

ACCO

Governance Training

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK



Welcome

This workshop is not about learning governance for its own sake.

It is about understanding how good governance helps protect and strengthen Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

Throughout the day we will use stories, conversations and practical activities to explore how Culture, Community and governance work together to support self-determination and ensure ACCOs remain strong for current and future generations.

This workbook contains the activities we will complete together during the workshop, along with space to record your own reflections and ideas.

Workshop journey

- Welcome and setting the scene – Why are we here together today?
- Governance, leadership & the role of the board?
- Making good decisions together – How do we make good decisions together?
- One Community, many roles, shared purpose
- Legal duties, ethics & Cultural integrity?

Name:

Organisation:

Community / Country / Mob (optional):

01

BREAKOUT 1: Org/board decisions Jayden

Jayden is a recently elected director of Community Connect, a Community Controlled Organisation providing health, family and wellbeing services in a regional Community. He joined the board because he wants to give back and help strengthen outcomes for local families.

At a recent board meeting, the directors considered a proposal from Youth Horizon, a mental health organisation seeking to co-locate services at Community Connect. Some directors believed the partnership would help address a gap in services, particularly for young men. Others questioned whether the organisation had built strong enough relationships with Community and whether the proposal aligned with Community Connect's values and long-term direction.

After a respectful and robust discussion, the board decided not to proceed with the partnership at this time. Although Jayden understood the reasoning, he had supported the proposal and was disappointed with the outcome. The following Saturday, while watching his daughter's footy game, Jayden ran into a former Community Connect employee who now worked for Youth Horizon. Two Community Connect members were also nearby and mentioned they'd heard there had been a big discussion at the board meeting and that the proposal wasn't going ahead. During the conversation Jayden said, *'I actually thought we should have gone ahead with it. A few of us were in favour, but most of the board were just too cautious. Karen and Michael were particularly against it. I don't think we made the right decision.'* One of the Community members replied, *'That's disappointing to hear. Maybe the board isn't really listening to what Community wants.'*

By Monday morning, different versions of the conversation had spread through the Community

Discussion

1. Was this a healthy way for Jayden to handle the situation.
2. Is there another way Jayden should/could have handled the situation? If so, how?
3. What board/committee governance principles are at stake?
4. Have you seen/experienced a situation like this?

Notes

02

BREAKOUT 2:

Community Connect board meeting simulation Agenda Item 5.2

You are a director of Community Connect, an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation providing health, family and wellbeing services across a regional Community. Today, your board is meeting to consider whether Community Connect should establish a new Youth Wellbeing and Cultural Connections Program, Strong Connections. Over the past 12 months, directors have consistently heard from Community members, Elders, local schools and partner organisations about the growing need for more after-school activities and safe spaces for young people. Families have spoken about increasing concerns around youth wellbeing, social isolation and the importance of creating opportunities for young people to strengthen their connection to Culture, Community and positive role models. The proposal aligns strongly with Community Connect's purpose and strategic priorities.

The CEO has presented a discussion paper supporting the intent of the proposal but has also highlighted some important challenges. Community Connect has modest financial reserves, enough to establish the program and operate it for approximately three months. However, there is no confirmed ongoing funding beyond that point.

Management has also advised that:

- existing staff are already operating close to capacity
- recruiting additional staff may take time
- using the organisation's reserves would reduce its ability to respond to future financial pressures
- there is no certainty that future funding applications will be successful.

Several directors have recently heard directly from families and Elders who hope the program can begin this year and are keen to see Community Connect respond to this growing need.

Board paper

Purpose: Seek Board direction on a proposal to establish Strong Connections, a Community-led youth wellbeing program that strengthens young people's connection to Culture, Community and positive role models.

Strategic alignment: Strategic Priority 2 – Strengthen the wellbeing, resilience and Cultural connection of children and young people through Community-led and Culturally safe programs.

Proposal:

- Operate two afternoons each week during school terms.
- Support around 30 young people aged 12–18 each week.
- Provide Cultural activities, mentoring, wellbeing workshops, recreation and life skills.
- Engage Elders, Community members and partner organisations in delivery.

Financial snapshot

Item	Position
Annual operating budget	\$3.2 million
Unrestricted reserves	\$240,000 (approx. 4 months operating costs)
Reserve policy	Minimum 3 months operating costs
Annual program cost	\$180,000
Establishment cost	\$45,000
Ongoing monthly cost	Approx. \$15,000
Confirmed funding	Nil
Grant applications	Two (outcomes expected in 4–6 months)

Key risks

Risk	Likelihood	Potential impact
Funding not secured	Medium	Program may need to be reduced or discontinued.
Reduction in reserves	Medium	Reduced financial flexibility.
Recruitment delays	Medium	Slower implementation and pressure on staff.
Community expectations	High	Reputational impacts if the program cannot continue.

Discussion

- Does the proposal align with Community Connect's purpose and strategic priorities?
- What benefits could it deliver for Community?
- What level of financial and operational risk is the Board prepared to accept?
- What alternatives could achieve a similar outcome with less risk?
- What decision is in the best interests of Community Connect, now and for future generations?

Our Board Resolution

- ☐ Approve the proposal and begin implementing the program now.
- ☐ Delay implementation until sustainable funding is secured.
- ☐ Request further information or alternative options before making a final decision.

Notes

03

BREAKOUT 3: Understanding roles, Janice

Janice has recently joined the board of **Community Connect**. With a background in business and strong ties to the local area, she is keen to make a positive contribution. At a Community event, **Janice** meets **Darren**, Community Connect's Operations Manager, and they stop to have a yarn. During the conversation, Janice mentions that the organisation's Community program reporting and data systems seem outdated and inefficient. She tells Darren she knows someone who specialises in digital systems for Community organisations and suggests they could really help.

Darren explains that Community Connect is already working with an existing provider and that any changes would need to be considered through the organisation's normal processes. Janice replies that it couldn't hurt to have another conversation and offers to introduce her contact.

A few days later, Janice organises a meeting between Darren and her friend. During the meeting, her friend outlines how their business could improve Community Connect's systems and reporting and mentions they would be happy to offer a discounted rate because of their connection to the Community.

Towards the end of the meeting, Community Connect's CEO, **Marlene**, walks past and is introduced to Janice's friend. Darren briefly explains the meeting, creating an awkward moment.

Discussion

1. Why is the moment awkward?
2. What governance issues are at stake?
3. How could Janice's knowledge & connections better serve the organisation?
4. Have you seen/experienced a situation like this? What was the outcome?

Notes

In pairs discuss - Decide who/which role should take the lead for each responsibility. (may be more than one)

Responsibility	Members	Board	CEO	Staff	Shared
Elect directors	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Recruit and appoint the CEO	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Recruit staff	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Develop the strategic plan	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Approve the strategic plan	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Approve the annual budget	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Deliver programs and services	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Monitor organisational performance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Manage organisational risks	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Represent the organisation at Community events	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Build relationships with Elders and Community	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Respond to a complaint from a Community member	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Develop a new youth program	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Approve opening a new service in another Community	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ensure the organisation remains true to its purpose and Cultural foundations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Monitor the CEO's performance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

04

BREAKOUT 4: Dilemmas

Choose to focus on one, or discuss both, of the following dilemmas.

Dilemma 1. Low Morale

You are a director of Community Connect. Over the past few months, several respected Community members have quietly approached you at different times to express concerns about increasing staff turnover and low morale. A former employee also mentions that staff are feeling overwhelmed and unsupported.

At each board meeting, however, the CEO reports that operations are running well and organisational performance remains on track. Nothing in the board papers suggests there is a significant issue.

You don't know whether these conversations reflect isolated concerns or something more widespread. You also don't want to rely on rumours or undermine the CEO.

The next board meeting is in two days.

Discussion

1. What would you do?
2. Would you raise the issue with the Chair before the meeting, during the meeting, or not at all?
3. What questions could you ask without relying on hearsay?
4. What additional information would you want before reaching any conclusions?
5. How do you balance your duty to exercise oversight with maintaining trust and respect?

Notes

Dilemma 2. Elder respect

Community Connect is considering a partnership with another Aboriginal organisation.

An Elder who sits on your board has publicly supported the proposal for many years and has encouraged directors to approve it.

You have enormous respect for the Elder and know many Community members expect you to support their view.

However, after reading the papers, you have concerns about the financial risks.

Discussion

- 1. Can Cultural authority create pressure?**
- 2. How do you balance your respect for your elder alongside your concerns in relation to risk?**
- 3. What does acting in the organisation's best interests look like?**

Notes

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