

 **RESPECT** | GRADUATE
SCHOOL

BOARD HANDBOOK

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1. Introduction

The Respect Graduate School (Hereafter RGS) Board Handbook is designed to serve as a comprehensive guide for the members of the Board of Trustees as they carry out their fiduciary, strategic, and generative responsibilities. As the governing body of RGS, the Board plays a critical role in ensuring that the institution remains mission-driven, accountable, and positioned for long-term success. This handbook brings together the essential policies, structures, procedures, and expectations that inform and support effective governance.

Rooted in the mission, vision, and values of RGS, this handbook equips board members with the information necessary to understand the institution’s governance model, decision-making processes, and performance expectations. It clarifies the scope of the Board’s authority, outlines its relationship to the President and his/her Cabinet, and establishes clear guidelines for ethical leadership, institutional oversight, and strategic direction.

1.1 Purpose of the Board Handbook

The primary purpose of the Board Handbook is to provide board members with a clear, organized, and accessible resource to guide their service. Specifically, this handbook aims to:

- Define roles, responsibilities, and expectations for the Board of Trustees, its officers, committees, and individual members.

- Ensure consistency and continuity in governance by documenting institutional policies, procedures, and best practices.
- Strengthen governance effectiveness by offering frameworks for board meetings, decision-making, assessments, and annual evaluations.
- Support new board members' onboarding by presenting all essential information in a structured format.
- Enhance alignment between the Board, the President, and the administration by articulating communication pathways and reporting expectations.
- Promote ethical, transparent, and informed leadership that advances the mission and long-term sustainability of the institution.

Together, these elements ensure that the Board of Trustees is well-prepared to guide RGS with integrity, foresight, and a shared commitment to academic excellence and institutional advancement.

1.2 Mission, Vision, and Goals of Respect Graduate School

Our Mission

Respect Graduate School is an academic institution that specializes in Islamic Studies, aiming at excellence in teaching, learning, and scholarship. With genuine appreciation for and study of traditional Islamic disciplines, RGS applies interdisciplinary and creative approaches to equip students to respond to contemporary social and intellectual challenges in the global context. Fostering respect and dialogue with diverse communities, RGS also offers moral and spiritual service to all.

Our Vision

Respect Graduate School aspires to become a distinguished university where religious and human knowledge is investigated from within a perspective that centers the Sacred.

Our Goals

- To endow students with broad and deep knowledge in Islamic Studies from both traditional and modern perspectives.

- To prepare students to conduct research in Islamic studies and related fields by providing them with the necessary analytical, critical, methodological, and interpretive skills.
- To provide the broader society with life-long learning opportunities and beneficial services.

1.3 Governance Philosophy

Respect Graduate School's governing philosophy is rooted in the belief that strong, ethical, mission-driven, and shared governance is essential to the flourishing of the institution and the fulfillment of its academic and community responsibilities. The Board of Trustees governs with a commitment to integrity, transparency, accountability, and long-term institutional stewardship.

RGS embraces a governance model that clearly distinguishes the roles of the Board, the President, and the administration while fostering collaboration, trust, and strategic alignment. The Board provides oversight and guidance at the policy and strategic levels, empowering the President and the President's Cabinet to lead the day-to-day operations of the institution with professionalism and expertise.

At the heart of RGS governing philosophy is a commitment to:

Mission-Centered Leadership

Every decision, policy, and strategic initiative is evaluated in light of the institution's mission, vision, and values. The Board ensures that RGS remains dedicated to academic excellence, student success, ethical leadership, and service to society.

Shared Responsibility and Collaborative Partnership

Governance at RGS is guided by a cooperative relationship between the Board, the President, faculty, staff, and the broader community. The Board respects and relies on the expertise of the academic and administrative leaders while providing high-level direction, support, and accountability.

Integrity, Ethics, and Stewardship

The Board upholds the highest standards of ethical conduct. Trustees act with independence, objectivity, and loyalty to the institution, ensuring responsible stewardship of financial, academic, and human resources. The governing philosophy emphasizes transparency in decision-making, avoidance of conflicts of interest, and a commitment to serving the public good.

Data-Informed and Evidence-Based Oversight

RGS governance prioritizes informed decision-making using accurate data, assessment results, external benchmarks, and trends in higher education. The Board continuously monitors institutional effectiveness and financial sustainability to ensure long-term stability and growth.

Strategic Vision and Continuous Improvement

The Board provides long-term strategic direction that positions RGS for success and resilience in an evolving educational landscape. Governance includes continuous reflection on institutional performance, assessment of board effectiveness, and improvement of governance practices to ensure excellence.

Diversity, Inclusion, and Mutual Respect

RGS values diverse perspectives and fosters an environment where all voices are heard and respected. Governance reflects a commitment to inclusiveness, fairness, and maintaining a campus culture grounded in respect, dignity, and intellectual openness.

1.4 Commitment to Inclusive, Transparent, and Ethical Decision-Making

Respect Graduate School is firmly committed to cultivating a culture of governance and leadership that reflects inclusiveness, transparency, and the highest ethical standards. These principles guide all institutional decision-making processes and ensure that the mission, values, and long-term well-being of the institution remain at the center of every action taken by the Board of Trustees, the President, and the administration.

Inclusiveness

RGS strives to ensure that diverse perspectives are thoughtfully considered in institutional deliberations. The institution values input from students, faculty, staff, trustees, alumni, and community partners. By embracing a broad range of experiences, viewpoints, and cultural backgrounds, RGS strengthens the quality of its decisions and promotes a community where every stakeholder feels respected and represented. Inclusive decision-making also involves actively seeking feedback through surveys, committees, assessments, and open communication channels.

Transparency

Transparency is essential to building trust, maintaining integrity, and fostering accountability across the institution. RGS is committed to making its processes, rationales, and outcomes clear and accessible. This includes communicating key decisions promptly, providing accurate and timely reports, documenting governance actions, sharing assessment results, and ensuring that stakeholders understand how and why decisions are made. Transparent governance strengthens institutional credibility and contributes to a healthy organizational culture.

Ethical Standards

Ethical decision-making is at the heart of RGS' governance philosophy. The institution upholds the principles of honesty, fairness, integrity, and responsibility in all aspects of leadership and administration. Trustees and leaders are expected to avoid conflicts of interest, respect confidentiality, act in the best interest of the institution, and comply with legal and accreditation requirements. Ethical conduct also includes responsible stewardship of financial resources, data, academic quality, and community trust.

1.5 Overview of Institutional Structure

RGS operates under a three-tiered system of governance designed to ensure clear authority, effective communication, and institutional integrity. This structure supports evidence-based decision-making, transparency, and continuous improvement in alignment with the institution's mission and strategic priorities.

Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees is the highest governing authority of RGS. It holds ultimate fiduciary responsibility for the institution's mission, vision, and long-term sustainability. The Board establishes and approves institutional policies, oversees the strategic plan, and ensures the financial and academic integrity of the school.

The duties and responsibilities of the Board are defined in the RGS Bylaws and detailed in the Board Handbook, which outlines governance policies, procedures, and ethical expectations.

The Board functions through two standing subcommittees:

- Educational Effectiveness Committee, which oversees academic quality, assessment of learning outcomes, and the results of regular program review.
- Financial Effectiveness Committee, which monitors financial performance, budgeting, and compliance with fiscal policies.

The Board of Trustees includes non-voting representatives from the Student Council Government Association and the Faculty, ensuring that student and faculty voices are directly integrated into Board deliberations and decision-making processes. The Student Representative and Faculty Representative attend all Board meetings and provide essential perspectives on matters affecting students and faculty, contributing to the Board's understanding of institutional needs and priorities.

President's Cabinet

The President's Cabinet, led by the President, serves as the bridge between the strategic direction set by the Board and the operational activities managed by the departments. The President is the chief executive and administrative officer of the institution, responsible for implementing the policies and strategic direction established by the Board in collaboration with his cabinet. Members of the President's Cabinet include the heads of departments, who collaborate on planning, coordination, and resource allocation. The President's Cabinet translates the Board's policies into actionable plans, ensures effective institutional operations, and monitors performance against strategic and accreditation goals.

Departments

The departments constitute the third level of governance and are the primary operational arms of RGS. Each department is led by a department head who reports to the President and participates in the President's Cabinet meetings. These departments deliver academic degree programs, student support, continuing education, and community services in fulfillment of the institutional mission and goals.

The major departments at RGS are:

- Academic Affairs
- Student Affairs
- Continuing Education
- Operations and Finance
- Masjid (Mosque) Services

Authority, Roles, and Relationships Among the Three Levels

Governance at RGS operates through a shared governance model where the Board of Trustees, in partnership with the President, President's Cabinet, faculty, staff, and students, collaborates on institutional decision-making. The Board retains authority for policy formulation, strategic oversight, and institutional accountability. It delegates administrative authority to the President, who exercises it through the President's Cabinet and department leadership to implement and manage operations.

The President serves as the primary liaison between the Board and the institution's administrative and academic components. All institutional policies, budgets, and strategic initiatives approved by the Board are executed under the President's direction. In turn, the President reports regularly to the Board on institutional progress, compliance, and outcomes.

The President's Cabinet acts as the body, ensuring alignment between Board policies, strategic priorities, and departmental operations. Department heads have decision-making authority within their respective areas and are accountable to the President for ensuring

that their activities comply with institutional policies and accreditation standards. They also operate in a consultative manner with their department members.

Each level maintains distinct yet interdependent responsibilities:

- The Board of Trustees governs and evaluates institutional effectiveness at a strategic level.
- The President's Cabinet, under the President's leadership, leads operational planning and implementation of plans, assessments, and analysis of outcomes, and ensures operational coherence.
- The departments implement programs and services, providing data and reports that inform institutional effectiveness and Board oversight.

This collaborative governance structure ensures a continuous cycle of communication and accountability, with each level contributing expertise and perspective to institutional decision-making. Strategic priorities are developed collaboratively by the Board in consultation with faculty, staff, and students, and then implemented by the President's Cabinet and executed by the departments. In turn, assessment data and feedback from departments inform the President's Cabinet and the Board, fostering a two-way process of evaluation and continuous improvement that meets both institutional and accreditation standards.

2. Board of Trustees as Outlined in Bylaws

RGS' Board of Trustees is outlined in Bylaws Article V as follows:

Definitions

The terms "Board of Trustees", "Board," and "Trustees" are used interchangeably and refer to the same body of members. The terms "Trustee", "Board Member", and "Member" refer to an individual elected to the Board of Trustees.

Powers of the Trustees

The Board of Trustees shall have all the powers compatible with carrying out the purposes for which the Nonprofit Corporation was established as set out in the Articles of Incorporation and the Bylaws; i.e., all the powers that are commonly exercised by the governing board of a similar nonprofit organization. These include, without limitation, the following:

- (a) The Board of Trustees shall be responsible for the operation, financial well-being, and development of the Nonprofit Corporation.
- (b) The Board of Trustees shall have absolute discretion over the use and expenditure of the Nonprofit Corporation's resources.
- (c) The Board shall approve the degrees to be conferred by the Nonprofit Corporation. The Board, upon recommendation from the Faculty, may confer such degrees and make such awards as it deems to be in accord with the resources and objectives of the Nonprofit Corporation and the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
- (d) The Board shall, from time to time, fix the amounts of tuition, fees, fines, housing costs, and other necessary contingent expenses of the Nonprofit Corporation.
- (e) The Board shall promulgate and maintain policies governing the operation of the Board and the conduct of Trustees.
- (f) The Board shall set policies for the Nonprofit Corporation regarding: mission and strategic direction; governance; academic programs and curricula; administration, personnel, student admissions, continuance, welfare, and conduct; resource allocation and management; Nonprofit Corporation facilities and campus use; asset acquisition, disposition, and management; fiscal matters; ethics; risk management; and audit. Ordinarily,

policies established by the Board shall be at the strategic level and provide guidance to the administration's actions, or at the functional management level and guide activities in major Nonprofit Corporation functions and operations.

(g) The Board of Trustees shall have the authority to appoint representatives of outside organizations associated with the Nonprofit Corporation to serve as Advisory Members of the Board. Advisory Members shall be entitled to report, in writing, at least annually to the Board and shall have a voice, but not vote, in meetings of the Board. At the invitation of the Board Chair, Advisory Members may sit with Board committees.

(h) The Board of Trustees shall have the right and power of taking and accepting real and personal property by gift, will or testamentary devise, the power to borrow money and mortgage real or personal property or give other security as may be appropriate and necessary, and the power to issue annuities and life-income contracts and similar contracts, all as may be appropriate and beneficial within the sole discretion of the Trustees.

(i) The Board of Trustees may create such other committees as it sees fit. The members and chairs of all committees shall be appointed by the Chair of the Board except as otherwise provided in these Bylaws, Board policy, or other Board action. The Chair and the President, by virtue of their offices, shall be members of all Board committees, except that the President shall not be a member of the Audit Committee or a committee charged with reviewing the performance of the President. A Trustee may attend any meeting of any Board committee and may participate in committee discussion, but may not vote unless the Trustee is a committee member.

Number and Qualifications

The exclusive management of the affairs of the Nonprofit Corporation shall be vested in the Board of Trustees, which shall be composed of not less than three (3) and not more than thirty-three (33) members. Each Trustee shall be a natural person at least eighteen (18) years of age who need not be a resident of Pennsylvania. In electing Trustees, the Board shall consider each candidate's willingness to accept responsibility for governance, including the candidate's availability to participate actively in board activities, areas of interest and expertise, and experience in organizational and community activities.

Election and Term of Office

The members of the Board of Trustees shall be elected by the present or remaining Trustees at the annual meeting of the Board of Trustees. Except as otherwise provided by resolution of the Board, each Trustee's term begins at the time of his or her election. Each Trustee shall hold office until (i) the expiration of the term for which he or she was elected and until his or her successor has been elected and qualified, or (ii) his or her earlier death, resignation, or removal. Each Trustee shall be elected for a three (3) year term. Each Trustee may be re-elected for a second three-year term of service. The re-election takes place at the annual meeting. No Trustee shall serve more than two consecutive terms, except that any officer (the Chairman or President, the Vice Chairperson, the Treasurer, and the Secretary) shall continue to serve as Trustee as long as such officer holds such officer's respective office. Trustees who serve two (2) consecutive terms are eligible to serve two additional three-year consecutive terms, provided that such Trustee leaves the Board for one (1) year after serving the first of two (2) consecutive terms. Notwithstanding any other provision of the Bylaws, any individual who was a member of the Board of Trustees as of September 25, 2022, shall be eligible to serve one (1) additional three (3) year consecutive term.

To maintain the foundational philosophy and the spirit of the institution, Founding Board Members shall serve for an indefinite time unless they resign as a Trustee or upon their death. The Founding Board Members are those individuals who founded the Nonprofit Corporation and signed the Articles of Incorporation filed with the Pennsylvania Department of State on December 14, 2012.

New Members or Vacancy on the Board of Trustees

Whenever any new member shall be added to the Board of Trustees or any vacancy shall occur in the Board of Trustees, by reason of death, resignation, or otherwise, the new or vacant Trusteeship shall be filled by the majority vote of the present or remaining Trustees to fill the term of the new Trustee or the unexpired term of that Trustee. Any appointment of a new or successor Trustee shall be made in writing, and upon the acceptance by the person so appointed, such person so selected shall be recognized as and shall be a member of the Board of Trustees of the Nonprofit Corporation and shall have all the powers and be charged with all the duties of his or her office.

Removal of a Trustee.

The power of removal of any Trustee or Trustees shall be vested in the Board of Trustees, and such removal may be made for any reason deemed sufficient by the majority vote of the Board of Trustees, excluding the Trustee whose removal is under consideration. Should any Trustee or Trustees be removed under the provisions of these Bylaws, the removed Trustee or Trustees shall be notified by letter stating such action and addressed to his or their last known address, and the decision of the Trustees in removing any Trustee or Trustees under the provisions aforesaid shall be final.

Resignation of a Trustee

Any Trustee may resign by so notifying the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the Nonprofit Corporation in writing. His/her resignation shall be effective upon its acceptance by the Board.

Quorum

At all meetings of the Board, a majority of the Trustees shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business, and the act of a majority of the Trustees present at any meeting at which there is a quorum shall be the act of the Board of Trustees, except as may be otherwise specifically provided by law or by the Articles of Incorporation or these Bylaws. The Trustees present thereat may adjourn the meeting from time to time, without notice other than announcement at the meeting, until a quorum shall be present.

Standing Committees

The Board of Trustees may, by resolution, passed by a majority of the Board present provided there is a quorum, designate one (1) or more committees, each committee to consist of one (1) or more of the Trustees of the Nonprofit Corporation, which, to the extent provided in the resolution, shall have and may exercise the powers of the Board of Trustees in the management of the business and affairs of the Nonprofit Corporation. Such committee or committees shall have such name or names as may be determined from time to time by resolution adopted by the Board of Trustees.

Minutes

Each committee shall keep regular minutes of its meetings and report the same to the Board of Trustees when required.

Telephone Meetings

Members of the Board of Trustees, or of any committee thereof, may participate in a meeting of such Board or committee by means of conference telephone or similar communications equipment that enables all persons participating in the meeting to hear each other. Such participation shall constitute presence in person at such meeting.

Actions in Lieu of Meeting

Unless otherwise restricted by the Articles of Incorporation or these Bylaws, any action required or permitted to be taken at any meeting of the Board of Trustees or of any committee thereof may be taken without a meeting, if a written consent to such action is signed by all members of the Board or such committee as the case may be, and such written consent is filed with the minutes of proceedings of the Board or such committee.

2.2 Officers

Board Officers are outlined in Bylaws Article VI as follows:

Officers of the Board of Trustees

The officers of the Board of Trustees shall be a Chairperson (or the "Chair of the Board"), a Vice Chairperson, a Secretary, and a Treasurer. The same person may hold more than one such office. The Board of Trustees at its first meeting and at each such annual meeting of the Board thereafter shall choose a Chairperson, a Vice Chairperson, a Secretary, a Treasurer, and such other officers and agents of the Board of Trustees as it shall deem necessary and appropriate. The officers of the Board of Trustees shall serve without compensation.

Terms, Qualifications, and Removal of Officers

The officers of the Board of Trustees shall hold office until their successors are chosen and qualified, or until their earlier resignation or removal. Any officer of the Board of Trustees

may be removed by the majority vote of the Trustees at any regular, annual, or special meeting of Trustees called as provided for herein. Any vacancy occurring in the office of the Board of Trustees during the year, prior to the annual meeting, shall be filled by election by majority vote of the members of the Board of Trustees, at their next regular meeting, or at any special meeting duly held as herein provided.

Chairperson

The Chairperson of the Board of Trustees must be a member of the Board of Trustees. The Chairperson shall preside at all meetings of the Board of Trustees and shall perform such other duties and have such other powers as the Board of Trustees may from time to time prescribe.

Vice Chairperson

The Vice Chairperson must be a member of the Board of Trustees. The Vice Chairperson shall, in the absence or disability of the Chairperson, preside at meetings of the Board of Trustees and otherwise perform the duties and exercise the powers of the Chairperson and shall perform such other duties and have such other powers as the Board of Trustees may from time to time prescribe.

Secretary

The Secretary of the Board of Trustees does not have to be a member of the Board of Trustees and may be the same person as the Secretary of the Nonprofit Corporation. The Secretary shall attend all meetings of the Board of Trustees and record all the proceedings of the meetings of the Board of Trustees in a book to be kept for that purpose. The Secretary shall give, or cause to be given, notice of all meetings of the Board of Trustees and shall perform such other duties as may be prescribed by the Board of Trustees.

Treasurer

The Treasurer shall have charge and custody of and be responsible for all funds and securities of the Nonprofit Corporation, shall receive and give receipts for moneys due and payable to the Nonprofit Corporation from any source, and shall perform other duties as assigned by the President or by the Board of Trustees.

Reports of Corporate Officers and Committees

The Chairperson of the Nonprofit Corporation shall make reports to the Trustees in writing at the annual and regular meetings of the Board of Trustees as requested. Other officers of the Nonprofit Corporation or Committees of the Board of Trustees shall make reports in writing at such times as the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees may require.

Order of Business

The Chairperson of the Board of Trustees shall determine the order of business and agenda for any annual, regular or special meeting of the Board.

2.3 Other Representations on The Board

Representations of the constitutions on the Board are described in Bylaws Article VII as follows:

Definition

To actively and accurately represent all voices of the Nonprofit Corporation, including students, alumni, and faculty, the following constituencies have representation on the Board in addition to the regular body of the Board of Trustees.

Student Representative

One student, elected annually by the Student Government Association (SGA or Student Council), shall serve as the Student Representative to the Board without the power to vote. The Student Representative shall attend meetings of the Board and shall represent student interests and concerns and report to the Board on issues that affect students, both before and after decisions are made.

Alumni Representative

Upon establishment of an Alumni Association of the Nonprofit Corporation, the Association shall annually elect one Alumni Representative to the Board. The Alumni Representative shall attend board meetings and shall not have the power to vote.

Faculty Representative

In consultation with the Dean of Academics, the Members of the Faculty shall annually select one Faculty Representative to the Board of Trustees without the power to vote. The Faculty Representative shall attend Board meetings and shall represent interests and concerns on behalf of the faculty.

2.4 Meetings

Board meetings are outlined in Bylaws Article VIII as follows:

Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of the Board of Trustees shall be held at the registered office of the Nonprofit Corporation, or at such other place as shall be designated for such purpose at such time by the Board of Trustees, on the date and hour specified by the Board of Trustees. The annual meeting shall be the last regular meeting of each fiscal year.

Regular Meetings

In addition to the Annual Meetings, the Board of Trustees may hold regular meetings at such place as may be designated in the notice of the meeting.

Special Meetings

Special meetings of the Board of Trustees may be called by or at the request of the Chairperson or by any Trustee. No business shall be transacted at any special meeting held upon the notice, other than that specified in the notice thereof.

Notice of Meetings

Notice of annual, regular, or special meetings of the Trustees shall state the time, date, and place of the meeting and shall be given not less than five (5) days prior to the date of such meeting by mail or email. Notice of special meetings shall state the purpose for which the meeting is called. Any trustee who does not provide the Nonprofit Corporation with a valid email address shall be deemed to have waived notice, and their failure to attend the meeting shall be deemed as consent to any action taken by the Board of Trustees.

Meetings Calendar

The Board of Trustees meets quarterly, in the months of March, June, September, and December of each year. The June meeting is defined as the annual meeting of the Board.

3. Standing Committees

3.1 Educational Effectiveness Committee, Duties and Responsibilities

The Educational Effectiveness Committee (Hereafter EEC) operates as a standing sub-committee of the Board of Trustees to ensure that RGS fulfills its academic mission with excellence, integrity, and continuous improvement. The Committee provides oversight, guidance, and accountability for all aspects of academic quality, student learning, and educational assessment.

Academic Quality and Program Oversight

- Monitor the quality, rigor, and integrity of all academic and continuing education programs.
- Review program goals, learning outcomes, curriculum changes, and program review findings.
- Ensure academic offerings align with the institutional mission, vision, and strategic plan.
- Confirm that faculty qualifications, teaching effectiveness, and instructional resources support student success.

Student Learning and Assessment

- Oversee institutional learning outcomes and program-level learning outcomes.
- Review assessment plans, data, and annual assessment reports submitted by academic and administrative units.
- Ensure RGS uses valid tools and methods to measure student learning across all programs.
- Confirm the closing-the-loop process by monitoring how assessment results inform improvements.

Accreditation and Compliance

- Support institutional compliance with accreditation requirements related to academic quality, assessment, student achievement, and continuous improvement.
- Monitor progress on accreditation recommendations and ensure timely follow-up.

- Assist in integrating accreditation standards into institutional planning and evaluation efforts.

Student Success, Support, and Achievement

- Review student achievement indicators, including retention, progression, completion, and post-graduation outcomes.
- Monitor student academic support services such as advising, tutoring, and library resources.
- Evaluate data trends related to student satisfaction, engagement, and academic experience.
- Ensure support services strengthen learning and persistently address student needs.

Academic Policies and Standards

- Review and recommend institutional academic policies (e.g., grading, transfer credits, academic integrity, admissions standards).
- Ensure policies promote fairness, equity, academic excellence, and student-centered decision-making.
- Help the Board oversee periodic evaluation of academic policies to ensure currency and alignment with best practices.

Continuous Improvement and Institutional Effectiveness

- Monitor the institution's cycle of planning, budgeting, assessment, and improvement to ensure educational effectiveness is central to decision-making.
- Ensure systematic use of data to drive decisions at the programmatic and institutional levels.

Collaboration with Administration and Faculty

- Engage with the Dean of Academics, faculty leadership, and assessment coordinators.
- Receive updates on academic operations, program performance, faculty development, and areas needing attention.
- Provide the Board with informed recommendations based on academic data and stakeholder input.

Reporting and Accountability to the Board

- Provide reports and presentations to the Board
- Highlight key findings, risks, required interventions, and recommendations for board action.
- Ensure full transparency in matters affecting academic quality and student achievement.
- Maintain clear documentation of committee activities, decisions, and follow-up actions.

Ethical, Mission-Driven Governance

- Ensure academic decisions and policies reflect RGS' Islamic ethical framework, institutional values, and community responsibilities.
- Safeguard academic freedom and support faculty in delivering high-quality education.
- Promote a culture of accountability, transparency, and evidence-based decision-making.

3.2 Relationship Between Educational Effectiveness Committee and the Academic Affairs Department

The relationship between the EEC of the Board of Trustees and the Academic Department of RGS is based on oversight, collaboration, and accountability, while fully respecting the distinction between governance and administration.

Governance vs. Administration

- The EEC represents the Board's governance function, focusing on high-level oversight of academic quality, assessment processes, student learning, and alignment with institutional mission.
- The Academic Affairs Department represents the administrative and operational function, responsible for designing, delivering, and improving academic programs, curriculum, instruction, and student learning.

In other words:

The EEC reviews, monitors, and assesses — the Academic Department implements.

Division of Responsibilities

EEC Responsibilities (Governance Oversight)

- Evaluate whether educational programs meet the Board's standards for quality, rigor, and mission-alignment.
- Review annual assessment reports, learning outcomes, program reviews, and KPIs.
- Ensure that assessment and academic decisions are data-informed.
- Provide the Board with recommendations for improvement or action.

Academic Department Responsibilities (Operational Execution)

- Develop and deliver academic programs and courses.
- Define learning outcomes, update curriculum, and manage instructional formats.
- Collect and analyze student learning and program data.
- Prepare program reviews, annual assessment reports, and improvement plans.
- Implement improvements based on data and feedback.

Flow of Information

The Academic Affairs Department provides the EEC with:

- Annual assessment reports
- Program review documents
- Curriculum updates
- Faculty qualification reports
- Student achievement data (retention, completion, grades, evaluations)
- Accreditation-related academic materials

The EEC reviews, evaluates, and synthesizes this information for the Board.

The EEC does not intervene in day-to-day academic administration or curriculum management.

Collaborative Support Relationship

- The EEC supports the Academic Affairs Department by offering strategic insight, identifying areas for improvement, recommending resource needs, and ensuring alignment with institutional goals.
- The Academic Affairs Department supports the EEC by providing accurate data, transparent reporting, and timely documentation needed for Board oversight.

Their collaboration strengthens institutional effectiveness, accreditation compliance, and continuous improvement.

Accountability Structure

- The Dean of Academics reports to the President and, through the President, provides information to the EEC.
- The EEC is accountable to the Board for ensuring academic quality and integrity.
- The Academic Affairs Department is accountable to the administration for implementing academic programs and assessment processes.

Thus, the EEC ensures accountability without managing the academic operation, maintaining proper governance boundaries.

Shared Goal

Both groups share a mission-driven goal:

To ensure RGS delivers high-quality, evidence-based, student-centered academic programs that fulfill the institutional mission and meet accreditation standards.

They operate at different levels but work toward the same purpose.

3.3 Financial Effectiveness Committee, Duties and Responsibilities

The Financial Effectiveness Committee (Hereafter FEC) is a standing sub-committee of the Board of Trustees tasked with ensuring the financial stability, integrity, and long-term sustainability of RGS. The Committee provides strategic financial oversight and supports the Board in fulfilling its fiduciary responsibilities.

Budget Oversight and Financial Planning

- Review and evaluate the institution's annual operating budget prepared by the administration.
- Assess the alignment of the budget with the strategic plan, mission, and institutional priorities.
- Recommend the annual budget to the Board for approval.
- Monitor budget performance throughout the fiscal year and request updates as needed.

Financial Health and Sustainability

- Monitor key financial indicators and trends such as revenues, expenses, liquidity, reserves, tuition dependency, and contribution patterns.
- Evaluate financial risks and emerging challenges, offering recommendations for mitigation.
- Review multi-year financial projections to ensure long-term sustainability.
- Assess the capacity of the institution to support its programs and strategic initiatives.

Financial Policies and Internal Controls

- Review financial and administrative policies (e.g., procurement, cash handling, tuition discounts, spending authority, reserve policies) to ensure best practices.
- Oversee internal control systems to safeguard assets, prevent misuse of funds, and ensure ethical financial conduct.
- Confirm compliance with institutional, legal, and regulatory financial standards.

Financial Reporting and Transparency

- Review financial statements, quarterly reports, and management analyses prepared by the VP or administration.
- Ensure that reporting is accurate, clear, timely, and aligned with nonprofit accounting standards.
- Provide the Board with financial performance summaries and recommendations as needed.
- Maintain full transparency in matters affecting financial health or risk.

Audit and Compliance

- Oversee the preparation and completion of annual independent audits.
- Review audit findings, management letters, and corrective action plans.
- Monitor compliance with IRS regulations, nonprofit financial standards, and grant requirements.
- Recommend audit-related policies and ensure timely follow-up on any noted issues.

Resource Management and Allocation

- Evaluate whether institutional resources are allocated effectively and efficiently in support of academic and operational priorities.

- Assess major financial commitments, capital investments, or expansion proposals.
- Review the financial viability of new programs, partnerships, and institutional initiatives.

Advancement, Contributions, and Revenue Diversification

- Receive periodic updates on fundraising, donor contributions, grants, and external partnerships.
- Assess the effectiveness of financial diversification strategies and provide recommendations.
- Ensure contributions are recorded, acknowledged, and used in compliance with donor intent.
- Review long-term financial strategies to reduce risk associated with single revenue streams.

Collaboration with Administration

- Engage closely with the President, VP, and relevant administrators responsible for financial planning.
- Request additional data, projections, or scenario analyses to support informed decision-making.
- Provide guidance on strategic financial matters without interfering with day-to-day operations.

Risk Management

- Identify financial risks related to tuition revenue, enrollment fluctuations, fundraising, debt, and operations.
- Oversee the institution's financial risk mitigation strategies and recommend improvements.
- Review insurance coverage, liability protections, and contingency plans.

Reporting and Accountability to the Board

- Provide written reports and analysis to the Board at least quarterly or as needed.
- Highlight issues, opportunities, financial trends, or decisions requiring action.
- Document committee discussions, recommendations, and follow-up actions.
- Ensure Board members clearly understand the financial condition of the institution and their fiduciary duties.

Ethical and Mission-Driven Stewardship

- Ensure financial practices reflect RGS' mission, values, and ethical commitments.
- Promote accountability, transparency, integrity, and responsible stewardship of all resources.
- Safeguard the institution's long-term financial health in service of its academic mission.

3.4 Relationship Between Financial Effectiveness Committee and the Vice President of Operations and Finance

The relationship between the Financial Effectiveness Committee and the Vice President of Operations and Finance (Hereafter VP) is grounded in oversight, collaboration, transparency, and accountability, while fully respecting the boundaries between governance (Board) and administration (Executive Leadership).

Governance vs. Administration

- The FEC represents the Board's fiduciary oversight function, ensuring financial stability, integrity, compliance, and sustainability.
- The VP represents the administration's operational leadership, responsible for managing day-to-day financial operations, budgeting, accounting, reporting, and resource allocation.

In simple terms:

The FEC monitors and evaluates; the VP executes and manages.

Roles and Responsibilities

Financial Effectiveness Committee Responsibilities

- Review and assess budgets, financial reports, projections, and audit findings.
- Evaluate financial risks, sustainability, and alignment with the strategic plan.
- Recommend financial policies or actions to the full Board.
- Provide governance-level oversight—without directly managing staff or operations.

Vice President of Operations and Finance's Responsibilities

- Prepare the annual budget, financial statements, and forecasts.

- Manage accounting, cash flow, internal controls, grant reporting, and financial compliance.
- Implement Board-approved financial policies and strategies.
- Provide accurate, timely, and transparent financial data to the FEC and the President.

Flow of Information

The VP provides the FEC with:

- Monthly/quarterly or need-based financial reports
- Budget drafts and performance updates
- Financial projections and risk analyses
- Results of audits and responses to findings
- Data needed for Board-level decision-making

The FEC reviews, questions, analyzes, and synthesizes this information before presenting recommendations to the full Board.

The FEC does not direct staff, supervise employees, or perform operational financial work—these remain within the VP’s domain.

Collaborative Working Relationship

- The VP works closely with the FEC to ensure the Board has the data needed for informed decisions.
- The FEC serves as a strategic partner—offering guidance, raising concerns, and identifying long-term financial risks or opportunities.
- Both work together to promote transparency, ethical stewardship, and fiscal sustainability.

Their collaboration strengthens RGS’ financial resilience and supports mission-aligned planning.

Accountability Structure

- The VP reports to the President as part of the administrative leadership structure.
- The VP also provides regular reports to the FEC, ensuring financial transparency and alignment with Board expectations.

- The FEC is accountable to the full Board for ensuring fiduciary oversight, sound financial governance, and long-term financial health.

Thus:

The VP is accountable for financial operations; the FEC is accountable for financial oversight.

Shared Goal

Both the VP and the FEC share a common objective:

To safeguard the financial integrity, sustainability, and mission-driven stewardship of RGS.

They work at different levels but toward the same purpose.

4. President and the Cabinet

4.1 The President and his/her office as outlined in the Bylaws

The President, his/her role, responsibilities, and major issues related to his/her office are outlined in Bylaws Article IX Section 2 as follows:

(a) The President shall be elected by the Board and shall serve for an indefinite period at the pleasure of the Board unless the Board should authorize a term appointment.

(b) The President is the chief executive officer of the Nonprofit Corporation, and shall administer the Nonprofit Corporation under the direction of the Board, and shall implement the policies of the Board. The authority and duties of the President shall be those ordinarily vested in the chief executive officer of an educational institution, except as they may be otherwise prescribed in these Bylaws.

(c) The President of the Nonprofit Corporation shall be responsible to the Board. The President shall have general supervision and direction of all other officers and agents of the Nonprofit Corporation and shall supervise in general the work of the faculty, the administration, and the students.

(d) The President is authorized to suspend other administrative officers, including the Dean of Academics, the Dean of Students, and the Vice President.

(e) The President shall be the principal representative and spokesperson for the Nonprofit Corporation. The President shall ordinarily preside on public occasions and shall confer degrees and make awards authorized by the Board.

(f) The President shall be the "Presiding Officer" of the faculty. As Presiding Officer, the President's responsibilities shall include: calling all regular and special meetings of the faculty, presiding over those meetings, appointing the standing committees of the Faculty, appointing, in consultation with the Faculty, all Faculty search committees, and performing such other duties as are ordinarily conferred on a Presiding Officer. The President attends and has a voice and a vote at any meeting of the Faculty or component of the Faculty constituted to conduct the business of the Nonprofit Corporation.

(g) The President shall recommend long-range goals and objectives to the Board and, upon adoption by the Board, devise the organization, policies, financial plans, and schedules designed to reach those goals. The President shall recommend strategic academic and curricular decisions to the Board following Board policy and procedures in which the faculty has a principal role. The President shall submit annually for adoption by the Board a budget for the next fiscal year's operations and shall have general supervision of all expenditures authorized by that budget. At meetings of the Board, the President shall report on the progress of the Nonprofit Corporation. Normally, all petitions and recommendations to the Board shall reach the Board through the President.

(h) In the event of an extended absence or incapacity of the President or in the event of a vacancy in the office of the President, unless the Board designates otherwise, the Vice President shall undertake the duties and powers of the President.

(i) The President is authorized to accept the resignations of other administrative officers, including the Dean of Academics, the Dean of Students, and the Vice President, and shall report resignations to the Board.

4.2 Presidential Leave and Succession Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish procedures governing temporary leaves of absence by the President of Respect Graduate School and to ensure continuity of leadership and institutional operations during such periods. Temporary leaves subject to this policy are defined as leave periods of five business days or more.

This policy provides for orderly succession of authority, continuity of administration, and clear delegation of presidential responsibilities during an approved leave.

Authority

The Chairman of the Board of Trustees shall have the authority to approve a leave of absence for the President, subject to any reporting requirements established by the Board of Trustees.

The Board of Trustees retains ultimate oversight authority regarding presidential leadership and succession matters.

Types of Leave

The President may request a temporary leave of absence for reasons including, but not limited to:

- Medical or health-related leave
- Personal leave
- Family leave
- Professional development, research, or sabbatical activities
- Civic, governmental, or professional service
- Other reasons deemed appropriate by the Chairman of the Board

Leaves may be paid or unpaid depending upon the circumstances, applicable employment agreements, and Board determinations.

Request and Approval Procedures

The President shall submit a written request for leave to the Chairman of the Board of Trustees specifying:

- The anticipated duration of the leave
- The general reason for the leave
- Any anticipated limitations on availability during the leave period

The Chairman of the Board may:

- Approve the leave,
- Modify the terms of the leave, or
- Refer the matter to the full Board of Trustees for consideration.
- The approval shall specify:
 - Effective dates of the leave,
 - Compensation arrangements if applicable,
 - Any conditions of the leave,
 - Succession arrangements during the leave period.

Acting President During Leave

During any approved leave of absence by the President, the Vice President of Operations and Finance shall serve as Acting President of Respect Graduate School unless otherwise determined by the Board of Trustees.

As Acting President, the Vice President of Operations and Finance shall possess all operational and administrative authority necessary to conduct the ordinary business of the institution, including authority over:

- Academic and administrative operations
- Personnel management
- Financial administration
- Execution of contracts and institutional documents
- Emergency decision-making
- Representation of the institution

The Acting President shall report directly to the Chairman of the Board of Trustees during the leave period.

Limitations on Acting Authority

Unless specifically authorized by the Board of Trustees or the Chairman of the Board, the Acting President shall not:

- Make material changes to institutional mission or strategic direction
- Enter into extraordinary financial obligations outside the approved budget
- Create or eliminate executive-level positions
- Execute long-term commitments extending substantially beyond the leave period

Communication During Leave

The Chairman of the Board, in consultation with the President and Acting President, shall determine appropriate communications to faculty, staff, students, accreditors, and external stakeholders regarding the leave and temporary leadership arrangements.

Return from Leave

At the conclusion of the approved leave period, the President shall automatically resume all duties and authority of the office unless otherwise determined by the Board of Trustees.

The Acting President shall return to the position of Vice President of Operations and Finance upon the President's return.

Extended Incapacity or Vacancy

If a leave extends beyond the approved period, or if the President becomes unable to resume duties on a permanent basis, the Board of Trustees may:

- Extend the acting appointment,
- Appoint an Interim President, or
- Initiate a presidential search process in accordance with institutional bylaws and applicable policies.

Policy Review

This policy shall be reviewed periodically by the Board of Trustees and may be amended as necessary to ensure effective governance and institutional continuity.

4.2 President's Cabinet, Structure and Function

The President's Cabinet, led by the President, represents the second level of governance and serves as the bridge between the strategic direction set by the Board and the operational activities managed by the departments. The President is the chief executive and administrative officer of the institution, responsible for implementing the policies and strategic direction established by the Board in collaboration with his/her Cabinet. Members of the President's Cabinet include the heads of departments, who collaborate on planning, coordination, and resource allocation. The President's Cabinet translates the Board's policies into actionable plans, ensures effective institutional operations, and monitors performance against strategic and accreditation goals.

The President evaluates his/her cabinet members on an annual basis and may involve the process in standing board committees if needed.

The major departments at RGS are:

- Academic Affairs
- Student Services
- Continuing Education
- Operations
- Masjid (Mosque) Services

4.3 Annual Evaluation of the President

Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of the annual evaluation of the President is to:

- Assess the President's effectiveness in implementing the Strategic Plan of RGS.
- Provide constructive feedback that strengthens institutional leadership.
- Ensure alignment between presidential priorities and institutional goals.
- Support continuous improvement in academic, administrative, and financial performance.

The evaluation is conducted by the Board of Trustees and facilitated by the Board Chair.

Guiding Principle

The President's primary obligation is to realize the RGS Strategic Plan through effective leadership of academic, administrative, and operational units. Therefore, the Strategic Plan serves as the core framework for evaluating presidential performance.

Annual Evaluation Cycle

Step 1 — Establishing Annual Presidential Objectives

Timeline: Beginning of the Educational Calendar (e.g., August/September)

1. The President reviews the Strategic Plan and identifies Yearly Presidential Objectives.
2. Objectives must be:
 - Aligned with strategic priorities
 - Specific, measurable, and achievable
 - Time-bound

3. The President submits these objectives in writing to the Chairman of the Board.

4. The Board Chair acknowledges receipt and confirms alignment.

Step 2 — Ongoing Monitoring & Informal Check-Ins

Timeline: Throughout the Year

- The Board Chair (or a designated liaison) maintains periodic communication with the President.
- The purpose is supportive oversight—not micromanagement—to ensure:
 - Progress toward objectives
 - Emerging challenges are identified
 - Additional Board support is facilitated when needed

No formal evaluation occurs at this stage.

Step 3 — Submission of Presidential Annual Report

Timeline: Prior to the Next Annual Board Meeting (e.g., May/June)

The President submits a written Annual Presidential Report to the Board Chair including:

- Progress toward each yearly objective
- Key achievements and challenges
- Evidence from academic, financial, operational, and community indicators
- Any modifications made due to unexpected circumstances
- Goals proposed for the upcoming year

This report forms the basis of the formal evaluation.

Step 4 — Board Review & Evaluation Drafting

Timeline: Before the Annual Board Meeting

1. The Board Chair reviews the President's Annual Report.
2. The Board Chair may designate a trustee or a small subcommittee to assist with the evaluation.

3. The evaluation includes:
 - Assessment against the yearly objectives
 - Assessment against the Strategic Plan
 - Leadership effectiveness
 - Relationship with the Board
 - Institutional health indicators
4. The Board Chair or the designated board member/s drafts a Written Presidential Evaluation on behalf of the Board.

Step 5 — Formal Presidential Evaluation Meeting

Timeline: During the Annual Board Meeting

1. The Board Chair (or designated trustee) meets with the President.
2. The Board Chair presents:
 - The Written Evaluation
 - A verbal explanation that highlights strengths, accomplishments, areas for improvement, and expectations for the coming year
3. A collaborative discussion takes place to ensure clarity and shared understanding.
4. The evaluation meeting is documented confidentially.

Evaluation Domains

Although the Strategic Plan guides the evaluation, the following domains may be considered:

Strategic Leadership & Mission Alignment

- Progress toward strategic plan objectives
- Alignment of decisions with mission and vision

Academic & Educational Oversight

- Quality and effectiveness of academic programs
- Collaboration with the Academic Department and EEC

Administrative & Operational Leadership

- Efficiency of operations
- Staff leadership and morale

Financial Stewardship

- Budget management
- Resource allocation
- Collaboration with the VP and the FEC

Institutional Advancement

- Fundraising and donor engagement
- Community and public relations

Governance Relations

- Communication with the Board
- Responsiveness and transparency
- Respect for governance boundaries

Documentation Required

- Annual Presidential Objectives (submitted at the start of the academic year)
- Annual Presidential Report (submitted before the annual Board meeting)
- Written Board Evaluation (prepared by Chair or designated member/committee leader)
- Confidential Evaluation Summary (filed by Board Secretary)

Confidentiality

All documents and discussions related to the President's evaluation are confidential and must be stored securely.

Improvement & Goal-Setting

Following the evaluation meeting:

1. The Board Chair and President finalize the Presidential Objectives for the next year.
2. These objectives are tied directly to the Strategic Plan.
3. They serve as the basis for the next evaluation cycle.

Annual Timeline Summary

Timeframe	Action
Start of Academic Year	President submits yearly objectives
Throughout the year	Informal monitoring/check-ins
Before Annual Board Meeting	President submits Annual Report
Before Board Meeting	Board Chair or designated member/committee drafts Written Evaluation
Annual Board Meeting (June)	Formal evaluation delivered
Post-meeting	New objectives finalized

4.4 Relationship Between Board and Executive Leadership

Governance at RGS operates through a shared governance model where the Board of Trustees, in partnership with the President, President's Cabinet, faculty, staff, and students, collaborates on institutional decision-making. The Board retains authority for policy formulation, strategic oversight, and institutional accountability. It delegates administrative authority to the President, who exercises it through the President's Cabinet and department leadership to implement and manage operations.

The President serves as the primary liaison between the Board and the institution's administrative and academic components. All institutional policies, budgets, and strategic initiatives approved by the Board are executed under the President's direction. In turn, the President reports regularly to the Board on institutional progress, compliance, and outcomes.

The President's Cabinet acts as the body, ensuring alignment between Board policies, strategic priorities, and departmental operations. Department heads have decision-making authority within their respective areas and are accountable to the President for ensuring that their activities comply with institutional policies and accreditation standards. They also operate in a consultative manner with their department members.

5. Board Development & Self-Evaluation

5.1 New Trustee Orientation

RGS is committed to providing all new trustees with the knowledge, tools, and resources necessary to engage fully and effectively in the governance of the institution. All new board members must participate in an orientation program coordinated by the President and Board Chair (or a designated committee). This orientation will take place within the first 60 days of appointment.

Scope

This policy applies to all newly appointed or elected members of the RGS Board of Trustees, regardless of prior board experience.

Responsibilities

Board Chair

- Oversees the orientation program and ensures its timely completion.
- Welcomes new members and introduces them to board culture, expectations, and governance responsibilities.
- Assigns a current trustee to serve as a mentor, if applicable.

President

- Provides an overview of the institution, its programs, strategic priorities, challenges, and opportunities.
- Supplies key documents and ensures new trustees understand institutional structure and operations.

New Board Members

- Attend the orientation meeting(s).
- Review all provided materials.
- Ask questions and seek clarification to ensure understanding of duties and expectations.

Orientation Procedure

Scheduling and Format

- The orientation session(s) shall be scheduled within 60 days of the trustee's appointment.
- Orientation may occur in person or via a virtual meeting, depending on schedules and availability.
- Additional one-on-one meetings may be arranged as needed.

Orientation Materials

The following documents will be provided to all new trustees:

Institutional Documents

- Mission, Vision, and Values Statements
- Strategic Plan
- Organizational Chart
- Academic Program Overviews
- Annual Budget Summary and Financial Statements
- Accreditation Status and Reports

Orientation Session Content

The orientation session will include:

Welcome and Introduction

- Conducted by the Board Chair
- Overview of RGS governance philosophy, expectations, and trustee responsibilities

Institutional Overview

Presented by the President:

- History and mission of RGS
- Academic programs and student demographics
- Administrative leadership structure
- Accreditation and regulatory requirements
- Current priorities and strategic goals
- Overview of financial position, revenue streams, and challenges

Governance Roles and Responsibilities

- Explanation of trustee fiduciary duties (care, loyalty, obedience)
- Role of the Board vs. Role of the President
- Expectations for board meeting participation, confidentiality, and ethical conduct
- Committee assignments and responsibilities

Review of Key Documents

- Guided walkthrough of bylaws, policies, and board procedures
- Explanation of decision-making processes and meeting protocols

Technology and Communication

- Overview of board communication platforms (email, portal, shared drive, etc.)
- Instructions for accessing meeting materials
- IT or staff support, as needed

Q&A and Mentor Assignment

- New trustees may ask questions and request additional information
- A current board member may be assigned as a mentor for the first year

Ongoing Support and Integration

- New members will be encouraged to attend committee meetings during their first year.
- Additional briefings may be arranged with the VP, Deans, or other administrators as needed.
- The Board Chair will check in with new trustees after three and six months to offer support and address any questions.

5.2 Ongoing Board Education and Training

Respect Graduate School is committed to building and sustaining a well-informed, high-performing Board of Trustees capable of providing sound governance, strategic oversight, and mission-aligned leadership. To support this commitment, RGS maintains a structured system of ongoing education and training for all board members. These practices ensure that trustees remain current with higher education governance trends, accreditation expectations, institutional data, and emerging best practices in nonprofit leadership.

Purpose of Ongoing Education

Continuous learning strengthens the Board's ability to:

- Understand and carry out its fiduciary, strategic, and generative responsibilities.
- Make informed decisions based on accurate institutional data and external trends.
- Enhance shared governance and support the President and administration effectively.
- Promote a culture of accountability, transparency, and ethical leadership.
- Ensure compliance with accreditation standards and state/federal requirements.

Board Training Program

RGS organizes Board Training Program at least once every three years, delivered by recognized experts, governance consultants, or university partners. This training typically includes:

- Core principles of effective board governance.
- The strategic role of trustees in shaping institutional direction.
- Financial oversight, risk management, and resource stewardship.
- Best practices in board culture, ethics, and self-evaluation.
- Updates on accreditation expectations and institutional performance.

Attendance at the annual training is expected of all trustees.

New Trustee Orientation

All newly appointed board members participate in a structured orientation, which includes:

- Overview of RGS history, mission, and values.
- Review of the Board Handbook, bylaws, and governance structure.
- Institutional data briefing (enrollment, finances, academic performance).
- Introduction to key administrators, programs, and strategic initiatives.
- Familiarization with board portals, communication systems, and meeting procedures.

This orientation ensures new trustees quickly become effective contributors.

Ongoing Development Throughout the Year

To maintain continuous learning, RGS ensures that trustees receive:

- Quarterly briefings on academic, financial, operational, and accreditation updates.
- Reports from the President's Cabinet on institutional progress and challenges.
- Short presentations from faculty, administrators, or external experts on emerging issues in higher education.
- Periodic workshops on topics such as fundraising, compliance, diversity and inclusion, and risk management.

These briefings help keep the board aligned with evolving institutional needs.

External Professional Development

RGS encourages trustees to engage in external learning opportunities such as:

- Governance workshops through AGB, Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), and other professional associations.
- Webinars and seminars on nonprofit governance, finance, enrollment management, and legal compliance.
- Conferences related to higher education leadership and institutional planning.

When appropriate, RGS may provide institutional support for such development.

Board Self-Assessment and Reflection

As part of its commitment to continuous improvement:

- The Board conducts an annual self-assessment to evaluate performance in governance, oversight, culture, and strategic alignment.
- Results inform future training priorities and guide board development plans.
- Committee chairs and the Board Chair may also recommend targeted training based on identified needs.

Documentation and Accountability

All board education activities are documented for accreditation and governance compliance.

Trustees are expected to:

- Participate fully in required trainings.
- Review educational materials prior to meetings.
- Engage actively in discussions, workshops, and governance exercises.

5.3 Evaluation of Board, Committees, and Individual Trustees

Purpose of the Evaluation System

The RGS Board of Trustees adopts a comprehensive annual evaluation system to ensure responsible stewardship, high-quality governance, and continuous improvement. This system assesses governance performance at three levels:

1. Board of Trustees (as a governing body)
2. Standing Committees of the Board
3. Individual Trustees

The evaluation supports compliance with accreditation standards, strengthens strategic leadership, and improves institutional effectiveness.

Principles Guiding the Evaluation

- Confidentiality: Individual responses remain confidential and aggregated for reporting.
- Integrity: Trustees engage in honest, reflective evaluation.
- Continuous Improvement: Results guide goal-setting and governance development.
- Alignment: Evaluation criteria align with the RGS mission, bylaws, and strategic plan.
- Transparency: Summary findings are shared with the Board to support informed decisions.

Components of the Evaluation System

Board Self-Evaluation

Assesses the performance of the Board as a whole.

Key Domains

1. Mission, Vision & Strategic Leadership
2. Governance Practices & Compliance
3. Financial Oversight
4. Academic Quality and Educational Effectiveness

5. Risk Management
6. Board Culture, Dynamics & Ethics
7. Board–President Partnership
8. Commitment to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
9. Meeting Effectiveness

Individual Trustee Self-Evaluation

Each trustee evaluates their own performance and contributions.

Domains for Individual Evaluation

1. Engagement & Preparation
2. Understanding of Governance Responsibilities
3. Ethical Conduct & Confidentiality
4. Support for Mission & Strategic Priorities
5. Financial Support and Fundraising Engagement
6. Advocacy & Ambassadorship
7. Committee Participation
8. Professional Conduct & Collegiality

5.4 Trustee Recruitment

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that Respect Graduate School maintains a highly qualified, diverse, mission-driven Board of Trustees capable of providing strategic leadership, fiduciary oversight, and long-term institutional stability.

This policy establishes a structured system for:

- Identifying trustee competencies needed for effective governance
- Recruiting qualified and committed individuals
- Ensuring smooth trustee transitions and leadership succession
- Maintaining continuity in Board leadership roles
- Supporting diversity, equity, inclusion, and strategic alignment

Guiding Principles

1. Mission Alignment: Trustees must demonstrate commitment to the mission, values, and Islamic ethical principles of RGS.

2. Strategic Fit: Recruitment prioritizes skills and perspectives necessary to advance institutional goals.
3. DEI Commitment: RGS strives for diversity in expertise, backgrounds, and representation.
4. Transparency: The process is structured, fair, and consistent.
5. Continuity: Succession planning ensures the Board maintains stability and operational strength.
6. Compliance: The policy aligns with RGS bylaws, accreditation standards, and applicable laws.

Roles and Responsibilities

Board of Trustees

- Managing recruitment and screening processes
- Conducting annual Board needs assessments
- Maintaining a trustee skills matrix
- Presenting qualified candidates to the full Board
- Overseeing succession planning for officers and committee chairs
- Conducting periodic orientation for newly appointed trustees

Board Chair

- Provides leadership in trustee succession
- Facilitates leadership development among trustees
- Ensures a smooth transition between officers

President (Ex Officio, Non-Voting)

- Provides input on institutional needs
- Supports orientation and onboarding

Trustee Recruitment Process

Trustee Skills & Qualifications Matrix

The Board maintains an up-to-date competency matrix that includes:

- Finance, audit, and accounting
- Higher education governance
- Academic leadership

- Legal expertise
- Fundraising and philanthropy
- Nonprofit leadership
- Marketing and communications
- IT, cybersecurity, data systems
- Interfaith work and community relations
- Islamic scholarship or education
- Strategic planning
- HR and organizational development
- Diversity and inclusion
- Local and global networks that benefit RGS

Identification of Prospective Candidates

Candidates may be identified through:

- Recommendations from current trustees
- Recommendations from administrators or community leaders
- Alumni or program participants
- Philanthropic partners
- Professional networks
- National or regional board talent pools

Screening and Vetting

The Board completes a structured vetting process:

- Review of resume/CV
- Evaluation of alignment with RGS values and mission
- Assessment of potential conflicts of interest
- Reference checks, if needed

Trustee Onboarding & Orientation

New trustees participate in a structured orientation that includes:

- Orientation session with the Chair and President
- Review of bylaws, Board Handbook, and policies

- Overview of accreditation expectations
- Tour of campus and key operations
- Introduction to administrators and committee chairs
- Assignment to a Board committee
- Access to past meeting minutes and financial statements

6. Board Policies & Procedures

6.1 Conflict of Interest Policy

Respect Graduate School requires the highest standards of ethical conduct, integrity, and transparency. The purpose of this Conflict of Interest Policy is to ensure that decisions made by the Board of Trustees, officers, committee members, and key personnel are free from personal or financial conflicts, and that all actions taken reflect the best interests of the institution.

This policy protects RGS as a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization by ensuring compliance with IRS regulations, accreditation requirements, and nonprofit governance best practices.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- All members of the Board of Trustees
- Board officers
- Members of Board committees (voting or non-voting)
- Senior leadership and key personnel designated by the President
- Any individual who can influence institutional decisions, contracts, finances, or policies

Definition of Conflict of Interest

A Conflict of Interest exists whenever an individual's personal, professional, or financial interests may compromise, or appear to compromise, their ability to act in the best interest of RGS.

A conflict may involve:

- Financial gain or benefit
- Personal relationships
- Professional loyalties
- Organizational affiliations
- Any situation where impartiality may reasonably be questioned

A conflict is not inherently wrong. However, failing to disclose a conflict is.

Examples of Conflicts of Interest

Conflicts may include, but are not limited to:

Financial Interests

- A trustee or family member has a financial interest in a company doing business with RGS.
- Trustee receives compensation, gifts, or favors from vendors, contractors, or donors.
- Trustee has investments that may be affected by RGS decisions.

Personal or Family Relationships

- Decisions involving employment or supervision of family members.
- Trustee's spouse or relatives applying for RGS scholarships, jobs, or contracts.
- Trustee influencing admissions or academic decisions for friends or family.

Organizational Relationships

- Holding leadership roles in other institutions that contract with RGS.
- Serving on boards of organizations in competition with or materially affected by RGS.

Use of Institutional Resources

- Using RGS property, staff, or confidential information for personal or business purposes.

Duty to Disclose

All individuals covered by this policy must:

1. Disclose any actual, potential, or perceived conflict of interest immediately.
2. Submit an Annual Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form.
3. Update disclosures promptly throughout the year when circumstances change.

Disclosure must be made to:

- The Board Chair (for Trustees)
- The President (for administrators and key personnel)

Failure to disclose may result in disciplinary action, including removal from the Board.

Procedures for Addressing Conflicts

Conflicted Individual Recusal

- The individual must abstain from discussions and votes related to the matter.
- They may provide factual information if requested, but must leave the room during deliberations.

Determination of Conflict

After disclosure, the Board Chair will:

- Review the nature of the conflict
- Determine if it is significant, manageable, or disqualifying
- Document the decision in the meeting minutes

Alternative Decision-Making

If a conflict affects decision-making:

- Another trustee or officer may assume responsibilities
- The Board may seek independent advice
- The matter may be reassigned to a different committee

Documentation

All conflicts and decisions must be recorded in:

- Board or committee meeting minutes

Prohibited Activities

Trustees, officers, and key personnel may not:

- Accept gifts or favors exceeding \$50 in value from any party doing business with RGS
- Use RGS information or resources for personal gain
- Participate in decisions where their objectivity is compromised
- Directly or indirectly influence RGS transactions that benefit themselves or their relatives
- Solicit personal benefits, donations, or contracts using their RGS position

Confidentiality

Individuals must maintain strict confidentiality regarding:

- Conflicts disclosed
- Deliberations on conflicts
- Any privileged information encountered during Board service

Breaches of confidentiality may result in disciplinary action.

Violations of the Policy

If the Board believes a violation occurred, the following may occur:

1. Review of the facts
2. Opportunity for the individual to explain
3. Determination of corrective action

Possible consequences include:

- Written warning
- Removal from a committee
- Suspension of voting privileges
- Recommendation for removal from the Board

Annual Disclosure Requirement

Every trustee and key personnel must sign:

- This Conflict of Interest Policy (acknowledgment)
- The Annual Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form

The Board maintains these records.

Statement of Affirmation

All trustees, officers, committee members, and key personnel must sign the following annually:

“I have read and understand the Conflict of Interest Policy of Respect Graduate School. I agree to comply fully and to disclose any actual or potential conflict of interest. I affirm that I will act solely in the best interest of RGS and uphold my fiduciary responsibilities.”

6.2 Whistleblower Policy

Respect Graduate School is committed to integrity, transparency, and ethical conduct in all aspects of governance and administration. This Whistleblower Policy provides a clear pathway for trustees, officers, administrators, employees, contractors, and volunteers to report suspected wrongdoing without fear of retaliation.

This policy ensures compliance with:

- Federal and state nonprofit laws
- IRS Form 990 governance recommendations
- Accreditation standards and best practices in higher education governance

Scope

This policy applies to:

- Members of the Board of Trustees
- Board officers
- Members of Board committees
- The President and administrative leadership
- Faculty, staff, contractors, and volunteers
- Any individual acting on behalf of RGS

Definitions

Whistleblower

Any individual who reports suspected misconduct, fraud, or violations of law or policy in good faith.

Good Faith Report

A concern raised with reasonable belief that wrongdoing has occurred or may occur. Reports made with malice or knowingly false information are a violation of this policy.

Wrongful Conduct

Includes, but is not limited to:

- Violations of federal, state, or local laws

- Financial improprieties, fraud, or embezzlement
- Abuse of authority
- Violations of accreditation requirements
- Conflicts of interest or self-dealing
- Harassment or discrimination
- Ethical or professional misconduct
- Retaliation against whistleblowers
- Destruction or falsification of records
- Misuse of institutional assets or confidential information

Reporting Procedures

Primary Reporting Channels

Whistleblowers may report concerns through any of the following:

- Board Chair (for concerns involving trustees or senior administration)
- President (for concerns involving employees, unless the President is implicated)

Alternative Reporting

If the concern involves the Board Chair, the report may go directly to:

- Vice Chair
- External legal counsel (if appropriate)

If the concern involves the President, reports should be made to:

- Board Chair

Anonymous Reports

Anonymous reports will be accepted and investigated to the extent possible. Lack of identity may limit the investigation.

Confidentiality

- All reports will be handled confidentially to the fullest extent allowed by law.
- Information will be shared strictly on a need-to-know basis.
- Whistleblower identities will be protected whenever feasible.

Investigation Procedures

Initial Review

Upon receiving a report:

- The Board Chair will review the claim.
- If necessary, an external investigator or legal counsel will be engaged.

Formal Investigation

The investigation may include:

- Interviews with relevant parties
- Review of documents and records
- Consultation with legal or financial experts
- Coordination with law enforcement, if required

Findings and Actions

At the conclusion of the investigation, the Board will:

- Prepare a findings report
- Recommend corrective actions
- Present recommendations to the full Board, if appropriate

Corrective actions may include:

- Disciplinary measures
- Removal of a trustee or officer
- Financial restitution
- Policy changes
- Referral to legal authorities

Non-Retaliation Protection

RGS strictly prohibits retaliation against anyone who:

- Reports a concern in good faith
- Participates in an investigation
- Provides evidence or testimony

Retaliation includes, but is not limited to:

- Termination or removal from the position
- Demotion or loss of responsibilities
- Harassment or intimidation
- Negative evaluations or unjust disciplinary action
- Threats, coercion, or discrimination

Violators of non-retaliation protections may face disciplinary action up to and including:

- Removal from the Board
- Termination of employment
- Legal consequences

False or Malicious Reports

Knowingly false, malicious, or reckless allegations are prohibited and constitute misconduct. Violations may result in disciplinary action, including removal from committees or the Board.

Documentation & Record Keeping

The Board maintains secure records of:

- All reports received
- Investigation notes and evidence
- Findings and recommendations
- Actions taken
- Closing summaries

All documentation is kept confidential and retained in accordance with the document retention policy.

6.3 Financial Contribution Policy

This policy outlines the expectations and responsibilities of the Board of Trustees regarding their financial contributions to RGS. Board giving is a cornerstone of effective nonprofit governance and reflects each trustee's commitment to the mission, sustainability, and long-term success of the institution.

Guiding Principles

1. Leadership by Example:

Board members demonstrate their commitment by contributing financially at a level that is personally meaningful and commensurate with their capacity.

2. Mission Stewardship:

Trustee contributions directly support institutional priorities, including academic programs, scholarships, facilities, and strategic initiatives.

3. Shared Responsibility:

All trustees collectively contribute to ensuring the financial strength, credibility, and resilience of RGS.

4. Ethical and Transparent Practice:

Trustee giving follows the highest standards of nonprofit ethics, transparency, and compliance with IRS requirements.

Annual Giving Requirement

1. 100% Board Participation: Every trustee is expected to make a personal annual financial contribution to RGS. Full participation is essential and contributes to:

- Donor confidence
- Accreditation documentation
- Grant eligibility
- Institutional culture of philanthropy

2. Meaningful Contribution: RGS does not prescribe a specific dollar amount. Each trustee is expected to give at a level that is meaningful based on personal capacity, with the understanding that RGS is a priority organization in their charitable giving.

3. Timing: Contributions should be made during each fiscal year. Trustees may fulfill their commitment through a one-time gift, recurring monthly or quarterly gifts, or through employer matching programs.

Additional Giving Opportunities

Trustees may also support RGS through:

- Major Gifts for strategic initiatives or capital projects
- Scholarship Funds and student support
- Endowment Contributions
- Sponsorship of Events, Conferences, or Programs
- Contributions to Annual Campaigns
- In-Kind Contributions of services or goods (evaluated per Gift Acceptance Guidelines)
- Planned Gifts, such as bequests or beneficiary designations

These additional opportunities are voluntary but encouraged.

Restrictions and Designations

- Trustees may designate their contributions to any approved fund consistent with the mission and priorities of RGS.
- RGS reserves the right to decline restricted gifts that are not aligned with institutional needs
- Board contributions to restricted funds must not create conflicts of interest.

Confidentiality and Disclosure

- Individual trustee gift amounts will remain confidential and will not be disclosed without consent.
- The President and Director of Outreach and Fundraising may track participation to ensure all trustees meet the annual expectation.
- Public reports (e.g., annual reports, accreditation documents) may state that 100% of the Board participates in annual giving, without listing individual amounts.

Ethics and Conflict of Interest

- No trustee may receive any personal financial benefit from their gift.
- Contributions must not influence board decisions or undermine the independence of governance.
- Gifts should be made in accordance with the Board's Conflict of Interest Policy.

Non-Compliance

If a trustee has difficulty fulfilling their annual giving commitment:

1. The Board Chair or President may hold a confidential discussion with the trustee to explore options.
2. Trustees who cannot meet the annual expectation may reassess their ability to continue serving on the Board.
3. Exceptions may be made for temporary financial hardship, respecting the dignity and privacy of the trustee.

Reporting and Acknowledgment

- All trustee contributions are processed and acknowledged by RGS in accordance with IRS requirements.
- Trustees will receive an annual statement summarizing their contributions.
- Contributions will be included in donor recognition programs unless the trustee opts for anonymity.

6.4 Ethical Conduct & Expectations for Trustees

The purpose of this policy is to set forth the ethical standards and expectations that guide the conduct of all members of the Board of Trustees of RGS. Trustees serve as stewards of the institution and are expected to uphold the highest levels of integrity, professionalism, and loyalty in all aspects of their service.

Guiding Ethical Principles

Trustees must embody the following principles in all actions and decisions:

1. Integrity: Act with honesty, fairness, and transparency at all times.
2. Loyalty to the Mission: Protect and advance the mission, vision, values, and long-term interests of RGS.
3. Accountability: Take responsibility for decisions and actions, ensuring compliance with laws, accreditation standards, and institutional policies.

4. Respect and Professionalism: Engage respectfully with fellow trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, students, and community partners.
5. Confidentiality: Preserve the privacy and confidentiality of institutional information, discussions, and deliberations.

Expectations of Trustees

Commitment to the Mission

- Support RGS's mission wholeheartedly in words, actions, and institutional representation.
- Act as ambassadors for the institution in the community.
- Make decisions that reflect the best interests of the whole college, not personal preference or external influence.

Governance Responsibilities

- Attend all board meetings, retreats, and committee sessions unless unavoidable circumstances prevent participation.
- Prepare thoughtfully for meetings by reviewing materials in advance.
- Engage productively in deliberations and decision-making.
- Uphold board decisions once made, even when expressing dissenting views during discussion.
- Participate in board self-evaluations, training, and ongoing education.

Ethical Behavior

- Avoid actions that could harm the reputation or independence of RGS.
- Treat all members of the RGS community with dignity, courtesy, and fairness.
- Uphold financial integrity and oversight, ensuring resources are used responsibly.
- Demonstrate objectivity and avoid undue influence or pressure.

Conflict of Interest

- Adhere strictly to the Board's Conflict of Interest Policy.
- Disclose all actual or potential conflicts to the Board Chair or President.
- Refrain from participating in discussions or decisions where a conflict exists.
- Ensure personal, professional, or financial interests do not influence board service.

Confidentiality

- Maintain strict confidentiality regarding:
 - Executive sessions
 - Personnel matters
 - Legal and financial discussions
 - Sensitive institutional data
- Do not share board materials or information with unauthorized individuals.
- Continue confidentiality obligations even after board service concludes.

Collegiality and Respectful Communication

- Foster an environment of trust, collaboration, and mutual respect.
- Listen actively and allow space for diverse viewpoints.
- Refrain from personal criticism, disparaging remarks, or divisive behavior.
- Support constructive dialogue and solution-oriented discussions.

Compliance and Legal Obligations

- Uphold all applicable federal, state, and local laws.
- Ensure RGS follows IRS regulations, accreditation standards, and nonprofit governance best practices.
- Report unethical behavior or violations of this policy to the Board Chair or President promptly.

Stewardship and Financial Responsibility

- Support prudent financial oversight, accuracy, and transparency in budgeting and reporting.
- Fulfill all board financial expectations, including annual personal giving.
- Safeguard institutional resources and avoid waste or misuse.

Conduct Beyond Board Meetings

- Represent RGS positively in the community and professional settings.
- Avoid public statements that conflict with board decisions or institutional positions.
- Report concerns constructively to leadership rather than through external channels.

Enforcement and Consequences

Violations of this policy may result in:

- A confidential conversation with the Board Chair
- Recommendation for additional training or mediation
- Temporary suspension from board activities
- Request for resignation
- Board action to remove a trustee, in accordance with the bylaws

Decisions are guided by fairness, due process, and the best interests of the institution.

6.5 Crisis Communication and Emergency Protocols

This policy establishes the procedures for responding to crises and emergencies at Respect Graduate School. Its goal is to safeguard the safety and well-being of students, faculty, staff, trustees, and visitors while ensuring timely, accurate, and coordinated communication. It also outlines the roles of the Board of Trustees and leadership in managing institutional crises.

Definition of a Crisis or Emergency

A crisis or emergency is any event—internal or external—that threatens the safety of individuals, disrupts operations, damages property, or poses significant reputational, financial, or legal risk. Examples include:

- Medical emergencies
- Fire, natural disasters, or hazardous conditions
- Security threats or acts of violence
- Cybersecurity breaches or data loss
- Public relations crises
- Legal or regulatory incidents
- Infrastructure failure (power, water, internet, building systems)
- Events impacting student safety or well-being

Guiding Principles

1. **Safety First:** The protection of human life is the highest priority.
2. **Timely and Accurate Information:** Communications must be prompt, verified, and transparent to prevent confusion and misinformation.

3. Coordination and Leadership: All crisis actions and communications must be coordinated through designated leaders to ensure consistency and compliance.
4. Confidentiality and Privacy: Sensitive information will be handled appropriately in accordance with legal, regulatory, and ethical standards.

Crisis Management Structure

President (Primary Authority)

The President leads the institutional response and has final authority over decisions during emergencies, including:

- Initiating the Crisis Management Team
- Authorizing campus closures, evacuations, or lockdowns
- Approving all official communications
- Liaising with emergency services, legal counsel, and external agencies

Crisis Management Team

The Crisis Management Team (Hereafter CMT) is activated during significant incidents and may include:

- President (Chair)
- Vice President
- Dean of Academics
- Dean of Students
- IT Director
- Facilities Manager
- HR & Operations
- Director of Outreach & Communications (if needed)

Responsibilities:

- Assess the situation
- Coordinate operational response
- Prepare and disseminate communication
- Document all actions
- Evaluate risk and continuity needs

Board of Trustees

The Board plays a governance-level role:

- The Board Chair is promptly informed in major crises (safety, legal, financial, reputational).
- The Board ensures oversight, supports leadership, and provides guidance as needed.
- Trustees do not speak publicly on behalf of RGS unless authorized by the President or Board Chair.

Emergency Response Procedures

Immediate Response

1. Call 911 in any life-threatening or safety-critical situation.
2. Notify:
 - President
 - HR & Operations
 - Facilities Manager (if relevant)
3. Evacuate or shelter in place following posted building instructions.

Campus Evacuation

- Follow posted evacuation routes.
- Staff ensure all occupants exit safely.
- Assemble at the designated meeting point.
- Wait for clearance before re-entering.

Lockdown Procedures

- Lock doors, turn off lights, and remain quiet.
- Silence mobile devices.
- Await further instructions from authorities or CMT.

Medical Emergencies

- Call 911 immediately.
- Provide basic care only if trained.
- Report incident to President and HR.

Cybersecurity or Data Breach

- Report immediately to IT Director.
- IT isolates affected systems.
- President and CMT coordinate legal, regulatory, and notification requirements.

Crisis Communication Protocol

Authorized Spokespersons

Only the following individuals may issue official statements:

1. President (primary spokesperson)
2. Delegated personnel by the President

No other trustee, faculty, or staff member may speak to the media or public on behalf of RGS during a crisis.

Communication Channels

RGS may use one or more of the following:

- Email alerts
- Text message notifications (if implemented)
- RGS website announcements
- Social media updates
- Phone trees or direct calls
- Press statements (when required)

Key Messaging Requirements

All crisis communications must be:

- Accurate and fact-checked
- Timely but not speculative
- Clear and concise
- Compassionate toward those affected
- Consistent across all channels
- In compliance with legal and privacy requirements (FERPA, HIPAA, accreditation guidelines, etc.)

Continuity of Operations

After the immediate crisis has been stabilized, the CMT will:

- Restore essential services and academic operations
- Coordinate alternative arrangements (remote instruction, temporary relocation, etc.)
- Assess financial and operational impact
- Report to the Board on recovery progress
- Review and update policies to prevent recurrence

6.6 Meeting Attendance and Participation Policy

This policy sets clear expectations for the attendance, preparation, and participation of all members of the Board of Trustees. Regular, informed, and active engagement in meetings is essential for effective governance, strategic guidance, fiduciary oversight, and support of the mission of RGS.

Guiding Principles

Trustees are expected to fulfill their duties with professionalism, integrity, and commitment, reflected through:

- Consistent meeting attendance
- Thoughtful preparation
- Constructive participation
- Respectful collaboration
- Accountability to the institution and fellow trustees

Meeting Attendance Requirements

Regular Attendance

1. Trustees are expected to attend all scheduled:
 - Regular board meetings
 - Special or emergency meetings
 - Committee meetings of which they are a member
 - Annual retreats or strategic sessions

2. Attendance is recorded and reviewed annually as part of board self-assessment and trustee evaluation.

Minimum Attendance Standard

- Trustees should attend at least 50 % of all board and assigned committee meetings per fiscal year.
- Falling below this threshold may initiate a discussion with the Board Chair regarding continued service.

Absences

- Trustees must notify the Board Chair or Board Secretary in advance of any absence, except in emergencies.
- Repeated unexcused absences may result in corrective action, including a request for resignation from the Board.

Meeting Preparation Expectations

Pre-Meeting Review

Trustees must:

- Review all meeting materials, reports, and financial documents in advance
- Seek clarification from leadership before meetings when needed
- Arrive prepared to discuss agenda items thoughtfully and constructively

Understanding Context

Trustees are responsible for maintaining familiarity with:

- Institutional mission, policies, and strategic priorities
- Recent organizational challenges and developments
- Financial performance and risk areas
- Accreditation, compliance, and governance standards

Participation Expectations

Active, Respectful Engagement

Trustees are expected to:

- Contribute perspectives, expertise, and insights
- Engage in discussions with professionalism and mutual respect

- Ask questions that support informed decision-making
- Uphold a collaborative and solution-oriented environment

Support for Board Decisions

- Trustees may express differing viewpoints during deliberations.
- Once a decision is made, all trustees must support the outcome publicly and institutionally.
- Trustees may not undermine board decisions through external communication or actions.

Conduct During Meetings

Professional Behavior

Trustees will:

- Begin and end meetings on time
- Avoid disruptions, side conversations, or inappropriate use of devices
- Maintain confidentiality of discussions, especially in executive session
- Respect meeting procedures and the authority of the Board Chair

Conflict of Interest

- Trustees must disclose any conflicts relevant to agenda items.
- Trustees with conflicts must recuse themselves from related discussions or votes.

Virtual Participation

When meetings are conducted online:

- Trustees must join with adequate technology to fully participate.
- Cameras should remain on unless otherwise permitted.
- Distractions should be minimized to ensure full engagement.
- Participation expectations remain the same as in-person meetings.

Committee Participation

- Trustees are expected to actively serve on at least one committee.
- Committee meeting attendance follows the same standards as board meetings.
- Trustees should contribute meaningfully to committee work, reviews, and recommendations.

Addressing Attendance or Participation Concerns

Initial Review

If a trustee struggles with attendance or participation:

- The Board Chair will address the issue privately and constructively.
- The trustee may be asked to recommit to expectations.

Continued Noncompliance

Ongoing issues may result in:

- Removal from committee assignments
- Reduction of board responsibilities
- Recommendation for voluntary resignation
- Formal removal as permitted by bylaws

Decisions are guided by fairness and the best interests of RGS.

6.7 Inclusive Decision-Making Policy

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that decision-making at Respect Graduate School is transparent, collaborative, inclusive, and reflective of the institution's diverse constituencies. Inclusive decision-making strengthens institutional effectiveness, builds trust, and ensures that policies, practices, and strategic directions are informed by those who are impacted by them.

Guiding Principles

1. Transparency – Decisions are made through clear, documented processes that are communicated to stakeholders.
2. Shared Governance – Faculty, administration, students, staff, and governing bodies each contribute to decisions within their roles and expertise.
3. Participation – Those affected by decisions should have meaningful opportunities to provide input.

4. Respect and Civility – All voices are welcomed and treated with professionalism and dignity.
5. Accountability – Each constituency is responsible for decisions within its authority and for communicating actions responsibly.
6. Evidence-Based Practice – Decisions rely on data, assessment, evaluation outcomes, and best practices.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- Board of Trustees
- The President and the President’s Cabinet
- Faculty
- Staff and administration
- Students and the Student Council
- RGS Masjid leadership
- Committees and working groups

All institutional decisions—academic, administrative, financial, operational, or student-related—must follow the principles and expectations outlined in this policy.

Roles and Decision-Making Responsibilities

Board of Trustees

- Holds ultimate fiduciary, strategic, and policy authority.
- Ensures the governance system supports inclusive participation.
- Engages stakeholders appropriately during major institutional decisions.
- Oversees high-level policies, financial sustainability, long-term planning, and mission alignment.

President and President’s Cabinet

- Leads day-to-day operations, implements board policies, and ensures cross-department coordination.
- Utilizes a collaborative leadership approach, seeking input from faculty, staff, students, and committees.

- Communicates major decisions to all stakeholders and ensures transparency in implementation.
- Facilitates institutional planning and assessment processes.

Faculty

- Responsible for academic standards, curriculum development, academic integrity, and student learning outcomes.
- Participate in academic committees and contribute expertise to institution-wide planning and assessment.
- Collaborate with administration in decision-making processes that impact teaching and learning.

Administration and Staff

- Provide professional expertise in operations, finance, student services, marketing, IT, HR, library, and other functions.
- Participate in relevant committees, task forces, and planning efforts.
- Offer recommendations supported by data, experience, and operational knowledge.

Students and Student Council

- Provide input on student experience, campus climate, program needs, and student support services.
- Participate in committees or listening sessions when decisions impact student life or academic services.
- Serve as representatives of the broader student population in institutional feedback processes.

RGS Masjid Leadership

- Advises on matters related to religious programming, spiritual life, community engagement, and facility use.
- Collaborates with administration to ensure decisions respect the religious mission of RGS and the needs of the masjid community.

Inclusive Decision-Making Processes

Consultation

Before major decisions are made, relevant stakeholders should be consulted through one or more of the following methods:

- Committee deliberations
- Listening sessions or town halls
- Surveys or focus groups
- Review of assessment and evaluation data
- Meetings with representative groups (faculty, students, staff)

Deliberation

Decision-making bodies evaluate:

- Stakeholder input
- Strategic alignment
- Resource requirements
- Risks and benefits
- Legal, accreditation, and compliance implications
- Impact on students, faculty, staff, and community partners

Communication

Decisions must be communicated in a timely, accessible, and transparent manner through:

- Email announcements
- Website updates
- Meetings or forums
- Formal policy or handbook updates
- Committee reports

Accountability and Follow-Through

Each constituency is accountable for:

- Carrying out their assigned responsibilities
- Monitoring implementation progress
- Reporting outcomes to relevant bodies

- Participating in periodic reviews
- Ensuring compliance with policies and accreditation standards

Timely assessments, program reviews, financial audits, and student/faculty surveys inform continuous improvement.

Conflict Resolution in Decision-Making

If disagreements arise:

- Issues are first addressed within the committee or group involved.
- If unresolved, the matter escalates to the President.
- Issues involving governance, oversight, or institutional priorities may be referred to the Board of Trustees.

All conflict resolution follows principles of professionalism, fairness, and confidentiality.

6.8 Mission Revision Policy & Procedure

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the institution's mission statement remains accurate, relevant, and aligned with its values, strategic priorities, and evolving educational landscape. Regular mission review and revision strengthen institutional integrity, guide decision-making, and support continuous improvement.

Policy Statement

The institution shall conduct a formal, comprehensive review and revision of the Mission Statement at least once every five (5) years. Additional revisions may be initiated earlier if significant institutional changes occur, such as new academic directions, major restructuring, accreditation requirements, or changes in the legal/financial context.

The mission must remain:

- Clear and publicly articulated
- Aligned with institutional goals and strategic plans
- Consistent with accreditation standards
- Representative of the community the institution serves
- Relevant to contemporary educational needs

Roles & Responsibilities

Board of Trustees

- Holds ultimate authority for approving any revisions to the Mission Statement.
- Ensures the review process is inclusive, transparent, and aligned with institutional governance.
- Reviews recommendations submitted by the President or Mission Review Committee.

President & President's Cabinet

- Initiate and oversee the mission review process.
- Appoint or convene a Mission Review Committee.
- Ensure campus-wide consultation and stakeholder engagement.
- Present the final recommendation to the Board for approval.

Mission Review Committee

(Ad-hoc or standing committee designated by the President)

- Examine the current mission for clarity, relevance, and alignment with institutional goals.
- Review external benchmarks, accreditation expectations, and sector trends.
- Collect feedback from faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community partners.
- Draft proposed revisions and submit a recommendation report.

Institutional Stakeholders

- Provide feedback during consultation processes.
- Participate in surveys, focus groups, and open forums.

Five-Year Review Cycle

A mission review must occur every five years following this cycle:

Years 3–5

- Mission Review Committee convened
- Environmental scan and stakeholder consultations
- Draft revisions, review by the President's Cabinet
- The Board of Trustees reviews and approves revisions

- Updated mission published
- Mission applied systematically in planning, budgeting, assessment, and accreditation
- Ongoing evaluation of mission effectiveness

At the start of Year 6, the next cycle begins.

Procedure for Scheduled Mission Revision

Step 1. Initiation

The President notifies the Board and institutional stakeholders that the five-year review cycle has begun. A Mission Review Committee is formed or reactivated.

Step 2. Data Collection & Analysis

The committee gathers inputs, including:

- Strategic plan and assessment results
- Accreditation feedback
- Benchmarking against peer institutions
- Feedback from faculty, staff, students, alumni, and the community
- Demographic and market trends
- Institutional effectiveness reports

Step 3. Drafting Proposed Revisions

The committee analyzes findings and prepares:

- A draft revised mission statement
- A justification statement
- Documentation of the consultation process

This draft is reviewed by the President's Cabinet.

Step 4. Campus-Wide Consultation

The draft is shared with the broader community through:

- Open forums
- Online comment forms
- Department meetings

- Faculty and staff councils

Feedback is collected and incorporated into the final draft.

Step 5. Approval by Board of Trustees

The President submits the final recommended revision to the Board.

Approval requires a formal vote at a scheduled board meeting.

Step 6. Publication & Communication

Upon board approval, the revised mission is:

- Published on the institutional website
- Updated in handbooks, catalogs, and strategic documents
- Communicated to students, faculty, staff, and partners

Step 7. Integration & Application

The revised mission is incorporated into:

- Strategic planning
- Curriculum development
- Budgeting and resource allocation
- Institutional assessment and reporting
- Accreditation documentation

Early or Unscheduled Revisions

The President or Board may call for an unscheduled mission review if major internal or external changes warrant immediate reconsideration of the mission. The same procedures outlined above shall be followed.

Recordkeeping

All documentation related to mission reviews—including drafts, feedback summaries, board minutes, and final approvals—shall be maintained by the Office of the President and included in institutional archives.

6.9 Strategic Plan Revision Policy & Procedure

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the institution maintains a clear, informed, and future-oriented strategic direction. A systematic review and revision of the Strategic Plan every five (5) years ensures alignment with the institution's mission, changing educational needs, emerging opportunities, resource capacity, and accreditation expectations.

Policy Statement

The institution shall undertake a comprehensive revision of its Strategic Plan every five years. This revision must include broad institutional consultation, environmental scanning, assessment of progress on previous goals, and formal approval by the Board of Trustees.

Interim updates or amendments may occur as needed, but a full revision is mandatory at least once every five years.

The Strategic Plan shall:

- Reflect the institution's mission and values
- Set clear priorities, goals, and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
- Guide decision-making, budgeting, and resource allocation
- Respond to internal and external trends and challenges
- Serve as an institutional roadmap for the next 5–10 years

Roles & Responsibilities

Board of Trustees

- Holds final approval authority for any revisions to the Strategic Plan.
- Ensures the plan aligns with mission, institutional integrity, and long-term sustainability.
- Reviews progress reports provided annually by the President.

President

- Initiates the five-year revision process.
- Appoints or convenes the Strategic Planning Committee.
- Ensures broad stakeholder engagement.
- Presents the revised plan to the Board for approval.

President's Cabinet / Executive Leadership

- Provide data, analysis, and feedback related to operations, academics, student services, finance, IT, and facilities.
- Support the development of measurable institutional priorities.
- Align departmental goals with the revised Strategic Plan.

Strategic Planning Committee

(Ad-hoc or standing committee designated by the President)

- Leads the revision process.
- Conducts the environmental scan and SWOT analysis.
- Reviews progress on the previous Strategic Plan.
- Facilitates campus-wide participation.
- Drafts the revised plan and submits it to the President.

Institutional Stakeholders (Faculty, Staff, Students, Alumni, Community Partners)

- Participate in surveys, focus groups, and consultation sessions.
- Provide input into institutional priorities and emerging needs.

Five-Year Strategic Planning Cycle

The five-year cycle shall follow this structure:

Years 3–5

- Launch strategic planning process
- Environmental scan (internal/external)
- SWOT analysis
- Stakeholder consultation
- Drafting strategic priorities and KPIs
- Finalize and publish the revised Strategic Plan
- Board approval
- Begin implementation
- Annual evaluation of progress
- Adjust tactics and departmental plans
- Publish an annual progress report

At the beginning of Year 6, a new five-year revision cycle begins.

Procedure for Mandatory Five-Year Revision

Step 1. Initiation

The President officially initiates the revision cycle and notifies the campus community.

A Strategic Planning Committee is formed or reconvened.

Step 2. Environmental Scan & Institutional Assessment

The committee gathers:

- Institutional data (enrollment, budget, staffing, facilities)
- Assessment results (academic & administrative)
- Accreditation feedback
- Market research and demographic trends
- Benchmarking against peer institutions
- Progress data from the previous Strategic Plan

Step 3. Campus Consultation

Feedback gathered through:

- Focus groups
- Online surveys
- Town hall meetings
- Department-level discussions
- Faculty and staff councils

Step 4. Drafting the Revised Plan

The committee prepares:

- Revised institutional priorities
- Updated goals and strategies
- KPIs and assessment measures
- A resource alignment plan (budget, staffing, facilities)
- Implementation timeline

The draft is reviewed by the President and Cabinet.

Step 5. Final Review & Board Approval

The President submits the final Strategic Plan to the Board of Trustees.

The plan becomes effective upon Board approval through a formal vote.

Step 6. Publication & Communication

Upon approval:

- The revised plan is published on the institutional website.
- Departments receive tailored guidance documents.
- An executive summary is shared with stakeholders.

Step 7. Implementation & Monitoring

- Departments align goals and budgets to the Strategic Plan.
- Annual progress reports are prepared by the President's Cabinet.
- Adjustments to tactics or timelines may be made as needed.
- Significant mid-cycle changes require Board approval.

Early or Unscheduled Revisions

The institution may initiate an early revision if significant circumstances arise, such as:

- Major accreditation action
- Institutional restructuring
- Financial or enrollment volatility
- New legal/regulatory requirements
- Strategic merger or partnership opportunities

Early revisions must follow the same procedures as the five-year revision.

Recordkeeping and Documentation

The Office of the President shall retain:

- All drafts and working documents
- Stakeholder feedback summaries
- Data used in planning
- Committee meeting minutes
- Board approval documentation
- Published versions of the Strategic Plan

Records must be archived for accreditation and institutional integrity purposes.

6.10 Policy on Board Non-Interference in Day-to-Day Operations

This policy affirms the governance role of the Board of Trustees of Respect Graduate School as distinct from the administrative authority vested in the President and the institution's professional staff. The purpose is to ensure effective governance, protect the integrity of RGS' academic and administrative processes, and maintain operational efficiency in accordance with accreditation standards.

Scope

This policy applies to all Trustees of RGS, including officers of the Board, standing committees, and ad hoc committees when acting in their capacity as Trustees.

Guiding Principles

- **Governance vs. Management:** The Board provides oversight, strategic direction, and fiduciary stewardship. Day-to-day management and operations—including academic, financial, and personnel decisions—are delegated to the President and administrative leadership.
- **Accreditation Compliance:** As an accredited academic institution, RGS must demonstrate institutional autonomy and clear separation of governance and management functions in line with standards set by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE).
- **Respect for Professional Expertise:** The Board recognizes that faculty and staff possess the professional competence necessary for the institution's daily functions.

Policy Statement

The Board of Trustees shall refrain from involvement in, influence over, or interference with the daily academic, operational, or personnel matters of RGS. All directives and concerns of the Board relating to operations must be communicated through the President or their designated representative. Individual Trustees shall not issue instructions, make commitments, or request actions directly from staff, faculty, or students.

Responsibilities of the Board

The Board's responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

1. Establishing and reviewing the mission, vision, and strategic goals of the institution.
2. Approving annual budgets, major capital expenditures, and institutional policies.
3. Selecting, supporting, and evaluating the President.
4. Ensuring compliance with all legal and accreditation requirements.
5. Engaging in fundraising and advocacy to advance the school's mission.

Responsibilities of the President and Administration

The President is the Chief Executive Officer of RGS and is responsible for all operational, academic, and personnel decisions within the scope of the policies and budgets approved by the Board.

Conflict Resolution

Any Trustee who has concerns about operational matters shall present them during Board or committee meetings or directly to the Board Chair or the President. Issues raised outside these channels may be referred back to the President or the Board Chair.

Enforcement

Violation of this policy may be addressed by the Board Chair in consultation with the Executive Committee and may result in further governance training or, where appropriate, a recommendation for removal from the Board under the bylaws.

6.11 Board Independence and Integrity Policy

The purpose of this policy is to safeguard the independence, integrity, and ethical conduct of the Board of Trustees. Independent and principled governance is essential to protecting institutional mission, ensuring accountability, and maintaining public trust. This policy establishes the standards and expectations for board members to act objectively, free from undue influence, and with the highest level of integrity.

Policy Statement

The Board of Trustees shall operate with full independence and integrity in all of its decision-making processes. Trustees are responsible for exercising oversight free from conflicts of interest, external pressures, or personal gain. All trustees must place the interests of the institution above personal, professional, or financial interests. To uphold its independence, the Board commits to:

- Making decisions based on evidence, institutional mission, and long-term sustainability
- Ensuring transparency and ethical behavior
- Maintaining objectivity in all fiduciary, academic, and operational oversight duties
- Avoiding conflicts of interest and the appearance of conflicts
- Ensuring that no individual or external entity exerts undue influence over the Board

Principles of Board Independence

Fiduciary Loyalty

Trustees must act solely in the best interest of the institution and its mission. Loyalty to personal, professional, political, or external affiliations must not influence board deliberations or decisions.

Objective Judgment

Trustees must exercise independent judgment, relying on evidence, professional standards, and institutional priorities—not on personal preferences or the influence of others.

Freedom from Undue Influence

No trustee, donor, employee, alumni group, religious body, government entity, or external organization may direct, control, or improperly influence the Board's decisions.

Avoidance of Conflicts of Interest

Trustees must disclose all real or perceived conflicts of interest and comply fully with the Board's Conflict of Interest Policy. Trustees may not participate in decisions where a conflict exists.

Independence from Administration

While maintaining a collaborative and respectful relationship with the President and senior leadership, the Board must retain full independence in:

- Evaluating the President
- Approving budgets and institutional priorities
- Overseeing audits and financial accountability
- Making governance decisions

The President and Cabinet may advise and recommend, but decision-making authority rests exclusively with the Board.

Principles of Board Integrity

Ethical Conduct

Trustees must uphold the highest ethical standards, including honesty, fairness, confidentiality, and respect for the dignity of all individuals.

Transparency

Board deliberations and decisions must follow established procedures and be documented accurately. Trustees should avoid actions that give the appearance of secrecy, favoritism, or impropriety.

Accountability

Trustees are accountable to the institution, its mission, and its stakeholders. They must fulfill their duties diligently, prepare for meetings, review materials thoroughly, and participate constructively.

Confidentiality

Trustees must protect non-public information and maintain the confidentiality of board deliberations unless disclosure is authorized.

Compliance with Policies and Law

Trustees must comply with institutional policies, bylaws, federal and state law, and accreditation standards.

Responsibilities of Individual Trustees

Each trustee must:

- Exercise independent judgment
- Avoid conflicts of interest and disclose potential conflicts immediately
- Maintain confidentiality
- Refrain from exerting or permitting undue influence
- Follow the institution's Code of Ethics and other governing policies

Enforcement and Accountability

Violations of this policy may result in:

- Recusal from discussions or votes
- Formal warning by the Board Chair
- Removal from committees
- Recommendation for removal from the Board (as permitted by bylaws)