

Foundations for effective community chairs

Session 2: Making healthy decisions, the chairs role

A three-session program
covering the essentials for
current and aspiring NFP chairs



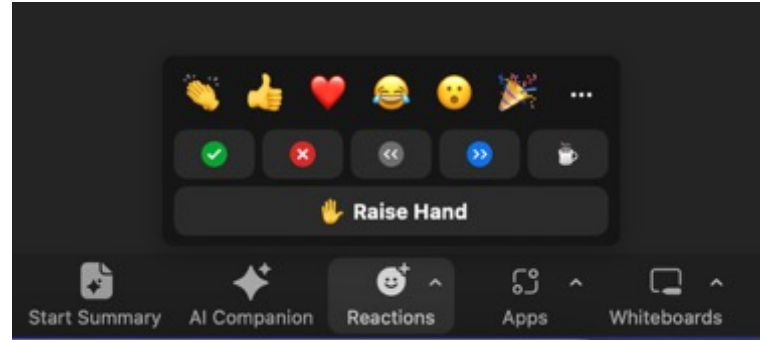
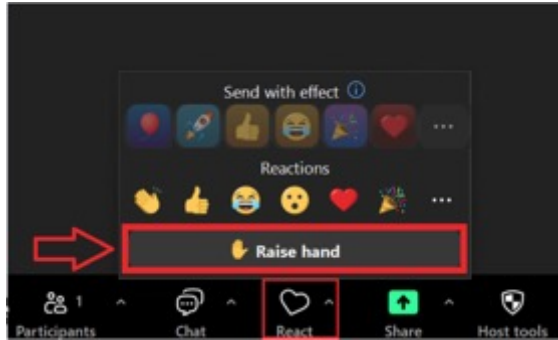


Acknowledgement of Country



Housekeeping

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



- Chat function is for everyone to use. Feel free to share your experience and advice, respond to prompts and answer any questions that arise if possible.
- You will receive the slides and the recording via the email you registered with.
- Please don't use AI to summarise or record this session.
- Please mute yourself unless you are speaking to the group.

Course outline – The Chairs Role (in)

**Session
one:**

Governance
and
Leadership

**Session
two:**

Making
Healthy
Decisions

**Session
three:**

Beyond
Meetings

Recap from Session 1

Reflective question (to contemplate)

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

Decision making frameworks

- What factors do we need to consider?
- Consensus, majority?
- Ethics, legalities, norms ...
- Chairing tricky meetings

Group discussion

The board of a not-for-profit organisation, LiveUp, dedicated to supporting youth mental health is presented with an offer of substantial funding from a major alcohol company. The donation could significantly enhance the organisation's programs and outreach, allowing them to impact significantly more young people than they are currently serving, especially in under-resourced communities.

However, the board is divided. Some members see this as a valuable opportunity to expand impact, address urgent service gaps and stabilise funding vulnerability. Others are concerned that accepting the donation could undermine the organisation, given the established links between alcohol use and youth mental health issues.

What elements/factors does a board need to consider when making a decision such as this?



Purpose

Risks (inc reputational)

Constitution

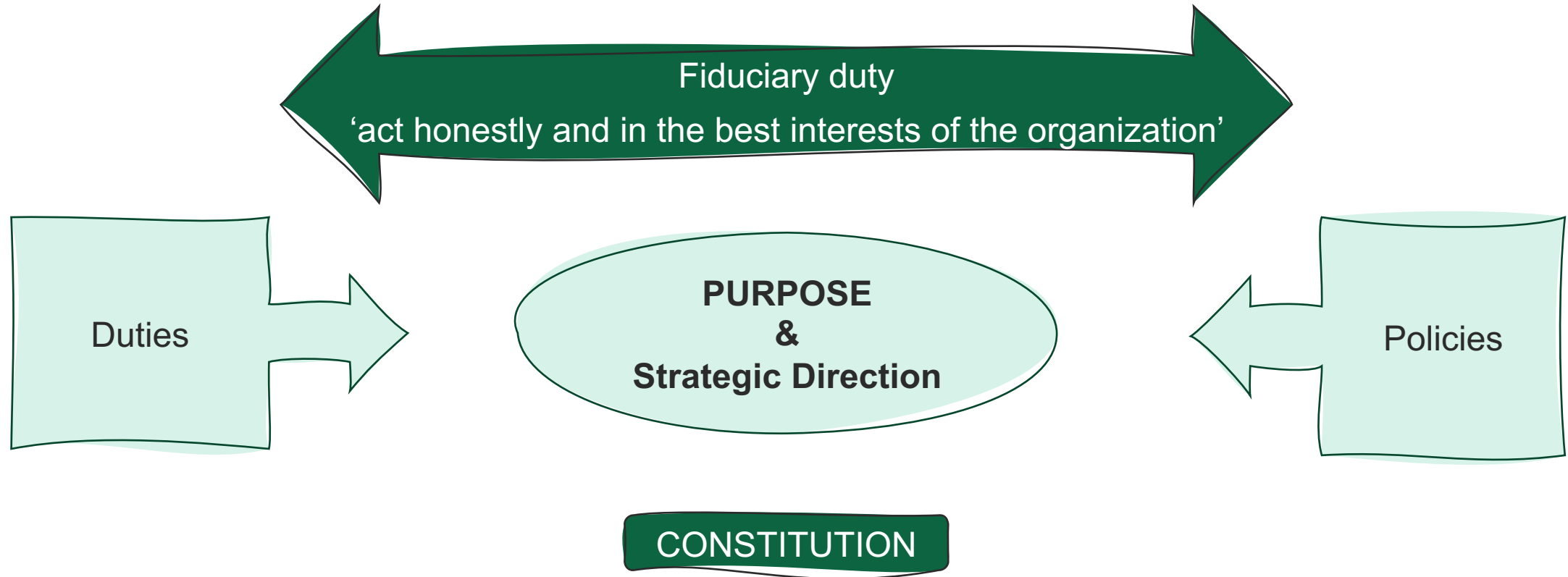
What factors do boards
have to consider when
making a decision?

Operational impact

Policies

Finances

Healthy decision making framework (for boards)



*'Boards should be building a hierarchy of reason ... as
opposed to an aristocracy of position'*

Simon Longstaff

Ethical decision-making checklist

- ☐ Have we included the right people in this decision?
- ☐ Have we thought about who might be impacted – and how?
- ☐ Would most people see this decision as fair?
- ☐ Are we staying true to our values and purpose?
- ☐ Would this be a good decision to make every time in a similar situation?
- ☐ Would we be comfortable if this decision was made public?

[ICDA help sheet: Drawing up a Code of Ethics](#)

Breakout 1

Bright Horizons, a charity supporting educational pathways for young people in out of home care, has recently welcomed three new members to the board. All the new members, one of whom has recent lived-experience in out of home care, have provided some critical feedback to the board on the organisation's engagement strategy. These new members believe that the strategy needs to go in a different, fresh direction to broaden the reach and impact of the organisation.

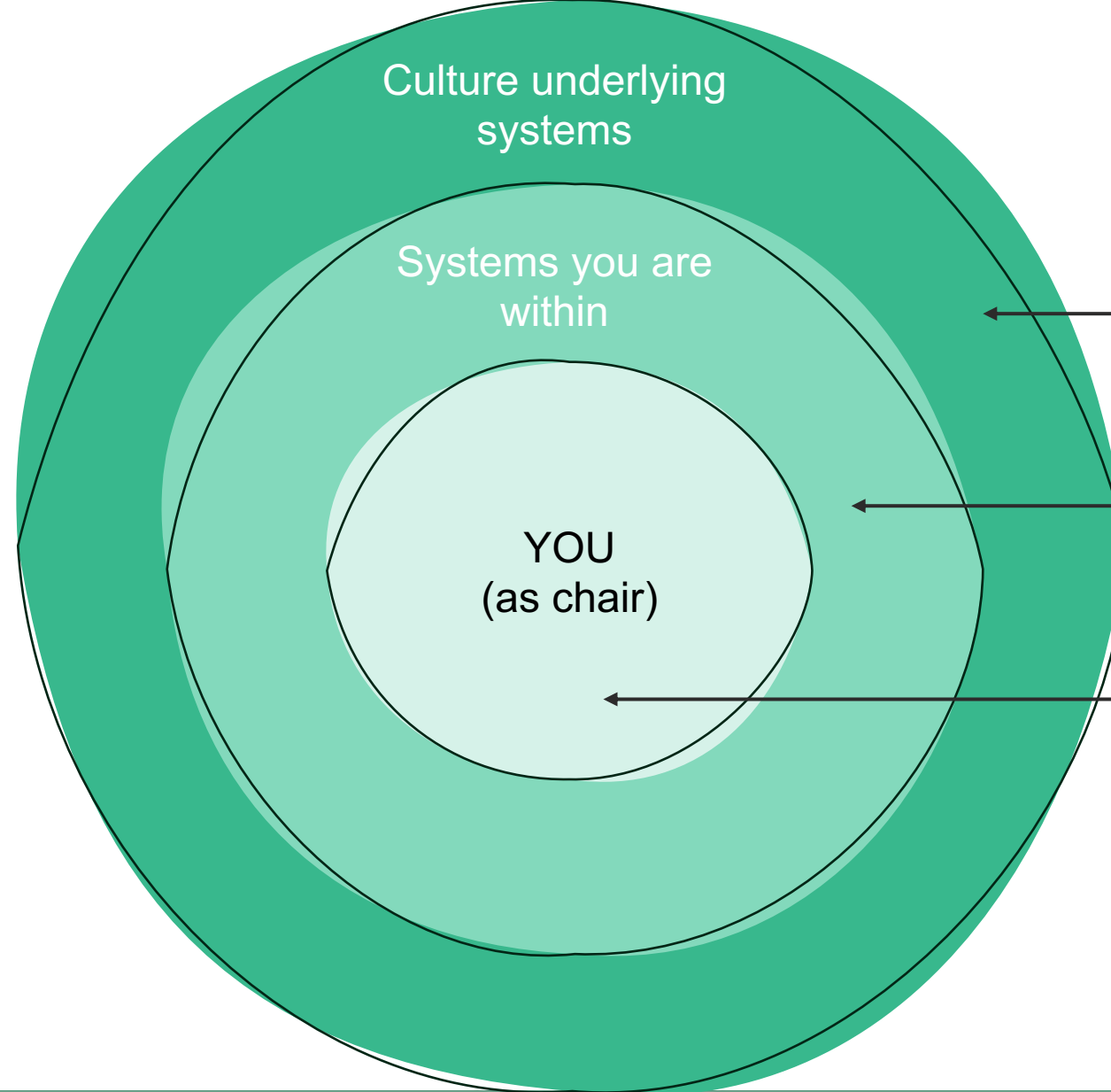
The board does not have standing orders or rules about meeting processes and after multiple emotive discussions over a number of meetings, consensus has not been reached within the board.

Four longer-standing members disagree that a new direction is required and are resistant to changing what they believe is working fine e.g 'don't fix what isn't broken.'

One of the new members has drafted the proposed fresh engagement strategy into a motion and is seeking approval by the board. When the item comes up for decision at the end of the meeting, the long-standing board members opposed to the motion refuse to engage in a vote and walk out of the meeting. This leaves five remaining members including the chair.

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

- What should the chair do under the circumstances?
(Consider both immediate and longer term)
- What are the legal/ethical obligations of the chair. Are they the same?



Are the systems,
culture you are
within healthy – what
is your capacity to
draw on, influence,
change etc?

What is the culture,
beneath, within the
systems?

What are the
systems, structures?

You - within an
ecosystem

Break!



Facilitating Constructive board discussions

- Diverse viewpoints
- Conflict
- Groupthink

Breakout 2

You've just stepped into the role of chair for a not-for-profit arts organisation known for its vibrant community workshops and inclusive local events. At your second board meeting, the group begins discussing a proposal to reallocate a portion of the events budget toward a new digital engagement initiative aimed at reaching younger audiences and those in regional areas. The conversation quickly becomes tense. One highly respected board member, who has a strong track record in delivering successful in-person festivals, dominates the discussion—cutting off others, dismissing alternative views, and insisting that “we should stick with what works.”

A newer board member, who brings professional expertise in digital strategy, offers their perspective but is spoken over and then withdraws from contributing. Several others nod in agreement with the main voice, keen to avoid further tension and “just get through the agenda.” You begin to notice a pattern—decisions are being made quickly, with limited challenge or genuine dialogue. As it is all unfolding in real time, you are not sure what to do.

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

- How might you encourage a broader range of viewpoints in the moment?
- What strategies could you use to manage the strong board member respectfully?
 - How could you prevent groupthink from taking hold in future discussions?
- What tools or practices could support a more inclusive and effective decision-making process?

Board reflection tools

Inclusive & effective decision making

Go
'round the table'
before any vote

Assign a rotating
'devils advocate'

Use a **'decision making template'**
for complex decisions

Collect **'anonymous reflections'** before
meeting via survey

Have a standing
'empty chair' to
represent community

Board reflection tools

Inclusive & effective decision making

Statement	Quick Pulse Check (Individual or Group)	Score (1–5)
Everyone had an opportunity to contribute to today's discussion.		
Differing viewpoints were welcomed and explored respectfully.		
We made space for both data and lived/professional experience.		
Our decision process today was clear and transparent.		
We avoided rushing to consensus too quickly.		
I felt comfortable expressing a dissenting or unpopular view.		
Our decisions reflect our mission and strategic priorities.		

Board reflection tools

Inclusive & effective decision making

Discussion Prompts (Choose 2–3)

Use these to spark a short group discussion or written reflection:

1. Who didn't speak today? What might we do differently next time to encourage them?
2. Did we rely too heavily on one person's opinion or past success?
3. Did any assumptions go unchallenged? Why?
4. What perspectives or data might be missing from our decision?
5. Did this decision align with our mission, values, and community needs?
6. How did power dynamics show up in the room today?
7. If someone disagreed, were they heard and respected?

Risk management & strategic decisions

- Risks
- Balancing mission, values, and financial sustainability

**The process
for managing
risk can be
broken down
into:**

- ✱ Establishing context
- ✱ Identifying risks
- ✱ Analysing risks
- ✱ Evaluating risks
- ✱ Treating risks

... while *continuously*:

- Communicating and consulting
- Monitoring and evaluating



Types of risk

- Strategic
- Operational
- Physical
- Financial
- Systems/infrastructure
- Human resources
- Privacy
- Cultural
- Child safety
- Regulatory
- Governance

What else?

Current risks facing your organisation

Under each of the following categories identify a risk currently facing your organisation:

- Governance
 - Operational
 - Financial
-
- What is currently in place to mitigate the risk?
 - Is this at a healthy level – what further needs to be done?

Shared decision-making framework tool

Use our shared decision-
making framework tool

<https://www.communitydirectors.com.au/tools/shared-decision-making-framework>

Decision making tool template

1. Clarity of purpose	What decisions are we trying to make? Why does it matter? How does it relate to our mission or strategy?
2. Inclusive input	Who needs to be at the table? Have we invited the right voices? Have we created space for quieter or underrepresented members to contribute?
3. Transparency of information	What data or evidence is informing this decision? Have we declared conflicts of interest or assumptions? Is there a shared understanding of risks, costs, and impacts?
4. Options and tradeoffs	What are our choices? Can we generate more than two options? What are the benefits and risks of each? Can we blend or phase options to meet different needs?
5. Agreed process	How will we decide? (e.g., consensus, modified consensus, vote with thresholds) What's the threshold for agreement? How will we record and communicate the decision?
6. Commitment and follow up	Are we aligned on implementation and next steps? Do we need to check back in or review the decision later? Have we considered how we'll communicate this externally?

Decision making tool

Use our decision-making tool

<https://www.communitydirectors.com.au/tools/decision-making-tool>

Decision Making Tool

Background				
1. What is the issue we are trying to decide?				
2. Is this timeframe dependent?				
3. What are the options available (including no decision)?				
4. What are the benefits and costs of each option? Does it support our mission?	Option	Benefit	Cost	Comment
	A			
	B			
	C			
	D			
5. How do we get information (data) to assist us in the decision?				
6. Who have we consulted?				
7. What are the criteria to decide? (Financial, planned, social, cultural)				

Reflections from today's workshop

- A key takeaway
- Next session

Reflective question (to contemplate)

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