

# Higher Education Institutions Recognized for Exceptional College and University Board Leadership

*AGB Announces 2026 Awards for Exceptional College and University Board Leadership*

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The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges ([AGB](#)) proudly announces the selection of four higher

education governing boards as recipients of the 2026 John W. [Nason](#) Award for Board Leadership. Established in 1992, the Nason Award recognizes governing boards that demonstrate exceptional leadership, courage, and initiative in advancing institutional mission and impact.



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The 2026 Nason Award recipients exemplify the very best of board leadership—grounded in mission, responsive to community needs, and willing to make courageous decisions in moments of uncertainty.”

*Ross Mugler, President and  
CEO of AGB*

This year’s awardees were selected from a highly competitive pool of nominations representing public and private colleges and universities, as well as institutionally related foundations. The 2026 Nason Award recipients are:

Colorado School of Mines Foundation Board of Governors - Facing a dramatic and sustained decline in state funding for higher education in Colorado, the Colorado School of Mines Foundation Board of Governors transformed itself from a primarily fiduciary body into a high-performing, strategic fundraising and governance partner. Over more than a decade, the Board undertook a comprehensive self-

reinvention—professionalizing leadership, restructuring governance, instituting accountability metrics, and committing personally to fundraising excellence. Through courageous decisions, including hiring the Foundation’s first full-time professional CEO and launching the institution’s first comprehensive capital campaign, the Board helped raise more than \$1 billion across two historic campaigns, dramatically expand the endowment, and position the Foundation as the

margin of excellence for a top-tier public STEM university. Their leadership strengthened alumni engagement, fueled campus transformation, and ensured Colorado School of Mines' continued national competitiveness in research, innovation, and student success.

The Evergreen State College Foundation Board of Governors - The Evergreen State College Foundation Board of Governors launched bold new fundraising and advocacy campaigns to help the College elevate its reputation and increase enrollment by 26% in four years. Launching the College's first major fundraising campaign in 2019—just before the global pandemic and amid significant enrollment and reputational challenges—the Board provided sustained, mission-driven leadership when it was most needed. Its long-range strategy expanded fundraising and exceeded the campaign's \$40 million goal, raising \$62.5 million. Through this leadership, the Board increased the student-aid budget by 82%, invested in student basic needs and retention programs, and mobilized alumni and supporters as effective advocates at the state legislature. The Board also prioritized culturally responsive governance, social and racial justice, and board diversification—demonstrating how foundations can propel institutional growth through principled action.

Fort Lewis College Board of Trustees - The Fort Lewis College Board of Trustees exemplified courageous and values-centered governance by leading the institution through a process of truth, healing, and reconciliation tied to its history as a former federal Indian boarding school. Rather than distancing the institution from its past, the Board embraced transparency and accountability—advocating for state legislation to research boarding school history, supporting the public release of findings, and unanimously adopting a formal institutional commitment to reconciliation. Working in close partnership with Tribal Nations, campus leadership, and community stakeholders, the Board embedded reconciliation as a core strategic priority, guiding long-term planning, governance practices, and presidential leadership. Their actions positioned Fort Lewis College as a national model for truth-telling, Indigenous-centered leadership, and higher education governance grounded in justice, responsibility, and relationship-building.

University of Pikeville Board of Trustees - Over the course of three decades, the University of Pikeville Board of Trustees transformed a financially fragile rural college into a comprehensive regional university with a national reputation for health professions education. Beginning with a bold decision to reject financial exigency and instead invest in mission-aligned growth, the Board championed the creation of the Kentucky College of Osteopathic Medicine, followed by the Kentucky College of Optometry and the Tanner College of Dental Medicine. Through strategic risk-taking, innovative financing, and deep personal commitment, the Board expanded academic offerings, stabilized finances, and built a powerful healthcare workforce pipeline for Central Appalachia. Today, University of Pikeville graduates thousands of physicians, optometrists, and soon dentists—many serving rural and medically underserved communities—demonstrating how sustained board leadership can drive institutional transformation and regional impact.

“The 2026 Nason Award recipients exemplify the very best of board leadership—grounded in mission, responsive to community needs, and willing to make courageous decisions in moments

of uncertainty,” said Ross Mugler, President and CEO of AGB. “These boards demonstrate how thoughtful governance, sustained engagement, and principled leadership can strengthen institutions, serve students, and create lasting public good. Their work offers powerful lessons for governing boards across higher education.”

Recipients of the 2026 John W. Nason Awards will be honored at AGB’s Foundation Leadership Forum this month and the National Conference on Trusteeship later this year.

The Nason Award is named for higher education leader John W. Nason, who served as chair of the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council and helped more than 4,000 interned students continue their college studies during World War II. Learn more about the Nason Award at [AGB.org/Award](https://www.agb.org/Award).

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