ABHE

BOARD GOVERNANCE

TRAINING HANDBOOK

TRUSTEES FORUM
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2026

EXCELLENCE IN BOARD GOVERNANCE

PRESENTERS: Dr. John Derry, Dr. David Gyertson

Board Governance Forum
February 11, 2026

Facilitator — John Derry and David Gyertson

Excellence in Board Goverance

OVERVIEW: Serving on the board of a Bible College is an opportunity to shape the institution's spiritual and academic direction. This forum track is designed to engage the president, board chair, and other trustees in assessing the board's strengths and in identifying strategies to improve governance effectiveness. Following each session, an evaluation instrument will guide participants in evaluating board performance on the topic addressed. At the conclusion of the day, each institution will formulate a board development action plan to implement in the coming months. Leaders will also be introduced to valuable governance tools accessible to ABHE members.

7:00 – 8:00 Forum Breakfast — Regency Foyer
8:00 – 8:15 Welcome & Introductions

8:15 – 9:30 SESSION 1 – INSTITUTIONAL VALUE, CULTURE, AND MISSION – John Derry

- The promise the institution makes to its constituency
- Institutional distinctives, brand and value
- Institutional purpose and heritage
- Guarding against mission drift

9:30 – 10:15 Refreshment Break — Regency Foyer

10:15 – 11:45 SESSION 2 – STEWARD BOARD CULTURE AND AUTHORITY – David Gyertson

- Steward board vs owner board
- Stewarding the institution as a spiritual enterprise
- Policy governance & the board policy manual
- Effective path for board chair and presidential partnership

12:00 – 1:00 Buffet Lunch — Regency Foyer

1:00 – 2:15 SESSION 3 – SUSTAINABILITY AND STRATEGIC PLANNING – John Derry

- Modes of governance as leadership – fiscal, strategic & generative
- Accurate assessment of institutional SWOT
- User friendly dashboard of institutional KPI's
- Compliance, risk assessment, and crisis management

2:15 – 3:00 Refreshment Break — Regency Foyer

3:00 – 4:15 SESSION 4 – BOARD DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION – David Gyertson

- An effective board governance committee
- Strategic board member recruitment and orientation
- Board and presidential evaluations
- Continuous board development

4:15 – 4:30 Wrap Up
6:00 – 8:30 CONNECTIONS DINNER — Ballroom B/C/D

MEET OUR COACHES

JOHN DERRY is President Emeritus of Hope International University (HIU) in Fullerton, California, completing sixteen years of service. Previously, he served as president of Dallas Christian College, Texas, vice president at Milligan University, Tennessee, pastor of Vermont Christian Church, Illinois, and campus minister at Western Illinois University. Following his tenure at HIU, he served as interim vice president for academic affairs at Dallas Christian College and as program coordinator and coach for the ABHE Excellence in Board Governance program.

He is a graduate of Lincoln Christian University with a B.A. and M.A., completed a M.S. Ed. degree at Western Illinois University, and earned his Ed.D. In higher education administration from East Tennessee State University.

John is an ordained minister with the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. He has authored articles and spoken nationally and internationally on Christian leadership, globalization, and higher education. He has extensive experience serving on the boards of non-profit and faith based organizations and advising presidents and trustees on collaborative ventures and mergers.

He continues to lead accreditation teams for the Western Association of Colleges and Schools Senior College and University Commission and the ABHE Commission on Accreditation. He has taught courses in strategic planning/management and in nonprofit board governance. John may be contacted at jderry@hiu.edu or john.derry@abhe.org.

John and his wife, Jane, are members of Compass Christian Church and reside in Denton, Texas. They have two children and eight grandchildren.

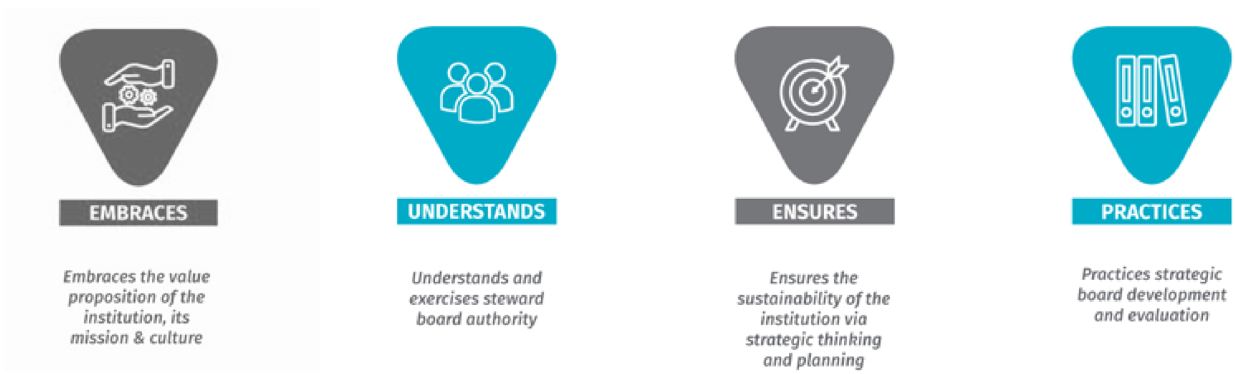
DAVID GYERTSON has a broad and varied background in higher education, publishing, consulting, executive coaching, ministry and media. He holds the Ph.D. from Michigan State University in Higher Education Administration and served as President of Regent University, Asbury University, Taylor University and Interim President at Asbury Seminary. He has held senior leadership positions in religious, charitable and business environments, including international and cross-cultural settings. He is a transitions facilitator and executive coach to faith-based organizations and their leaders.

David consults with the InTrust Center for Theological Schools and the Association of Biblical Higher Education specializing in Board/Trustee governance training, transition planning and on-boarding of new executives. He does retreats in areas of spiritual formation for organizational leaders, ministry professionals and others desiring to grow personally and professionally as committed followers of Christ. He is frequent speaker at conferences, camps, schools, universities & churches.

Currently he is Distinguished Leader in Residence and Affiliate Professor of Leadership Formation and Renewal at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, KY. He can be emailed at David.Gyertson@asburyseminary.edu or djgyertson@gmail.com

David and his wife, Nancy, attend the Free Methodist Church and live in Wilmore, Kentucky. They have two grandchildren.

ESSENTIALS OF EXCELLENCE IN BOARD GOVERNANCE



An Excellent Board . . .

1. *Embraces the value proposition of the institution, its mission and culture*

- The promise the institution makes to its constituency
- Institutional distinctives, brand, and value
- Institutional purpose and heritage
- Guard against institutional drift

2. *Understands and exercises steward board authority*

- Create a steward board vs. owner board culture
- Cultivate the board's spiritual vitality
- Board authority expressed as one voice through policy governance and the board policy manual
- Prudent plans for presidential selection and evaluation

3. *Ensures the sustainability of the institution via strategic thinking and planning*

- Modes of governance as leadership – fiscal, strategic, and generative
- Accurate assessment of institutional SWOT
- User friendly dashboard of institutional KPI's
- Compliance, risk assessment, and crisis management policies

4. *Practices strategic board development and evaluation*

- A robust and highly effective board governance committee
- Strategic board member selection and a comprehensive orientation program
- Board evaluations
- Continuous board development

Resources

Fifteen Minute Videos on Key Topics: www.abhe.org/board-governance/
ABHE Board Governance Community: https://abhe.connectedcommunity.org/login

BOARD ASSESSMENT of EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

Please evaluate your board on each of these items, using the scale below to assign a number according to the level of follow-up needed.

1 = This is a current board practice, no work needed.
2 = This is perhaps an area of need; further study might be warranted.
3 = This is a significant issue we need to address.
4 = This is an urgent issue that needs to be addressed soon.
5 = This is the most significant and urgent issue, and our board needs to follow up in a timely manner.

Scoring and Notes

#1 - Embraces the value proposition of the institution, its mission and culture

____ 1. **Our board is confident in our market distinctives and the ongoing demand for the programs we offer.**

____ 2. **Our institution is held in high value by our employees and other key stakeholders.**

____ 3. **All board members have a clear understanding of where we fit within the broader context of higher education and the focus of biblical higher education.**

____ 4. **Our board believes the fundamental value proposition of the institution is as a spiritual enterprise.**

____ 5. **Our board members personally include the school in their persistent prayers of faith and expectancy . . . and we regularly see God at work.**

____ 6. **Every board member can articulate the mission statement of our college.**

____ 7. **Our trustees have a working knowledge of the circumstances and individuals that surround the founding of our college.**

____ 8. **I am confident we have taken the necessary steps to guard the mission of our college.**

____ 9. **There is visual evidence on our campus that we value our historical heritage and culture.**

____ 10. **The heritage and mission of our college are communicated to new students, faculty, staff, and trustees.**

Top three scores on issues that may need board attention: #______ #______ #______

An action step that would help our board be more effective in this area is:

BOARD ASSESSMENT of EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

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Scoring and Notes

#2 - Understands and exercises steward board authority

____ 1. **We understand our responsibility to model spiritual direction for the rest of our campus community.**

____ 2. **Our board functions with a steward mindset, brought together by God to lead a piece of His kingdom work.**

____ 3. **Our board governs rather than manages our institution.**

____ 4. **Our trustees understand the duties, roles, responsibilities, and limits of their governing authority.**

____ 5. **We have a Board Policy Manual/Handbook that is current and is reviewed on a regular basis.**

____ 6. **The board regularly monitors compliance with the established policies that guide the administration and guard the mission.**

____ 7. **Our institution has a set of executive parameters that define the roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities of our CEO.**

____ 8. **Our board regularly evaluates the performance of our CEO in the context of the defined executive parameters and outcomes.**

____ 9. **We have a well-articulated and board approved succession plan with clearly stated policies for guiding the search, selection, and onboarding of our next CEO.**

____ 10. **There is an effective working relationship between the board chair and the CEO.**

Top three scores on issues that may need board attention: #______ #______ #______

An action step that would help our board be more effective in this area is:

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Scoring and Notes

#3 - Ensures the sustainability of the institution via strategic thinking and planning

____ **1. Our board has confidence in the soundness and sustainability of our business model.**

____ **2. Our board has a good balance between the fiduciary, strategic, and generative modes of governance.**

____ **3. Our board members can articulate a compelling vision to our constituents.**

____ **4. We have a strategic plan that effectively meets the needs of the college.**

____ **5. There is a standing agenda item for our board meetings when progress on the strategic plan is reviewed.**

____ **6. Our board is well-informed and apprised of developments in the higher education environment that directly impact our current and future operation.**

____ **7. We have a Risk Management and Compliance Policy that meets the needs of the college with reports that are reviewed at least annually.**

____ **8. We are confident that our college is in compliance with accreditation, state, and federal regulations.**

____ **9. Our college has a Crisis Management Plan that is readily accessible and a Crisis Management Team that we are confident can handle an emergency.**

____ **10. We have a comprehensive and user-friendly Trustee Dashboard of Key Performance Indicators that we review regularly.**

Top three scores on issues that may need board attention: #______ #______ #______

An action step that would help our board be more effective in this area is:

BOARD ASSESSMENT of EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

Please evaluate your board on each of these items, using the scale below to assign a number according to the level of follow-up needed.

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Scoring and Notes

#4 - Practices strategic board development and evaluation

____ **1. Our board is actively engaged in recruiting highly capable and deeply committed, mission-fit candidates for board membership.**

____ **2. A board composition matrix is used to monitor the skill sets, professional backgrounds, and demographic composition the board requires to be effective.**

____ **3. We sign an annual Conflict of Interest statement and an annual Affirmation of Service commitment.**

____ **4. We have a board portal that is user-friendly and includes all the necessary tools.**

____ **5. Our board orientation program is comprehensive in preparing new trustees for effective service.**

____ **6. Our board has an active Governance Committee that coordinates board education, trustee recruitment, and related governance concerns.**

____ **7. Board meetings are well-organized and an efficient use of time.**

____ **8. Board committees have a charter and are clear on their responsibilities.**

____ **9. Our board conducts meaningful, regular education and board development sessions with the goal of continuous improvement.**

____ **10. Board and individual trustee evaluations take place on an annual basis.**

Top three scores on issues that may need board attention: #______ #______ #______

An action step that would help our board be more effective in this area is:

ADVANCING BOARD EFFECTIVENESS

The *Excellence in Board Governance* forum invites you and your board to thoughtfully identify areas for growth that will strengthen its effectiveness. From the topics covered during the sessions and the assessments, please select three to five areas where you believe your board may want to give attention. Then, form an action statement that can be considered as part of your board development strategy in the coming year. Each board is free to determine the most appropriate path for implementing the recommended Action Step.

As you develop your plan, consider the following:

- ✓ Ensure each Action Step is clearly defined and outcome oriented.
- ✓ Designate a person or committee to oversee implementation.
- ✓ Allocate the necessary resources to support those responsible for the Action Step.
- ✓ Use a template to outline the strategy and track progress.
- ✓ Set a timeline with regular updates to the board and a target completion date.

Here are some examples of Action Steps to get your started.

Sample Action Steps

_____ **Safeguard and Promote Heritage and Mission Alignment** – Take proactive steps to safeguard the institution's, mission, purpose, accreditation, and positioning with key stakeholders. Ensure every Board Member, staff member, and student can clearly articulate the values, heritage, mission and statistical outcomes.

_____ **Optimize University Strength and Growth** – Secure the university's future through strategic growth, innovation, fundraising, and sound financial stewardship.

_____ **Board Orientation** – Ensure board members have a thorough onboarding experience and on-going access to all policies, bylaws, and handbooks.

_____ **Prioritize Board Development** – Foster continuous board education, development and spiritual ethos in governance through guest speakers, data-driven insights, and intentional resources and initiatives.

_____ **Succession Planning** – Develop and maintain a board-approved succession plan that includes policies for the search, selection, and onboarding of the next CEO and key executives.

STRATEGIC ACTION STEPS

Institution: ______________________________ **Date:** ______________________________

President: ______________________________ **Chair:** ______________________________

Action Step One:		
Coordinator:		
Projected Completion Date:		
Resources Required:		
Action Step Achieved:	☐ Yes	☐ No

Action Step Two:		
Coordinator:		
Projected Completion Date:		
Resources Required:		
Action Step Achieved:	☐ Yes	☐ No

Action Step Three:		
Coordinator:		
Projected Completion Date:		
Resources Required:		
Action Step Achieved:	☐ Yes	☐ No

Action Step Four:		
Coordinator:		
Projected Completion Date:		
Resources Required:		
Action Step Achieved:	☐ Yes	☐ No

Action Step Five:		
Coordinator:		
Projected Completion Date:		
Resources Required:		
Action Step Achieved:	☐ Yes	☐ No

RESOURCES

To support excellence in board leadership, the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) offers a suite of resources tailored specifically for trustees and presidents of member institutions.

Board Governance Training Videos: www.abhe.org/board-governance/

This series of eight brief videos covers key topics essential to effective board governance. Designed for flexibility, the videos can be integrated into regularly scheduled board meetings to spark meaningful discussion and support the ongoing board development encouraged by accrediting associations. Each video is accompanied by a discussion guide, making it easy for the board chair, president, or governance committee to facilitate engagement. The series also serves as a valuable resource for orienting new trustees, helping them quickly grasp foundational principles of board leadership. The topics covered are:

- Board Chair and President Roles
- Dashboard Key Performance Indicators
- Guarding Against Mission Drift
- Policy Governance and Board Policy Manual
- Recruitment and Orientation of New Trustees
- Roles and Responsibilities of Trustees
- Securing Institutional Resources
- Governance as a Spiritual Enterprise

ABHE Board Governance Community: https://abhe.connectedcommunity.org/login

The ABHE has developed a secure, password-protected online platform exclusively for member presidents and trustees. Access is granted via a personalized invitation email, allowing users to create a login and password. The site features a robust library of downloadable and customizable tools to enhance board effectiveness. Trustees can also engage in peer dialogue through a discussion board, where current challenges and insights are shared across institutions.

ABHE Continuing Education Micro-courses:

Trustees can also benefit from a series of concise, high-impact micro courses designed to strengthen governance leadership. Topics include board roles and responsibilities, strategic planning, financial oversight, and mission alignment. These flexible modules are ideal for onboarding new trustees or deepening the skills of experienced board members and can be completed individually or as part of a broader development plan. They incorporate case studies, recommended reading, and learning exercises. The courses are available at no cost to institutions that are members of ABHE and include:

- Introduction to Board Governance: Essentials of Excellence in Board Governance
- Succession Planning: Presidential Search and Transition
- Monitoring Institutional Health: Trustee Dashboards and KPIs

GOVERNING BOARD ASSESSMENT

For each item, record in the box your evaluation score from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

How well does our board function?	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1. Our board carves out time to creatively address the current and future needs of our students.					
2. Our board clearly sees its work as Christ-centered.					
3. Our board has been very effective over the last 12-18 months.					
4. Our board understands its roles and responsibilities.					
5. Our board ensures that the college has an active strategic planning process in place.					
6. Our board annually affirms and “owns” the college’s strategy.					
7. We know the spiritual gifts and skills of every board member.					
8. Our board members have high passion for the mission.					
9. We expect every board member to be an annual donor.					
10. We provide training and encouragement to help board members encourage others to give.					
11. Most members on the board help the president in appropriate ways by offering strategic input (as opposed to tactical input).					
12. Outside of board meetings, members avoid offering opinions that differ from agreed-upon board decisions.					
13. Our board devotes creative energy and board meeting time to assess risks and opportunities—and thus is well informed about the outside forces impacting the institution.					
14. Our board has policies—and the spiritual integrity required— to ask an underperforming board member to resign.					
15. Our board is very focused on measuring mission impact.					
16. Our board conducts an annual performance review of the president.					
17. Our board approves the president’s annual measurable goals that align with the strategy.					
18. The working relationship between our president and board chair is excellent.					
19. Our board chair (or a designated board member) regularly encourages our president to address “soul care” in his or her life.					
20. Board members pray regularly for the college and the president.					
Add the scores for each column.					
Total score of all five columns.	________				

Compare and discuss your top two “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree” items with the perspective of others on your board.

If your total score is:

90-100 = highly effective board
80-89 = effective board
70-79 = average functioning board
60-69 = board needs improvement
0-59 = potentially dysfunctional board

BOARD MEMBER SELF-ASSESSMENT

For each item, record in the box your evaluation score from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

How well do you serve on your board?	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1. I am aware of what is expected of me as a board member.					
2. I have a good record of meeting attendance.					
3. I read the minutes, reports and other materials in advance.					
4. I am familiar with what is in the colleges's by-laws and governing policies.					
5. I frequently encourage other board members to express their opinions at board meetings.					
6. I am comfortable expressing my perspective at board meetings and when I have a different opinion than the majority, I raise it.					
7. I am a good listener at board meetings.					
8. I follow through on things I have said I would do.					
9. I maintain the confidentiality of all board decisions.					
10. I support board decisions once they are made even if I do not agree with them.					
11. I participate in college events and activities whenever I can.					
12. I promote the work of our college in the community whenever I have an opportunity to do so.					
13. I am informed about issues relevant to our mission and bring information to the attention of the board.					
14. I have trust and confidence in the president.					
15. I can quote the mission statement from memory.					
16. I give generously and frequently to the work of the college.					
17. I serve actively on at least one Board committee.					
18. I am very familiar with the strategic goals of the college.					
19. I am optimistic about the future of the college.					
20. I pray regularly for the college and the president.					
Add the scores for each column.					
Total score of all five columns.	________				

The results of this assessment are confidential and intended to serve as an opportunity for personal reflection on the individuals board member's level of engagement.

If your total score is:

90-100 = highly effective board member
80-89 = effective board member
70-79 = average functioning board member
60-69 = board member needs improvement
0-59 = potentially ineffective as a board member

INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

STANDARD 3
AUTHORITY AND GOVERNANCE

The institution has legal authority to operate in its state or province, and in all other jurisdictions in which it operates, and has a governing board with legal and fiduciary authority to exercise appropriate oversight of the institution.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by . . .

1. Enabling documents that establish the institution as a legal entity in its state or province; protect its mission, statements of faith, and control; and provide a basis for governance and administration. Where an institution is a subsidiary of a parent organization, the institution has its own enabling documents.

2. Authorization to award the credentials that it offers in all the jurisdictions in which it operates, including distance education.

3. A governing board that exercises legal authority for the institution and ensures institutional integrity, with autonomy to make decisions in the best interest of the institution. Where an institution is a subsidiary of a parent organization, the institution has its own governing board that includes representatives from a broader pool than the governing board of the sponsoring organization alone and exercises autonomy over institutional decisions.

4. Published board policies and practices that define the board's authority and limitations and clearly distinguish board and staff roles.

5. Board membership that excludes all employees except the chief executive officer. The chief executive officer does not serve as a board officer.

6. A conflict-of-interest policy, regularly affirmed by each board member, that protects the board from undue influence related to financial interests, contracts, employment, family relationships, or other personal interests.

7. A process for effective recruitment, orientation, and development of board members to ensure board stability and engagement, and identify new members.

8. Appropriate board oversight of financial management to meet public accountability obligations.

9. Ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of the board and its members, including analysis of assessment data and use of results for the purpose of improvement.

Applicable Policies: *Policy on Governance; Policy on Semi-Autonomous Institutions; Policy on State/Government Authorization*

BOARD FUNCTIONS, DUTIES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Five Functions of the Board

1. Establishing and Overseeing Implementation of the Institution's Mission
2. Assuring High Performing Leadership and Shared Governance
3. Assuring the Financial Well Being of the Institution
4. Maintaining and Supporting the Improvement of Academic Quality and Student Learning
5. Supporting Institutional Planning and Improvement

Three Duties of Trustees

1. The Duty of Care is a level of competence that an ordinarily prudent person would exercise under similar circumstances. It requires trustees to be engaged as stewards of institutional assets and to make well-informed decisions, taking into consideration risk and the long-term impact on sustainability. Failure to exercise these duties in good faith can result in the board's legal liability.

2. The Duty of Loyalty is a standard of faithfulness that prohibits a board member from acting in a manner that is for personal gain rather than in the best interest of the college. It is reflected in the signed "Conflict of Interest" statement signed by trustees as a condition of their service. It is wise to avoid even an appearance of impropriety.

3. The Duty of Obedience requires board members to be faithful to the organization's mission and to ensure measures are in place for the college to follow institutional, accreditor, and federal regulations, as well as all applicable laws. This expectation lies in establishing the trust of constituents and stakeholders who are invested in the college's mission.

Ten Responsibilities of Trustees

1. Protect the mission and core values of the college. The Board ensures that the college stays true to its Christian mission and foundational values in all its endeavors.

2. Practice prayerful discernment in decision-making. Trustees incorporate prayer and spiritual guidance in their decision-making processes.

3. Hire, manage, evaluate, and support one employee – the president. Trustees oversee the recruitment, performance, and ongoing support of the college president.

4. Establish appropriate institutional policies. The Board creates and delegates the implementation of policies that guide the college's operations and maintain its integrity.

5. Practice fiscal responsibility. The Board manages the college's financial resources prudently, ensuring sustainability and integrity in financial practices.

6. Focus on ends, not means. The Board concentrates on the college's long-term goals and outcomes, rather than the day-to-day operations, and monitors institutional health through key performance indicators.

7. Engage in strategic planning and vision casting. Trustees are involved in developing the college's strategic direction and envisioning its future growth through generative thinking.

8. Govern only during a duly called board meeting and speak with a single voice. Trustees exercise their governance responsibilities exclusively in official board meetings and present a unified stance on decisions and communications made by the board.

9. Model the values of the college. Trustees exemplify the Christian values and ethical standards that the college upholds.

10. Serve as ambassadors of the college. Trustees represent the college within the broader community and foster positive relationships with stakeholders.

NOTES