

The Role of the Board of Trustees in a Construction Project

By Bob Bremm

Every Institutional Board of Trustees is unique in both its makeup and its roles. The Board may have a hands-off attitude toward activities or may micromanage them. The board may meet weekly, quarterly, or monthly. These attitudes and practices become important when the Board's role involves a construction project. Also included in the mix are the culture of the institution and the Board's expertise in Project Management.

One of the keys to determining the Board's role is that the Board needs to be available so that decisions can be made in a timely manner. Other considerations are

- How much the Board trusts the Administration in managing a construction project
- The risk the institution incurs as a result of the project
- The project's overall visibility

The structure of communications and the Board's role should be solidified at the earliest possible moment. What follows is a discussion of various levels of Board involvement in a construction project.

Low Involvement

If the Board decides it just needs an oversight role, an effective model is to provide them with monthly or quarterly reports, and perhaps major milestone reports, such as the end of conceptual design, schematic design, design development and the completion of major estimates.

If a Board determines it wants a slightly higher level of involvement and wants to stay better abreast of the project's progress, the Board can create a subcommittee that will be available on a regular basis for updates. These updates can be performed by the project team, administrators and/or the steering committee.

Medium Involvement

At this level, the Board assigns one or two board members to the steering committee. These members meet on a regular basis with the project team. If this is the case, it must be determined what the authority and decision-making capacity of these Board members is. For instance, can they make decisions for the board, do they just advise, or must they report back and make recommendations for decision making?



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High Involvement

If the Board wants a high level of involvement in the decision making process, it needs to recognize that time is of the essence. Administration must insist upon a mechanism to allow timely decisions. As previously discussed, this can be accomplished by appointing Board members to the project team or by having a subcommittee of the Board available on short notice, even by conference call, to make decisions quickly. If decisions must wait for periodic meetings or full Board membership, the project will be in deep trouble—costs will rise and the schedule will suffer.



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