



COLLEGE
of the DESERT

Follow-Up Report

Submitted by

College of the Desert
43-500 Monterey Ave
Palm Desert, CA 92260

to

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

March 2026


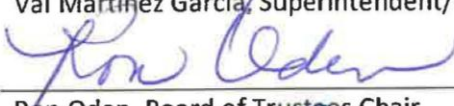


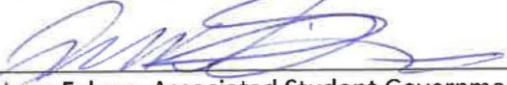


Certification

To: Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

From: Val Martinez Garcia, Superintendent/President
College of the Desert
43-500 Monterey Ave
Palm Desert, CA 92260

This Follow-Up Report is submitted to ACCJC for the purpose of demonstrating resolution of deficiencies cited by the Commission in the action letter dated January 21, 2025. The Follow-Up Report reflects the nature and substance of this institution, as well as its best efforts to align with ACCJC Standards and policies, and was developed with appropriate participation and review by the campus community.

Signatures:

	2/20/26
Val Martinez Garcia, Superintendent/President	Date
	2/20/26
Ron Oden, Board of Trustees Chair	Date
	2-18-26
Dr. Corbyn Wild, Academic Senate President	Date
	02-18-2026
Omar Fimbres, Classified Staff Union President	Date
	2/20/26
Juan Falcon, Associated Student Government President	Date
	2/19/26
Bert Bitanga, Faculty Accreditation Liaison	Date
	02/20/2026
Joy Cowden, Accreditation Liaison Officer	Date

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Response to Identified Compliance Requirements

College of the Desert respectfully submits this Follow-Up Report in response to the Compliance Requirements identified in the Commission’s January 21, 2025 Action Letter. This report documents the specific actions taken to address Standards IV.C.2, IV.C.10, and IV.C.12 and demonstrates sustained, measurable progress in strengthening Board governance, clarifying delegation of authority, and institutionalizing continuous improvement. Since 2023, and particularly throughout 2025, the Board of Trustees has revised policies, engaged in targeted governance training, conducted candid public self-evaluation, and implemented structural mechanisms to ensure ongoing compliance with ACCJC Standards. The evidence presented reflects not isolated corrective steps, but a deliberate and sustained cultural shift toward disciplined, policy-driven governance aligned with the Commission’s expectations for accreditation.

College Requirement #1 - Standard IV.C.2

Standard IV.C.2 (College Requirement 1): In order to meet the Standard, the Commission requires that the governing board acts as a collective entity and that once the Board of Trustees reaches a decision, all board members act in support of board decisions.

College of the Desert has successfully resolved prior deficiencies related to Board cohesion and collective action. Since 2023, the Board of Trustees has implemented formal policy revisions, conducted scenario-based legal training, engaged in open self-evaluation, and demonstrated unity during major institutional decisions. These actions collectively mark a sustained shift from individualism toward disciplined, policy-driven governance aligned with ACCJC Standard IV.C.2.

Formal Codification of Collective Authority

To clarify and reinforce that individual trustees may not act independently, the Board revised key policies:

Board Policy 2715 (Code of Ethics/Standards of Practice) was revised in January 2025, to require trustees to “abide by and uphold the final majority decision of the Board” and to clarify that “an individual Board member has no legal authority outside the meetings of the Board to direct staff.”

Board Policy 2200 (Board Duties and Responsibilities) was adopted in April 2025, affirming the Board’s duty to act as a unified body representing the public interest, not as individuals or constituency representatives.

These policy updates provide an explicit governance framework that supports Board accountability, collective responsibility, and institutional integrity.

Targeted Legal Training on “One Voice” Governance

On September 19, 2025, the Board participated in a livestreamed study session titled “The Role of the Board,” facilitated by Eileen O’Hare-Anderson of Liebert Cassidy Whitmore. The training focused squarely on the legal and ethical requirement that the Board act as a collective entity.

Using practical hypotheticals, legal counsel illustrated unacceptable behavior such as a trustee unilaterally committing the District to address a local drainage issue. Trustees were explicitly advised that “a single trustee has no power or authority” to act independently.

In one widely referenced example, the “official vegetable” scenario, counsel explained that even if a trustee opposed selecting “broccoli” during a vote, once the Board adopted it, all trustees must publicly support it. Counsel emphasized, “You can’t say broccoli sucks even if you would be speaking truth... until the board changes its action, the action of the board stands and you support it.”

Student Trustee James and other members actively engaged in clarifying how to separate personal opinions from official positions. This session helped operationalize board policy through real-world application and emphasized the risks of undermining collective action.

Public Acknowledgment and Correction of Past Issues

The Board used its 2025 self-evaluation, facilitated by the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), to confront prior challenges. During the May 22, 2025 special retreat, trustees discussed survey results showing “Board adheres to a code of ethics” as the lowest-rated item. Rather than deflect, trustees openly acknowledged the need to “act as a cohesive unit” and committed to improving internal communication to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

Trustee Sanchez-Fulton and Trustee Perez discussed cultural communication cues, such as nodding, which had previously led to misperceptions. The Board agreed on strategies to ensure shared understanding and signal consensus clearly, reflecting growth in their interpersonal dynamics.

Demonstration of Sustained Unity

The Board has exhibited collective governance in high-stakes public decisions:

In May 2025, the Board appointed Val Martinez Garcia as Superintendent/President following a prior search process disrupted by a breach of confidentiality. The initial appointment was approved by a 3–2 vote, reflecting differing trustee perspectives during deliberation. However, at the subsequent regular meeting, the Board voted unanimously (5–0) to approve President Garcia’s employment agreement. During that meeting, all five trustees expressed public support for President Garcia’s leadership and affirmed his authority as the District’s chief executive. Trustee Pérez stated, “I’m thrilled to say that Val Martinez Garcia is that leader,” and the Board has since acted consistently and in alignment to support the Superintendent/President in carrying out the responsibilities of the office.

Board Officer Transition: During the December 2024 organizational meeting, trustees expressed mutual respect and collaboration. Trustee Pérez said to the incoming Chair, “I’m looking forward to working with you in this new role and the experience and leadership that you bring,” reflecting a tone of trust and institutional continuity.

Governance Structure: In November 2025, the Board created a permanent Board Continuous Improvement Committee to oversee ongoing training, self-evaluation, and adherence to governance standards. This action ensures that Board cohesion is regularly assessed and strengthened over time. The committee was originally called the Board Committee for Institutional Effectiveness but has been renamed the Board Continuous Improvement Committee to better reflect the nature of the committee. The committee held the first meeting on January 14, 2026 and board membership was finalized at the January 22, 2026 regular board meeting.

Evidence List – Standard IV.C.2

- [Board Policy 2715](#) – Code of Ethics/Standards of Practice (Revised Apr 2025): Codifies collective responsibility and prohibits unilateral trustee action. [April 10, 2025 Agenda Item](#). [April 10, 2025 Minutes](#).
- [Board Policy 2200](#) – Board Duties and Responsibilities (Adopted Apr 2025): Defines the Board’s obligation to act as a unit representing the public interest. [April 10, 2025 Agenda Item](#). [April 10, 2025 Minutes](#).

- Board Study Session – [“The Role of the Board”](#) (Sept 19, 2025): Scenario-based legal training reinforcing that individual trustees may not act independently or publicly oppose Board decisions. [September 19, 2025 Agenda Item](#).
- Special Board Retreat (May 22, 2025): Facilitated discussion of [self-evaluation results](#) and Board communication improvements. [May 22, 2025 Agenda Item Review/Discuss Board Evaluation](#). [May 22, 2025 Agenda Item Review of ACCJC Compliance Requirements/Discuss Progress to Date](#). [Board Minutes May 22, 2025](#).
- Regular Board Meeting (May 16, 2025): Unanimous vote to approve the Employment Agreement for the Superintendent/President following a previously 3-2 vote to appoint. [Board Minutes to Appoint Superintendent/President](#). [Board Minutes to Approve Superintendent/President Contract](#).
- Organizational Meeting (Dec 20, 2024): Trustee statements of support and mutual accountability during Board leadership transition. [Board Minutes December 2024](#).
- [Continuous Improvement Board Committee](#) (Jan 14, 2026): Creation of the Board Continuous Improvement Committee as a structural mechanism to monitor and enhance collective governance. [Board Minutes Appointing Members to Continuous Improvement Committee](#).

College Requirement #2 - Standard IV.C.10

Standard IV.C.10 (College Requirement 2): In order to meet the Standard, the Commission Requires that the Board of Trustees adheres to its policy on a regular evaluation that it uses the results to improve board performance, academic quality, and institutional effectiveness.

College of the Desert has resolved prior deficiencies related to Standard IV.C.10 by embedding a rigorous, policy-based self-evaluation process into the Board's annual cycle, conducting evaluations through third-party facilitation, and, critically, using the results to drive structural reforms and professional development. This commitment has shifted the Board's self-evaluation from a perfunctory compliance activity to a primary tool for continuous governance improvement.

Codification of an Annual, Transparent Evaluation Process

The Board updated Board Policy 2745 (Board Self-Evaluation) to ensure that self-assessment is regular, meaningful, and directly tied to Board improvement efforts. The revised policy mandates:

- Appointment of a subcommittee each fall to select the evaluation instrument;
- Completion of the evaluation each spring; and
- Public discussion of results to inform goal setting and training priorities.

In alignment with this policy, Trustees Meyer and Pérez were appointed in early 2025 to lead the evaluation process. At the April 10, 2025 board meeting, Trustee Meyer announced the use of the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) evaluation tool, noting that the instrument had "well over 107 questions" and was selected because it directly addressed areas identified in the ACCJC's 2025 Action Letter.

Public Discussion and Candid Analysis of Evaluation Results

The Board held a dedicated public retreat on May 22, 2025, facilitated by Dr. Debbie DiThomas (ACCT), to review the self-evaluation findings. During this session:

- The lowest-rated item, "Board adheres to a code of ethics or standards of practice," received a 3.0 average score. Dr. DiThomas emphasized this item should be prioritized: "More than one person thought there was a problem with the Board adhering to your code of ethics."
- Another low score (3.2) on the Board's relationship with the CEO highlighted role confusion and was acknowledged as a training priority.
- Trustees reflected candidly. Trustee Oden commented, "It would be interesting to see a comparison of these results with previous results... it doesn't really address the recommendations... we know what they were," acknowledging the need for progress tracking.

The Board's willingness to engage publicly in analyzing these findings marked a pivotal cultural shift toward accountability and continuous self-correction.

Direct Linkage Between Evaluation Results and Board Improvement

The Board immediately used these findings to implement changes and establish long-term improvement mechanisms:

- Targeted Governance Training: In direct response to the low ethics and role-clarity ratings, the Board held a scenario-based legal training session on September 19, 2025, facilitated by legal counsel Eileen

O’Hare-Anderson. The session focused on the limitations of individual trustee authority and the importance of collective support for Board decisions, key issues flagged in the self-evaluation.

- Standing Committee on Continuous Improvement: During the May 2025 retreat, Trustee Meyer proposed the creation of a permanent Standing Committee on Continuous Improvement to oversee trustee development, governance goal implementation, and the use of evaluation results to drive Board improvement. The Board formalized this proposal at its October 2025 meeting, initially naming it the Standing Committee on Institutional Effectiveness. However, in alignment with the original intent and to better reflect its focus on ongoing trustee development and governance excellence, the Board has since agreed to adopt Trustee Meyer’s proposed name, Standing Committee on Continuous Improvement. This committee ensures that reflective practice and continuous evaluation are sustained as core elements of Board operations.
- Goal-Setting Based on Evaluation Findings: The Board used ACCT-facilitated discussions to draft internal governance goals, distinct from institutional goals, including objectives such as “Board speaks with one voice” and “Clarify Board/CEO roles.” These became the foundation for Board development activities in 2025–2026.

Evidence of a Culture of Reflective Governance

Beyond policy and structure, Board meetings from April, May, and October 2025, reflect a culture of responsiveness and commitment to improvement:

- At the April 10, 2025 meeting, Trustee Meyer presented a timeline for self-evaluation and governance development aligned with ACCJC expectations.
- At the October 2025 meeting, Chair Kinnamon announced that the Board Continuous Improvement Committee had been formally established to sustain long-term accountability.

Throughout these meetings, the Board repeatedly affirmed that results from its self-evaluation would inform future governance practices.

Evidence List – Standard IV.C.10

- [Board Policy 2745](#) – Board Self-Evaluation: Mandates annual self-evaluation, instrument selection, and public results discussion. [Board Agenda Jan 17, 2025](#).
- Board Meeting Transcript (April 10, 2025): Public confirmation of the ACCT instrument selected by the Ad Hoc Committee (Meyer/Pérez) to directly address ACCJC standards. [YouTube Meeting Link](#). [Board Agenda Item April 10, 2025](#). [Board Self-Evaluation Tool Selection Committee Report](#).
- Special Board Retreat Transcript (May 22, 2025): Verbatim record of the Board discussing low ratings on ethics and role clarity, facilitated by ACCT. [YouTube Meeting Link](#). [Board Meeting Minutes May 22, 2025](#). [Self-Evaluation Summary Results](#).
- Board Study Session Transcript (September 19, 2025): Legal training on trustee conduct, directly addressing issues raised in the self-evaluation. [YouTube Meeting Link](#). [Board Meeting Minutes September 19, 2025](#). [Board Study Session Presentation](#).
- Board Meeting Transcript (May 22, 2025): Public creation of the Board Continuous Improvement Committee to institutionalize governance evaluation and development. [YouTube Meeting Link](#). [Board](#)

[Meeting Minutes May 22, 2025. Continuous Improvement Board Committee Minutes \(Jan 14, 2026\): Board Minutes Appointing Members to Continuous Improvement Committee.](#)

College Requirement #3 - Standard IV.C.12

Standard IV.C.12 (College Requirement 3): In order to meet the Standard, the Commission requires the Board delegate full responsibility and authority to the CEO to implement and administer board policies without Board interference

College of the Desert has fully addressed the compliance requirement regarding Standard IV.C.12 by clearly codifying the delegation of executive authority to the Superintendent/President and demonstrating, through board policy, trustee training, and public meeting behavior, a sustained commitment to non-interference in administrative operations. The Board has moved from a posture of operational overreach to one of strategic governance and policy oversight, consistent with ACCJC expectations.

Codification of Delegated Authority

The delegation of authority is established through a comprehensive policy framework that makes clear the Superintendent/President's exclusive role in implementing and administering board policies:

- Board Policy 2430 – Delegation of Authority to the Superintendent/President: This foundational policy explicitly assigns “executive responsibility for administering the policies adopted by the Board and executing all decisions of the Board requiring administrative action” to the Superintendent/President.
- Board Policy 3100 – Organizational Structure: Authorizes the CEO to establish organizational charts and delineate staff duties, ensuring the Board does not involve itself in staffing decisions or internal reporting structures.
- Board Policy 7110 – Delegation of Authority, Human Resources: Assigns authority for personnel actions to the CEO, with the Board's role limited to final ratification, eliminating any trustee participation in hiring processes.
- Board Policy 2200 – Board Duties and Responsibilities (Revised April 2025): Clarifies that delegation of power to the chief executive is a specific duty of the Board, reinforcing the boundary between policy-setting and administration.

Training on Legal and Ethical Boundaries

To reinforce these policy lines and ensure practical understanding, the Board participated in a legal study session on September 19, 2025, titled “The Role of the Board”, facilitated by attorney Eileen O'Hare-Anderson. Trustees reviewed scenarios designed to illustrate the distinction between governance and interference:

- In the “Drainage” Scenario, counsel emphasized that no trustee may promise facilities actions to the public. Trustees were instructed that even saying, “I'll look into it,” may imply unauthorized commitment and that operational matters must be referred to the CEO.
- In the “Grievance” Scenario, trustees learned that engaging in discussions with faculty about personnel issues undermines administrative processes and violates the line between board and staff.

This training clarified that while trustees may inquire about issues of concern, they must not direct, influence, or involve themselves in the operational response.

Demonstration of Delegation in Practice

The Board has consistently upheld this delegation of authority in recent public meetings:

- Campus Safety (November 14, 2025): During a discussion of Indio Campus safety concerns, the Board received reports from the Police Chief and Director of Public Safety. Trustees asked clarifying questions but did not issue directives. Trustee Rubén Pérez publicly commended Superintendent/President Garcia for his leadership, demonstrating trust in the administration’s operational judgment.
- Academic Programming (December 19, 2025): In a study session reviewing the proposed Bachelor of Science in Casino Management, trustees praised the program’s strategic value but left curricular details and industry partnerships to the Vice President of Instruction and faculty.
- Personnel Appointments: In multiple board meetings, the Board ratified executive appointments, including the Vice President of Instruction and Deans, based solely on the Superintendent/President’s recommendations, in accordance with Board Policy 7110.

CEO Accountability Without Interference

The Board fulfills its obligation to hold the CEO accountable not through operational involvement, but through a structured evaluation process. As required by Board Policy 2435 – Evaluation of the Superintendent/President, the Board conducts regular evaluations based on policy implementation and annual goals. In May 2025, the Board unanimously approved the employment agreement for Superintendent/President Val Martinez Garcia, reinforcing their commitment to executive accountability without micromanagement.

Evidence List

- [Board Policy 2430](#) – Delegation of Authority to Superintendent/President
- [Board Policy 3100](#) – Organizational Structure. Board reviewed approved February 20, 2026. [Board Meeting Minutes Feb 20, 2026](#).
- [Board Policy 7110](#) – Delegation of Authority, Human Resources
- [Board Policy 2200](#) – Board Duties and Responsibilities (April 2025 Revision). [Board Agenda Item April 10, 2025](#). [Board Meeting Minutes April 10, 2025](#).
- Board Study Session Transcript (Sept 19, 2025) – Legal training on the limits of trustee authority (Drainage and Grievance scenarios). [YouTube Meeting Link](#). [Board Meeting Minutes Sept 19, 2025](#). [Board Study Session – The Role of the Board](#).
- Board Meeting Transcript (Nov 14, 2025) – Indio Campus safety discussion. [YouTube Meeting Link](#). [Board Meeting Minutes Nov 14, 2025](#). [Indio Campus Site Assessment Presentation](#).
- Board Meeting Transcript (Dec 19, 2025) – Casino Management bachelor’s program. [YouTube Meeting Link](#). [Board Meeting Minutes Dec 19, 2025](#). [Bachelor of Science in Casino & Integrated Resort Management Presentation](#).
- Board Meeting Transcript (May 16, 2025) – CEO employment agreement and ratification. Unanimous vote to approve the Employment Agreement for the Superintendent/President following a previously 3-2 vote to appoint. [YouTube Meeting Link](#). [Board Minutes to Appoint Superintendent/President](#). [Board Minutes to Approve Superintendent/President Contract](#).