

Tennessee Board of Regents

Audit Committee Charter

Purpose

The Audit Committee, a standing committee of the Tennessee Board of Regents, provides oversight and accountability on all aspects of institutional operations within the Tennessee Board of Regents system. The committee will assist the Board in fulfilling its oversight responsibilities by reporting regularly to the Board about Audit Committee activities and issues that arise with such recommendations as the committee deems appropriate. The Audit Committee will provide for open communications among the Board of Regents, the Board's and colleges' senior management, the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury, and System-wide Internal Audit regarding audit matters.

For the Board of Regents and its colleges, the Audit Committee will provide oversight in the following areas:

- Audit engagements with the Tennessee Comptroller's Office, including the integrity of financial statements and compliance with legal and regulatory requirements.
- Audit engagements with external auditors.
- Internal Audit activities.
- Internal Audit administration.
- Internal controls and compliance with laws, regulations and other requirements.
- Risk and control assessments.
- Fraud, waste and abuse prevention, detection, and reporting.
- Other areas as directed by the Board.

Audit Standards

The internal audit function adheres to the mandatory elements of the Institute of Internal Auditors' International Professional Practices Framework, including the Definition of Internal Auditing, the Code of Ethics, the *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing (Standards)*, and the Core Principles for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing. These mandatory elements constitute principles of the fundamental requirements for the professional practice of internal auditing and for evaluating the effectiveness of the internal audit activity's performance.

Authority and Scope

The Audit Committee has the authority to conduct or authorize audits or investigations into any matter within its scope of responsibility. The scope of internal auditing extends to all aspects of institutional operations and beyond fiscal boundaries. The committee is authorized to:

- Seek any information it requires from employees or external parties. Employees are directed to cooperate with the committee's requests.
- Have access to all books, records and physical properties of the Tennessee Board of Regents and its colleges.
- Meet with Board and institutional officials, external and internal auditors, legal counsel, or others as necessary.
- Delegate authority to subcommittees, providing that such decisions by any subcommittee are presented to the full committee at its next scheduled meeting.

Organization and Reporting Structure

In accordance with T.C.A. 49-14-102 and TBR Policy 04-01-05-00, *Internal Audit*, the Board employs a person qualified by training and experience to serve as the Chief Audit Executive for the system. The System-wide Chief Audit Executive reports directly to the Audit Committee and the Board. The System-wide Chief Audit Executive reports administratively to the Vice Chancellor for Business and Finance. The campus Internal Auditors report to the respective community college President with audit reporting responsibility to the Audit Committee and the Board through the System-wide Chief Audit Executive. The Chief Audit Executive coordinates audit activities with the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury, with the campus internal auditors and with any other external auditors. The Audit Committee facilitates any audit and investigative matters, including advising auditors and investigators of any information the committee may receive pertinent to these matters.

Role and Responsibilities

The Audit Committee will carry out the following duties for the Board and its colleges and will report to the Board about Audit Committee activities and issues that arise with such recommendations as the committee deems appropriate:

Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury Audits

- Understand the scope and approach used by the auditors in conducting their examinations.
- Review results of the Comptroller's examinations of financial statements and any other matters related to the conduct of the audits.
- Review with management and general counsel any legal matters (including pending litigation) that may have a material impact on the financial statements, and any material reports or inquiries from regulatory or governmental agencies.
- Resolve any differences between management and the Comptroller's auditors regarding financial reporting.
- Meet, as needed, with the Comptroller's auditors to discuss any matters that the Audit Committee or auditors deem appropriate.

External Audits

- Understand the scope and approach used by the external auditors in conducting their examinations.
- Review results of the external auditors' examinations and any other matters related to the conduct of the audits.
- Meet with the external auditors to discuss any matters that the Audit Committee or auditors deem appropriate.

Internal Audit Activities

- Ensure that the Chief Audit Executive has direct and unrestricted access to the chairman and other committee members.
- Review and approve the charter for the System-wide Internal Audit function and the colleges' audit functions.
- Review and approve the annual audit plans for the system office and the colleges' audit functions, including management's request for unplanned audits.
- Receive and review significant results of internal audits performed.
- Review the results of the year's work with the Chief Audit Executive. Receive and review any other work prepared by the Chief Audit Executive for the system.
- Ensure the internal audit function maintains a quality assurance and improvement program, including internal procedures and assessments and a periodic external quality assessment of conformance with the Institute of Internal Auditors' *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing*.

Internal Audit Administration

- Review the Chief Audit Executive's administrative reporting relationship to the Vice Chancellor for Business and Finance to assure not only that independence is fostered, but adequate resources in terms of staff and budget are provided to enable the department to effectively perform its responsibilities. The Vice Chancellor has administrative authority for approval of the Chief Audit Executive's time, travel and other expenses of the Office of System-wide Internal Audit. Additionally, the Vice Chancellor may initiate a performance evaluation of the Chief Audit Executive at the request of the Audit Committee or Chair of the committee. This administrative reporting relationship is meant to facilitate administrative activities and does not diminish the Chief Audit Executive's reporting relationship to the Audit Committee and the Board of Regents.
- Review and approve the appointment, compensation, reassignment, or dismissal of the Chief Audit Executive; review and approve the compensation, and termination of system office internal auditors; review the compensation of campus internal auditors; and approve the termination of campus internal auditors.

Risk, Internal Control and Compliance

- Consider the effectiveness of the internal control system and compliance with laws and regulations, including computerized information system controls and security.
- Understand the scope of internal and external auditors' reviews of internal controls over financial reporting.

- Make recommendations to improve the internal control and compliance systems to ensure the safeguarding of assets and prevention and detection of errors and fraud. The components of the control system are:
 1. control environment—creating a culture of accountability;
 2. risk assessment—performing analyses of program operations to determine if risks exist;
 3. control activities—taking actions to address identified risk areas;
 4. information and communication—using and sharing relevant, reliable, and timely information; and
 5. monitoring—tracking improvement initiatives and identifying additional actions needed to further improve program efficiency and effectiveness.
- Review and evaluate risk assessments performed by management of the Board and its colleges.

Fraud

- Ensure that the Board, the management and staff of the Board, and its colleges take all reasonable steps to prevent, detect, and report fraud, waste and abuse.
- Formally and regularly inform management of their responsibility for preventing, detecting, and reporting fraud, waste and abuse.
- Establish a process for employees, taxpayers and other citizens to confidentially report suspected illegal, improper, wasteful or fraudulent activity.
- Inform the Comptroller of the Treasury of assessments of controls to reduce risks of fraud.
- Promptly report indications of fraud to the Comptroller of the Treasury.

Other

- Review and assess the adequacy of the Audit Committee’s charter annually, requesting Board approval for proposed changes.
- Ensure the receipt, retention and resolution of complaints regarding accounting, internal controls or auditing matters.
- Review the Board’s policies regarding employee conduct to ensure they are readily available to all employees, easy to understand and implement, enforced and provide a confidential means of reporting violations.
- Review the Board’s policy regarding conflict of interest to ensure that “conflict of interest” is clearly defined, guidelines are comprehensive, annual signoff is required for those in key positions and procedures are in place to ensure potential conflicts are adequately resolved and documented.

Membership

Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-8-201, includes the requirements for the appointment and terms of public members of the Tennessee Board of Regents. From this membership, the Audit Committee and its chair shall be appointed annually by the Board

Chairman pursuant to Board bylaws and shall consist of at least one member, preferably the chair of the committee, who shall have accounting and financial management expertise and other members who are generally knowledgeable in financial, management, and auditing matters. In addition to the Regents appointed to the committee, the Board may select one or more certified public accountants or other qualified citizens who are not members of the Board to serve on the Audit Committee. The committee shall have at least three but not more than seven members.

Independence

Each member shall be free of any relationship that would give the appearance of a conflict or that would interfere with his or her exercise of independent judgment.

Education

The Board's senior management and the System-wide Internal Audit office are responsible for providing the committee with educational resources related to accounting principles, internal controls, applicable policies, and other information that may be requested by the committee to maintain appropriate financial and compliance literacy.

Meetings

The Audit Committee shall meet as necessary, but at least quarterly. The committee may invite Board management, auditors, or others to attend and provide relevant information. Meeting agendas will be provided to members in advance, along with appropriate briefing materials. Minutes will be prepared. A majority of the members of the committee shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. The committee shall also meet at the request of the Comptroller of the Treasury.

The Audit Committee shall follow the public notice requirements of the Board. All meetings of the Committee shall be subject to the open meetings provisions of *Tennessee Code Annotated*, Title 8, Chapter 44, except that, as provided by *Tennessee Code Annotated*, Section 4-35-108(b), the committee may hold confidential, nonpublic executive sessions to discuss:

1. Items deemed not subject to public inspection under *Tennessee Code Annotated*, Sections 10-7-503 and 10-7-504, and all other matters designated as confidential or privileged under this code;
2. Litigation;
3. Audits or investigations;
4. Information protected by federal law, and
5. Matters involving information under *Tennessee Code Annotated*, Section 4-35-107(a), where the informant has requested anonymity.

Source: Committee on Audit Meeting, November 23, 2004; Committee on Audit Meeting, June 29, 2006; Committee on Audit Meeting, September 11, 2007; Committee on Audit Meeting, November 17, 2009; Committee on Audit Meeting, November 16, 2010; Committee on Audit Meeting, November 25, 2014; Committee on Audit Meeting, November 15, 2016; Committee on Audit Meeting, November 13, 2018; Committee on Audit Meeting, September 1, 2020.