



# Community Sector Chairs

## Session 1: Governance and Leadership

**Kate James**, Institute of Community Directors Australia

Wednesday 10 June 2026

# Acknowledgement of Country

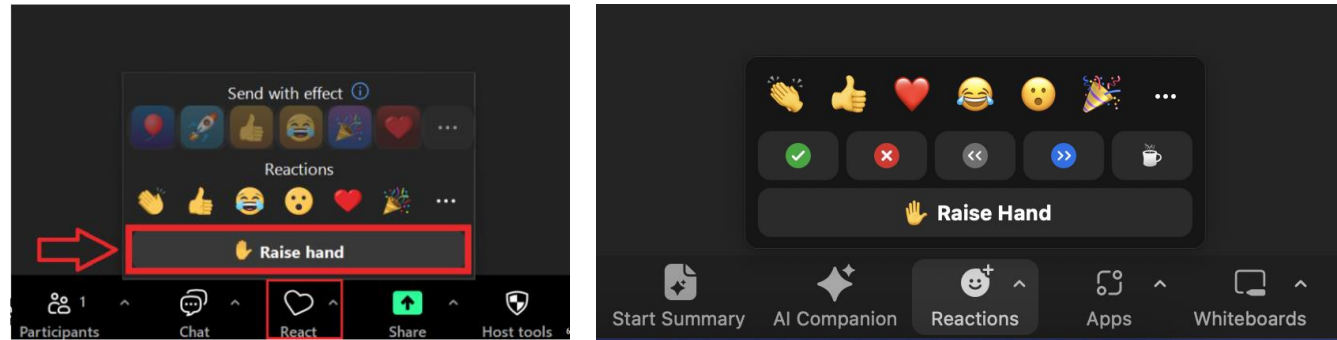
Emily Kam Kngwarray, *Ntang Dreaming*

1989, Utopia, Central Desert, Northern Territory  
Synthetic polymer, paint on canvas  
National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, purchased 1989  
© Emily Kam Kngwarray/Copyright Agency  
<https://nga.gov.au/exhibitions/emily-kam-kngwarray-paintings-from-utopia/>



# Housekeeping

- When you'd like to share with the group, please use the raise hand function:



- The chat function is for everyone to use. Feel free to share your experiences and advice, respond to prompts and answer any questions.
- You will receive the slides and the recording via the portal.
- Please don't use AI to summarise or record this session.
- Please mute yourself unless you are speaking to the group.

# Kate James

- Bachelor of Arts, Master of Laws (Juris Doctor), Dip Gov
- Trained mediator and private investigator
- Experience working with community organisations as a solicitor, consultant and PI



## Program approach

\* **Session 1: Governance and leadership**

\* **Session 2: Making healthy decisions**

\* **Session 3: Beyond meetings**

*How will you stay connected?*

# Introductions

- Name, role and organisation
- Why you got involved with your organisation
- What do you love about chairing?
- What do you find most challenging about chairing?





# The ideal chair

**Board culture and expectations**

**Effective board discussions**

**What are the  
qualities of an  
effective  
chairperson?**





## An ideal chairperson:

- Keeps the meeting focused on the governance context
- Leads by example and is a team builder
- Is fully informed and informs fully
- Gains the respect and trust of their board colleagues, staff and volunteers
- Knows how to achieve consensus and enables equitable discussion
- Achieves results by knowing when to exercise patience and when to push through change

# Breakout

The board of the **Riverstone Arts Collective** is made up of passionate community members, but meetings are a little disjointed. Decisions are often pre-decided by a couple of long-standing members who tend to be the most vocal during meetings. While there is a dot pointed agenda, circulated the day before the meeting, discussions often go round in circles or veer off topic.

The Chair, Alan, while well-intentioned and polite avoids conflict and rarely challenges the status quo. New board members are expected to 'learn on the go' as those who came before them did and over the past few years there has been a relatively high board turnover.

The CEO feels unsupported, reluctant to raise key issues and tending to make decisions based on whatever the most immediate operational priority is.

## Appoint a chair, a scribe and discuss in your group:

1. What problems can you see in how Alan is currently leading?
2. How is the board culture impacting effectiveness?
3. What steps/actions could Alan as chair take to shape healthier meetings/governance?



# The chair's role in a nutshell

## Before (prepare)

- Help prepare agenda
- Work with & brief relevant stakeholders
- (Work with the CEO)

## During (host)

- Follow agenda (keep everyone on track)
- Facilitate discussions
- Ensure everyone has a chance to contribute
- Summarise & conclude discussions
- Outline decisions made
- Delegate forward actions

## After (follow up)

- Ensure decisions are carried out
- Represent group to the outside world
- (Work with the CEO)

# The governance context: Systems and culture

What is quorum for your board/committee to be able to officially meet?

Why is it important?

Where can you find out if you don't know?

How does your board currently make decisions?

Formal/informal?  
Consensus/majority rule?  
Casting vote?  
Led by few?  
All voices heard?

What structures are in place to support board members to understand their role?

Induction?  
Board charter/manual?  
Code of conduct?  
Mentoring?  
Training?

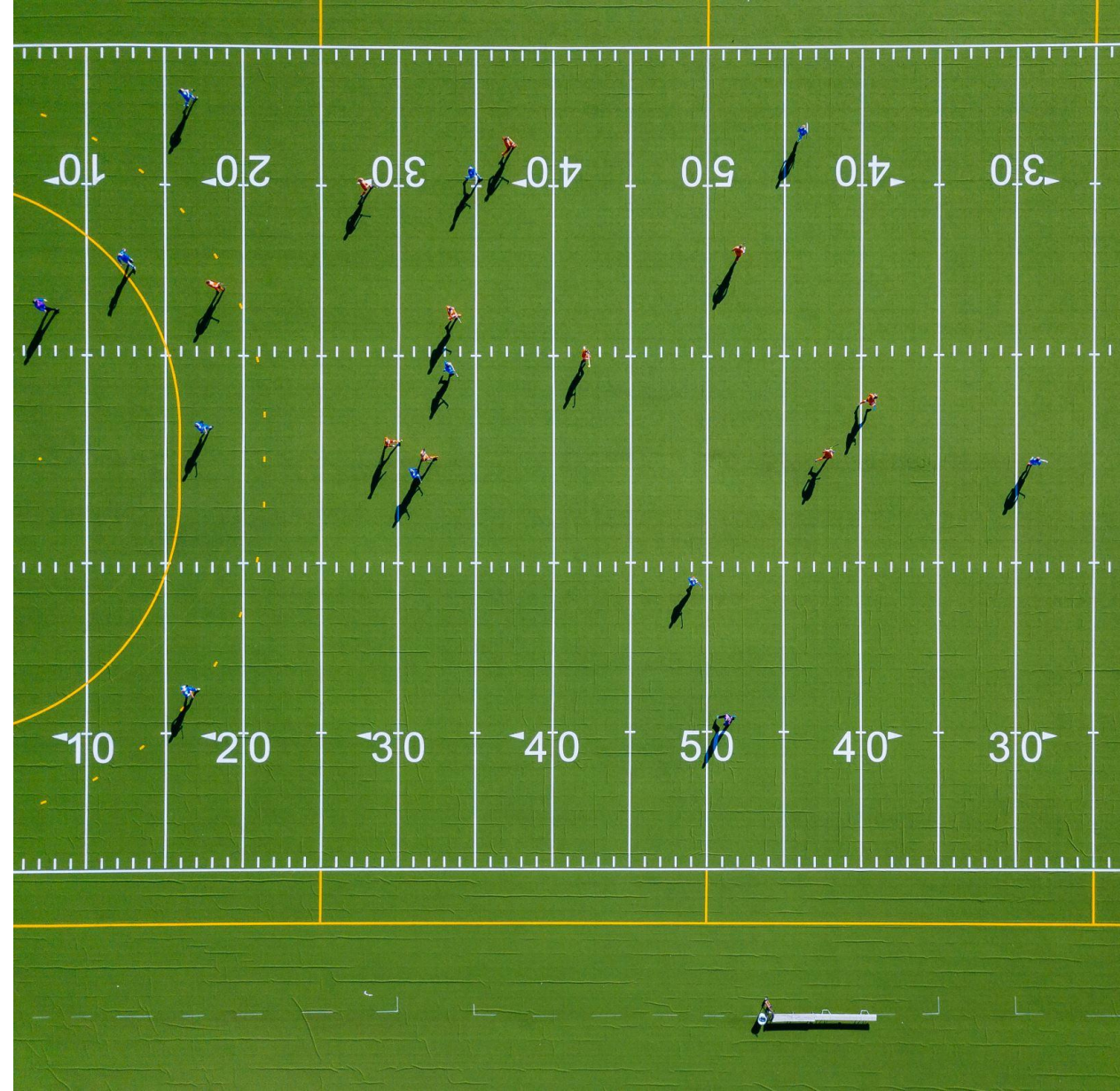
**Break!**



# Governance and management

Understanding the board's role

What are boards responsible for?

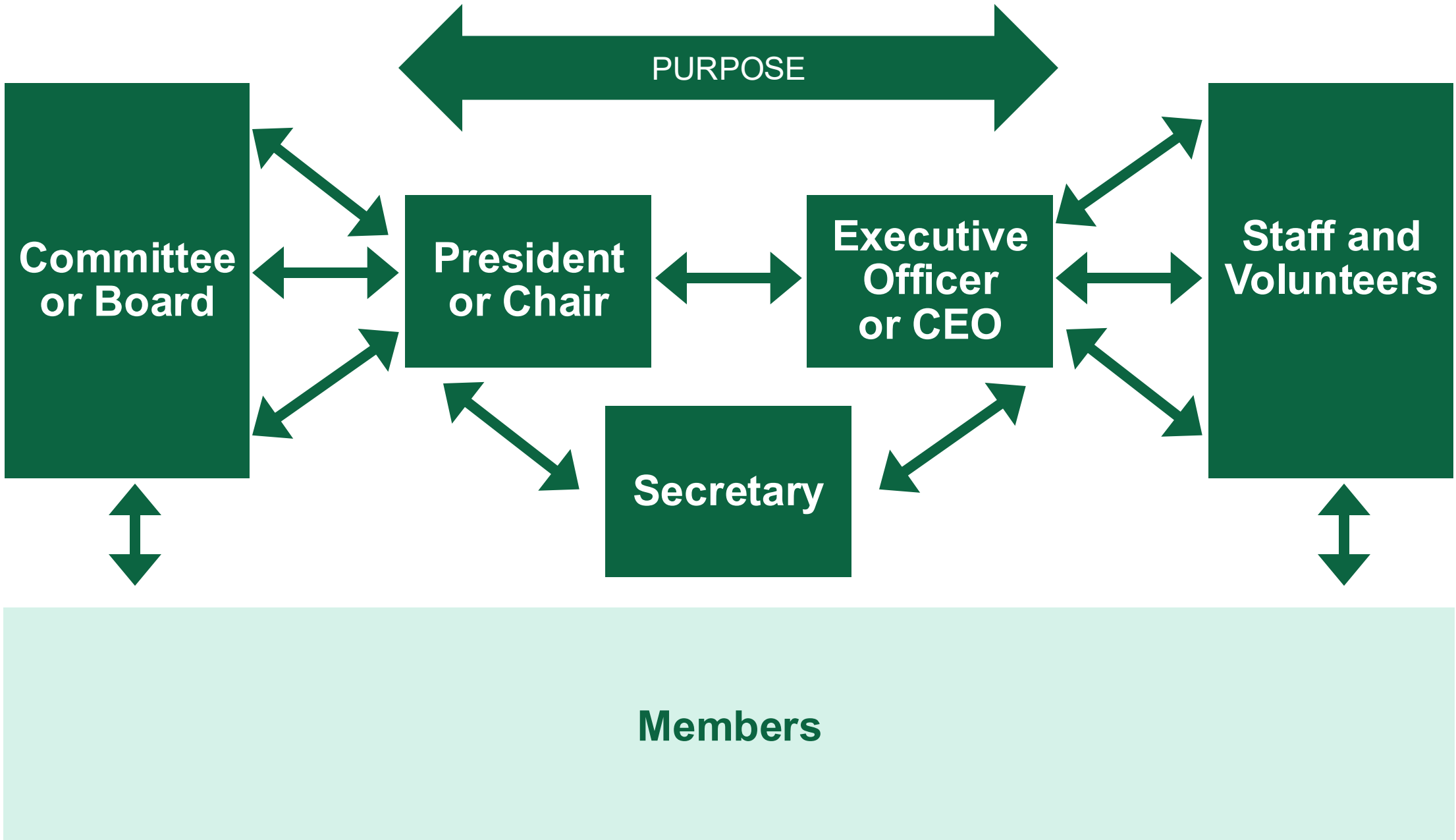


# What do boards do?

- Safeguard mission and purpose
- Set strategic direction
- Recruit and manage the CEO
- Oversee operations
- Advocate for the organisation
- Ensure legal compliance
- Manage and monitor finances
- Succession planning
- Protect the organisation's reputation
- Manage risks

*How clearly are these roles understood by your board?*





# Where's the line?



Strategic  
High level  
More focus on long-term  
Proactive

Operational  
“In the weeds”  
More focus on now, upcoming  
Responsive

# Breakout

Janet has recently become the Chair of a small non-profit, *Hillside Community Support Network*. She's enthusiastic, very hands-on and wants to support the CEO Asif. With these intentions she starts visiting the office frequently, introducing herself to everyone and organising one on one meetings with program leaders and giving advice to them based on her experience in the industry. She really wants to impart her knowledge and support the staff to do a better job.

Soon, some other board members begin to follow her lead. One gives a staff member feedback on their social media posts, another asks the IT lead about the software being used and offers to show them some alternative possibilities. While this hands on engagement and interest from the board is initially welcomed by some of the staff some significant problems begin to emerge.

## Appoint a chair, a scribe and discuss in your group:

1. What sort of problems do you anticipate may emerge based on this approach by Janet etc?
2. What does a healthy relationship between the chair and the operations team look like?

# What should the board do?

## Govern, not manage

How does your current board navigate the relationship between board members and staff?

Where is the line in your context?

# Board dynamics

Managing diverse personalities and perspectives

Having difficult conversations

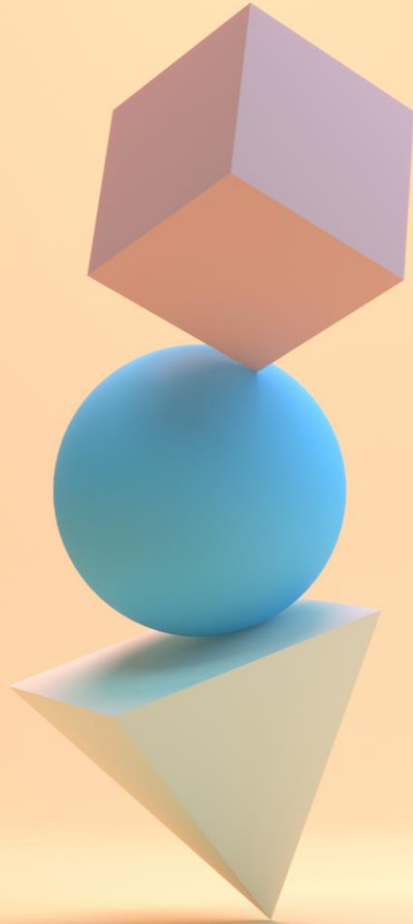


# Managing diverse personalities and perspectives

- Foster a culture of respect
- Know your board
- Leverage diversity as a strength
- Stay neutral and inclusive
- Use group agreements/code of conduct
- Invest in board knowledge, training, development

*What are some practical techniques to foster a culture of respect?*





# Handling difficult conversations within meetings

- Set the tone early
- Use clear, respectful language
- Name tension constructively
- Use process to defuse emotion
- Stick to roles and boundaries
- Know when to park the issue
- Stay neutral and steady
- Debrief afterwards

# Reflections from today's workshop

**In the chat:**  
Share a key takeaway

**To contemplate:**  
What change in systems and/or culture could help our board govern more effectively?