

# In Trust Center launches Governance Initiative

By MATT HUFMAN

*This year, the In Trust Center for Theological Schools launched its new Governance Initiative to explore governance models and support boards of theological schools with new programs.*



The initiative, backed by funding from Lilly Endowment Inc., is a five-year project that will start this spring with a survey of leaders in theological education and then follow with the development of programming informed by the research.

“Our team is very excited about the initiative, and we’re very grateful to Lilly Endowment Inc. for its support of theological schools and good governance,” In Trust Center President Amy Kardash said. “I believe the work will be very valuable for the field. We’ll be able to understand current board demographics, study board practices, and respond with new resources.”

The Center, in partnership with The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) and under the leadership of Deborah H. C. Gin, ATS director of research and faculty development, will survey executive leaders of schools accredited by ATS and survey advisory and governance board members.

David Rowe, the In Trust Center’s project director for the Governance Initiative and senior advisor for governance and strategy, said that this could be groundbreaking.

“The Governance Initiative could provide the field-needed insights to help guide decisions,” Rowe said. “This is coming at the right time for a sector that has seen significant transition and change.”

## **First research since 2012**

Kardash said there is a clear need for the work. She noted that the field is undergoing unprecedented turnover in executive leadership and pointed to the lack of research on governance in the field for more than a decade.

The survey will be the first in the field since 2012, research that was undertaken by the Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education and published in *Governance That Works* in 2015. Kardash noted that there have been significant shifts in the field since then, including a variety of pressures on schools post-pandemic. There is a gap in knowledge that we seek to fill, she said.

“Given the trends, this is a good time for us to survey the field and provide leaders with data as we begin to study the critical work of both advisory and governing boards,” said Kardash.

She said that current trends have created the need for deeper engagement of boards and board leaders, and boards are increasingly called upon to provide continuity and stability for their institutions.

The In Trust Center has long supported the boards of institutions. The Center has worked with boards and focused on board development for more than three

decades. During the past six years, the In Trust Center's Wise Stewards Initiative has included focused work with 60 boards of theological schools and institutions, focusing on essentials of good governance.

"We have learned from decades of listening to, learning from, and working with boards," Kardash said. "In our new initiative, we will take a step beyond that and work to not only survey boards to learn more, but also to consider wise practices and governance models that work."

David C. Wang of Fuller Theological Seminary will lead the quantitative research. The Center has also created an advisory committee including leaders across theological education and more broadly in higher education to help guide the work.

Kardash is inviting all executive leaders to complete the survey and encouraging them to ask their boards to do the same.

The work is important, she said, because it will provide new insights for the field.

### ***Key questions guide initiative***

Kardash said that throughout the initiative, the In Trust Center will seek to answer:

- What does governance in theological schools need to look like to best serve and support mission vitality in theological schools?

- What are the practices and models of high-functioning boards?
- In what ways can we best offer support and resources to this critical stakeholder group as they advance and adapt their governance practices?

Kardash said the Center has experienced that board members and leaders "are dedicated to seeing the organizations they serve thrive" and expects this initiative to help them achieve that.

"Board members require opportunities to develop in their capacity to effectively govern and foster board growth that enables learning and development to stick," she said. "We know that good governance is foundational to flourishing institutions and that good governance is essential for mission vitality and sustainability."

Kardash also noted the partnership with ATS, saying that it provides a model for institutions working together.

"Our colleagues at ATS are wonderful to work with," she said, "and we're grateful for the chance to partner with them once again."

To learn more about the initiative, visit [intrust.org/GI](https://intrust.org/GI) or email [resources@intrust.org](mailto:resources@intrust.org).



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