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### JOIN US ON ACCT CONNECT

[connect.acct.org/spaces/8778457/feed](https://connect.acct.org/spaces/8778457/feed)

### FIND US ON FACEBOOK

ACCT Professional Board Staff Network

### PBSN WEBSITE

[www.acct.org/membership/PBSN](http://www.acct.org/membership/PBSN)



## Building Stronger Support for Stronger Leadership

BY REATHA BELL  
PBSN PRESIDENT

AS WE begin 2026, I extend warm greetings on behalf of the Professional Board Staff Network (PBSN) Executive Committee to the dedicated professionals who support presidents, boards of trustees, chancellors, and administrators at their institutions.

PBSN is committed to strengthening the role of executive support professionals, who are essential to effective leadership in our colleges. As executive assistants and liaisons to presidents, boards of trustees, and chancellors, PBSN members are trusted partners who facilitate communication, coordination, and continuity. Their efforts enable leaders to advance higher education and carry out the Constitution and institutional policies.

This year, our focus is on building a stronger support staff to help leaders remain committed to the Constitution. We advance this goal through regional sessions and development sessions at the ACCT Annual Conference. These professional development opportunities enhance our members' ability to serve with excellence, integrity, and foresight.



Learn more at [www.acct.org/membership/PBSN](http://www.acct.org/membership/PBSN).



The PBSN Executive Committee provides strategic leadership for our network. We appreciate the dedication of our committee members:

- President: Reatha Bell
- Immediate Past President: Shelby Foster
- Vice President: Andrea Wittig
- Secretary: Kattie Riggs
- Communications Coordinator: Venisa Earhart
- Central Region Coordinator: Benita Duncan
- Northeast Region Coordinator: Evelyn Cordova
- Pacific Region Coordinator: Chelley Sadowsky
- Western Region Coordinator: Denise Wilson
- Senior Advisor to the President: Cynthia Gruskos

Their leadership ensures PBSN remains a vital, forward-thinking network that supports its members and the institutions they serve.

We look forward to gathering at the ACCT Annual Conference in Chicago in October 2026. This event offers PBSN members opportunities for professional growth, networking, and meaningful dialogue with higher education professionals nationwide. We encourage all members and supporters to attend and help shape the future of executive support in higher education.

Throughout 2026, let us work together to build stronger support systems that empower our leaders and uphold our institutional values. By doing so, we strengthen both our professional roles and the impact of leadership in our communities and colleges.

We look forward to a productive and inspiring year ahead.



PBSN Executive Committee. Not pictured: Cynthia Gruskos.

## Investing in Governance: Why Professional Board Staff Matter

BY ANDREA WITTIG, PBSN VICE PRESIDENT

COMMUNITY COLLEGES ARE built on access, opportunity, and upward mobility. Every day, trustees and presidents make consequential decisions that shape the futures of millions of students. But behind every high-performing board and every student-centered institution is a group of professionals whose work is rarely visible yet absolutely essential.

We are the professional board staff.

We serve as the connective tissue between governance, the institution, and the communities our colleges serve. We translate vision into execution. We shepherd policy into practice. And we help build and sustain the systems, structures, and strategies that allow boards and CEOs to lead with clarity, confidence, and purpose.

In doing so, we help create the conditions for student success

### Governance That Works for Students

Strong governance is built intentionally, thoughtfully, and strategically.

Professional board staff help ensure that boards are informed, prepared, compliant, and aligned. We manage complex governance calendars, public transparency requirements, accreditation cycles, executive searches, institutional partnerships, and strategic planning processes. We safeguard institutional integrity and support leadership continuity so institutions can move forward with confidence.

Most importantly, we help ensure that governance remains anchored to its ultimate purpose, student success.

Every agenda we build, every policy we shepherd, every board retreat we design, and every legislative briefing we prepare is guided by one central question: How does this move students forward?

It is this student-centered lens that shapes our work, and it is why professional board staff serve not only as operational leaders, but as the connectors, strategists, and trusted advisors who help translate governance into real-world impact.



## The Connectors

Professional board staff operate at the intersection of governance, leadership, and the institution. In our day-to-day work, we connect trustees to presidents. We also connect governance to the operational life of the institution.

We help ensure that information flows clearly and consistently across the institution. We coordinate communication across departments. We support alignment between board priorities and institutional action.

In an era when community colleges are navigating increasing complexity and public expectations, connection is not optional. It is essential.

Professional board staff help ensure that boards are not operating in isolation, but as informed, engaged, and well-supported leaders of their institutions.

## The Strategists

Student success requires more than good intentions. It requires strategy. And strategy requires disciplined governance.

Professional board staff support boards and CEOs as they move from aspiration to action. We help design and manage the governance processes that turn priorities into plans and plans into results.

Through agenda design, policy development, long-range planning, and progress reporting, professional board staff help boards govern with focus, discipline, and accountability. In doing so, we help institutions remain centered on what matters most, ensuring that students are supported from entry through completion and prepared for meaningful careers and continued education.

## The Trusted Advisors

Community colleges serve generations of students. College leadership evolves, their strategies grow, and their communities change, but their mission endures.

Professional board staff serve as trusted advisors and partners in institutional continuity.

We preserve institutional knowledge. We carry forward commitments to students and communities. We support leadership transitions with stability, discretion, and trust. And we help boards navigate moments of uncertainty with perspective and care.

When new leaders arrive, we help them understand the culture and history they inherit. When boards face difficult decisions, we help to provide the context that allows them to lead with confidence. And when institutions confront change, we work alongside trustees and CEOs to help translate vision into action.

In a time of rapid transformation across higher education,

professional board staff provide the steady foundation that allows our institutions to move forward with clarity and momentum in service of students.

## Why PBSN Matters

The Professional Board Staff Network is the premier national organization dedicated exclusively to advancing the profession of professional board staff in the community college sector.

PBSN provides a national forum where board professionals share best practices, exchange governance innovations, strengthen leadership capacity, and build trusted peer networks across states and systems. Through this work, PBSN elevates the profession and supports the development of the next generation of leaders.

As part of the Association of Community College Trustees, PBSN exists to support the professionals who support boards. All ACCT member institutions are welcome and encouraged to engage their professional board staff in PBSN and to take full advantage of its programs, convenings, and community.

## A Respectful Request to Trustees and CEOs

Trustees and presidents carry the ultimate responsibility for the success of our institutions and the students we serve. Professional board staff are honored to support that leadership.

As governance continues to grow more complex, we respectfully encourage trustees and CEOs to view their professional board staff as strategic partners in institutional success and to support their continued professional development.

Each year, PBSN convenes at the ACCT Leadership Congress, bringing together professional board staff from across the country to learn, collaborate, and exchange best practices. These gatherings strengthen governance teams and equip board professionals to better serve their boards, presidents, and institutions.

In addition to the Leadership Congress, PBSN offers professional development opportunities, regional engagement, and year-round check-ins designed to support one another as we navigate an always changing higher education landscape.

Investments in professional board staff strengthen governance. They strengthen institutions. And ultimately, they strengthen student outcomes.

Strong governance begins with strong people. We are grateful for the opportunity to serve and for the continued partnership of trustees and presidents who share our commitment to student success.



Learn more at [www.acct.org/membership/PBSN](http://www.acct.org/membership/PBSN).