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On Balance:
Case Study of Effective Coordination:
Washington State Board for
Community and Technical Colleges

An Organizational Perspective

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July 2012
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Supported by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Question

Given the inherent difficulty of *coordinating* independently governed postsecondary institutions, what has SBCTC done to be viewed as effective and how has it done it?



Research Process

- 60-90 minute open ended conversations with 31 people over 4 days in person and by phone.
 - Sitting Board members
 - Current and former SBCTC staff members
 - Sitting and former College Presidents
 - Sitting Trustees
 - Legislators and staff, Executive branch staff
 - Leaders from the other segments (4 year institutions)
- Document review

Who Thinks About Improving Coordination?

- Legislators and Governors
 - Design and use of formal structures
 - Leadership appointments
- Coordinating boards
 - Strategic use of formal and informal authority
- College presidents and trustees
 - Use of delegated formal and informal authority; leadership strategies
- Intermediaries/funders
 - Importance of state context; relative assets and deficits
 - Technical assistance to emphasize impact of leadership

SBCTC as Case Study

Washington has mastered:

- Clear mission focus
- Policy changes at scale
- Balance and mediate relationships

Enabling initiatives such as:

- Running Start
- Worker Retraining
- I-BEST
- Student Achievement Initiative (momentum points)
- Applied baccalaureates
- Opportunity Grants
- Open Course Library

And sustaining institutional quality:

- Well-represented among Aspen prize finalists



Figure 2

Explanatory Factors in SBCTC Effective Coordination

State Economic and Political Context

- Populist state culture
- Part-time legislature
- Economic dependency on two-year colleges
- Continuity of political party of governor

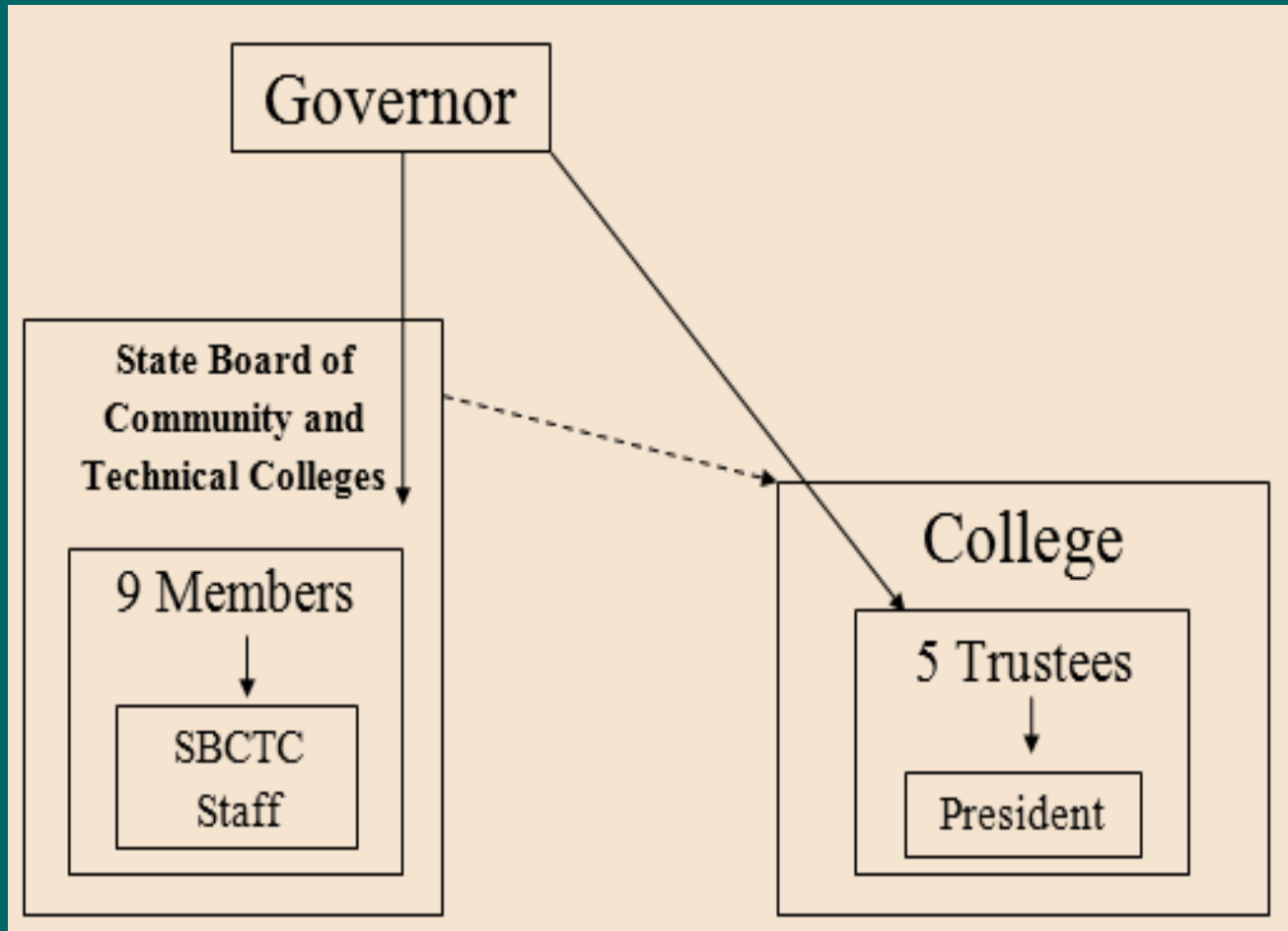
Core Institutional Design Elements

- Broad fiscal powers
- Broad policy-setting authority
- Unified political appointing power
- SBCTC is not a “state agency”
- Encompassing mission to serve adults

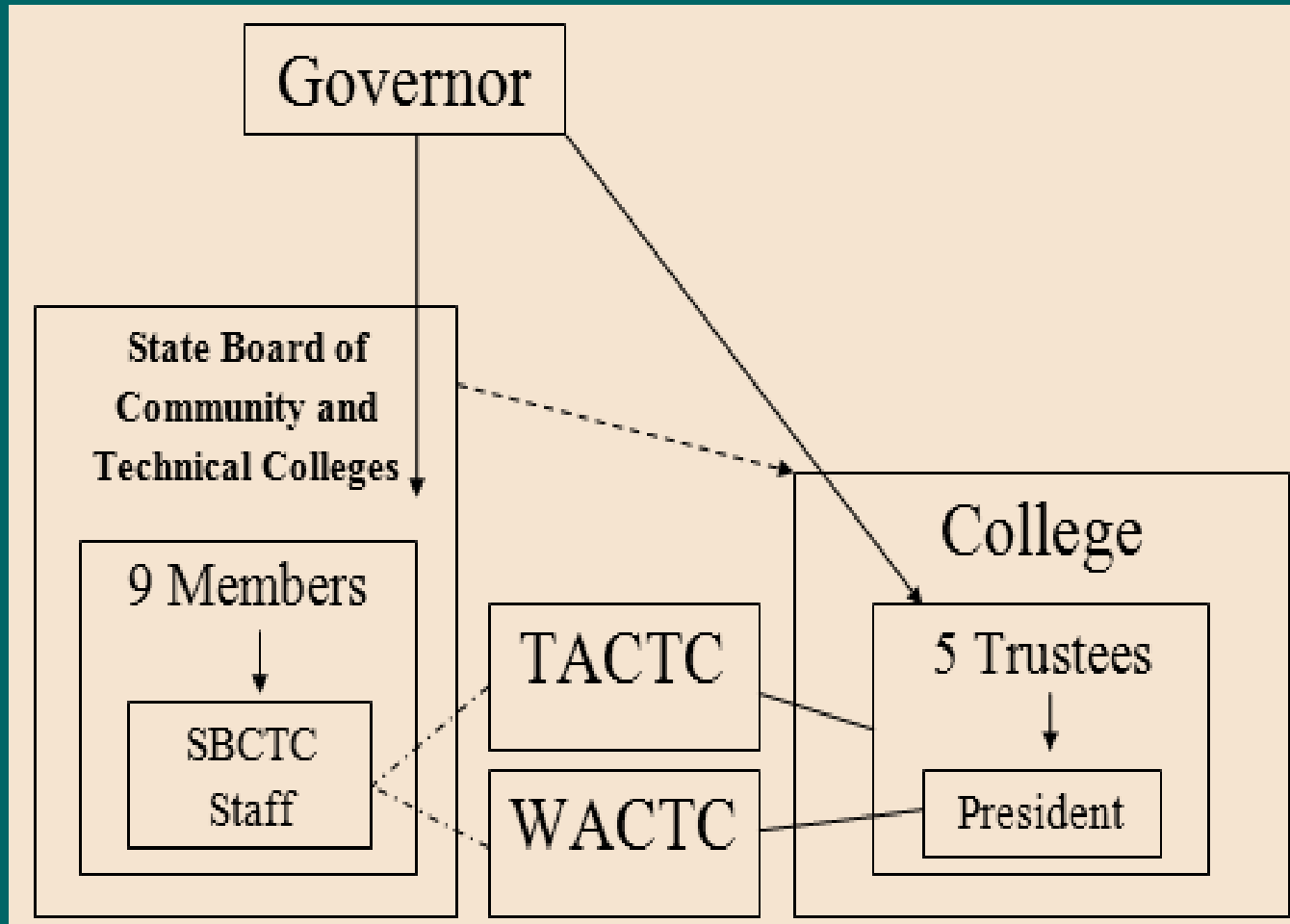
Organization and Leadership Strategies

- Relentless focus on a mission of public value
- Continual cultivation of support from key constituencies
- Policy strategists more than program implementers
- Extensive collaboration and shared decision making
- Strategic use of data

Statutory Community College Governance Structure



Decision Making Structure in Practice



Some Noteworthy Story Lines from SBCTC

- Design/formal powers
 - Fiscal and policy authority are critical (even when not used)
 - Unified appointing power fosters cohesion
 - Human resource flexibility used to foster staff competence
- Organizational leadership
 - Created formal, shared decision structures
 - Presidents' self-governing – e.g., end run policy
 - Strategic opportunity seized to craft mission around workforce
 - Constant attention to mission, common message
 - Make time for Board and staff to just think!
- A balancing act – but the state/local balance is shifting
 - Increasing state-level attention to accountability, efficiency
 - Growing unease among presidents

Self Assessment Components



- State Context (10 items)
 - Locus of control; degree of oversight
 - Culture (degree of politicization; competitive/cooperative)
 - Expectations of the college system (unity, standardization)
- Institutional Design (9 items)
 - Scope of mission and formal powers (policy, budget, regulatory)
 - Appointing authority
 - Match of capacity to expectations
- Organizational Leadership (16 items)
 - Mission-related (strategy, policy v rule-making, data, message)
 - Capacity (relative to expectations of colleges and lawmakers)
 - Communication and collaboration (internal and external constituencies)

Questions

- What lessons can be learned from the SBCTC case study?
 - What changes might affect SBCTC's ability to perform effectively?
 - How can SBCTC continue to strike an appropriate balance between local and state level control? Do different policies call for a different balance?