Accountability Steps for Institutional Leaders

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| **Step** | **Description** |
| **Hold a Discussion about Accountability** | ✔ Leaders must make sure that accountability is part of their daily discussions and decisions.  ✔ Boards and administrators should periodically have a straightforward conversation about to whom they are accountable and how they might demonstrate it.  ✔ Boards at religiously affiliated institutions may feel accountable to the sponsoring order, particularly regarding mission.  ✔ Identify other stakeholders such as students, alumni, donors or the larger community. The ways in which leadership demonstrates accountability to each group may vary. But the more leaders can be intentional about this, the better they will govern. |
| **Practice Pre-decision Accountability** | ✔ Boards and administrators should engage in pre-decisional accountability and make decisions as if they had to explain them to stakeholders (e.g., alumni, students, staff and faculty, and for public universities, the citizens of the state).  ✔ Prepare how to respond to a stakeholder group. |
| **Create an Inclusive Structure of Accountability** | ✔ Stakeholders need to be equipped with more information about how schools are performing on key measures of quality. Identify what those measures are and the schedule in which they will be shared.  ✔ Actively include diverse members on the board for accountability and diverse perspectives. |
| **Improve Higher Education Data System** | ✔ Improve higher education data systems so they may provide reliable, consistent, and usable information.  ✔ Create student, faculty, and staff level data networks that disaggregate data by race and income so that data on critical measures of success are assessed.  ✔ Ensure privacy and security for sensitive information such as citizenship status, discipline records, and criminal history. |
| **Create Pressure and Provide Support to Improve Equitable Access and Success for Students** | ✔ Establish minimum standards for enrolling historically underserved students (i.e. low-income students and students of color.  ✔ Establish minimum standards for institutions on student performance, experiences, and outcomes using measures such as retention, transfer, graduation and job placement, especially for historically underserved students (i.e. low-income students and students of color).  ✔ Provide rewards for making continual growth toward reaching ambitious access and success goals within a reasonable timeline.  ✔ Sustain and increase investments in historically under-resourced departments to support the implementation of evidence-based strategies that improve completion and quality of experience especially for historically underserved students; and  ✔ Enforce meaningful consequences for underperforming departments that,  after getting needed resources, time, and support, fail to meet minimum enrollment and performance standards. |

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| **Epitomize performance accountability for the institution** | ✔ Administrators and boards should instill internal practices that help keep them aware of their accountability and that bring issues to light to help them avoid blind spots, potholes and sinkholes.  ✔ The Board and administrators should be explicit about their collective understanding of great governance, how it intends to execute it and how it will measure it.  ✔ Periodically you should conduct a comprehensive self-assessment of the board and administrative collective performance.  ✔ Trustees and administrators should self-assess their own engagement and performance. While these assessments might be a bit inflated, the simple act of self-reflection is helpful.  ✔ Assess the work of committees and board meetings. |
| **Create and uphold a statement of expectations** | ✔ Have a written statement of administrator or Board member expectations, or a code of conduct, that spells out the responsibilities and how the board or administrators will deal with violations. This statement should be public and demonstrate that the board takes seriously the ways its members engage with one another and with the work of governance. |
| **Seek management’s overall assessment annually** | ✔ Administrators should engage in dialogue with the Chancellor or President about how the administrators are performing. Such conversations can happen with the board chair or with the executive or governance committee, and overarching views should be discussed with the full board. |
| **Hold executive sessions for reflective practice** | ✔ To learn and improve, administrators should reflect on their performance, which can often best be done in an executive session without senior leadership present. Such sessions are a time for administrators to open up with one another about how they see their performance and talk about blind spots that may have been revealed in the assessments and how to overcome them.  ✔ Periodically take stock of the past year and discuss both contributions/successes and shortfalls in terms of the administrator’s governance function.   * What did we do especially well? * Where did we fall short? Why? * What have we learned? * How will we govern still better in the year ahead? |
| **Avoid conflicts of interest** | ✔ Institute a yearly internal process of accountability to ensure administrators do not have any conflicts of interests. |

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| **Use the mission as a guidepost and touchstone** | ✔ Ensure that the actions of administrators and board members are not viewed as running counter to the mission and values of the university.  ✔ Avoid losing credibility by offering excessive compensation packages for senior leadership yet leave students with a high debt load or staff are not being paid living wages.  ✔ Appoint diverse administrators at each meeting to ask, “How does this decision reflect on our values and mission?” |
| **Avoid delegating too many tasks** | ✔ Leaders should not delegate their authority away to the point that they are unable to maintain a meaningful level of accountability |

References

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