

Find the Right Fit: Hiring and Onboarding Presidents in Small and Rural Colleges

ABSTRACT

Small and rural community colleges require CEOs with a unique skillset, demeanor, and perspective. Trustees are tasked with finding and onboarding strong leaders to effectively lead in these environments. Members of AACC's Commission on Small and Rural Colleges will offer their perspective to help Trustees hire and onboard successful CEOs.



PANEL

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INTRODUCTION

Quick Overview of Scenarios

There are aspects of living and serving in a small rural community and college that need to be considered when recruiting and hiring a college president in a small rural community. We need the right fit for all stakeholders. But how do you define, articulate, and successfully recruit for the right fit for your community and college?

Questions to Consider, as we begin the session:

1. Are you aware of, or have you observed, poor or unsuccessful examples of a presidential search or hiring process at a small rural college?
2. Are you aware of, or have you observed, good or successful examples of a presidential search or hiring process at a small rural college?
3. What do you think are some key characteristics to watch for when recruiting or onboarding a new president at a small rural college?

DISCUSSION

We have two scenarios to help catalyze the discussion.

Each of you has a copy of one of the two scenarios on the back side of this handout.

SCENARIO TWO

There is a small rural college in the Midwest that has had a long term president (24 years) and he is retiring. He has been totally in control on the inside and the major community person. He knows everyone and they all support him and the college because of these relationships. While the college has been successful in its own right, there are many opportunities that could be developed if addressed, but the retiring president has his own vision of the college and its mission which has limited the ability of the college to fully realize its potential. The board is elected locally and they only know what he has provided and they have not been engaged nationally in community college work. The president has told the board that there is no one inside the college to take over (anyone who had been there who might have been developed left because he restricted their roles). He tells the board that they should be able to do the search themselves and they do know that there are groups out there that conduct searches that they might use.

What is the board to do?

- Hire a consultant?
- Conduct the search themselves?
- Keep the retiring president out of the process? Why?
- Include the retiring president? Why?

What are the questions the board needs to ask?

- What are the requirements?
- Position description (theirs old or not even one)?
- Educational credentials (he only had a Master's)?
- Experience across all dimensions?
- Leadership traits desired?

How do they describe the position as to "fit" issues?

- Create a realistic view of the opportunity but not restrict it to "what has been".
- Be direct as to the expectations for time and effort commitments.
- Describe the "fish bowl vs. large pond" setting.
- Provide a history of the institution with its successes and its opportunities.
- Relay salary and benefit parameters to set realistic expectations.

What should be consideration given to all dimensions of the search process.

- Timeline?
- Cost?
- How to engage all internal and external populations?
- How to manage public relations?
- How to negotiate the contract?