FROM ADOPTION TO EXCELLENCE

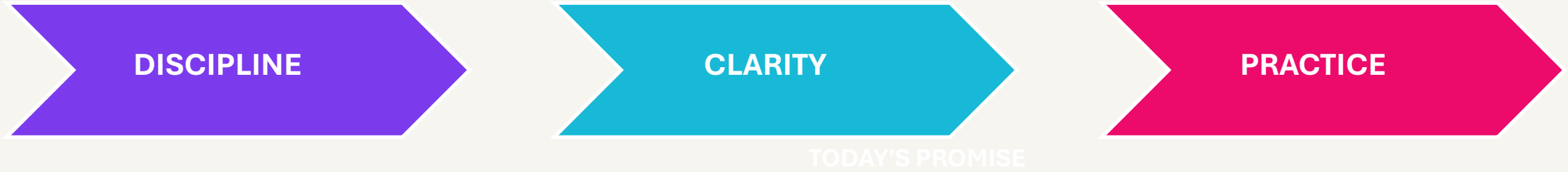
Making Policy Governance Work for Community College Boards

OACC 2026 | FIELD-TESTED PRACTICES

Dr. Dwight McElfresh | Steve Stone | Patrick Williams | Stephen Williams

Adoption alone does not deliver the intended results

Boards often encounter role confusion, inconsistent practice, and gradual loss of strategic focus.



Today's three outcomes

1. Build trustee-led training and development into the regular agenda
2. Review policy and governance performance systematically
3. Distinguish Owners' Voice from Consumers' Voice and Respond Appropriately

PRACTICAL + REPLICABLE

Dwight

01

OUTCOME ONE

Make board development part of the board’s work

Ongoing orientation succeeds when principles are applied repeatedly, in public, and by trustees themselves.

Dwight

The governance year is intentionally designed

Scenario rehearsal and policy review are paired across regular meetings, with Ends reviewed throughout the year and at retreat.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES 2026 Policy Governance Training Schedule

NCState Meeting Date	Principle Discussion	Discussion Leader	PolGov Policy Review	Discussion Leader
January 21, 2026	Rehearsal Scenario 6.3	S. Stone	4.9 Executive Limitations	M. Masters
February 25, 2026	Rehearsal Scenario 5.5	P. Williams	2.0, 2.1, 2.2 Governance Process	K. Aspin
March 25, 2026	Rehearsal Scenario 4.2	E. Morando	2.3, 2.4, 2.5 Governance Process	L. Nelson
April 22, 2026	Rehearsal Scenario 3.7	K. Winkle	2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.9 Governance Process	D. Patton
May 27, 2026	Rehearsal Scenario 6.10	M. Masters	3.0, 3.1, 3.2 Board-CEO Relationship	D. McElfresh
July 22, 2026	*None Scheduled*	*Planning Retreat*	1.0, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, & 1.5	*Planning Retreat*
August 26, 2026	Rehearsal Scenario 3.19	K. Aspin	3.3, 3.4 Board-CEO Relationship	S. Stone
September 23, 2026	Rehearsal Scenario 5.9	L. Nelson	4.0, 4.1, 4.2 Board-CEO Relationship	P. Williams
~~October 28, 2026~~ November 4, 2026	Rehearsal Scenario 3.10	D. Patton	4.3, 4.4, 4.5 Executive Limitations	E. Morando
December 2, 2026	Rehearsal Scenario 3.17	D. McElfresh	4.6, 4.7, 4.8 Executive Limitations	K. Winkle
NOTE: ENDS Policies 1.0, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, & 1.4 will be reviewed throughout the year and discussed at the July BOT Planning Retreat.				

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- Distribute review across the year
- Pair principles with application
- Rotate trustee discussion leaders
- Reserve retreat time for Ends
- Make learning part of board work

Dwight

Trustee-guided learning changes the culture

The presenter is accountable for preparation; the full board is accountable for application.

PREPARE

A trustee reviews the assigned scenario, relevant policies, and the questions that frame the discussion.

GUIDE

The trustee leads the discussion without becoming the “expert” who supplies the answer.

APPLY

The board tests principle, delegation, compliance, and the response consistent with policy.

Dwight

1 POLICY

Which Ends, Executive Limitations, delegation, or governance-process policies apply?

2 BOUNDARY

Is the matter delegated? Is the issue CEO compliance or board behavior?

3 ACTION

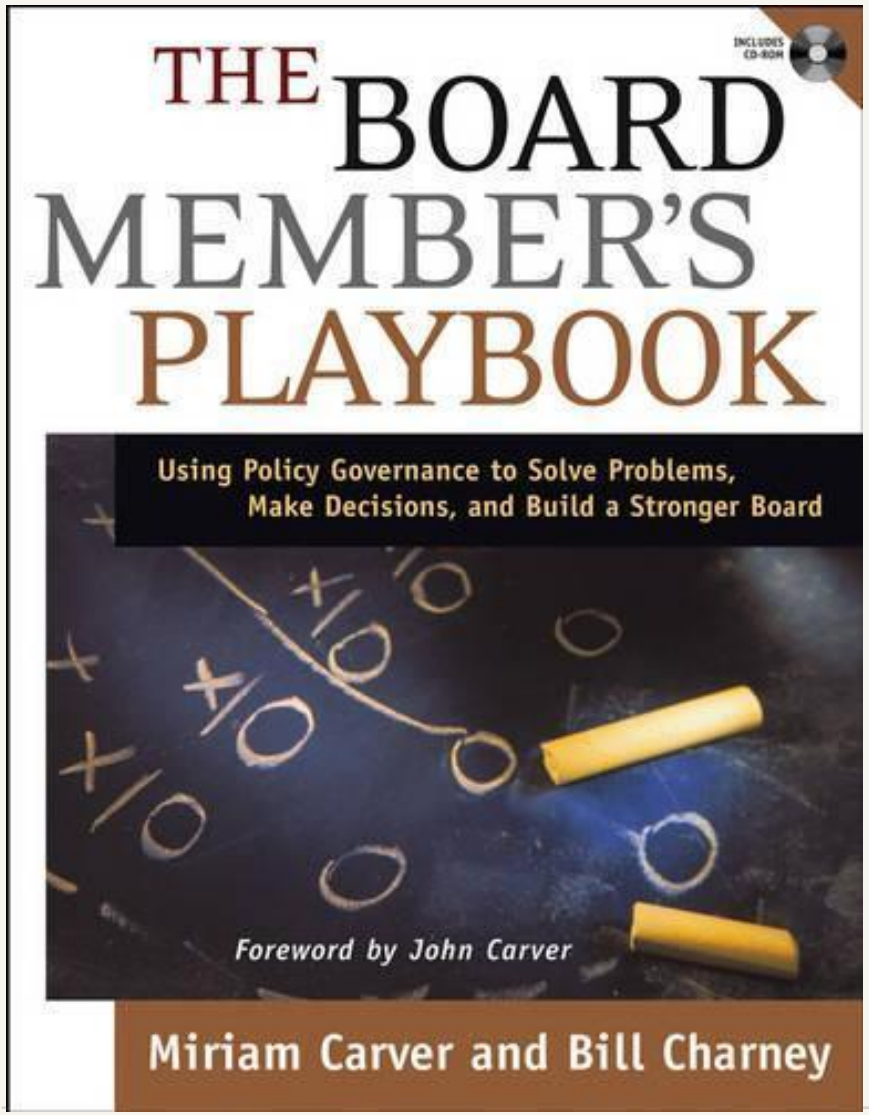
What board or board-member response preserves accountability?

Sample tensions: a trustee directing staff, insufficient attention to Ends, or an ownership committee attempting to direct operations.

Patrick

It helps if the board is using a framework that guides its decision making

It's always a challenge at the board table to decide not only how to answer questions but also what questions to answer.



"Rehearsals provide concrete lessons to new members."

"A board might spend months learning Policy Governance and require even longer for the new discipline to feel natural. Curiously, the same board might thoughtlessly pop a new member into this new and unfamiliar world with, at best, a short orientation. The new board member must learn largely from watching the behavior of more experience colleagues.

Rehearsals, because they organize that learning more pointedly, promise to get the new member up to speed faster than if he or she were exposed only to the unhurried, normal flow of board issues. It is very instructive to experience how to handle a crisis before it occurs through regular rehearsal of scenarios that boards and individual trustees are likely to encounter during their time as a member of the Board."

– John Carver, *November 2003*

Patrick

Rehearsal 4.1

TITLE: Program Decisions: Board or Staff?

SCENARIO: A credit union board member has an idea about a children's banking program that he thinks should be implemented. He shared it with the CEO, but the CEO did not proceed to implement the program. What should the board member do?

Resolve this scenario by answering the following questions:

Patrick

1. What has the board already said in its relevant policies?

Ends: "Savings of minor members will yield interest at a rate better than that available to other members" (1.0, example A).

Executive Limitations: N/A

Board-Management Delegation: Only decisions of the board are binding on the CEO (3.1). Decisions or instructions of board members are not binding unless specifically authorized (3.1.1). The board instructs the CEO through Ends and Executive Limitations policies, allowing the CEO to use any reasonable interpretation of these policies (3.3), in which case the CEO is authorized to establish all further policies, practices, decisions, activities, and so on (3.3.3). As long as a particular delegation is in place, the board will respect and support the CEO's choices (3.3.4).

Governance Process: The purpose of the board is to ensure achievement of ends and avoidance of unacceptable actions and situations (4.0). The board will observe Policy Governance principles, with emphasis on strategic leadership more than on administrative detail and collective decisions rather than individual decisions (4.1). The board will focus on intended long-term impacts outside the organization, not on the administrative or programmatic means of attaining those effects (4.1.2). The board establishes Ends policies and Executive Limitations, which establish the boundaries within which all executive activity and decisions must take place (4.2.2). A board member may recommend or request an item to be on the agenda for board discussion (4.3.2.C). Board members' interaction with the CEO must recognize the lack of authority vested in individuals except when explicitly board authorized (4.5.3.A).

Dwight

2. According to the board's policies, does this scenario refer to anything that has been delegated to the CEO? (*underline*) Yes No

The determination of operational means, including banking programs is delegated to the CEO.

IF YES:

2a. Does this scenario suggest that the CEO is in compliance with a reasonable interpretation of the board's Ends and Executive Limitations policies? (*underline*) Yes No Unsure

(*Explain your answer.*) There is no reason to believe that the CEO is not complying with board policy.

IF NO:

2b. Does this scenario reflect behavior consistent with the board's Governance Process and Board-Management Delegation policies?

(*underline*) Yes No Unsure

(*Explain your answer.*)

Patrick

What action, if any, should the board or board member now take? (*Specify the board or board member actions that you believe would be consistent with Governance Process and Board-Management Delegation policies.*)

The board member with the program idea must remember that the CEO is free to accept or reject suggestions and that as an individual, he has no authority over the CEO.

He should also remember that even the board is committed to not prescribing operational means. If he feels that the board's Ends policy is either inappropriate or open to an unacceptable range of interpretation, he can request that the board consider an amendment to it.

If the board member feels that the credit union should produce results for minors beyond those included in Ends policies, he can request that the board consider such an addition.

Patrick

If the action you propose involves a possible board policy change:

4a. What amendments or additions do you suggest?

The board member may propose that the board consider defining Ends policies prescribing some identified additional results for minors.

4b. What further information, if any, does the board need before deciding on this change?

If there is a proposal to revise the Ends policies to expand the benefits to be received by minors, the board should collect information regarding the cost and desirability of achieving this prospective outcome.

The Board Must Review the Classic ENDS Questions: What Good, For Whom, At What Cost.

You are now ready for full board discussion and decision.

Patrick

The blank worksheet can provide a framework for Board decision-making

REHEARSAL WORKSHEET

TITLE:

SCENARIO:

Resolve this scenario by answering the following questions:

1. **What has the board already said in its relevant policies?**

   Ends:

   Executive Limitations:

   Board-Management Delegation:

   Governance Process:

2. **According to the board's policies, does this scenario refer to anything that has been delegated to the CEO?**

   (underline) **Yes No**

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IF YES:

2a. **Does this scenario suggest that the CEO is in compliance with a reasonable interpretation of the board's Ends and Executive Limitations policies?**

   (*underline*) Yes No Unsure

   (*Explain your answer.*)

IF NO:

2b. **Does this scenario reflect behavior consistent with the board's Governance Process and Board-Management Delegation policies?**

   (underline) **Yes No Unsure**

   (*Explain your answer.*)

3. **What action, if any, should the board or board member now take? *(Specify the board or board member actions that you believe would be consistent with governance process and board-management delegation policies.)***

4. **If the action you propose involves a possible board policy change:**

   4a. **What amendments or additions do you suggest?**

   4b. **What further information, if any, does the board need before deciding on this change?**

You are now ready for full board discussion and decision.

Stephen

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BOARD OF TRUSTEES SCENARIOS PER POLICY GROUP

Policy Group	3.0 Scenarios	4.0 Scenarios	5.0 Scenarios	6.0 Scenarios
4.9 Executive Limitations	3.6, 3.18, 6.3, 5.1			
2.0, 2.1, 2.2 Governance Process	3.1, ~~3.2~~, ~~3.4~~, ~~3.6~~, 3.9, 3.10, 3.14	~~4.3~~, ~~4.6~~,	5.3, 5.5, 5.7, ~~5.10~~, 5.8,	~~6.5~~, 6.6, 6.7,
2.3, 2.4, 2.5 Governance Process	3.3,	4.2, 4.4, 4.5,	5.2, 5.6, 5.7, 5.9, 5.10	6.1
2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.9 Governance Process	3.2, 3.7, 3.13,		5.4, 5.5,	6.5, 6.6
3.0, 3.1, 3.2 Board-CEO Relationship	~~3.1~~, 3.3, 3.4, ~~3.6~~, 3.8, 3.12, ~~3.17~~, 3.18	4.1, ~~4.2~~, 4.3, 4.5, 4.7	5.7, 5.10	6.7, 6.10
1.0, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, & 1.5				
3.3, 3.4 Board-CEO Relationship	~~3.5~~, 3.7, 3.10, 3.13, 3.20, 3.19,	4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.9		6.2
4.0, 4.1, 4.2 Board-CEO Relationship	3.4, 3.5, ~~3.6~~, 3.10, 3.12, 3.13, 3.14, 3.20		5.9	6.5
4.3, 4.4, 4.5 Executive Limitations	~~3.5~~, ~~3.7~~, 3.10, 3.15, 3.16, 3.20	4.9,	~~5.11~~	~~6.1~~
4.6, 4.7, 4.8 Executive Limitations	3.5, 3.15, 3.17, 3.18, 3.20	4.8	5.11	
NOTE: ENDS Policies 1.0, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, & 1.4 will be reviewed throughout the year and discussed at the July BOT Planning Retreat.				

2024 – 2025 – 2026 – 2027 – 2028 – 2029

crossed out scenarios are already used somewhere else

Stephen

02

OUTCOME THREE

Build a Continuous Governance Improvement System

Monthly policy review and recurring self-assessment make drift visible before it becomes culture and creates a learning system.

Steve

Monthly policy review is both maintenance and development

ASSIGN

Policies are distributed across the annual calendar.

REVIEW

A trustee guides refresher and reassessment.

DECIDE

Board affirms relevance and accuracy or recommends revision.

RETURN

Changes come back through the board's formal process.

The review question is practical: Is the policy still relevant, accurate, and at the appropriate level?

Steve

Self-assessment turns impressions into governance evidence

Monthly behavior, annual practice, and quarterly trends create a feedback loop.

MONTHLY

- Agenda discipline
- Meeting focus
- Ends versus means
- Balanced participation
- Owner linkage
- Support for reasonable interpretation

ANNUAL

- Policy-level action
- Use of case studies
- Process improvement
- Ends clarity
- Annual calendar
- Chair role and ownership focus

TREND

- Collect aggregate results
- Identify recurring patterns
- Discuss strengths and gaps
- Select the next learning priority

Steve

Self-evaluation turns impressions into patterns

North Central State College evaluates meeting behavior monthly and governance performance annually.

Board Self-Assessment

BOT Meeting held on: _____

Rate the Board's general meeting behavior by assigning a numerical rating using the following scale:

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not Applicable	We failed	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Commendable	Met our best expectations

Note: Please comment on all ratings of 1 or 2 in addition to other comments you may have to offer.

Monthly: (following each regular meeting)

1. The Board followed its agenda and did not allow itself to get sidetracked.
2. The agenda was well planned to focus on the real work of the Board.
3. The meeting was well attended.
4. The Board's decision-making processes followed Carver Policy Model (focused on Ends not Means).
5. Participation was balanced. Everyone participated, no one dominated.
6. Meeting participants treated each other with respect, courtesy and openness. Board members avoided side conversations.
7. The Board regularly provides evidence of Owner Linkage.
8. The Board supports the president in any reasonable interpretation of applicable Board policies.

Annually (to be sent before the retreat & becomes part of the retreat agenda):

9. Most Board actions occur at the policy level rather than at the operational level. (02.51a.)
10. The Board reviews what it has already said in its policy about each specific topic before discussion on that issue.
11. The Board regularly deepens its understanding and application of the process through discussion of case studies.
12. The Board routinely spends time monitoring and improving its own process. (2.14)
13. The Board works on clarifying Board priorities/values among the range of potential outcomes, beneficiaries and costs of outcomes.
14. Ends policies are clearly and logically stated and support the mission.
15. The Board follows an annual calendar based on a plan for accomplishing its job.
16. The Board Chair helps the Board get its job done rather than supervision or becoming involved in staff work.
17. The Board spends most of its time debating, defining and clarifying its vision and in linking with its owners and public as opposed to "fixing things."

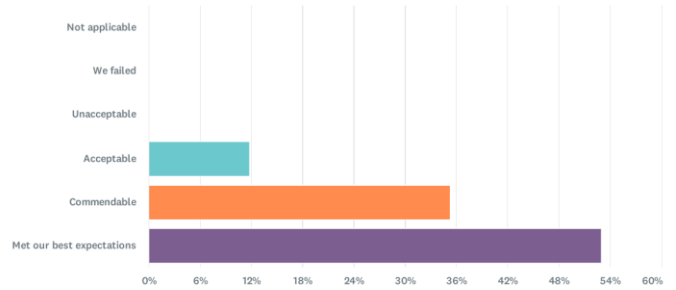
COMMENTS:

COLLECT
→ TREND
→ DISCUSS

Board Self-Assessment Survey 2025-2026

Q7 17 responses

The Board regularly provides evidence of Owner Linkage.



Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Not applicable	0%	0
We failed	0%	0
Unacceptable	0%	0
Acceptable	11.76%	2
Commendable	35.29%	6
Met our best expectations	52.94%	9
Total		17

#	NOTE: PLEASE COMMENT ON ALL RATINGS OF 1 OR 2 IN ADDITION TO ANY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THIS AREA YOU MAY HAVE TO OFFER.	DATE
	There are no responses.	

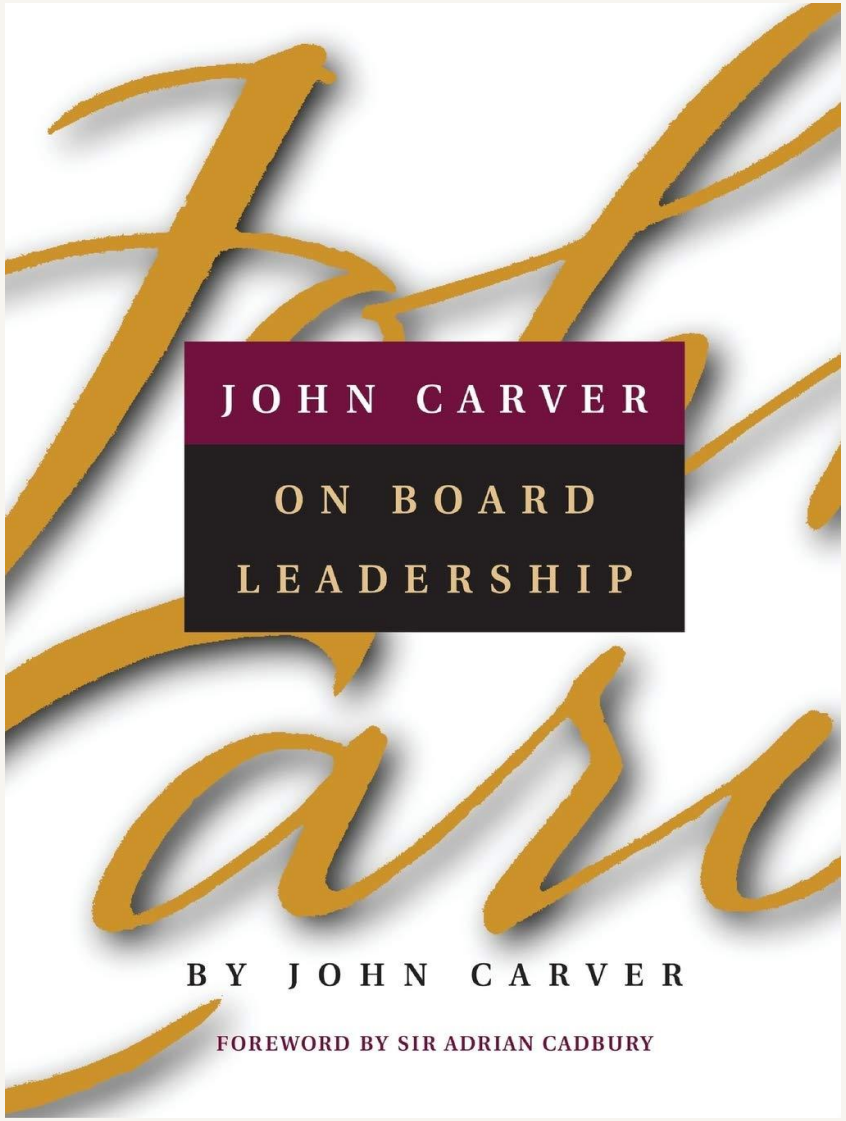
One visible improvement opportunity: Owner Linkage was the only monthly item in the Q2 2026 summary with any "Acceptable" ratings.

7 / 9

Stephen

A Focused Study into the Owners Voice

A series of short articles from the Board Leadership Newsletter compiled in the book *John Carver on Board Leadership* by John Carver.



Focused Study Articles:

1. Ownership (*Legitimacy is at the Base of All Governance Thinking*) *p.55-56*
2. Understanding the Special Board-Ownership Relationship (*Why the Board's Primary Obligation is to its Owners) p.57-65*
3. Determining Who Your Owners Are (*An Essential but Often Overlooked Step for All Boards*) *p.66-67*
4. Connecting with the Ownership (*Looking to the Source of Board Legitimacy and Authority*) *p.68-75*
5. What to Do If You Find a Consumer on Your Board (*Boards Represent Owners, Not Consumers*) *p.76-78*

Stephen

A Trustee-led Exploration into a deeper Understanding Owners Voice

August 24, 2022	Enrichment Activity *Ownership Study Introduction*	M. Masters
September 28, 2022	Enrichment Activity *"Understanding the Relationship"*	E. Morando
October 19, 2022	Enrichment Activity *"Determining Owners and Connecting"*	K. Aspin
December 7, 2022	Owners Connections *"Setting a New Course"*	M. Smith

Stephen

The practical policy that made linkage repeatable

A defined board product plus three approved methods moved ownership from concept to routine practice.

2.21 The link between the ownership and the operational organization.

The board-ownership relationship is the essential, defining relationship of an organization. As such, the board provides the legitimate link between the owners of North Central State College, the residents of Ashland, Crawford, and Richland Counties and the operating organization.

2.211 In order to ascertain the desires of the Ownership of the institution (owner's voice), the Board will establish methods for gaining ownership input that may include but are not limited to:

(a) Community Connections: An opportunity for Trustees to report on those community activities they have taken part in or participated in to gain a better perspective on the "owner's voice" and can share those experiences with the rest of the Board.

(b) Owners Linkage: An opportunity to invite any owner or owner representative individual or group to attend a regular or special board meeting for the purpose of providing some discussion to enrich the Board's understanding of the "owner's voice" or other service consideration for the College (Board) to consider when planning for the future direction of the institution.

(c) Link and Learn: An opportunity for the board to visit an Owner organization or community partner to help enrich the Board's understanding of its relationship to the organization and how the service of the College can impact those sectors of the Ownership.

2.212 To assist the Board in its re-exploration of Ends policies, the Board will include board-ownership activities into the development of its annual policy governance agenda.

What to notice

- The ownership link is an explicit board responsibility.
- Methods are named, but not over-prescribed.
- Ownership activity is built into the annual governance agenda.
- Input is brought back to the full board through Community Connections.

TRANSFERABLE IDEA

Define ownership linkage as a board product, then schedule it.

Stephen

03

OUTCOME THREE

Listen to the right voice

The board must distinguish the values that should shape Ends from feedback that should improve service delivery.

On whose behalf does the board govern?

Dwight

From ownership study to repeatable board practice

NCSC converted learning into policy, agenda structure, and three linkage pathways.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Trustees report insights from community activity.

OWNERS LINKAGE

Owner representatives enrich understanding at a board meeting.

LINK & LEARN

The board visits an owner organization or community partner.

LISTEN → DISCERN → TRANSLATE → DISCUSS ENDS

Dwight

Owners' Voice and Consumers' Voice answer different questions

OWNERS' VOICE

What difference should the institution make?

Shapes purpose, Ends, public value, and long-term priorities.

CONSUMERS' VOICE

How well is the service experience working?

Informs programs, processes, delivery, and operational improvement.

Classify the perspective being expressed, not simply the person speaking.

Patrick

Audience exercise: Which voice are you hearing?

Classify the statement, then explain what board-level meaning can be drawn from it.

Hospital CEO

"We need a stronger pipeline of work-ready nurses."

OWNER / CONSUMER / BOTH?

Current student

"The registration process takes too long."

OWNER / CONSUMER / BOTH?

County commissioner

"The region needs higher educational attainment."

OWNER / CONSUMER / BOTH?

Alumni donor

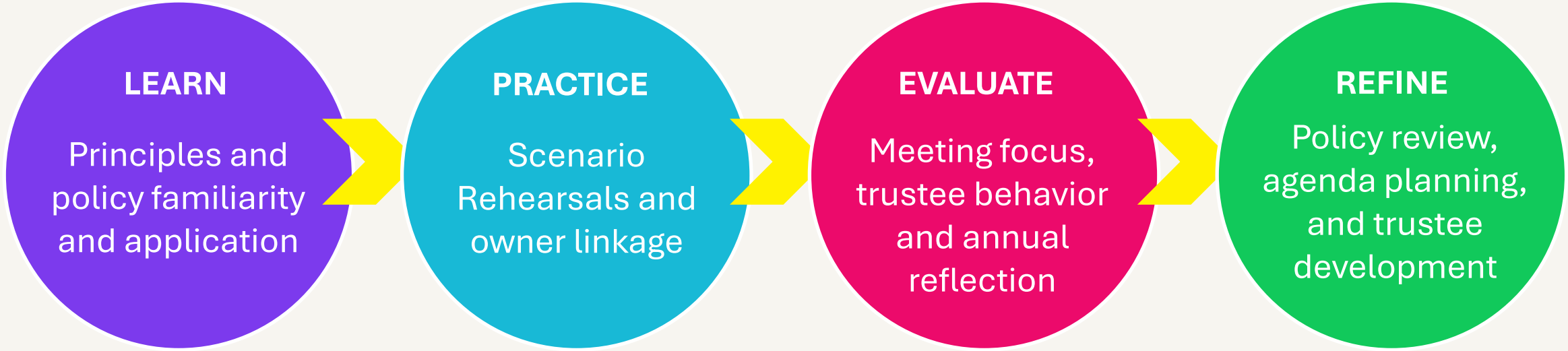
"The evening program changed my career."

OWNER / CONSUMER / BOTH?

Debrief by perspective. Owner voice points toward institutional difference; consumer voice points toward service experience.

Patrick

Close the loop: learn, practice, evaluate, refine



Continuous improvement is not another agenda item. It is the way the board conducts its work.

Dwight

Three commitments boards can take home

SCHEDULE LEARNING

Put trustee-led training and development on the regular governance calendar.

USE EVIDENCE TO IMPROVE

Review policy and board performance as a tool for continuous improvement on a recurring cycle.

LISTEN WITH DISCIPLINE

Separate ownership values from operational feedback and take action as appropriate for each.

Choose one practice your board will add, strengthen, or schedule during the next governance year.

Dwight

Five Lessons from our journey

Dwight

Governance Excellence requires discipline, not just adoption of Policy Governance

Patrick

Trustee-led scenario rehearsals build governance competency

Steve

Ongoing policy review & self-assessment prevent governance drift

Patrick

Distinguishing Owners' Voice vs. Consumers' Voice improves strategic focus and decision-making

Stephen

Embedding learning into annual board calendar creates a culture of continuous improvement

Team

Moving From Ideas to Action

Commit to Trustee Development

Schedule Trustee Development: trustee education every board meeting; many rehearsal scenarios annually; 100% trustee participation
- Patrick

Commit to Governance Review

Implement Continuous Improvement: Review all governance policies annually; complete monthly self assessment & annual governance evaluation
- Dwight

Commit to Ownership Linkage

Strengthen Owner Linkage: conduct several owner-linkage activities per year; trustees to report community insight at each board meeting
- Stephen

Commit to Listening with Discipline Before Acting

Listen with Discipline: Separate Owners' Voice (mission, outcomes, values) from Consumer's Voice (service, operations) before acting
- Patrick

DecisionCommit to Policy-Based Descision-Making

Use Policy-Based Decision Making: for every governance issue, ask what policy applies, has authority been delegated, what response preserves accountability
- Steve

Team


Thank You for attending our session
Visit our Board of Trustees Webpage at:
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