

Speaking With One Voice

[ps://www.acct.org/article/trustee-talk-free-speech-rights-and-responsibilities-boards-trustees](https://www.acct.org/article/trustee-talk-free-speech-rights-and-responsibilities-boards-trustees)

ACCT's first standard of good practice, "act as a unit," comes to mind immediately. For both elected and appointed board members, the traditional board code of behavior of publicly going along with the board's decisions does, in essence, prohibit individual trustees' "free" speech. ACCT's principles emphasize that boards should get along as colleagues, allow the president or the board chair to be the primary spokespersons on any key issue, and basically keep one's own differing opinion confidential and out of the headlines. Those actions protect the institution.

Smith writes, "Even with the best of intentions, trustees may clash over differences of opinions about what they believe is best for the college. But when discussions and decisions are guided by a thorough understanding of the community and the higher education sector, and informed by data, it is always possible to function as an effective team."

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Function Only as a Whole Body

The power of the board is as a body of the whole, not as individual actors. Board members should avoid personal self-interests in the boardroom and speak on behalf of the college and community, not for any political or personal affiliation. According to Cindra Smith, author of *Trusteeship in Community Colleges: A Guide for Effective Governance* (2008), "Every trustee brings their own perspectives to the board room and applies their own experiences and insights to the important discussions and decisions that are made. Yet the commitment to serve on a board of trustees is tied to the inextricable acknowledgement that 'no individual trustee has power or authority to act on his or her own.'"

Your Personal Agenda

According to "Trusteeship 101: Board Basics" from ACCT's seminal handbook, *Trusteeship in Community Colleges*,

The term "rogue trustee" has been used in the news media to describe board members whose personal or competing interests interfere with the board's collective interests. Every board member should be aware of the potential of wandering into this pitfall, and they should constantly ask themselves whether what they are doing is in the interest of the college or serving a personal agenda. If it is serving a personal agenda, then the

trustee must realize that what is in his or her best personal interest is to set the agenda item aside — as trustees who are disruptive for reasons that don't serve the mission, vision, or goals of the college tend to undermine their own aims in the end by alienating themselves from the board.

<https://www.acct.org/page/governing-board-roles-responsibilities>

Specific responsibilities are to:

- Act as a unit.
- Represent the community and serve the public good.
- Be visionary; think strategically.
- Establish policies to support the mission of the institution.
- Employ, evaluate, and support the College President.
- Create a culture of evidence that monitors institutional performance.