

Development of a Presidential Selection Policy

BACKGROUND

Recruitment, selection, and appointment of the university president are fundamental responsibilities of the Board of Trustees. Ideally, procedures for presidential searches are in place well in advance of a presidential vacancy. A well-structured process will engage university constituencies to help the institution not only identify its next leader but also learn about the needs and aspirations that its diverse constituencies have. In addition, the process will build buy-in for the search and will facilitate the transition process for the new president. To aid the Board in developing such a process, this document highlights best practices recommended for university presidential search and selection as well as statutory requirements.

BEST PRACTICES AND STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

To identify best practices for presidential searches, staff reviewed material from the American Council on Education, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB), and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, as well as other publications. In addition, the Board Chair and staff gathered information on presidential searches at the 2016 AGB National Trusteeship Conference and reviewed practices at other universities.

Based on this information on best practices, a presidential selection policy should include:

- A process for appointing an interim president, if needed;
- An assessment of institutional strengths and development of a statement of desired leadership qualities prior to initiating a presidential search;
- The appointment of a search committee chaired by a Trustee and broadly representative of the university to conduct specific activities identified in the policy;
- Engagement with the university community; and
- A process for selecting and assimilating the new president.

Appointment of an Interim President

The Board may need to appoint an interim president due to the length of time anticipated for a search or the amount of notice provided by the current president. The timeline for a presidential search varies based on the level of urgency, when within the academic calendar the search begins, and the length of time the search takes but is ordinarily about four to six months from beginning to end (excluding summers). A presidential search policy can specify that the Board Chair solicit nominations for candidates to fill the interim position and bring a recommendation to the Board. Many institutions require that the interim president not be a candidate for president.

Assessment of the Institution and Development of a Leadership Profile

The selection of a new president is an opportunity for a governing board to take stock of where the institution stands and where it wants the institution to go. A presidential selection policy should include in the earliest stages of the process an assessment of the institution. That assessment should include consideration about whether the current strategic direction of the university should be sustained or changed. This stage of the process should also invite comments from university-related constituencies about the future of the university and what kind of president it needs.

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Based on this assessment, the Board establishes a leadership profile describing/listing the measurable qualifications, experience, competencies, and capacities desired in a new president. This leadership profile serves as a road map for the recruitment and selection process.

Search Committee

A presidential search process typically requires the establishment of a search committee and specifies its duties and composition. Except in the case of an interim or acting president, Oregon law requires that the hiring committee for a president of a public university in Oregon include representatives of the university community and at least one other president of a public university based in Oregon (Oregon Revised Statutes 352.096).

In addition to meeting these statutory requirements, the following practices are recommended when convening a presidential search committee:

- Members should be appointed by the Board Chair with input from Trustees and the leadership of the university.
- The committee should be chaired by a Trustee who is appointed by the Board Chair and acts as spokesperson for the committee.
- The committee should be composed of Trustees and representatives from the faculty, student body, staff, and the broader community, as well as others who are identified as helpful to the process. Best practice is for constituencies to provide slates of names from which the Board Chair can select.
- The committee is staffed by the Board Secretary who works under the direction of the Search Committee Chair and in close coordination with the search consultant, if one is engaged.

The search committee typically:

- Has the ability to engage a search consultant to assist the committee throughout the process;
- Develops a position advertisement based on the Board's assessment of the institution and the leadership profile the Board develops;
- Advertises the position broadly and solicits nominations and applications from a diverse group of well-qualified persons;
- Screens applications using the leadership criteria as the basis for choice;
- Ensures that full consideration is given to internal candidates while avoiding any appearance of an "inside track";
- Ensures that appropriate information about the university and the presidency is provided to candidates at each stage of the process;
- Selects and interviews semifinalist candidates;
- Recommends a group of qualified finalists to the Board Chair. When forwarding their recommendations to the Board Chair, the committee would provide a report on each recommended finalist, detailing strengths and weaknesses in terms of the desired qualifications for the position. The Board Chair would then complete a review of the recommended finalists and may narrow the field of candidates after consultation with the committee. After this independent review, the Board Chair determines the finalists to forward to the Board;
- Arranges campus visits for all final candidates;

- Provides the Board with a summary of campus and community reaction to the final candidates; and
- Ensures that confidentiality is strictly observed with respect to applicants and the committee's internal deliberations.

Engagement with the University Community

The presidential selection policy should provide for engagement with the university community. Engagement includes:

- Inviting input from the university community on the university's anticipated needs over the next decade and what background, skills and experience are needed in the next president;
- Including broad university representation on the search committee;
- Encouraging the entire university to submit names of well-qualified candidates; and
- Emphasizing transparency in the process through regular updates from the Board or Search Committee Chairs.

Selection and Transition

At virtually all public colleges and universities, the final candidate visits to campus are an open process with the identities of candidates announced to the campus and external communities. These visits feature opportunities for candidates to interact with members of the Board, faculty, students, staff, and the broader community. At this stage in the process, the Board would interview the final candidates in executive session, as allowed under Oregon Public Meeting Law.

Once campus visits and interviews are complete, the Board would convene again in executive session to rank the candidates and to delegate in public session the responsibility for the Board Chair to negotiate with a "first choice" candidate and to consult with the Governor or Governor's designee (as required by Oregon Revised Statutes 352.096).

Following this negotiation phase, in public session, the Board would vote to appoint the new president and approve the contract and compensation. This process may necessitate action in advance by the OSU Foundation Board, if a portion of the compensation package would be provided by the Foundation.

Welcoming a new president generally includes establishment of a transition team who can orient and advise the new president during the first year or two. The team should introduce the new president to the institution's history, culture and aspirations as well as provide introductions to all constituencies. The Board also has continuing responsibility for providing advice and support to the new president. The Board should use the university assessment completed at the outset of the search to establish, in consultation with the new president, the major goals for the president's first year, which will be the basis for the initial performance review.

NEXT STEPS

Based on Committee discussion, staff will develop a draft presidential selection policy for consideration at the next Committee meeting.