

# Community Sector Chairs

## Session 3: Leading Beyond Meetings

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

Wednesday 24 June 2026

# Acknowledgement of Country

Kaylene Whiskey, *Dolly Flying to Iwantja*

2022, made on the lands of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara  
Yankunytjatjara peoples, South Australia  
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## Program approach

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

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

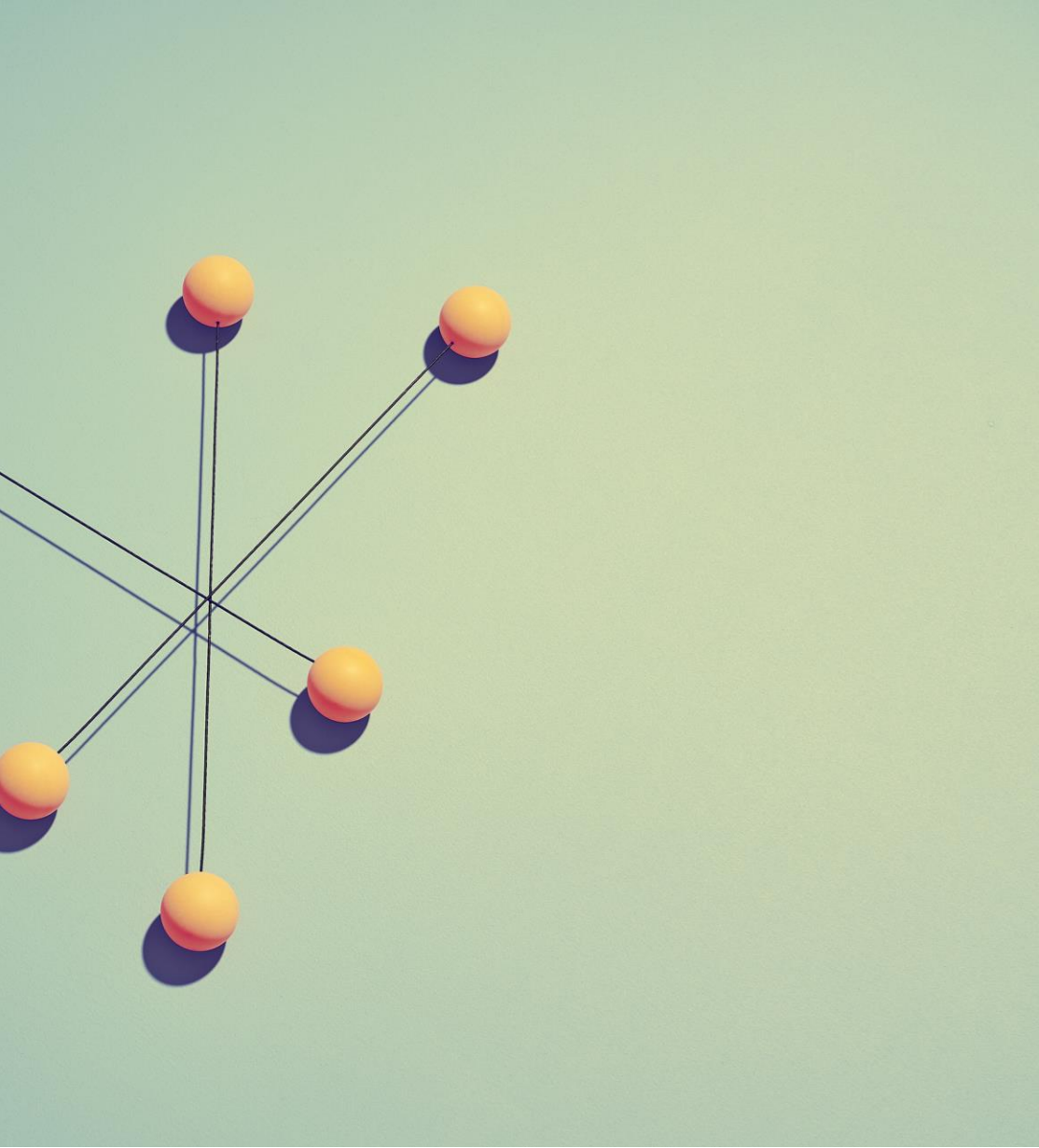
\* **Session 3: Beyond meetings**

*How will you stay connected?*

## Recap from Session 2

**To contemplate:**

Choose a governance risk your board is facing.  
What is one thing you could do toward addressing  
this risk?



# The chair and CEO relationship

Supporting and managing the CEO

# Breakout

Heather is the chair of Health Connect, a mid-sized not-for-profit community health organisation. Heather has built a strong, long-standing friendship with Health Connect's CEO, Jeremy.

Known for being a steady and supportive presence, Heather often praises Jeremy's dedication and defends his actions and decisions during board meetings. However, some concerning issues have recently emerged — staff turnover is increasing, key reports are overdue, and some strategic goals are being missed.

Heather continues to reassure the board that Jeremy is simply under too much pressure and suggests the board “*rally behind him*” rather than “*piling on more stress*”. Other board members begin to feel their questions are being deflected and that they cannot exercise proper oversight. Tensions rise as Jeremy's performance issues remain unaddressed.

## Discuss:

- What are the risks to the board and the organisation if this pattern continues?
- What could Heather do differently to reset the balance without undermining trust?
- How could the board collectively reinforce both support and accountability?
- What systems or processes could help prevent this type of imbalance from developing?

# Chair–CEO relationship checklist

## Strategic alignment

- We have a shared understanding of the mission and strategic priorities.
- There is clarity about the respective roles of the board and CEO.
- We regularly check in to ensure we're aligned on organisational direction.

## Communication and trust

- We have regular, open, and honest communication.
- The CEO feels safe raising concerns or uncertainties.
- I offer feedback that is timely, constructive, and respectful.
- We have agreed on how and when to communicate (e.g. frequency, format, issues to raise).

## Support and development

- I understand what support the CEO needs from me as Chair.
- I check in periodically about the CEO's wellbeing and workload.
- I encourage and support the CEO's professional development.
- I offer support in navigating difficult board or stakeholder relationships.

## Accountability and performance

- We have clear, measurable goals/KPIs linked to the strategic plan.
- The CEO performance review process is regular and fair.
- Performance issues, when they arise, are addressed constructively.
- We celebrate achievements and reflect on learnings.

## Reflection

- We are able to name and address any tensions or assumptions.
- I reflect on my own leadership style and how it impacts our relationship.

## Succession and sustainability

- We've discussed CEO succession planning.
- There is a contingency plan if the CEO becomes unavailable.
- We are actively building leadership capacity beyond the CEO.

## Board–CEO interface

- I help set a culture where the board both supports and challenges the CEO.
- The board avoids micromanaging while still maintaining oversight.
- I act as a bridge—not a gatekeeper—between the board and CEO.
- We model a productive, respectful board-executive relationship.



# Stakeholder engagement and advocacy

**Building board cohesion and  
accountability**

**Representing the organisation  
externally**

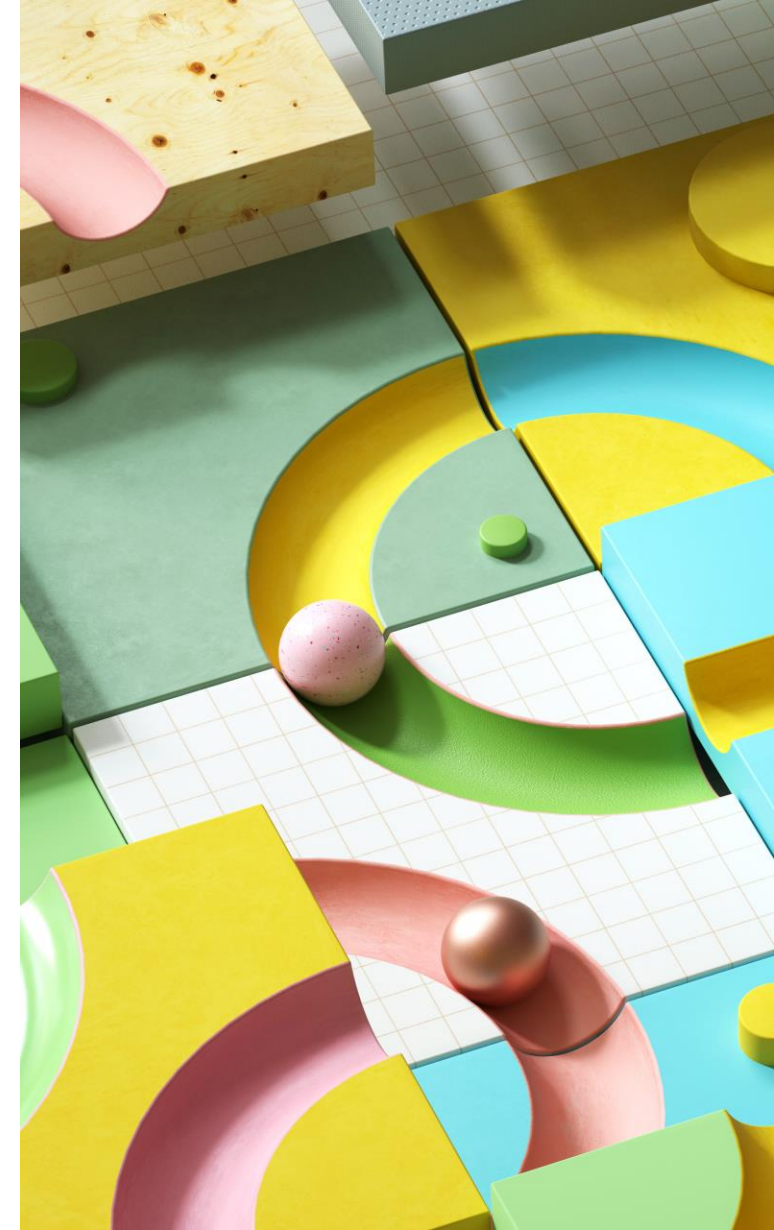
# Representing your organisation

You are the chair of a mid-sized mental health NFP. You're attending a panel Q&A session at a national community sector conference when one of your fellow board members, Kim, unexpectedly takes the stage.

Kim criticises government funding priorities, stating that your organisation is "*actively shifting away from partnerships with public services that no longer align with its values*".

While your board has been discussing potential advocacy directions, it is yet to formally agree on a position.

**What actions do you take? Short-term and long-term?**



**Break!**



# Breakout

You are the chair of MindReach, a not-for-profit delivering vital mental health support services in regional communities. Over the past 12 months, service demand has surged — particularly among young people and rural families — but core funding has not kept pace. The CEO has requested greater board involvement in advocacy efforts, especially in preparing for upcoming government consultations and a local health sector forum.

Meanwhile, board meetings have revealed a lack of shared understanding about the board's role in stakeholder engagement. Some directors prefer to stay behind the scenes, while others are keen but unsure how to contribute effectively. You recognise that stronger board cohesion and clearer external messaging will be essential if MindReach is to have influence and secure sustainable support.

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

- How can you, as chair, help build board cohesion and a shared advocacy voice?
- What could help the board stay on track and work together toward the organisation's goals?
- What risks or tensions can arise when representing the organisation publicly? How might these be navigated?
- How can the board support — not duplicate — the CEO's advocacy work?

# Building board cohesion and accountability

Unified messaging

Collective responsibility

Strategic alignment

Preparing for stakeholder engagement





# Representing the organisation externally

Relationship building

Credibility and influence

Storytelling and ambassadorship

Policy engagement





# Succession planning and board development

Ensuring continuity in leadership

Recruiting and onboarding new board members

Ongoing training and development for board members

# Culture and inclusion

Amina has actively volunteered at the Green Valley Community Sports Club for many years. When invited to join the committee as part of an effort to better engage the club's culturally diverse community, Amina was excited to contribute. However, from her very first meeting, Amina noticed that key decisions seemed to have already been made in informal conversations before the committee meetings. When she suggested ways to make the club more welcoming—such as providing translated materials or celebrating cultural holidays—her ideas were brushed aside as “*too complicated*” or “*not really relevant to most people*”.

Committee meetings were long and unstructured, often filled with inside jokes and casual banter that made it hard for newer members to participate. When Amina and another new committee member, Bilal, proposed a multicultural family day, they were met with polite nods but no follow-up. Amina and Bilal were later told that “*we tried something like that once, and no one came.*” Despite her initial enthusiasm, Amina felt she couldn't make a meaningful contribution. After a year of feeling overlooked and dismissed, Amina resigned. She was disillusioned and hesitant to put her hand up for another committee if this was what inclusion looked like.

**What are the issues here?**  
**What could have made this experience better for Amina?**

# Culture and inclusion – V2

Amina had always been an active volunteer at the Green Valley Community Sports Club, so when she was invited to join the committee as part of an effort to better reflect the cultural diversity of the local community, she was excited to contribute. Amina was given a well-thought-out induction that gave her an understanding of her responsibilities and ongoing mentor to help with any questions. Amina felt welcome from the very first meeting, with the chair introducing new members and ensuring everyone had a chance to speak. When she suggested ways to make the club's events more inclusive—such as celebrating culturally significant dates and offering translated materials for families with English as a second language—the group listened attentively and worked with Amina to implement a trial plan.

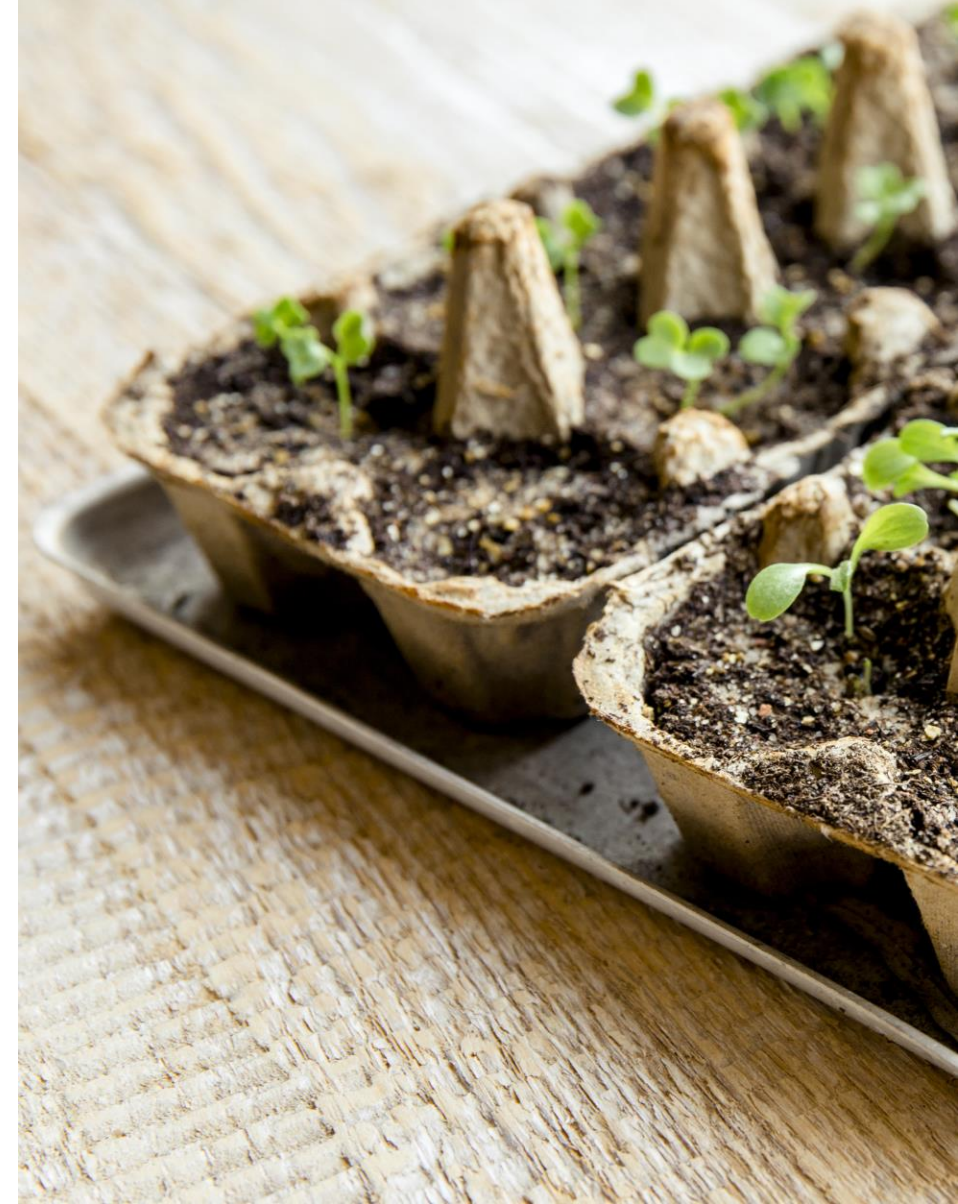
Meetings were well-structured, with clear agendas and space for open discussion making it easy to participate. Governance training was provided to the whole board. Questions were encouraged and robust yet respectful debates took place with a focus on the best interests of the club. When Amina and another new committee member, Bilal, proposed a multicultural community day to welcome more local families, the committee engaged in a thoughtful discussion about how to ensure success. Over time, Amina felt valued and empowered, seeing real changes take shape through collaboration. Her contributions helped modernise the club, making it more inclusive and sustainable. At the end of her 3rd year on the committee and after a stint as vice chair, Amina was encouraged to take on the role of chair when the previous one resigned—and while she was nervous about this, she decided to give it a go.

# Succession planning

*‘Good succession planning is about the healthy handover of collective wisdom, thereby ensuring the continuity and evolution of organisational knowledge and purpose’*

- Have we got the right mix of people and skills on our board?
- What will we do if our chair/treasurer/secretary resigns?
- Who are the next custodians of our organisation?
- How can we pass on our knowledge?

<https://www.communitydirectors.com.au/help-sheets/10-questions-succession>



# Board renewal

Maria has recently stepped into the role of Chair for a Connect Up, a small-to-medium-sized not-for-profit that delivers family and youth services in a rapidly growing outer suburban area. Connect Up has a committed but aging board. Several directors have been involved for over a decade, and two have signalled they may step down within the next 12 months. There's no clear succession plan, no term limits, and little board renewal in recent years.

Maria quickly realises that while the board culture is friendly and collaborative, strategic conversations about Connect Up's future direction and governance capability are lacking. Meanwhile, the community Connect Up serves is changing fast — becoming younger, more culturally diverse, and digitally engaged.

Maria wants to ensure the board is well-positioned for the future but isn't sure how to start raising issues of renewal, accountability, and future leadership without unsettling long-serving members.

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

- What are some respectful and constructive ways that Maria could begin conversations about board renewal and succession planning, especially with the long-standing directors?
- How might the board's current composition and lack of renewal affect its ability to respond to the evolving needs of the community it serves?
- What steps could the board take in the short and longer term to build a more future-focused, diverse, and sustainable leadership structure?



# Review your governance practices

- Board composition
- Inclusive meetings and structures
- Succession planning
- Induction process
- Ongoing commitment to healthy culture (psychological safety)

Board diversity, experience and skills matrix:

<https://www.communitydirectors.com.au/tools/board-skills-and-experience-matrix>

Board self-assessment tool:

<https://www.communitydirectors.com.au/tools/board-self-assessment-tool>

# Reflections from the course

**Session 1:** Governance and leadership

**Session 2:** Making healthy decisions

**Session 3:** Beyond meetings

*Discussions, scenarios, tools, frameworks...*

# Advanced Leadership for Chairs

The course consists of five sessions of two hours each that have been designed to build knowledge, skills and confidence in the chairs of community organisations. It is suitable for leaders who are already serving in the role of chair, as well as those who aspire to the position.

The sessions will cover:

1. Visionary leadership - ensuring your vision and purpose are at the centre of governance
2. Backstage and front of house: using both to make good decisions
3. The chair's relationship with the CEO
4. Strategic funding: Developing your case for support
5. Ethical board leadership

Participants will learn alongside other community sector leaders, in sessions designed to enable them to connect and network with their community sector peers.

Participants who complete all five sessions will receive a **Certificate in Advanced Leadership for Community Chairs**, a micro-credential recognising completion of the program.

## Price

**Member price:** \$790.00 inc GST

**Non-member price:** \$890.00 inc GST

People who did this course will be eligible for a **10% discount** on the next enrolment for ALCC – you will be emailed closer to the event

# Feedback



<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2026CSChairs>