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## Fundamentals and Flow

**ACCT's strategic plan leverages advocacy and trustee education to meet the moment in a rapidly changing landscape.**

BY ROBIN MATROSS HELMS

**M**Y 15-YEAR-OLD SON IS A MUSICIAN. SPECIFICALLY, he plays the trombone. What started as “we need an activity” virtual Zoom lessons during the pandemic has turned into a true passion for him — and it's a joy to watch him play. Even as a complete non-musician myself (that talent definitely came from the other side of the family), I can tell when he drops into what is often called a “flow” state. The music entirely consumes his attention, focus, and energy — mind and body are working in harmony (literally), and amazing music just seems to emerge. The result is beautiful.

I'm not sure how often a strategic planning exercise is described as entering a flow state, but this is what comes to mind when I think of the ACCT Board of Directors' process at its retreat in Bellevue, Washington, last July. With expert facilitation by Dr. Steve Head, our board engaged in robust discussions, considering big-picture questions about ACCT's role in facilitating good governance as a means to institutional and student success, along with individual board members' experience of, engagement with, and vision for our work.

While opinions and perspectives varied — exactly the point of having a board composed of individuals from a wide array of backgrounds — there was remarkable alignment in terms of key themes and priorities. As the group iterated and different ideas came together to create a clear and unified roadmap, the energy in the room rose and it just felt right. It was a collective sense of flow, and the resulting strategic plan, too, just feels right.

As a staff member, what I especially love about the new strategic plan is that it focuses on and leverages ACCT's fundamental superpowers — advocacy and trustee education — to meet the moment in a rapidly changing higher education, national, and global landscape. In my three years at ACCT, it has been a privilege to watch, support, and engage with our public policy team's advocacy efforts and to celebrate its successes. The emphasis on advocacy in the new strategic plan not only recognizes and enables Vice President Carrie Warick-Smith and her colleagues' notable impact on federal policy, but also underscores



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their expertise in supporting college leaders to advocate for their own institutions and our sector.

On my side of the house, the membership and educational services team will continue to focus on our core mission of trustee education, doubling down on the fundamentals of good governance and ensuring trustees have the resources they need to effectively guide their institutions. With ACCT Connect and our state-based Governance Leadership Institutes, we've broadened our foundation. With its focus on governance education, the new strategic plan gives us the framework to continue to build what we've started by increasing resources, creating more touchpoints with our members, and establishing pathways — for example, through our ACCT Excel Trustee Excellence Program — for members to amplify their expertise over time.

Just as the ACCT board found its flow in formulating the new strategic plan, given the plan's focus on the fundamentals, I'm confident that it will provide the foundation for our staff, in turn, to zero in on what's most important, align our focus and effort, and find our own flow state in its implementation. A different kind of harmony than my son's music, perhaps, but a beautiful harmony nonetheless.

To this end, there are a few particular resources and opportunities to keep an eye out for in the coming months from the membership and educational services team:

- The ACCT Excel Trustee Excellence Program will launch at the Leadership Congress in October. In line with our strategic emphasis on governance education, the Excel Level 1 certificate will focus on the fundamentals, leveraging our Governance 101 and Advocacy 101 online courses on ACCT Connect and other foundational governance education opportunities. ACCT members will be invited to apply to join the first cohort to earn trustee education badges and a certificate.
- Also on Connect, we are excited to launch our next online course: Data-Informed Decision and Policy Making. The course is a result of our collaboration with Achieving the Dream and the data-informed decision-making working group a number of ACCT member presidents and trustees participated in last year. The course highlights key data metrics and sources for trustees to consider in driving policies that enable student success. It also provides practical advice for accessing the right sources and asking the right questions about the information they provide.
- During Congress, we will release the results of our groundbreaking trustee study, conducted in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Community Colleges (see p. 14 for a preview). We have a better picture of who trustees are,

why they serve, and what they see as key priorities, opportunities, and challenges than we perhaps ever have had before. This data will help us better serve our members and our colleges as we build our resources and services, and more broadly, it will further the goal of thought leadership by ACCT as articulated in the new strategic plan.

- Building on the success of our US-UK Community College and Technical Exchange Program and the India-US Partnership Lab, we will expand our global education work in the coming year, inviting additional colleges to participate. Keep an eye out for announcements and information soon, and consider attending our global education-focused events at Congress in October.

ACCT is grateful to our members for your engagement and your commitment to good governance and the success of your institutions and their students. We look forward to continuing to find our flow together.



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