

Board inductions – bringing on a new board member

Legal information for community organisations

This fact sheet covers:

- why is board induction important?
- who is responsible for board inductions?
- what should happen before an appointment to the board?
- what should be covered in a board induction?
- training and development of board members, and
- a checklist to support the board induction process



A properly-functioning board is vital to the success and longevity of any community organisation. The effective operation of a board largely depends on the free exchange of information and ideas between its members.

Ensuring new board members are quickly brought up to speed with the organisation (including its strategy and the environment within which it operates) is an important aspect of every board's role.



Disclaimer

This fact sheet provides general information about the process for inducting people to a community organisation's governing body (the board or committee of management). This information is a guide only and is not legal advice. If you or your organisation has a specific legal issue, you should seek legal advice before deciding what to do.

Please refer to the full disclaimer that applies to this fact sheet.

The terms we use in this fact sheet

We use the terms 'board', 'board member' and 'member' in this fact sheet. These terms are used in a generic sense to refer to the decision-making body of an organisation, the people that form the decision-making body, and the group of stakeholders that the decision-making body serves.

The description of the decision-making body differs between organisations. The principles explained in this fact sheet apply to the decision-making body and the people on the decision-making body of your organisation no matter what it may be called.



In this fact sheet we use	The equivalent name used by your organisation might be
Board	Committee, Committee of Management, Council
Board member	Committee member, Director, Councillor
Constitution	Rules, rule book, governing document

Why is board induction important?

There are many different roles and people involved in the management of an organisation. These people may be members, employees, volunteers, clients and customers.

It's important that board members understand the role generally, their specific role on the board and how that role differs from the roles of other people involved in the organisation. Taking the time to establish a good board induction process is a prudent investment in any community organisation's future.

A person invited to join the board of a community organisation may have an extensive background in the not-for-profit sector and board experience. Alternatively, a new board member may be volunteering their services for the first time, and have no previous board experience or detailed knowledge of the sector or the organisation.

In either scenario, making sure an effective board induction process is established and implemented is an important way of ensuring that new board members:

- quickly develop a clear understanding of the organisation and its expectations of them as board members
- understand the legal obligations, duties and liabilities that accompany the role, and
- are equipped with the information they need to hit the ground running and make a meaningful contribution to the work of the board

More broadly, an effective board induction is a useful way to establish and promote a good board culture and governance within the organisation.

Who is responsible for board inductions?

The responsibility for conducting board inductions is ideally shared between the board itself, senior management of the organisation, the company secretary and the new board member.

The chairperson of the board, or another senior person in the organisation, will often play a pivotal role in the induction process for new board members. A person who knows the organisation 'inside out' should oversee the process so that the necessary information can be shared with the new board member and any questions can be answered in an appropriate way.

The person who assumes responsibility for overseeing the induction process should be supported by other board members and senior management. For instance, the organisation's CEO may be involved in the process – introducing the new board member to key members of the management team, conducting a briefing on the challenges and opportunities facing the organisation and conducting a tour of the organisation's premises or operations.

A new board member will also need to make themself available to participate actively in the induction process.



What should happen before a person is appointed to the board?

Before a person is appointed to the board, an organisation should take steps to ensure the appointment is both legal and sustainable.

The following questions should be considered:

1.	Does the person meet the organisation's requirements? Are you selecting the right person?
2.	•Does the person meet the legal requirements for appointment to the board?
3.	 Does the chosen board member understand the legal obligations and liabilities that apply to their role?
4.	• Have you followed the proper process for appointment of the board member?

Does the person meet the organisation's requirements? Are you selecting the right person?

Board members should have a range of (or be able to quickly gain) skills and traits, including:

- enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, the organisation and its mission
- adequate time for the task
- · basic understanding of the role of a board and an interest in board work
- · good working relationships with other people involved in managing the organisation
- · reliability and good organisational skills, and
- · strong communication skills



Tip

There are websites where you can post free notices for board vacancies, such as on <u>Our Community's Business on Boards</u>, <u>Pro Bono Australia's Volunteer Match</u> and <u>Volunteering</u> Australia's GoVolunteer.

You may also be required to conduct relevant screening checks, such as police checks, reference checks and working with children checks, where appropriate.



More information

For more information about the legal issues arising when recruiting and engaging employees, see <u>our webpage on background checks</u>.

Does the person meet the legal requirements for appointment to the board?

Your organisation may **set out requirements in its constitution** in relation to the appointment of board members. For example, there may be a requirement that the person be a member of the organisation to be appointed to the board.



There are also certain legal requirements for the appointment of board members and for specific roles, such as the 'secretary' or 'public officer' (people who hold these roles are typically responsible for reporting to the regulator), that must be met in addition to anything set out in the organisation's constitution.



More information

For more information about positions in an incorporated association in your jurisdiction and in a company limited by guarantee (**CLG**), see our webpage who runs the organisation.

The requirements for appointment are different in each jurisdiction and for the different legal structures available to not-for-profit groups.

We have provided a high level overview below for the two most common legal structures.



Caution

Our summary is not exhaustive and, if you are involved in board appointments, you should refer to the legislation governing your organisation and familiarise yourself with the specific requirements that apply to the board members.

If you are uncertain about the requirements, contact the regulator, or seek legal advice.



Note

In some circumstances, a person will automatically cease to be a board member. For example, a person is automatically disqualified from managing a corporation if the person is an undischarged bankrupt under the law of Australia, its external territories or another country.

Companies limited by guarantee (CLG)

If your organisation is incorporated as a **company limited by guarantee (CLG)** under the *Corporations Act* 2001 (Cth) (**Corporations Act**), a board member (referred to as a 'director') of the CLG must:

- · consent to the appointment
- be at least 18 years old
- not have been convicted of various offences such as fraud or offences under the Corporations Act (and certain time limits apply from the time of conviction or release from imprisonment)
- not be an undischarged bankrupt or have executed a personal insolvency agreement, and
- not be the subject of a court disqualification order

Note that at least two directors of a CLG must ordinarily reside in Australia.

CLGs must also appoint a company secretary. A company secretary may, but does not have to be, a director of the CLG. However, a company secretary must meet similar legal requirements as a director and must also provide their consent before their appointment.





Note - Director Identification Numbers

Directors are now required to have a Director Identification Number (**DIN**). A DIN is a 15-digit identifier given to a director (or someone who intends to become a director) who has verified their identity with the <u>Australian Business Registry Service</u> (**ABRS**).

A person will need a DIN if they are (or are to become) a director or an alternate director of a company, a Registrable Australian Body or a registered foreign company under the Corporations Act.

A director will only ever have one DIN, which they keep forever even if they:

- · change companies
- stop being a director
- · change their name, or
- · move interstate or overseas

If you do not have a DIN, you are required to make an application for a DIN before your appointment as a Director. Applications can be made through the <u>Australian Business</u> Registry Service.



More information

For more information about companies, their directors and secretary's duties, see the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (**ASIC**) webpage – <u>'Your company and</u> the law'.

Incorporated associations

Organisations that are incorporated under state incorporations laws will need to make sure they meet any specified requirements set out in those laws.

The table below outlines some requirements and is not a complete list. You should refer to the legislation to make sure that you are clear about the requirements and that the person your organisation is appointing meets the requirements. Note, in the table below we have used the term 'management committee' rather than 'board', as that is the term you will find in the legislation.

State or territory	Requirements
Victoria Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 Sections 72,73(3) and 78	No specific requirements for general management committee positions exist under the legislation, however, a person will automatically stop being a committee member in certain situations (including if they have been disqualified from holding office as a director of a company, Indigenous corporation or a co-operative). This means such people should not be appointed to the position. In Victoria, the secretary of an incorporated association must: • consent to the appointment to the position • be at least 18 years old, and • be a resident of Australia A secretary of a Victorian incorporated association may, but does not have to be a member of the management committee. Find more information on Consumer Affairs Victoria's website.
New South Wales	A committee established to manage the affairs of an association is to include three or more members, each must be aged 18 years or more, and at least three must be ordinarily resident in Australia.



<u>Associations Incorporation</u> <u>Act 2009</u>

Sections 28, 34

In New South Wales, the 'public officer' of an incorporated association must be:

- a person who is 18 years old or more; and
- · ordinarily resides in New South Wales.

The public officer of a NSW incorporated association may, but does not have to be a committee member.

Find more information on Fair Trading NSW's website.

Queensland

<u>Associations Incorporation</u> Act 1981

Sections 61, 61A, 65 and 66(1)

All incorporated associations must have a management committee consisting of at least three members who must be adults and include one president and one treasurer.

A person is not eligible to be elected to the management committee if the person:

- has a conviction or is summarily and sentenced to imprisonment (other than in default of payment of a fine), and the rehabilitation period in relation to the conviction has not expired
- is an undischarged bankrupt, or
- · has entered into certain arrangements due to bankruptcy

In Queensland, the **secretary** of an incorporated association must:

- reside in Queensland, or
- · reside in another state but no more than 65km from the Queensland border

The secretary of a Queensland incorporated association may, but does not have to, be a committee member (they can be elected by the association or be appointed by the management committee).

Find more information on the Queensland Government website.

Northern Territory

Associations Act 2003

Sections 4, 27, 30 and 40

A person can't be a member of the management committee if:

- they are an 'insolvent under administration' or 'a disqualified person' as declared in writing by the Commissioner of Police, or
- have been convicted of certain offences (including offences involving fraud or dishonesty, or in relation to the promotion, formation or management of a body corporate),

unless they have applied for, and have been granted leave from the Commissioner of Consumer Affairs.

In the Northern Territory, the 'public officer' of an incorporated association must be resident in the Territory and may (subject to the rules of the organisation) hold any other position on the management committee in addition to that of the public officer.

Find more information on the Northern Territory Government website.

Tasmania

<u>Associations Incorporation</u> Act 1964

Section 14

There are no specific requirements for general management committee positions.

In Tasmania, the 'public officer' of an incorporated association must:

- be a person who is 18 years old or more, and
- · is a resident in Tasmania

The public officer of a Tasmanian incorporated association may or may not be a member of the management committee. They can hold any other office (subject to the rules of the organisation), except the office of auditor.

If the committee fail to appoint another person as public officer, the first public officer of an incorporated association is to be the person who applied for incorporation of the association.

If the office of a public officer of an association becomes vacant (at any time), the committee of the association must, within 14 days after the office becoming vacant, appoint a person to fill such vacancy. Failure to comply with this requirement will result in each member of the committee being deemed guilty of an offence.

Find more information on the Tasmanian Government website.

Western Australia

A person can't accept an appointment or act as a member of the management committee if:



Associations Incorporation Act 2015

Sections 39 and 40

- · they are a bankrupt
- · their affairs are under certain insolvency arrangements, or
- they have been convicted of certain offences (such as those involving fraud or dishonesty),

unless they have successfully applied to the Commissioner to accept an appointment or act as a member of the committee of an association.

The legislation does not specify certain positions (or specific requirements).

Find more information on the Western Australian Government website.

South Australia

<u>Associations Incorporation</u> Act 1985

Sections 29, 30 and 56

A person can't be appointed as a member of the management committee or be in any way (whether directly or indirectly) concerned in or take part in the management of an incorporated association if:

- they are an 'insolvent under administration', or
- have been convicted of certain offences (such as those involving fraud or dishonesty or under the SA incorporated organisation's law),

unless they have successfully applied to the Corporate Affairs Commission to be a member of the committee.

Subject to the rules of the association, no employee of an incorporated association is to be precluded from being appointed as a member of the committee of the association simply by reason of their employment.

In South Australia, the 'public officer' of an incorporated association must:

- · be a person who is 18 years old or more, and
- · is resident in South Australia

A public officer of a South Australian incorporated association may or may not be a member of the management committee.

If an incorporated association is without a public officer for a period longer than one month, the association will be deemed guilty of an offence.

Find more information on the South Australian Government website.

Australian Capital Territory

<u>Associations Incorporation</u> Act 1991

Sections 57, 60 and 63

A person can't be appointed as a member of the management committee, or a public officer, of an incorporated association if:

- · they are bankrupt or personally insolvent, or
- have been convicted of certain offences (such as those involving fraud or dishonesty, or in relation to the promotion, formation or management of a body corporate),

unless they have successfully applied to the Supreme Court for leave to accept an appointment or to act as the public officer or a member of the committee of an association.

In the ACT, the 'public officer' of an incorporated association must be:

- at least 18 years old, and
- · a resident in the ACT

The public officer of an ACT incorporated association may, subject to the rules of the organisation, hold any other office, in addition to that of public officer.

Find more information on the Australian Capital Territory Government website.



More information

For more information about positions in an incorporated association in your jurisdiction and in a company limited by guarantee (**CLG**), see our webpage who runs the organisation.



Organisations registered as charities with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission

Organisations registered as charities with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (**ACNC**) also need to make sure they meet the requirements of the <u>Australian Charities and Not-for-profits</u> <u>Commission Regulation 2013 (Cth)</u> (**ACNC Regulations**) which sets out '<u>Governance Standards</u>' that apply to people sitting on a charity's board or committee (referred to as 'Responsible Persons).

For example, <u>Governance Standard 4 - Suitability of Responsible Person</u> provides that a charity must take reasonable steps to be satisfied that persons appointed to a charity's board or committee are not disqualified from:

- managing a corporation under the Corporations Act, and
- being a Responsible Person by the ACNC Commissioner within the preceding 12 months



More information

For more information about governance requirements for registered charities see the <u>ACNC</u> webpage 'Welcoming new Responsible People to your charity'.

The ACNC has also published has a <u>template handover sheet for charities</u> you could provide to a potential board member.



Tip

In addition to satisfying itself that the potential board member meets the above legal requirements for appointment, your organisation could also ask the person to sign a letter (a template declaration for Responsible People is available on the ACNC website.

Does the chosen board member understand the legal obligations and liabilities that apply to their role?

The organisation should provide an overview of the board position, including the legal obligations (duties) that the new board member must comply with.

The legal obligations arise from a number of sources including:

- legislation
- common law (judge-made law)
- the organisation's constitution or rules, and any
- · the organisation's policies

Summary of obligations

There are four main legal duties that all board members must understand and comply with.

Four main legal duties of board members

- 1. Duty to act in good faith and for proper purposes
- 2. Duty to act with reasonable care, skill and diligence
- 3. Duty not to dishonestly use position or information
- 4. Duty to avoid conflicts of interest



While board members are typically not personally liable (that is, legally responsible) for the debts or consequences arising from an organisation's actions or decisions, there are circumstances where a board member will be personally liable for their organisation's debts or may be subject to regulatory action.

A board member may be subject to penalties as a result of their own actions (breach of a legal duty), and they may also be held liable for the actions of the organisation they govern, where that organisation has breached a law. For example, if the organisation fails to pay certain income tax instalments (such as on salary and wages paid to employees) or superannuation guarantee payments (for employees), board members may be personally liable for these amounts.



Note

Potential board members need to understand both the legal obligations and the potential liabilities so they can make an informed decision about whether they consent to becoming a board member.



More information

Your organisation could provide our following resources (which explain directors' legal obligations and potential liabilities) to your new board members: New to a board or committee? An introduction to your role and Duties Guide.

Have you followed the proper process for appointment of the board member?

Organisations must follow their governing document (rules or constitution) in relation to the appointment (and removal) of a person on their board. This will usually be by election of members at an Annual General Meeting, or direct appointment by the board (for example, the filling of a casual vacancy), which may or may not need a resolution at the next meeting of the organisation.

When a board member is appointed, organisations must notify the relevant regulators.



For example

- Companies limited by guarantee must inform ASIC. See <u>ASIC webpage 'Adding or removing an officeholder</u>
- Incorporated associations must notify their state or territory-based regulator (there may be some exceptions for incorporated associations in some states who are also regulated by the ACNC)
- Companies limited by guarantee and incorporated associations that are registered as charities will need to inform the ACNC. See the <u>ACNC webpage</u> - <u>'Update Charity</u> <u>Details'</u> for further information (you can make changes through the Charity Portal).

It's important to note that time limits for notification are usually applicable and so organisations must make notification a priority.

What should be covered in a board induction?



Note

The main reason for a board induction is to make sure a new board member receives key information about the organisation and their role.

In addition, the induction process can be used to collect information required from the board member.

The nature and extent of the information provided to the new board member will, to a degree, be informed by:

- the size and type of the organisation (for example, a multi-million dollar disability provider compared with a small maternal health support group)
- · the person's background and experience, and
- the information that has been shared with them before their appointment was formalised

Despite this, the process should, as much as possible, be conducted in a consistent manner so that each new board member receives the same information.

The induction process will often include:

- meetings with the chair, CEO, a mentor, or both (another board member that may be allocated) to introduce the organisation and invite questions, as well as meetings with other board members and senior management
- a tour of the organisation's premises and operations (if applicable)
- provision of a board induction pack (see below)
- specific training or professional development in relation to the role, and
- completion and return by the board member of any outstanding appointment-related documents, such as the consent, appointment letter, declaration of interests forms

A 'board induction' pack

A board induction pack should be produced and provided to each new board member at, or as soon as possible after, the time their appointment is confirmed.

The following information about the person's role, the board and the organisation, is often included in a board induction pack.

The board member's role	
A letter or document setting out the 'terms and conditions' of appointment (a sample letter is available at the <u>ACNC website</u> (for organisations registered as charities).	
A letter or document setting out their specific 'roles and responsibilities', including as member of a sub-committee (the job description).	
Any policies or procedures specific to board members or related documents like insurance details.	
Information about key legal duties and potential liabilities (see, for example, our webpage responsibilities of the board and committee members).	
Any handover notes, key contacts, regulator details and key compliance and board dates.	



Note

Both the organisation and individual board members should understand the basis on which the board member is appointed (volunteer or employee basis). This is important as there are laws that apply differently to volunteers, or some laws that do not apply at all and, as a result, different legal entitlements apply.

The letter of appointment and induction process should be clear and consistent about whether or not the board role is voluntary in nature. For more information about the different roles, see our guide to volunteering.

The board	
The structure of the board (including positions held, together with the roles and responsibilities of those positions).	
A list of all board members and their contact details (biographies, if available).	
A calendar, or schedule of forthcoming board meetings (date, time and location including whether electronic meetings) and other significant events.	
Details of any subcommittees (including roles, responsibilities and reporting lines).	
Details on how the board operates in practice (for example, how documents are circulated, amended, and stored).	
Previous minutes of board meetings (the last six to twelve months are likely to be most useful).	
Any specific board policies and procedures (such as attendance policy, disputes, delegations, confidentiality.	
The organisation	
The organisation's governing document (rules or constitution)	
Financial information (including the financial statements for previous years and audit reports, where applicable)	
Annual report	
Planning documentation (such as a corporate plan, strategic plan and financial plans)	
Risk assessment information (such as a copy of the organisation's risk register)	
Organisations policies and procedures (for example, its code of conduct, health and safety policies, social media policy)	



Training and development of board members

In addition to ensuring that an effective board induction process is implemented, community organisations should encourage and support their board members to complete appropriate training to make sure they have the necessary knowledge and skills to properly perform their responsibilities.

Boards often receive training and professional development in the following areas:

Financial literacy

All members of a community organisation's board should have at least basic financial literacy skills so they can understand and participate effectively in board discussions concerning the organisation's financial reports.

A board member can't simply rely on the opinions and financial expertise of the treasurer. To meet their legal duties, every board member needs to understand the organisation's financial position and contribute to its proper financial management.

A board member who doesn't have adequate financial literary skills and knowledge to interpret financial statements, or who would benefit from refresher training, should be supported to attend appropriate financial literacy training.

Directors' duties and governance

As already discussed, board members have a number of legal obligations (duties) that must be understood and complied with. The source and nature of those duties, and the potential consequences of a failure to comply with them, will differ depending on the nature of the organisation.

A new board member should be informed, at the time of their appointment, of their duties, including those under the Corporations Act, the ACNC governance standards or incorporated associations legislation (where applicable).

While these duties may seem be daunting for some new board members, it's important to reassure them that these duties are essentially a common sense approach to good governance and there are supports available to help them understand the duties and how they can be met. New (and existing) board members should also be encouraged and supported to attend governance training, as required.

For more information, see our webpage <u>responsibilities of the board and committee</u> <u>members</u>.

Regulatory compliance

Particularly for community organisations operating in highly-regulated environments, consideration should be given to facilitating board members' attendance at training sessions covering key regulatory issues and risks affecting the organisation.

For example, if your organisation holds public events the board may benefit from training on how to identify and manage key risks, occupational health and safety or work health and safety (OHS or WHS) and negligence laws, and the types of insurance and protection available.

The board may want to consider having regular discussions about the skills and knowledge that each member brings and discuss (if are any gaps) where training would be beneficial.

The board may also want to consider conducting an annual review of the performance of all its board members, similar to performance assessments you might undertake with staff (if applicable). This is another good way of identifying gaps in skill or knowledge.

The following areas may be considered in these discussions and reviews:

- industry knowledge
- board of director experience
- CEO succession planning
- community affiliation or access
- financial skills
- fundraising
- government relations
- · technology and IT

- human resources
- leadership
- legal lobbying
- marketing or public relations
- organisation management
- risk management
- · strategic management



Induction checklist

Completing an induction checklist for each new board member.

The following checklist is an example only. It's not exhaustive and should be tailored to suit your organisation and the board member role.

Step	Discussion	Completed
Before appointing the board member	Provide the person with an overview of the position, including the legal obligations and potential liabilities that come with being a board member so the board member can make an informed decision about whether they consent to becoming a board member.	
	Conduct screening checks, where appropriate (if they have contact with children or other vulnerable people, some checks will be mandatory).	
	Ensure the person meets all the legal requirements (for example, age, not bankrupt, Australian resident)	
	 their consent to act as a board member (if required). The ACNC has a sample appointment letter that could be used to appoint a person to the board of a registered charity. If your organisation is not a charity, and doesn't have a consent letter it may consider adapting the sample appointment letter as appropriate a declaration of any conflicts of interest (potential or actual), which should be included on the organisation's risk register. The ACNC has a sample template conflict of interest policy and a template risk register. If your organisation is not a charity, and doesn't have a way to manage documents relating to conflicts of interest, it may consider adapting these templates as appropriate personal contact details, and any other requirements relevant to your organisation For example, directors involved with a community organisation in Victoria that has a fundraising licence or is seeking a fundraising licence, may need to complete a 'Criminal Record and Personal Insolvency Declaration'. 	
	 Ensure the person has information relevant to the role including: the 'terms and conditions' of appointment letter This is likely to include: the term of appointment circumstances where they cease to be a board member key duties time commitment information about disclosure of conflicts, insurance and any travel and reimbursement details, or remuneration the expectations and specific responsibilities, and any policies or procedures specific to directors 	



Appointing the board member	Follow the governing document of the organisation (rules or constitution) to appoint the board member (this will usually be election of members at an Annual General Meeting, or direct appointment by the board to fulfil a casual vacancy).	
Notifying relevant regulators	 Promptly notify relevant regulators upon a person becoming a member of the Board. For example: CLGs will be required to inform ASIC (unless they are registered with the ACNC) organisations registered as charities with the ACNC will need to inform the ACNC, and organisations that are incorporated under state law (for example, the Associations Incorporation Act 1999 (NSW)) will usually be required to notify their regulator (for example, New South Wales Fair Trading) Note that timeframes apply and fees can be charged if notification is not given with the timeframes. 	
Completing the induction process	 Meet with the new board member to: introduce the organisation and invite questions, and receive relevant documents from the board member if not already provided before the appointment (the declaration of meeting legal requirements, and declaration of interest's) 	
	Introduce the new board member to other board members (and senior management).	
	Arrange visits to the organisation's premises and operations (if applicable).	
	Discuss the new board members' needs (for example, training).	
	Provide a board induction pack.	