

Governor Roy Romer pushed through a legislative change in 1993 to have the Executive Director appointed by the Governor. He did so – purportedly – because it had always bothered him that the ED was, by statute, on his cabinet (as was the Commissioner of Education), but not “his appointee.” Though the ED worked for a Board appointed by the Governor, Romer felt strongly that the largest functions of Government should be under the executive leadership/control of the state’s chief executive.

In most other states, governors have the authority to appoint statewide board members, and a few hold *ex officio* memberships on state boards. All statewide *governing* board chief executives report to the board, not the governor; in a few states the governor has a direct role, sometimes complete authority, to appoint the chief executive of the state coordinating board.

In the majority of states, it is still the coordinating or statewide governing board that appoints the state higher education executive without direct (although sometimes indirect) gubernatorial influence.

A few other states with coordinating boards have their executive officer appointed by the Governor, but with few exceptions, none of those models are viewed particularly positively. States that have had some success with this model have had a governor with a strong higher education agenda and who has used the appointee for that purpose.

Having the Executive Director Appointed By the Board

Advantages:

- Supports continuity over years and across administrations: It is very difficult to establish a long-term strategic vision and plan, if the other stakeholders have no reason to believe that the current vision will be the future vision.
Note that Governor Owens had three EDs during his eight years in office, with no flow obviously into his successors term, and Governor Ritter has had two during his four year term.
- Provides knowledge and experience. Part of the EDs job is to know not only higher education policy, but the unique quirks of policy within the state they serve. It is hard to learn this knowledge and gain this experience without some “time in grade.”
- It is useful sometimes to bring in a fresh face. Some of Colorado’s past EDs came from other states (Blenda Wilson and David Longanecker were the most recent) and brought experience and knowledge, but also a new fresh perspective on what might be possible in Colorado. This is more likely to happen when the ED is appointed by the Board.
- The governor, for legitimate political reasons, may not wish to bear complete responsibility for difficult decisions (it can be useful to share power). Having the ED appointed by a Board insulates the Governor from tough decisions.
- A Board-appointed Executive also insulates the legislature.
Note: This was part of the reason the legislature passed HB1187 in 1985, knowing that there were some tough decisions (e.g., cutting programs) that had to be made.
- To truly advance a higher education agenda and advocate for higher education, the commission and ED need to serve as a “strong cop.” The commission can’t do this if the ED can overrule a decision.

Disadvantages:

- The ED can develop, but doesn’t start with an up close and personal relationship with the Governor, and such a relationship can certainly help move a Governor’s higher education agenda more rapidly than if the ED has to get to know and be trusted by the Governor.
Note: The Governor doesn’t always know what a state’s higher education agenda should be.

Having the Executive Director Appointed by the Governor

Advantages

- Given higher education's current challenges, active gubernatorial engagement can be a powerful tool for advancing necessary change.
- As an appointee, the executive is "at the table" with the Governor, Cabinet, others.
Note: counter argument is that even if appointed by the commission, which is appointed by the Governor, the Executive IS at the table.

Disadvantages

- One of the most significant roles of an effective coordinating board is to be a buffer between the institutions, the Governor, and the Legislature. It is very hard to effectively "buffer" if the ED belongs to (or is seen as belonging to) one of the entities.
- The work becomes unavoidably partisan; any initiative or success achieved by a governor is more at risk after his/her term ends due to the personal element in the political process; there is unlikely to be any carryover in ideas or plans from one administration to the next, which in effect turns over control to the higher education enterprise.
- The ED and the Commission are viewed as an advocate for one perspective – that perspective generally being the Governor's.
- The ED may or may not have the knowledge and experience in higher education that can help move a progressive agenda forward.
- The governor's staff may not have the stature and independence required to give unbiased or challenging feedback.
- If Governor's top priority is not higher education, which is typically the case, the Executive Directorship becomes second tier (e.g., New Mexico, where in the past 4 years they've had 5 executive directors).
- The chief executive of the state agency is term-limited along with the governor, and as a result the agency may lose momentum near the end of term or during the transition between governors (e.g., Minnesota, which has ended up 18 months before the end of the term with a "caretaker" executive. Or NJ, where the Governor's top pick left and has left the agency "limping along.")
- If the commissioners work for the Executive Director, why be a commissioner? E.g., the best and brightest individuals are not attracted to serving on a commission that is seen as subordinate to the Exec Director/Governor.

