has negotiated articulation agreements with NJ's 19 community colleges to award a minimum number of recommended credits toward an associate degree program.

An Overview of New Jersey's Higher Education System

New Jersey's 19 community colleges form a sector within the state's higher education system that includes 12 other public and 18 private institutions. The other public colleges and universities include three research universities (Rutgers University, New Jersey Institute of Technology, and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey), nine state colleges/teaching universities, and 18 private institutions (14 senior colleges and universities receiving state aid, two religious institutions, and two degree-granting proprietary institutions).

THE NEW JERSEY HIGHER EDUCATION RESTRUCTURING ACT OF 1994:

This state law abolished the State Board and Department of Higher Education. For almost 30 years, the State Board and Department had broad regulatory authority over New Jersey's colleges and universities. Dissolving these state entities reduced the extent of state control over colleges, removed a level of bureaucratic review, and introduced a new entrepreneurial spirit to New Jersey's colleges and universities. Most importantly, the restructured system gave increased autonomy, responsibility, and accountability to local trustees. The 1994 restructuring act also created the Commission on Higher Education as the new state-level coordinating agency for New Jersey's system of higher education, and the Presidents' Council as a new systemwide advisory body. It also gave many new responsibilities to boards of trustees and to the New Jersey Council of County Colleges, the state association for New Jersey's 19 community colleges.

COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION: The Commission on Higher Education is New Jersey's state

agency for higher education.

The Commission's primary responsibilities include: systemwide planning, research, and advocacy; final decisions on institutional licensure and mission changes; policy and budget recommendations for higher education; and, upon referral from the New Jersey Presidents' Council, decisions on new academic programs that exceed an institution's mission or are unduly costly or duplicative.

In exercising its institutional licensure responsibility, the Commission ordinarily accepts the judgment of the Middle States Association (MSA) with respect to New Jersey college and university accreditation. Commission staff members accompany Middle States teams on site visits only in certain circumstances.

In addition, legislation enacted in 2010 elevated the role of the Commission on Higher Education's executive director. He or she now serves as Secretary of Higher Education and sits on the Governor's cabinet.

PRESIDENTS' COUNCIL: The New Jersey Presidents' Council consists of the presidents of the state's public and private colleges and universities. In all, the Presidents' Council consists of 49 voting members.

The Presidents' Council's responsibilities include: reviewing and commenting on new academic programs; providing research and public information on higher education; advising the Commission on planning, institutional licensure, and mission as well as costly or duplicative new academic programs; making recommendations on statewide higher education issues, state aid, and student assistance; and encouraging regional and cooperative programs and transfer articulation agreements.

The Presidents' Council's activities are largely guided by a 14-member Executive Board consisting of five community college presidents, three research university presidents, three state college/teaching university presidents, and three non-public institution presidents.

BOARDS OF TRUSTEES: Trustee boards govern our community colleges. They have much more responsibility since the 1994 restructuring act than they previously did under the State Board and Department of Higher Education. Trustee responsibilities now include setting student tuition and fees, establishing admissions standards and degree requirements, investing institutional funds, and overseeing legal affairs. Boards of Trustees also have full authority over academic programs, personnel decisions, contracts, and capital

(physical plant) initiatives.

THE NEW JERSEY COUNCIL OF COUNTY

COLLEGES: A 1967 law established the New Jersey Council of County Colleges to advise state-level policy makers on matters affecting community colleges. A 1990 law made the Council a trustee-headed nonprofit corporation whose primary purpose was to serve as the state-level advocacy organization for New Jersey's 19 community colleges.

Under the 1994 restructuring act, the Council was given new coordinating responsibilities including submitting a statewide budget request for community colleges, developing the formula for distributing state aid among the colleges, and allocating capital funding among the 19 community colleges.

All community college trustee board chairs (or their designees) and all community college presidents are members of the Council. A seven-person Executive Committee consisting of four trustees and three presidents, with a trustee serving as the Council Chair, guides the Council's activities.

Funding

S **STATE FUNDING:** State aid to each community college is based on a formula, developed by the New Jersey Council of County Colleges and approved by the State Treasurer, that provides foundation funding for each institution plus funding based on enrollments.

The state also provides funding for certain employee fringe benefits. For example, the state pays pension costs related to community college employees who are eligible for the TIAA-CREF plan.

New Jersey's community colleges were founded on the basic funding principle of one-third, one-third, one-third – that is, one-third funding from the state, one-third funding from the counties, and one-third funding from tuition. The Commission on Higher Education, the New Jersey Presidents' Council, and the New Jersey Council of County Colleges have consistently endorsed this funding plan for community colleges.

The state share had dropped well below the one third goal in the mid-1990s – to about 20 percent. Several years of state funding increases pushed the state share up to about 30 percent. But most recently, diminished state funding in combination with rapid enrollment growth has resulted in the follow-

ing estimated funding shares:

State: 20 percent
Counties: 25 percent
Tuition: 55 percent

COUNTY FUNDING: Each New Jersey county has a board of school estimate (typically three freeholders and two trustees) that determines the overall budget for its community college. The freeholder board then collects and appropriates the county share of funding to its local community college.

TUITION: Each board of trustees has final authority for setting tuition and fees each year. The board is required by law to hold a public hearing before approving tuition increases.

CAPITAL FUNDING: The NJ Council of County Colleges recommends new construction and renovation projects for approval by the State Treasurer through what is known as the “Chapter 12” program. Upon approval by the Treasurer, counties issue the bonds, and the state then reimburses the counties for half of the annual debt service on the bonds.

The Chapter 12 program is a revolving fund. That is, as principle on the bonds is retired each year, it can be reissued for new capital projects.

This has been a very successful program for community colleges. Over the past 10 years, about \$1 billion has been allocated for capital projects at New Jersey’s community colleges.

STUDENT FINANCIAL AID: There are a number of federal and state programs that provide financial aid for community college students. Two New Jersey programs deserve a special mention.

NJ STARS, approved by the Legislature in 2004 and the first program of its kind in the country, provides full community college tuition and fees scholarships to high school students who graduate in the top 15 percent of their class. NJ STARS students who earn their associate degrees from community college with at least a 3.25 grade point average may qualify for NJ STARS II, a substantial tuition scholarship at New Jersey’s public colleges and universities. Students can receive between \$6,000 and \$7,000 per year, depending on their grade point averages. Nearly 6,000 students receive NJ STARS and NJ STARS II scholarships each year.

Part-time Tuition Aid Grants (TAG), created by the State Legislature in 2003, provide financial aid for students who

enroll at community colleges as part-time students (taking six to 11 credits per semester). Over 11,000 part-time students receive these grants each year.

Trustee Duties and Responsibilities

The duties and responsibilities of a community college board of trustees are spelled out in state law. One of the first things a new board member should do is become familiar with the portion of state law that deals with community colleges. This is commonly called the New Jersey Statutes Annotated. Community college trustee responsibilities are specified in the county college portion of the statute (18A:64A-12) as well as in the 1994 higher education restructuring legislation (18A:3B-6).

Some of the major responsibilities you will have as a board member are:

- Defining the role and mission of the college;
- Evaluating institutional performance;
- Approving college facilities plans;
- Establishing tuition rates;
- Hiring the president;
- Evaluating the president;
- Establishing institutional budgets and approving contracts and expenditures;
- Setting the tone for institutional leadership; and
- Representing the community to the college and the college to the community.

One of Eleven

As a community college trustee, you are one member of an eleven-member board.* Under state law, a county's board of chosen freeholders appoints eight members of a community college's board of trustees, the Governor appoints two, and the county executive superintendent of schools serves ex officio.

** Note: Atlantic Cape Community College and Raritan Valley Community College, because they each serve two counties, have 15 trustees. Union County College, in addition to having 11 trustees, has a 28 member Board of Governors.*

The student body elects from the graduating class a representative to the board. The community college board of trustees has the option to make the student representative a voting member.

All trustees of public institutions of higher education serve on a voluntary basis. All voting board members have equal rights and responsibilities.

All decisions made by boards of trustees must be made by a vote in a public meeting. Away from the boardroom, each board member speaks only as an individual and cannot make comments for the board as a whole.

Remember that board members cannot act as individuals, but only as a board. This means that even though you may sometimes disagree with what becomes board policy, once it is adopted by the board you will bear some responsibility for implementation of that policy. As decisions are made, you are expected to speak openly for your point of view. But once the decision is final, you should support the position of the board. Effective trusteeship requires the ability to function as part of a team. A team functions best when members support each other publicly, even though there might have been different points of view as a decision was being reached.

Officers of the Board

Community college boards of trustees elect their officers at an organizational meeting each Fall. The statute says the board shall elect one of its members as chairperson and another member as vice-chairperson. The board may also elect other officers as it deems necessary.

ROLE OF THE CHAIRPERSON: As the chosen leader of the board of trustees, the chairperson fills a unique role. Duties of the chairperson include presiding at meetings and taking responsibility for their orderly conduct. The chairperson should know parliamentary procedure and use it to assist the board in moving quickly and efficiently through the meeting's agenda.

The chairperson must see that all board members who wish to speak are given the opportunity to do so. The chairperson guides the discussion and must see that college staff members provide any needed information. The chairperson consults often with the president as the agenda is put together. Different boards have different approaches on the length of time the chairperson should serve. Some boards believe the

board should continue with an experienced chairperson; other boards believe in regularly electing a different chairperson so that the experience of being chairperson helps develop board members.

The President

Perhaps the most important responsibility of the board is to employ its chief executive officer, the president. It is the president who is responsible for the administration of the college. In fact, as a matter of state law, boards can hire college staff only upon the recommendation of the president. The president acts as academic leader, representative of the college in the community, top manager, and chief advisor to the board. As the most visible employee, the president represents the college to all of its many constituents.

The relationship between the board and the president should be open and mutually supportive. Without a shared sense of purpose between the board and the president, and without mutual respect and trust, a college will experience difficult times.

The president should be the major source of information and recommendations channeled to the board. As chief executive officer, the president must be responsible for all administrative recommendations that are brought to the board. While it is necessary to delegate authority in most matters, the president alone is responsible for the recommendations coming to the board from staff.

For this reason, board members should be sensitive to the president's need to be the link between trustees and administrative staff. By coordinating information and requests, the president can clarify questions and monitor the accuracy of reports. When trustees have a question or suggestion, it is wise to call the president first.

Presidents strive to be sensitive to the goals and concerns of the board and to act in accordance with its wishes. In most instances, recommendations made by the president will be acceptable to the board of trustees. Once the board makes policy decisions and the administration has been directed to carry out those policies, the president and other employees have the right to expect support from the board of trustees.

The presidency of a community college is a very difficult job. Demands are made on the president's time around the clock, and presidential decisions are constantly tested and challenged. Presidents need the strong support of their boards if they are to lead their institutions effectively.

The Difference Between Governance and Administration

Boards of trustees are governing boards and are responsible for making policy. The president and his or her staff members are responsible for administering the college. The foundation for these mutual responsibilities is in the nature of the two jobs. Board members are part-time volunteers. The system works best when part-time volunteers set general policies as representatives of the community, but leave it to the president and staff members to establish procedures and make decisions that carry out those policies on a day-to-day basis.

Sometimes, however, it is difficult to clearly draw the line between policy-making and administrative matters. Deciding the appropriate roles of the trustees and the president must ultimately rest with the people who are involved at the local level. Past practice, local tradition, and the personalities of board members and administrators all play a role in this determination.

Generally, however, it can be said that the board should take the larger perspective. It functions most effectively when day-to-day details are left to the president and the staff.

The Attorney and the Auditor

Two people of particular importance to the board are its attorney and its auditor. While both work at the direction of the president, both have a very special obligation to protect the interest of the board.

You should expect to receive legal opinions and auditor's reports on a regular basis. Boards that ignore management letters from their auditors or that act contrary to the legal advice from their attorneys often do so at the risk of serious consequences and potential liabilities.

The Students and the Faculty

Underlying all of your decisions as a trustee should be a concern for the welfare of the students who come to your community college for education and training. These students are of all ages and backgrounds, with a

variety of life situations and personal or career goals.

Students are at your college because they want new opportunities in their lives. They want to improve themselves, and they believe that the community college is the best way to achieve their goals.

Faculty work with you to help the students reach their potential. As the core of your academic workforce, faculty serve both as role models and as providers of knowledge.

Of all the employees at the college, it is the faculty who are most directly responsible for fulfilling the college's primary mission. Periodically, the board should review all policies regarding the hiring and evaluation of faculty. In addition, the board should support efforts to reward excellence in teaching.

The Open Public Meetings Act

The New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act was enacted in 1975. This law requires that the public and press receive advance notice of, and be given the right to attend, all meetings of public bodies. Failure to comply with this law may result in voiding of actions taken by a public body, personal liability on the part of participating public officials, or court rulings mandating compliance with the law. County college boards of trustees are subject to the Open Public Meetings Act.

While the public has the right to be present at a meeting, the board of trustees retains the right to determine whether the public may speak and if so what reasonable limitations it will impose on public participation.

Boards of trustees should consult with their attorney to ensure that their meetings fully meet the Open Public Meetings Act requirements.

The Open Public Records Act

The New Jersey Open Public Records Act (OPRA) was enacted in 2002. This law significantly expanded the rights of public access to records of public agencies including county colleges. Unless otherwise exempt by statute, executive order, court rule or federal law, the public has the right to inspect, receive or copy all records that an official of a public entity has made, maintained, kept on file or that has been received in the course of his or the public entity's official business. This definition includes written and printed material, photographs, microfilm, data processed doc-

uments, sound recordings, and information that is transmitted or stored electronically, including e-mail.

In general, public colleges must make records available within seven days of receipt of requests for the records. OPRA provides procedures for determination of disputes concerning denial of access, and it provides sanctions when access is unreasonably denied.

Boards of trustees should consult with their attorney to ensure compliance with the Open Public Records Act.

Financial Disclosure Statement

The New Jersey Local Government Ethics Law requires officers of county colleges to annually file a financial disclosure statement with the Local Finance Board (LFB) of the Division of Local Government Services within the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. The LFB provides the form of the Financial Disclosure Statement that must be filed by April 30th of each year.

An “officer” of the county college means any person, whether compensated or not, whether part-time or full-time, serving on the governing body (the board of trustees), or who is a managerial executive or confidential employee of the college.

Boards of trustees should consult with their attorney to ensure compliance with the Financial Disclosure Statement requirements.

Collective Bargaining

New Jersey has collective bargaining laws for public employees, including those working at public community colleges.

All community colleges are now involved in some form of collective bargaining. No matter what the state of collective bargaining in your county, this is an important subject with which you should become familiar.

Collective bargaining is important because it frames your relationship with your employees, affects the resources available for running the college, and has many legal ramifications with which a newly appointed trustee may not be familiar. You should spend time with your administrators and attorney

reviewing collective bargaining issues and your college's practices in this area.

Most seasoned trustees will agree that collective bargaining is one of the most sensitive (and challenging) issues that trustees and presidents must deal with in New Jersey. Especially during contract negotiations, it is critical for the board to function as a team and to fully support the administration in the negotiations with employee unions.

Governmental Relations

Because state and county governments affect much of what community college trustees do, and because the state and counties provide substantial funding to our community colleges, it is necessary that each college maintain solid working relationships with its state legislators and county government officials.

At the state level, the New Jersey Council of County Colleges serves community colleges by representing their general legislative and budgetary interests in Trenton. The Council supplies information and testimony to legislators and their staffs, monitors legislative activity, provides updates to trustees and presidents, and generally coordinates all government relations activities for New Jersey's 19 community colleges at the state level.

At the local level, it is essential that trustees and presidents know their legislators and freeholders, and constantly keep them abreast of developments at the college.

Some trustees might ask, "Why trustees?" Why should trustees be involved in these activities with legislators and freeholders? Isn't this the responsibility of presidents and senior staff members? The answer is yes, presidents and staff members must take an active role in working with state and county political leaders. But, when trustees give freely of their time and energy to advocate for their colleges, the impact can be very powerful. There is nothing quite as effective as trustee participation in college lobbying efforts.

The good news for community college trustees is that our colleges have more political assets than any other colleges. "All politics is local" is a phrase frequently heard in Trenton. Applied to higher education, this means that legislators (and freeholders) will always be interested first and foremost in their local college. This is a tremendous advantage for community colleges, since there are more community colleges in more legislative districts than any other sector of higher education.

How do community colleges convert these political assets into real political influence? Here are a few suggestions for trustees to keep in mind when communicating with legislators (and freeholders) in their local communities:

- **KEEP LEGISLATORS INFORMED** – Trustees should keep in touch with legislators even when community college priorities are not being considered. Legislators are bombarded with hundreds of requests during each legislative session. They will look more favorably on those requests that come from individuals who have taken the time to get to know them on an ongoing basis.
- **INVITE LEGISLATORS TO CAMPUS** – The academic calendar presents countless opportunities to get legislators involved in campus activities. Commencement is the obvious example, but there are many others such as inviting legislators to groundbreaking ceremonies and awards ceremonies, and encouraging legislators to serve as guest lecturers.
- **BE BRIEF** – Legislators have hundreds of issues on their desks, and will always appreciate your recognition of that fact. Thus, you will always help your cause by being brief and direct.
- **FOLLOW-UP & THANK-YOUS** – Make sure to follow-up in writing or with a phone call to re-acquaint legislators with your issue. Always thank legislators for their time and consideration.

Trustee Ambassadors

The New Jersey Council of County Colleges has established a statewide Trustee Ambassador Program to identify and assist trustees who are especially interested in participating in state-level community college activities.

Trustee Ambassador activities typically include:

- Community College Ambassador Days in the Statehouse;
- Meetings with state legislators;
- Meetings with members of the NJ Congressional Delegation;
- Participating in Trustee Ambassador conference calls; and
- Providing regular “Trustee Ambassador Reports” at local board meetings.

If you are interested in serving as a Trustee Ambassador for your college, please call your college president or the Council.

Doing Your Homework

Good board members stay informed about their college and participate in campus events, and will also be invited to many others. Each college has community luncheons, lecture programs, athletic contests, political events, and theater presentations at which the attendance of board members is encouraged. Trustees play especially important roles at certain special events, such as commencement or nurse-capping ceremonies.

When you attend campus events, you may be approached with suggestions for the board or criticisms of the college. Experienced trustees advise that a board member should listen carefully and report such conversations to the president. Trustees should be careful not to commit themselves or their boards to any specific course of action.

In addition to attending campus events, trustees have the responsibility to keep informed about proposals and recommendations that the administration presents. You will probably receive a packet of materials regularly, prior to each board meeting. The well-informed trustee reads this material well before the meeting.

Should questions arise, the best approach is to contact your president before the board meeting to make him/her aware of your questions. If the president is not able to answer your questions at that time, at least he/she will have been alerted so that the correct research and information can be provided at the board meeting.

A good relationship between presidents and trustees eliminates surprises. Good administrators do not bring “walk-in” items to board meetings. Similarly, good trustees make presidents aware of concerns and questions early enough so that answers can be thoroughly prepared.

You should expect to do a certain amount of reading about the field of education to improve your understanding of the many different policy matters that will be discussed during your time on the board. One of the best sources of current news in the field of higher education is a weekly newspaper called the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. It contains in-depth news and analyses of higher education issues as well as a large section devoted to listings of current job openings in the field.

Two other newspapers of special interest to community colleges are the bi-weekly *Community College Times*, available online from the American Association of Community Colleges (www.CommunityCollegeTimes.com), and the independent *Community College Week*. Both focus solely on community college issues and feature opinion columns, legislative updates, and job listings.

Another resource you may find helpful is the online publication *Inside Higher Education*, which you can access via www.INSIDEHIGHERED.COM. The Web site features breaking news, feature stories, and daily commentary on higher education.

If your college does not provide you with these publications and online services, or similar ones, you should let your president know if you are interested in receiving them.

Associations

Trustee education materials are available at the state and national levels.

NEW JERSEY COUNCIL OF COUNTY

COLLEGES: The Council sponsors seminars and conferences for trustees. The Council also serves as an information source, providing a trustee newsletter, membership and legislative directories, legislative analyses and alerts, and other materials designed to keep trustees well informed.

ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE

TRUSTEES (ACCT): This group performs many of the same functions at the national level that the New Jersey Council of County Colleges performs at the state level. ACCT regularly publishes a newsletter called the ACCT Advisor, produces a quarterly magazine that features papers on trusteeship written by trustees, and hosts regional and national meetings that offer educational seminars. More information is available via ACCT's Web site, www.acct.org.

Feel free to call the Council at any time for more information at 609-392-3434. Fax us at 609-392-8158 and send e-mail to info@njccc.org. You can follow the Council and New Jersey's community colleges on www.twitter.com/NJCommColleges. Also, visit our Web site: www.njccc.org, where several publications and other resources are available for you.

Asking Questions

This Trustee Manual was designed to answer some basic questions about effective trusteeship. But it only touches the surface. It will take time for you to develop the background and understanding needed for complete familiarity with the community college movement and the many challenges facing New Jersey's community colleges.

One of the best ways for you to learn is to ask questions. If you don't understand the budget or a proposed policy or program, ask questions. You are the final decision-making authority on your college campus, and you will bear the responsibility for the decisions that are made. Make sure you understand what you are doing and why it is being done.

Your president will welcome the opportunity to help you keep informed. In addition, your peers at the New Jersey Council of County Colleges stand ready to provide help and guidance. Trustee seminars are available, using the expertise of community college leaders from around the state and nation. Regular meetings of the Council are also open for you to attend.

We look forward to hearing from you and seeing you at upcoming Council events.

New Jersey Council of County Colleges

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