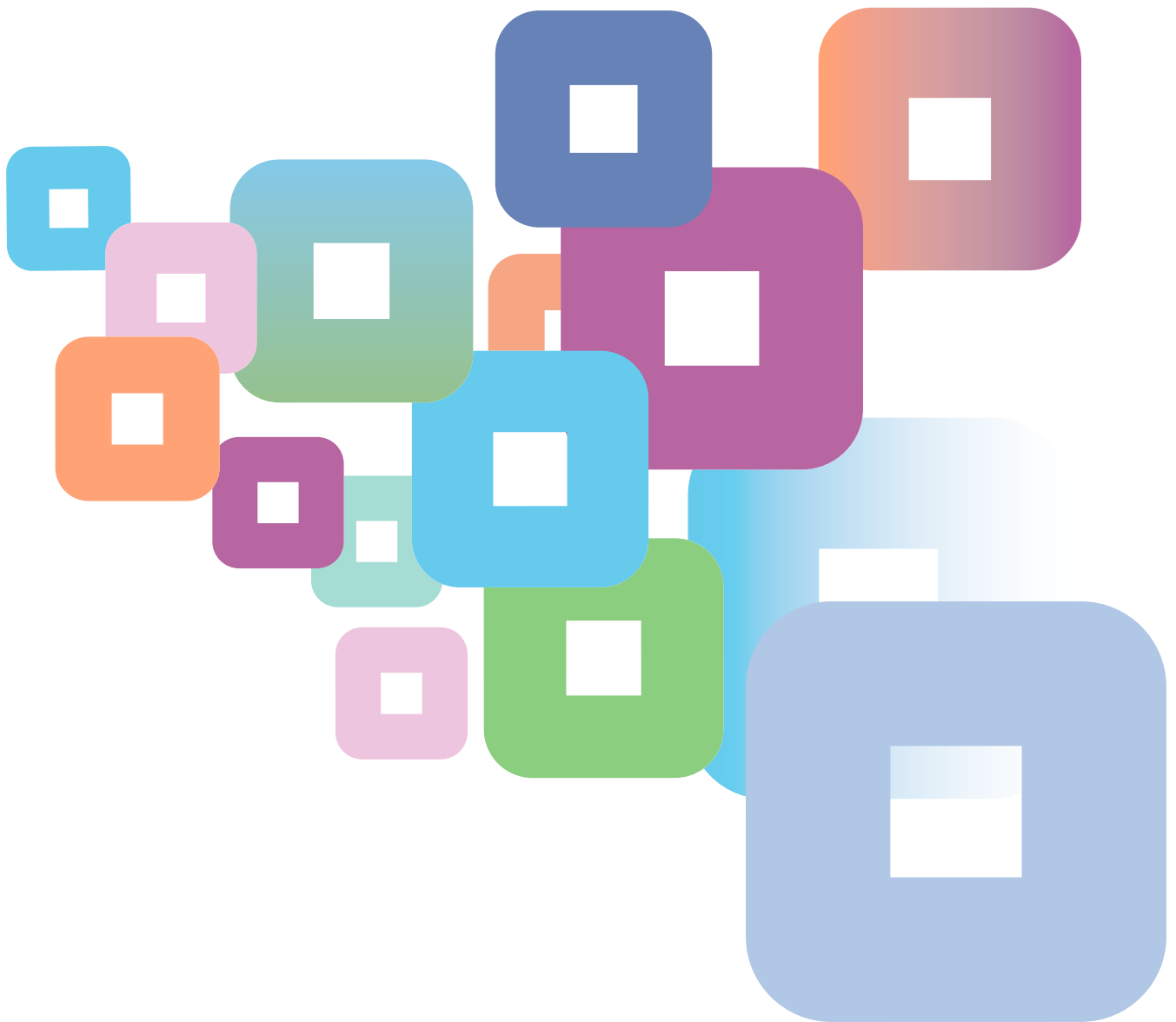




Diversifying boards— your cultural advantage

A guide to pursuing a board role





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Diversifying boards—your cultural advantage is available for viewing and download in a variety of formats, including this Word version from the Office of Multicultural Interests website:

www.omi.wa.gov.au.

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Minister's foreword

Cultural diversity is one of Western Australia's great assets.

Around one-third of Western Australians were born overseas. Almost one-fifth (17 per cent) were born in a non-main English speaking country. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people represent 3.1 per cent of Western Australia's population.

Western Australia's economy is becoming increasingly connected to those of countries around the world. Our cultural diversity offers the opportunity to forge these links and connections through people-to-people networks, cultural knowledge and language skills.

Research highlights that people from diverse cultural backgrounds—and with a range of skills—stimulate new ideas, higher rates of innovation and creativity, business formation, job generation and economic growth.

Just as organisations are realising the benefits of a culturally diverse workforce, there is a growing awareness of the benefits cultural and linguistic diversity can bring to boards and committees. For a board to be effective, members collectively need to have knowledge, skills, attributes and networks relevant to its business. Cultural and linguistic background adds an important element to the mix.

Diversifying boards—your cultural advantage is a guide to how you can contribute to boards and committees by adding your unique cultural and linguistic perspective, together with your knowledge, skills and experience.

It provides information about the functions of boards, how to make yourself attractive for board selection and the benefits this can bring to individuals, organisations and society.

I encourage you to take inspiration from this guide and use the information and insights to add your voice to those who shape our lives and our future.



Hon Dr Mike Nahan MLA
TREASURER; MINISTER FOR ENERGY;
CITIZENSHIP AND MULTICULTURAL INTERESTS



Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Have you ever thought about being a member of a board or committee?

Board membership offers an opportunity to develop personal and professional skills, contribute to the community, set the direction for organisations whose work you value and be a role model for others.

This guide can help you assess your board-readiness and learn about how to pursue a board role.

Just like looking for a job, there are basic things to consider when working towards a board role. Board membership requires certain attributes, skills and commitment.

A person's cultural and linguistic background is an attribute that is not always promoted by the individual or recognised for the benefits it can bring to the functioning of a board.

The guide includes information about boards and what being a board member involves. It also includes case studies of people from a wide variety of backgrounds who have become members of different types of boards. Some were born in Australia of migrant parents. Most came to Australia as migrants. They represent countries and cultures from across the world.

The guide also includes resources that you can access to help you on your journey to board membership. Information and networks are available to support you.

Take the first step and turn the page!





Section 1—The benefits

Why cultural diversity matters in the boardroom

In Australia and around the world, with increasing and changing patterns of migration, globalisation and technological change, businesses are becoming increasingly complex. There is a growing awareness of the need to broaden the composition and breadth of perspective of executive boards and committees for them to remain relevant and effective. Research shows that:

- diversity increases effectiveness and competitiveness in a globalised environment
- leveraging cultural diversity benefits business and services by developing appropriate products and/or services and responding to new markets and/or emerging needs or communities
- diverse talents, experiences, competencies and knowledge enhance organisational effectiveness and financial performance
- diversity is essential for boards to navigate the complex and dynamic issues that public and private agencies, including the not-for-profit sector, now face
- diversity and inclusion lead to better risk management, more innovation and stronger connections with customers, employees and business partners.

One report found that, for companies in the top quartile of executive board diversity, return on equity was 53 per cent more and earnings were 14 per cent higher on average than they were for companies on the bottom quartiles.

"Diversity and inclusion are not just the right thing to do but are important to the business agenda. Boards are at their best when there is diversity of culture, thinking and perspective."

Diversity is also important for good corporate governance:

- multiple views on the possible outcomes of actions enhances the decision-making process as this allows wider identification and consideration of various risks, consequences and implications
- a diverse board offers greater capacity to anticipate and consider the concerns and perspectives of all key constituencies
- a robust dialogue of differing views allows a company to keep pace with changing dynamics both internally and externally.¹

However, a 2013 report by Diversity Council Australia, *Capitalising on Culture: A Study of the Cultural Origins of ASX 200 Business Leaders* found that, among the board directors of ASX200 companies:

- 22.2 per cent of directors are 'culturally diverse' compared to 32.2 per cent in the general Australian community

¹ Russell Reynolds Associates, 2009

- when a narrower definition of ‘culturally diverse’ is adopted (excluding people from North West European cultural origins), the proportion of culturally diverse directors falls to 11.3 per cent, compared with 24.3 per cent in the general community
- most culturally diverse directors have North West European cultural origins (10.9 per cent)
- the proportion of business leaders with Asian cultural origins is relatively low compared with the general community, especially given the importance of the Asian region to Australia’s current and future economic growth—only 4.2 per cent of directors had Asian cultural origins compared with 9.6 per cent in the general community).²

In 2014 only one per cent—45 out of 4305 people—currently registered as members of public boards and committees in WA were from a CaLD background.³

Benefits for you

There are personal and professional benefits to gain from participating on boards or committees.

Personal benefits include:

- satisfaction when you achieve goals, make a difference to people’s lives and help to achieve a better community

2 Diversity Council Australia (2013) Capitalising on Culture: A Study of the Cultural Origins of ASX200 Business Leaders. See www.dca.org.au/dca-research/capitalising-on-culture.htm

3 Hansard: 22 May 2014 p. 671b–674b

- building your social skills such as cooperation and collaboration and developing relationships and networks
- learning from other board members and executives
- influencing and leading an organisation
- increased confidence and communication skills
- enhanced intrapersonal competence such as self-awareness and self-control
- financial reward for positions that attract a sitting fee.

Benefits to you professionally can include:

- enriching your résumé
- developing knowledge and understanding of the public, community, corporate and business sectors
- improving your future career prospects and widening your career opportunities by enabling you to develop valuable knowledge and skills, such as:
 - leadership and decision making, negotiation, influencing skills, conflict resolution, fund-raising, advocacy and networking
 - day-to-day management processes
 - current government standards and issues
 - compliance



- accountable and transparent practices and procedures
- specific areas of interest.

Benefits for the community

Your membership of a board can also have benefits for the community. You can:

- be a role model by directly or indirectly influencing others to seek leadership roles
- mentor or teach other members of the community by sharing knowledge and experiences
- promote cultural exchange within an organisation and advocate for consideration of the issues, perspectives and needs of culturally diverse communities.



Challenges

There are also some challenges to consider. Taking on a board or committee role will require commitment, both in time and effort. Managing multiple responsibilities may require making compromises in your other work and life commitments. You may need to allocate time to:

- attend meetings
- prepare for meetings
- carefully read minutes of meetings and other documents
- check compliance standards.

Payment you may receive by joining a board could:

- create conflicts of interest
- affect other forms of income you have
- not adequately compensate your time.

Board membership has other challenges, such as dealing with differences of opinion and conflicting views. Lack of clear performance measures or key performance indicators (KPIs) may be frustrating. Dealing with a dysfunctional board can be a challenge.

It is also important to be sure that you:

- feel comfortable with the level of responsibility
- are clear about your personal responsibilities
- are aware of your legal responsibilities and are able to meet them.

Case study—Pearl Proud

Pearl Proud is currently the Chair of ConnectGroups, 'the not-for-profit peak body for over 640 Support Groups and Self-Help (Peer Support) Groups in Western Australia'. She was previously a board director of ConnectGroups and Fremantle Multicultural Centre.

Pearl was born in Durban, South Africa and migrated to Australia in 1987. Her first language is Zulu. Other than English, she also speaks Xhosa, Mpondo and Afrikaans. She obtained university degrees in psychology, literature and business administration in South Africa and Australia.

She is a consulting psychologist and clinical lead at a not-for-profit organisation that provides mental health services for young people.

Pearl says she was interested in joining a board as a form of community service, to make a contribution and as a way of gaining governance skills.

She found out about board membership opportunities mainly through her networks and was invited to get involved after expressing a general interest.

Pearl notes the many personal benefits of being a board member have included developing governance and leadership skills, making a contribution to the not-for-profit sector, being engaged and supporting others, building networks and making a contribution as a person from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) background.

Pearl believes that her cultural background helps bring a broader and more inclusive perspective to her work and helps highlight the positive contribution the CaLD community makes in Western Australia and beyond.

Other interests she considers to have helped her be of value as a board member are her participation in leadership courses and workshops, being a mentor to younger people, involvement in the arts, and a general interest in politics and current affairs as well as reading and travelling.

Pearl notes that there are challenges to board membership. Some that she has experienced have been maintaining board cohesion and, on a personal level, balancing board responsibilities with work and other demands.

Good communication, conflict management and leadership skills have been important to address matters affecting board cohesion.

Planning and prioritising wellbeing including exercise, meditation and good nutrition has been important in balancing board, work and other life responsibilities.

Pearl says she did not encounter any difficulties gaining board membership on the boards of which she has been a member. However, she acknowledges that this may not be the case in gaining corporate board directorships—her current goal.

She notes that improving skills, and inviting support or mentorship would assist in overcoming challenges if they were to emerge.

Pearl offers the following advice to people from culturally diverse backgrounds interested in becoming a board member:

“Be involved! It is a highly enjoyable endeavour. Find a mentor for support, identify an area of interest and gain skills and knowledge in governance.”





Case study—Tony Chong

Tony Chong is Chairperson of the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), Vice President of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Councillor

and past-Deputy President of the WA Divisional Council of Certified Practising Accountants (CPA) and board member of the Curtin University School of Accounting.

Tony was born in Malaysia and arrived in Australia in 1985. He speaks Mandarin and Cantonese. He has qualifications in law, accounting and taxation from Murdoch University and the University of New South Wales. He is currently a partner of a Perth-based company providing legal services.

Tony says he was interested in joining a board to assist in the not-for-profit sector in a strategic way. He says he was either approached or was nominated to join the boards.

He says the challenge he faced in seeking a position on a board was narrowing down his interest and knowing where to look for vacancies. Persistence and patience were necessary.

For Tony, understanding your strengths and weaknesses and understanding how you can add value as a board member are important.

“Working closely with the chair and other board members and executives and asking questions helped overcome these challenges”, he says. “There are no dumb questions.”

Tony says that for him the benefits of board membership have been an overwhelming satisfaction in being able to assist and partake in the community. He believes that different cultural backgrounds help provide a different perspective and the ability to tap into separate networks.

He stresses that it is important to believe in the organisation and its mission:

“It is through that, that you get an understanding of what the organisation needs and how best to add value.”

Tony’s advice to a person from a culturally diverse background considering a board role is to understand what makes this background special and how it can add value to an organisation.





Section 2—What are boards?

A board is the governing body of an organisation. Governing bodies can also be known by other names, such as committees and councils, however, they all perform similar roles. A board's role is to provide purpose, leadership, direction and overall strategy for the organisation for which it is responsible and to oversee the performance and activities of management. Boards typically perform four main functions:

- ▣ compliance—ensuring that operations are legal and procedures work
- ▣ strategic direction—directing or setting the overall corporate strategy
- ▣ performance management—ensuring competent and efficient management and that the finances of the organisation are sound
- ▣ risk and crisis management—managing risks and crises to ensure the organisation's long-term viability.

Types of boards

Most organisations operating within the private, not-for-profit and public sectors have some type of governance body. They can vary significantly in size, structure and function.

Not-for-profit sector

These boards support organisations that serve the community, or provide services to support the community.

They cover many different sectors including human and community services, sports and recreation, culture and the arts, and

environment and heritage. They can be a good entry point for learning about governance. Appointments are usually endorsed by the membership at an annual general meeting or by election. Many not-for-profit boards are governed by legislation, particularly the *Associations Incorporation Act 1987*.

Public sector

As the stakeholders for these boards are generally taxpayers and Australian citizens, public sector boards are driven by considerations of the public interest.

Members are required to work within a legal framework.⁴ These roles are often paid, but generally not paid to the same degree as large corporate boards. Appointments are usually made by Ministers or the Governor-General. Western Australian Government boards can be broadly grouped into the following types:⁵

- ▣ Trading Enterprises: Boards of public trading enterprises engaged in commercial activities. In some cases these trading enterprises may be government owned, such as the Fremantle Port Authority, Gold Corporation, Electricity Networks Corporation (Western Power) and Busselton Water Board

4 More information about the relevant legislation and other requirements can be found at www.publicsector.wa.gov.au/public-administration/public-sector-governance/good-governance-boards-and-committees

5 Adapted from www.publicsector.wa.gov.au/public-administration/public-sector-governance/good-governance-boards-and-committees



- **Governing:** Boards of statutory authorities that govern the operation of an agency, such as the Art Gallery of WA, WA Planning Commission and Botanical Parks and Gardens Authority
- **Policy or review or specialist:** State level committees with a policy or coordination role, such as the Industry Management Committee and State Emergency Management Committee
- **Regulatory or registration or appeal:** Boards with a regulatory or registration role, such as the Liquor Commission, Plumbers' Licensing Board, Legal Practice Board of WA and Local Government Standards Panel
- **Stewardship:** Boards that manage public assets or trusts, such as the Aboriginal Land Trust, Public Education Endowment Trust and Western Australian Local Government Grants Commission
- **Advisory or consultative:** Boards and committees with an advisory or consultative role, such as the Geographic Names Committee and Pest Animal Control Ethics Advisory Committee. These boards do not have decision-making authority.

Private sector

The private sector is profit-driven. Governance roles with these organisations are usually paid. The sector covers a broad range of organisations from large corporations to small businesses. Board appointments are usually made by shareholders, but often led by existing

directors. The appointment process is highly competitive. Operation of boards of private sector companies is governed by the *Corporations Act 2001*.

Relationship between boards and management

Broadly, governance involves “the systems and processes in place that shape, enable and oversee management of an organisation. Management is concerned with doing—with co-ordinating and managing the day-to-day operations of the business.”⁶

The relationship between boards and the management of an organisation will vary depending on factors such as the size of the organisation and funding arrangements. These are formally explained in the rules or by-laws of the organisation.

Large organisations usually have paid staff members who take care of day-to-day management matters. In these organisations, board members focus on high-level strategic issues and staff deal with operational matters. In small organisations with voluntary or part-time staff, board members may take on many or all staff responsibilities as well as their duties as board members.

The relationship between boards and management is outlined on the next page.

6 Meredith Edwards and Robyn Clough, 2005



Board	Management and staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Sets strategy and goals and authorises all major decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Recommend the strategic direction and translate these into operation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Approves the business plan, budget and corporate policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Manage physical, human and financial resources to achieve the organisation's objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Monitors and assesses the performance of the organisation, management and major projects, agrees on KPIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Carry out day-to-day responsibility in conformity with relevant laws, regulations and compliance frameworks
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Ensures the organisation's long-term viability and sound finance, its compliance and accountability system	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Develop, implement and update policies and procedures, prepare budget, operate programs and organise events
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Ensures effective communication with stakeholders and CEO	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Act as a conduit between the board and the organisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Oversees and monitors risk management frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Develop, implement and manage the organisation's risk management framework

How boards work

Each board follows a set of rules and is guided in its operations by procedures. The rules and procedures will vary according to the type of organisation and the purpose of the board, but the rules will usually specify:

- how the board is to be established
- the boundaries and extent of the board's powers
- the number of members and length of their terms
- procedures to appoint members and to fill vacancies (such as the qualities that the office holders on the board should have)
- roles and responsibilities of office holders
- procedures for removing board members

- meeting requirements and procedures
- guidelines for remuneration or reimbursement for expenses
- expected conduct
- conflict of interest considerations
- frequency of meetings.

Board member responsibilities

Board members may also be called directors, committee members, councillors or trustees, depending on the type of governing body and the organisation it oversees. Responsibilities will vary and the board's role should be clearly defined by the organisation and reviewed regularly. Board members are responsible for:

- setting the strategic direction of the organisation, including the vision, objectives, and strategic and operational plans



- ▣ approving key organisational policies
- ▣ ensuring that the organisation has adequate funds, approving the budget and monitoring expenditure
- ▣ appointing the chief executive officer and holding her/him accountable for implementing the strategic plan consistent with organisational policy and the approved budget
- ▣ ensuring legal requirements are met
- ▣ developing a risk management plan and ensuring it is implemented
- ▣ ensuring the board is functioning well, reviewing the work of the board and planning for the succession and orientation of board members.

Directors

A director oversees the management of the company on behalf of its shareholders. There are different types of director positions.

Executive Director: usually a full-time employee of the company or organisation who also holds a position on the board.

Managing Director: the most senior executive in the company or organisation who also sits on the board.

Non-Executive Director: not an employee but holds a position on the board.

Independent Director: non-executive directors who may receive a director's salary, but do not have any material or


financial relationship or transactions with the company, its promoters or shareholders, its management or its subsidiaries, which may affect their independence of judgement. All independent directors are non-executive directors but a non-executive director is not necessarily an independent director.

Office holders

Most boards are made up of a group of office holders including at least a chair, deputy chair and treasurer, whose roles are described below. Many boards also have sub-committees that focus on particular areas, such as audit, risk management and ethics. Directors are often asked to sit on one or more board committees such as an audit committee or human resources committee. Appointment procedures for the different office holders should be outlined in the board's rules.

Chairperson: The chair serves as the board's spokesperson and takes a leading role in the functioning of the board. The chairperson is responsible for managing board meetings, ensuring that the discussion remains focused, decisions are reached and that members observe meeting rules.

Some chairpersons are also given an additional casting vote, to use when the votes on the board are evenly divided. With larger boards, the chairperson may act as the link between the board and the head of the organisation or chief executive officer.



Deputy Chairperson: many boards appoint a deputy chairperson to support the chair and to fill in when the chair is absent. The deputy chairperson is also expected to play a major role in board leadership.

Treasurer: the treasurer is responsible for monitoring the financial position of the organisation and keeping other board members informed of financial matters.

Company Secretary: company secretaries make sure that a company complies with its legal and regulatory obligations and that decisions made by the board are implemented.

Executive Officer/Secretary: administrative support for boards can either be provided through the management structure of an organisation or as a board role, often known as a ‘secretary’ or ‘executive officer’. This role is responsible for tasks such as preparing and distributing meeting agendas and minutes, and maintaining records.

In the not-for-profit sector, the board secretary may also be responsible for ensuring the preparation and adoption of a media policy and serves as spokesperson for the organisation as appropriate, promoting the organisation in the community as opportunities arise.

Board documents

There are a number of key documents relevant to boards. These relate to:

- induction
- insurance
- finance
- annual reporting.

Induction documents

Most boards provide new members with a governance handbook that includes information about the organisation, board and board members:⁷

- organisation—strategic plans and structure, core operations, policies, role of management and key stakeholders, legislation, reporting requirements and compliance obligations
- board—role of the board, board structure, code of conduct, board rules and procedures, legislative and/or compliance requirements, board policy, minutes from recent board meetings and an annual calendar of activities
- board members—roles and responsibilities including financial and legal obligations.

⁷ Sourced from Public Sector Commission, Western Australia
Resources, links and tools for CEOs, board and committee members, board and committee chairpersons, Ministers and their staff, and staff supporting boards and committees, November 2009 www.publicsector.wa.gov.au/boardsandcommittees/Pages/ResLinksTools.aspx



Insurance documents

Some common insurance policies include:

- public liability insurance (to protect against negligence claims against the organisation or company)
- directors' and officers' (D&O) liability insurance (to protect individuals against negligence claims).

The higher the risk, the more insurance the board and its members need. You may need to consult a broker to determine if any other types of insurance are required for your particular role. The board should have details available of any insurance it holds for its board members, how much coverage is provided and for how long they will be covered. An insurance policy's Certificate of Currency and policy document will provide information about what is covered and for how long.

Financial papers

Financial accountability requires that all transactions are recorded, all payments authorised and that the board does not authorise the expenditure of more money than it can afford.

The board's financial documents should include a statement of the budgetary position, and allow members to have information available about assets and liabilities. Board members should become familiar with all financial documents as financial accountability is one of the board's most important areas of supervision. Board members are often expected to review and approve financial

papers at regular intervals. They may also be involved in preparing documents in readiness for external auditing.

Annual report

The annual report outlines the activities that have taken place during the previous year and provides an outlook for the future. An annual report can be important because it demonstrates the board's fulfilment of its duty to be accountable and transparent. It can also show the efficiency and effectiveness of the board through a description of the year's achievements.

Annual reports vary greatly depending on the style and the responsibilities of particular boards. They may be freely available to the public or produced only for internal and government reporting purposes.



Resources

How boards work

Links to some of the available resources available are provided below:

- The Western Australian Public Sector Commission publishes a guide to assist members of Western Australian Government board members in understanding their obligations and the scope of the task ahead:

Good governance for WA boards and committees

See: www.publicsector.wa.gov.au/public-administration/good-governance-wa-boards-and-committees

The website provides general information about the responsibility for ensuring good governance of a public sector body, types of boards and committees, and links to two publications: 'Board essentials' and 'Conduct guide for public sector boards and committees'.

The link to the 'Board essentials' publication is here:

www.publicsector.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/board_essentials.pdf

The link to the 'Conduct guide for public sector boards and committees' publication is here:

www.publicsector.wa.gov.au/document/conduct-guide-public-sector-boards-and-committees

- The Governance Institute of Australia is an independent professional association that focuses on the practice of governance. It provides education and support for practising chartered secretaries, governance advisers and risk managers.

A link to the institute's 'Good Governance Guide—Board structure' for not-for-profit organisations is here:

www.governanceinstitute.com.au/media/365695/ggg_board-structure.pdf





Lily Chen is Vice President of the Migration Institute of Australia, President of the WA Branch of the Migration Institute of Australia, external

member of the Heirisson Island Sculpture Park Board and President of the Australian Chinese Women's Council. She is currently a councillor of the City of Perth.

She was a member of the Women's Advisory Council for four years and is a former President of the Australian Chinese Women's Federation.

Born in China, Lily studied a Bachelor and a Master's Degree in Russian language and literature and Bachelor of Law. She worked as a lecturer at Nanjing University and as a Russian language translator and interpreter before moving to Australia in 1995.

She then completed a law degree at the University of Western Australia and commenced her career as a solicitor before establishing her private practice. She is now director and principal solicitor of her own business, a law firm specialising in migration law, family law and property settlements.

Lily says she became interested in joining a board to help make a contribution, find learning opportunities and be an example for other women from CaLD backgrounds.

She considers her skill and experience in marketing and networking, a positive attitude and passion for things to be done and to assist wherever and whenever required as some of the key attributes that have made her a valuable board member.

Case study—Lily Chen

Lily notes the challenges to obtaining a board position:

“There can be personal barriers such as a lack of confidence to put your name forward and being isolated”, she says. “There can also be organisational barriers such as facing negative assumptions about the skills and abilities of people who speak English with a foreign accent.”

She says having a positive attitude, determination and a passion for making a contribution have helped overcome these challenges.

Once on a board, Lily found that the main challenge was underestimating her capacity to do things and handle issues. Having the confidence to take action and being a consistent member of a board were ways to address these difficulties.

She notes that the personal benefits of joining a board have included developing governance, management and public speaking skills.

Lily believes that having a different cultural background has advantages:

“Flexibility in problem solving, language skills and a willingness to acknowledge and learn in a culturally diverse environment are some of the benefits”, she says. “Cultural values such as respect for those who are more experienced and capable are also an advantage.”

Her final advice for anyone from a CaLD background considering a board position is simple:

“Be confident to stand up and be determined.”

Case study—Dr Asem Mousa

Dr Asem Mousa was born in Jordan to Palestinian parents. He arrived in Australia in 1997 as a skilled migrant. Asem is a board member of the Association of Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors (ASeTTS).

Asem completed a Masters of Business Administration (MBA) at Monash University and a Doctorate of Philosophy at the University of New South Wales. He is currently a business manager at a management consulting firm in Perth.

Asem has long been involved in community work and had worked with ASeTTS for two years. The association was a key supporter of his efforts to establish a community organisation dedicated to supporting Palestinian refugees who had arrived in Western Australia from Iraq and Syria. He became chair of United Voices, the client reference group representing ASeTTS and was invited to join the ASeTTS board. He recognised that this would be an opportunity to represent the needs of ASeTTS' client base at a board level and accepted the invitation.

He says his biggest challenge was uncertainty about the role of a board member and the work and responsibilities it involves. Support from the ASeTTS team helped with his decision. An informal discussion was held with the chairperson before the first meeting and was a helpful unofficial induction to the role.

“Team support was critical for me to be able to make a contribution. Informal ‘chats’ with the Chair and other board members helped break the ice.”

He notes the concerns some people may feel about how the difference in language and accent can be a barrier. However, Asem says

that in his experience it is not as big a hurdle as one might think:

“In my experience, Australians are welcoming and willing to listen”, he says.

Key skills Asem believes have been of value to the board include his community work and project management skills.

He also believes that having an understanding of the culture and history of a significant proportion of ASeTTS' clients has helped ensure that their issues are included in board discussions.

For Asem, the benefits of being a board member have included a better understanding of the organisation's mission, objectives and structure, being involved in setting the direction for the organisation and a broader understanding of the not-for-profit sector.

Asem emphasised that being from a CaLD background is an advantage rather than a burden:

“We come with a unique experience and bring new perspectives. Being a refugee or a migrant is just one dimension of who we are.”

He emphasises the value that people can add regardless of their background and circumstances:

“I have met many asylum seekers who were capable and able to establish themselves as successful business people and professionals once they were able to find their feet and overcome their fear.”





Section 3—Assessing your board readiness

Do you have relevant attributes and skills?

While boards and committees are different and have specific membership requirements, there are some common attributes and skills needed to be an effective member of any board or committee.

Consider whether you're ready to serve on a board or committee by asking yourself the following questions.

Am I—

- ▣ a team player
- ▣ committed to the board and its mission
- ▣ confident of my knowledge and skills
- ▣ positive and proactive
- ▣ flexible and adaptable
- ▣ creative and innovative
- ▣ of strong moral and ethical character?

Do I have—

- ▣ the skills to communicate well with a diverse range of people including stakeholders, other board members and directors
- ▣ the capacity to analyse, evaluate and solve problems and apply strong critical reasoning
- ▣ the ability to juggle professional and personal life, meet deadlines and work under pressure
- ▣ board or leadership experience in a relevant sector or industry
- ▣ relevant expertise specific to the board (such as financial management or legal skills)?



The following link may be helpful if you would like a more in-depth assessment of your leadership skills and board strengths.

- ▣ How Good Are Your Leadership Skills? www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_50.htm

Checklist for personal and professional development

The following checklists will help assess your board readiness. You do not have to tick all the boxes. Only tick the ones you need to focus on to begin your journey.

A. Your education

Do you need to upgrade your formal education to be attractive to a board? If no, go to B.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, which of the following options could you commit to?		
Accounting	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Legal	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Financial analysis	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Company Directors course (see Australian Institute of Company Directors' website)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Western Australian Council of Social Services (WACOSS) board training	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Other board training	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Other education or training	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

Note: subjects such as accounting, law and financial analysis can be studied at various levels, from certificate level to degree and beyond.

B. Your professional development

Are there areas of knowledge and skills that you need to upgrade to be attractive to a board? If no, go to C.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, which of the following areas of knowledge and skills do you need to upgrade?		
Leadership and management skills	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Financial literacy, such as how to understand a budget, cash flow, profit and loss	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Working with teams and building teams	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Industrial relations and human resource management	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Organisational dynamics	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Understanding cultural difference and diversity	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Risk analysis	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Ethics in business	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Investment decisions	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Shareholder rights and responsibilities	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Strategic planning	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Accountability	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Public speaking	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Time management	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

Note: it is not necessary to be knowledgeable and skilled in all of these areas. Select the ones that you feel would increase your appeal as a board member. Aim to develop a mix of skills.



C. Your work experience

Have you had limited work experience in management roles, in a limited number of industries? If no, go to D.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
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If yes, which of the following career strategies would help expand your experience?

Find a mentor who could advise you on career opportunities	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Move 'sideways' to a different industry or sector	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Take on a specific project that will expand your skills and experience	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Be seconded to a role that will expand your skills and experience	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Take on a role on a committee with a challenging task	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Be promoted to a position with more management responsibilities	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Another strategy to expand your work experience (please specify)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

Note: choose one or two strategies that you feel would be most effective for you. You may like to talk to colleagues or friends to explore other opportunities to increase your management experience.

D. Your networks

Having identified the sector in which you aspire to have a board role, do you need to expand your networks and contacts in that sector? If no, go to E.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
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If yes, which of the following strategies would assist you?

Join an industry or professional association and attend functions	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Join an organisation that aims to increase awareness of board issues, such as the Australian Institute of Company Directors or Institute of Community Directors Australia	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Subscribe to the Western Australian Council of Social Services (WACOSS) newsletter for information on issues and events in the not-for-profit sector	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Another strategy (please specify)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

Note: you may wish to scan the internet or talk to colleagues and friends to identify relevant networks and contacts.

E. Your personal development

Are there areas of personal development that you need to work on so that you could better manage the demands of being a board member?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Health and fitness	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Supportive family and friends	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Managing your emotions	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Managing difficult people	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Making time for yourself	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Other issues (please specify)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

Note: identifying the areas in which you can develop your knowledge and skills is the first step. Use the checklist on the next page to develop a plan for some specific actions to take.



F. To do list

	Action areas	Steps you plan to take	Review date	Progress
Your education				
Your professional development				
Your work experience				
Your networks				
Your personal development				

Note: Use this 'To do' list to plan some specific actions you can take to build your knowledge and skills. Review the list regularly and update your progress. You may wish to go back to the checklists to identify new areas for development.



Fadzi Whande is a board member of Mirrabooka Senior High School and the Carers Advisory Council and is on the Perth International

Women's Day Committee. She was recently appointed as part of the Australian National Committee delegation to the 59th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations held in New York.

Born in Zimbabwe and migrating to Australia in 2006, Fadzi is fluent in English and Shona, one of the local dialects of Zimbabwe.

Fadzi's interest to serve was stimulated by a desire to ensure that the needs of her community were not forgotten and to highlight the difficulties she faced as a single mother in creating a work/life balance. She wanted to ensure that the voices of those in a similar situation were heard loudly and clearly.

The challenge for her, she says, was getting on a board. Registering for board membership did not produce results and she found resilience and strength to persevere through her faith.

"There is a biblical story that talks about a persistent woman who kept going back to ask this unrelenting judge for something she needed", she said. "Because of her pestering persistence, the judge ended up granting her request. So I just kept telling myself to keep knocking on the doors because, at some stage, someone would get tired of all the knocking and open the door."

Fadzi notes that the benefits of being a board member have included being provided with professional development opportunities,

Case study—Fadzi Whande

and exposure to governance principles and the decision-making process. She adds that networking has contributed to her knowledge and opened doors to further opportunities.

She says her public speaking skills and confidence have allowed her to expand her network and use these networking opportunities to maximum advantage.

Fadzi acknowledges that her fellow board members have been appreciative of what she can bring and the mutual feeling of respect and reciprocal learning have provided her with positive experiences and the opportunity to learn and grow as an individual.

Her cultural background has been an advantage on boards seeking to better engage with CaLD communities. She concedes that the personal experiences, challenges and barriers she has faced, coupled with her education and training, have been a benefit to the performance of the boards she has been a part of and says that she has been able to highlight the needs of CaLD communities as a focus of board discussions.

Fadzi encourages people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to become board members, particularly those who may be considering a board position but may lack the confidence to apply or are afraid of being rejected:

"Answers are available; and often times they will come on their own if one brings the will and desire to serve", she says. "More and more boards are seeing the need to be more inclusive. I think people like me from CaLD backgrounds and who have ethnic names are there to show others that it is possible."



Section 4—How to make it happen

Building your profile

If you are serious about being a leader, create opportunities where possible and make the most of every opportunity that comes your way. You can consider taking the following strategies:

- promote your successes
- build your reputation
- develop your networks
- create an online profile
- direct your career
- complete accredited board training
- find a mentor and/or sponsor.

Promote your successes

Communicate your successes and the contributions you have made in your employment and board roles to people who make decisions about board appointments. This will help you be noticed. Emphasise strengths you have that are in high demand and short supply. Draw attention to these in your curriculum vitae (CV).

Build your reputation

Your reputation is a vital asset. Build your reputation by delivering beyond expectation, being professional at all times and acting with integrity. Be selective about the roles you accept.

Peer support is a good indication that you have earned a strong reputation. Holding a position as chairperson or deputy chairperson

and being re-appointed to positions are examples of this. Include these in your CV.

Ask yourself what sets you apart from your peers and other people seeking board positions. This will give you a clearer understanding of what you have to offer. Once you are clear about this message, keep it consistent throughout your CV, cover letter, online and personal networks. This is sometimes referred to as your ‘personal brand’.

Demonstrating that you understand ethical issues will be a benefit. A clear understanding of the ethical standards required by board members will help you to recognise when potential conflicts of interest or other sensitive issues arise. Board members must also be clear about the boundaries between the strategic responsibilities of the board and the operational responsibilities of the staff and/or volunteers.

Develop your networks

Networks are the connections and relationships you have formed with people in your communities or profession. Networking is about both giving and receiving information and assistance. It provides access to useful contacts, perspectives and opportunities.

Benefits of networking include:

- increasing the number of opportunities that you hear about
- keeping up-to-date with issues affecting the sector in which you operate or are interested



- ▣ access to those who make decisions or have an influence over board appointments in the sector that interests you
- ▣ benefit from the support and advice of others
- ▣ raising your profile.

Ways to develop your networks include:

- ▣ attending training courses, conferences and other events in your field
- ▣ registering on databases such as the Department of the Premier and Cabinet's Interested Persons Register
- ▣ joining organisations such as the:
 - Australian Institute of Company Directors www.companydirectors.com.au
 - Business and Professional Women's Association www.bpw.com.au
 - Institute of Community Directors Australia <https://www.communitydirectors.com.au>
 - Lions Club in WA <http://lionsclubs.org.au/contact/wa/>
 - Rotary Clubs in WA www.clubsofaustralia.com.au/Rotary/Clubs-in-Western-Australia.html
 - Toastmasters WA <http://toastmasterswa.net>
 - Volunteering WA <http://volunteeringwa.org.au>

Create an online profile

It is now common practice to search the internet for information about a candidate for any position including a board position. Anyone considering you for a board position may search for information about you on the internet.


Information about you can be stored on a variety of sites. Social networking sites, for example, are used for professional networking and information sharing.

LinkedIn is an online social networking site. Unlike Facebook or Twitter, LinkedIn is used for professional networking. Business professionals create profiles and connect with colleagues. LinkedIn can be a powerful networking tool, allowing users to build their business networks and stay in touch with professional contacts.

Other sites can contain information about you that does not enhance your personal brand or reputation.

Suggestions for your social media networking profile include:

- ▣ creating a LinkedIn profile including your education history, work experience, professional affiliations, a picture and current contact information.
- ▣ strengthening your online profile by contacting people you know in professional contexts such as current and former bosses, co-workers, clients and classmates, along with relevant friends and relatives
- ▣ joining the Facebook pages of relevant groups to which you belong (consider alumni groups and professional societies)
- ▣ requesting former bosses to write a recommendation highlighting key skills and including specific examples of your successes

- 
- providing information about your board aspirations by sending short messages to selected members of your LinkedIn network; ask them to contact you with any board opportunities in their organisations
 - helping members of your network when you can by answering questions, providing introductions and writing recommendations
 - specifying appropriate privacy settings.

Complete accredited board training

A good way to improve your understanding of the responsibilities of board members and the functions of a board is to complete some accredited board training (also known as governance training). Board training is preferred but, of course, is not compulsory, however, it will demonstrate to a board that you are serious about quality governance. There are a range of providers available, for example, the Australian Institute of Company Directors and Western Australian Council of Social Services (WACOSS).

Direct your career

Work experience can be a key consideration in a board's selection decision. For example:

- the size and complexity of the organisations with which you have been involved affects how your board capability is perceived—you are more likely to be perceived as suitable for leadership roles in similarly sized organisations
- a business background is usually necessary for positions on business boards and experience in the business sector is often sought after in other sectors
- law and accountancy are valuable board skills since an understanding of regulatory compliance and financial literacy are both important.

Your job can provide an avenue to increase your board readiness. For example:

- include an objective of taking on leadership and board roles in your performance development plan as a way of informing management of your goals and seeking their support
- apply for relevant training courses
- seek out challenging projects that will stretch your abilities, allow you to learn, and attract the attention of senior managers and board members.



Profile building checklist

<p>Do you have a clear idea of the public image you wish to project to complement your aspirations as a board member? If not, think about the types of photographs and information, both professional and personal, that would reinforce your profile.</p>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Are your presentation, business card design and speaking style consistent with the profile you wish to promote?</p>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Use reliable search engines to find out what is publically available about you. Does it complement the board member image you wish to project? If not, seek advice on what you can change or ameliorate.</p>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>If you have a Facebook, Twitter, or other social networking account, are the security settings appropriate to protect your privacy? If not, adjust accordingly.</p>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Would a LinkedIn account be useful to build your professional profile? If you have an account, review what is publically available to make sure that it is consistent with your desired public image.</p>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Are you always careful with any communications (including email, tweets and internet forums) to use appropriate language and respectful opinions? If not, remember that a person making a recommendation for a board position may see or hear about this.</p>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

Find a mentor and/or sponsor

Mentors

A mentor is an experienced person who acts as your role model and guide and who assists you in carrying out your role effectively. Mentors can be particularly helpful when it comes to managing more complex challenges.


A mentor:

- ▣ acts as a sounding board to test your ideas
- ▣ helps you to identify and maximise your strengths and aptitudes for a board role

- ▣ discusses your performance and helps you address areas where you require development.

It is important that a mentor:

- ▣ has an appropriate level of skill and experience
- ▣ is committed to your development
- ▣ is trustworthy—you need to have confidence in your mentor’s discretion
- ▣ has sufficient time available for your requirements.



When choosing a mentor, consider people who have served on similar boards as they are likely to understand challenges you may face. If a suitable person cannot easily be identified in your area, you could consider a telephone or electronic mentoring relationship.

Mentoring schemes operate through a number of organisations, such as:

- Australian Institute of Company Directors
www.companydirectors.com.au/Director-Resource-Centre/Governance-and-Director-Issues/Board-Diversity/Mentoring-Programs
- Business and Professional Women's Association
www.bpw.com.au/what-we-do/programs/mentoring/
- Women on Boards
www.womenonboards.org.au/professional-development/mymentor/
- Women and Leadership Australia
<http://wla.com.au>

Many organisations have set up formal or structured mentoring programs. Your organisation may have a mentoring program that you could consider joining. Once you are on a board, there may be a formal mentoring system in place for your board. If not, search for a person or people who could serve in this capacity.

Sponsors

A sponsor is different from a mentor. A sponsor can proactively help you to advance your career. A sponsor is an experienced person who may connect you to senior leaders within or external to the organisation, or advocate on your behalf.

The sponsor can promote your visibility, give advice on career moves and actively help you to find career opportunities either within or outside your organisation. At different stages of your board career you may benefit from either a mentor or a sponsor, or perhaps both.

Some organisations may include sponsorship as part of their human resources capability development or career progression strategy. As part of your personal development plan you may wish to discuss this further with your manager.

Be persistent

There is strong competition for board roles. The first board role is often the hardest to get, but as your experience and reputation grow, more opportunities are likely to come your way. To succeed, you need to be persistent. If you do not have immediate success, do not take it personally—keep developing your talents and building your experience.



Case study—Rasa Subramaniam

Rasa Subramaniam is currently a board member of the Health Consumers Council and WA State Trauma Education Committee. Previous board

memberships include the Governing Council of Challenger TAFE, the Safety and Quality Health Care Council, KULCHA, Celebrate WA, and the Medical Radiation Technologist Registration Board. He was previously a Councillor for the City of Melville. He was a member of the Ministerial Advisory council from 1992 to 1994 under Hon Judith Watson and Hon Graham Kierath. Rasa is currently Senior Medical Imaging Technologist at Fremantle Hospital.

A member of the Institute of Radiography, Rasa was born in Malaysia to Sri Lankan parents. Rasa obtained qualifications in India and Australia. He came to Australia in 1968 and remained following completion of his university studies. His first language is Tamil and he also speaks Malay.

He became attracted to the idea of joining a board from his interest in diversity and health issues and in how policy can impact on delivery of best practice in organisations.

His first board opportunity arose from his involvement in multicultural interests when he was invited by the Office of Multicultural Interests to join the board of the WA Week Council (now Celebrate WA). Rasa says that his profile gained from working in the field of multicultural policy was an asset in obtaining his first board position and that his knowledge of contemporary issues, communication skills and networking led the way to future positions.

Rasa says that the challenges he has experienced as a board member have been in promoting change in organisations:

“Organisations consider boards as part of their structure and may consider them to be intrusive. They would like to carry on doing what they want—business as usual”, he says. “Suggesting changes is not always welcome.”

He says that a key to addressing this is to understand the culture of the organisation, to listen to the issues that management and staff may have, and helping to problem-solve.

“Change is not embraced quickly”, he observes. “Patience and communication is the key.”

Rasa says that board membership has provided him with insights into board duties and responsibilities and what it means to be an effective organisation. He believes his experience as a local government councillor, his understanding of multicultural issues, and involvement with his professional association have assisted him in his board roles.

Experience and training undertaken in his local government position also provided him with knowledge regarding record keeping, debating and media liaison.

Rasa advises potential board members to reflect on their motivations before seeking a board position:

“It is important to be honest and have a good knowledge of the organisation that you want to serve”, he says. “It is vital that your primary motivation is not to gain personal advantage or gain but to contribute to the realisation of the organisation and its mandate.”



Case study—Maria Saraceni

Maria Saraceni has held many board and committee positions. Born in Australia to Italian born parents, she credits the different experiences and understandings that come with her cultural background as being a valuable asset to her board appointments.

Maria is currently Director of the board of management of the Industrial Foundation for Accident Prevention, member of the Appeal Costs Board (WA Statutory Board), Director of Lost and Found Opera Company Inc and an Adjunct Professor at Murdoch University School of Law.

She has been Chairperson of the Women's Advisory Council, member of SBS Community Advisory Council, member of the management committee of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia Inc (FECCA), President of the Ethnic Communities Council of WA, committee member of the WA chapter of Australian Human Resources Institute, President of the Law Society of Western Australia and Director of the Law Council of Australia. In 2012, she was appointed a People of Australia Ambassador by the Commonwealth Minister for Multicultural Affairs.

A barrister specialising in the areas of workplace relations/employment law and occupational health and safety, Maria completed a number of qualifications in law and education at the University of Western Australia. Before becoming a lawyer, she was a teacher in the Western Australian education system.

Maria says she was interested in joining a board to actively participate in and contribute

to organisations to which she was committed and whose values corresponded with her own.

She recalls challenges gaining appointment to a board:

“Having the confidence to apply, inadequate networks to guide me in my decision-making were some of my early challenges”, Maria says. “Initially, I had too low a profile and I was therefore an ‘unknown’ quantity.”

She says that becoming President of the Law Society of WA gave her profile a large ‘boost’ and it became easier thereafter.

She highlights the importance of researching the requirements of board or committee membership and undertaking due diligence before sitting on a board:

“It is important to understand the legal frameworks creating obligations and liabilities for directors of boards or persons on a committee of management”, she says. “Then you need to investigate what insurance arrangements are in place and whether they provide adequate protection for the individual director.”

Maria also stresses the importance of self-assessment:

“You need to be able to articulate what skills and relevant background knowledge you would bring to a particular board. What is your brand? How can you value-add to the board composition?”

“Having a mentor or supporter will also prove invaluable.”



She notes that she has experienced challenges as a board member:

“After the initial appointment, having the confidence to speak up and express my opinion was a challenge”, she says. “Some board members can be resistant to change and this can also be a challenge.”

Maria says that having a mentor to whom she could talk openly about issues was also helpful.

Benefits she has gained as a board member have included developing a greater depth of understanding of various organisations and their areas of influence, gaining an understanding of ‘due diligence’ as it applies in a practical sense to an organisation, improved team building skills, experience in negotiating and dealing with State and Commonwealth Government agencies and gaining a diversity of acquaintances.

She believes that her cultural background has helped her bring a different set of understandings to the boards in which she has been involved and ensure that, in their decision making they do not forget the particular needs of CaLD persons, and women in particular.

Maria considers that specific interests that have made her a valuable board member include being a legal practitioner, having a love of people and different cultures and having wide and eclectic interests that have allowed for a more rounded person.

How to prepare a CV for a board position

A curriculum vitae (CV) is required as a part of the appointing agency selection process to assess your experience and achievements. A governance CV is a marketing document above all else, and should be tailored to the requirements of the board and its industry.

You need a well-thought out and constructed governance CV to make sure it gives you the best chance to be considered for a board role. It should be more focused, concise and at a more strategic level than a standard resume or management CV.


Your board CV should be strongly targeted to highlight your leadership and/or management skills, knowledge of, networks in and commitment to the community or industry in which the board is involved, and your related work experiences and achievements. It should ideally be no longer than two to three pages.

Research the organisation, and its industry, to show your expertise in those areas.

What you need to include

Your board CV should include:

- personal information such as contact details. It is optional to include date of birth, residency status and languages
- professional memberships, awards or recognition
- a statement of your personal strengths (what you can offer to the board)
- a summary of your board experience

- 
- board appointments with details of role held and dates in reverse chronological order (most recent first)
 - employment history, including a short description of the roles, responsibilities and achievements for each position, and dates in reverse chronological order
 - community and volunteer service
 - educational qualifications and accreditations (name of institution and dates)
 - professional training and development (name of institution and dates)
 - optional information (LinkedIn address, awards received, interests, hobbies and projects undertaken).

Tips for a great board CV

- Include context where relevant—include your achievements, the size of your organisation, if it is an international or national company, the scale of projects for which you have been responsible, risks involved, the size of the company's workforce, its budget, turnover, savings achieved, change management involved and timelines met.
- Customise your CV—highlight the information most relevant to the role that you are seeking. If you have worked in a profession different from the board or have expertise in other areas such as human resources, marketing, information technology, risk, or change management, emphasise your general management experience while also

pointing out the added value you can bring from your specialty.

- Be brief—include only the information that best describes your skills, experience and achievements that are of relevance in a governance role.
- Be honest but not unnecessarily modest—your CV should be an accurate reflection of your skills and experience. Always be truthful. Do not exaggerate. Clearly describe your leadership and influence in a particular role, project or team. Use action verbs such as 'I created' or 'I coordinated'.
- Reflect your professionalism, not your personality—a CV is a professional document designed to summarise and reflect your professional skills, experience and attributes. It is not an opportunity to display your personality or character traits. Keep it simple, straightforward and professional. This includes formatting. Use an easy-to-read font like Arial 12 point. Carefully check spelling and grammar, and do not use coloured paper or clip art.



Board CV template—not-for-profit sector

Curriculum vitae of	Your name
Personal details	Name Addresses (physical and/or postal) Telephone number/s Email
Memberships	Include current community and professional memberships. Add previous memberships if relevant to the position.
Summary of what you can offer to the board.	Use short, clear sentences to describe what you offer to the position. Summarise the qualities and experience that you believe will make you a valuable member of the board.
Governance experience	Governance experience in the community sector
Current directorships	List position and start date (month and year) in reverse chronological order, the most recent first. Indicate if you are chair or a member of a committee.
Previous directorships	Use the same format, but include relevant community directorships.
Aspiring board member	If you have not yet been a director on a community sector board, list your experience on either private or public sector boards. You can also include other governance experience, such as working on committees and reporting to a board.
Employment history	Same as above unless relevant to the board position you are seeking. For each position, include a brief sentence about your principal responsibilities in the position, your achievements, emphasising the relevant information.
Community and voluntary service	List all current community and volunteer service, and past service if relevant.
Qualifications	List your qualifications, year completed and institutions from which they were obtained. You may choose to highlight relevant aspects of a course (for example, BA, including a unit in governance in the not-for-profit sector).
Optional	Other relevant information, such as interests, hobbies and projects undertaken.

Board CV template—public sector

Curriculum vitae of	Your name
Personal details	Name Addresses (physical and/or postal) Telephone number/s Email
Memberships	Include current professional memberships. Add previous memberships if relevant to the position.
Summary of what you can offer to the board	Use short, clear sentences to describe what you offer to the position. Summarise the qualities and experience that you believe will make you a valuable member of the board.
Governance experience	Governance experience in government.
Current directorships	List position and start date (month and year) in reverse chronological order, the most recent first. Indicate if you are chair or a member of a committee.
Previous directorships	Use the same format as above, but include relevant public sector directorships only for the last 10 years.
Aspiring board member	If you have not yet been a director on a government board, list your experience on either not-for-profit or private sector boards. You can also include other governance experience, such as working on committees and reporting to a board.
Employment history	For each position, include a brief sentence about your principal responsibilities and your achievements, emphasising the relevant information.
Community and voluntary service	If relevant
Qualifications	List your qualifications, year completed, and institutions from which they were obtained. You may choose to highlight relevant aspects of a course (for example, Certificate IV, Public Policy, including a unit in adding value to the public sector).
Optional	Other relevant information, such as interests, hobbies and projects undertaken.



Board CV template—private sector

Curriculum vitae of	Your name
Personal details	Name Addresses (physical and/or postal) Telephone number/s Email
Memberships	Include current business and professional memberships. Add previous memberships if relevant to the position.
Summary of what you can offer to the board	Use short, clear sentences to describe what you offer to the position. Summarise the qualities and experience that make you a great fit for the board.
Governance experience	Governance experience in business.
Current directorships	List position and start date (month and year) in reverse chronological order, the most recent first. Indicate if you are chair or a member of a committee.
Previous directorships	Use the same format, but include relevant business directorships.
Aspiring board member	If you have not yet been a director on a business board, list your experience on not-for-profit or public sector boards. You can also include other governance experience, such as working on committees and reporting to a board.
Employment history	For each position, include a brief sentence about your principal responsibilities and your achievements, emphasising the relevant information.
Community and voluntary service	If relevant
Qualifications	List your qualifications, year completed, and institutions from which they were obtained. You may choose to highlight relevant aspects of a course (for example, BSc, including a unit in renewable energy generation).
Optional	Other relevant information, such as interests, hobbies and projects undertaken.

Case study—Dr Aesen Thambiran

Dr Aesen Thambiran is a general practitioner with an interest in refugee health and is currently on the board of Hepatitis WA. Born in South Africa of Indian descent, he arrived in Australia in 1977. While his first language is English, he grew up in a household where Tamil and Zulu were also spoken.

Aesen became attracted to board membership through a professional interest in the treatment of viral hepatitis infection:

“I wanted to make a contribution to the community beyond my paid employment, specifically to assist people living with hepatitis B and C access treatment”, he says. “Therapies for these infections have improved dramatically over the last few years. Hepatitis C is now a potentially curable infection. People living with these conditions are often from marginalised groups in our society including from CaLD communities. I also have an interest in health administration and governance. So joining a board of an NGO with a health focus seemed like an ideal opportunity.”

Aesen says that he found out about the board opportunity through an email communication. While he did not have any difficulty gaining the appointment, he says that understanding the roles and responsibilities of a director was daunting at first—particularly those related to understanding financial reporting.

Hepatitis WA organised training for board members on corporate governance and understanding financial reports. The training was delivered by the Western Australian Council of Social Services (WACOSS) and Aesen says that this was invaluable.

Aesen says that he has benefited from his experience on the board of Hepatitis WA in a number of ways:

“I have gained a better understanding of board director responsibilities and the operation of an NGO. Being a member of the board requires you to analyse and interpret reports and think about the strategic direction of the organisation. It also requires good communication skills to discuss and debate issues at board meetings. I think my skills in these areas have improved since joining the board.”

Aesen notes that being a board member also requires teamwork and he has enjoyed the spirit of collaboration and sense of common purpose he has experienced on the board:

“The board of Hepatitis WA are a great team”, he says. “All the members are passionate about reducing the transmission of viral hepatitis and in improving health outcomes for people living with hepatitis B and C in WA. It is very rewarding to be part of this team!”

He believes his cultural background has been an asset to the board, bringing an alternative view of the issues. As a doctor who works with people from refugee backgrounds on a daily basis, he also believes he is in a position to advocate for improving access to treatment for viral hepatitis.

“Health, wellbeing and recovery are all viewed through our personal cultural lens”, he says. “Western explanatory models of health tend to be very biomechanical. Whereas non-western explanatory models, in my experience, are more holistic and include spiritual beliefs. There are also important cultural issues around status and shame



when it comes to viral hepatitis infection in some CaLD communities and this can be a barrier to accessing health care. I believe that I bring this viewpoint to the board of Hepatitis WA.”

Invited to offer advice to a person from a culturally diverse background considering joining a board, Aesen says:

“Go for it! It is a little bit daunting to start with but there are plenty of training opportunities and the rewards are immeasurable. Being a board member does require a lot of reading of reports and documents, so you do need to be fairly proficient in English.

“As the boards of Australia become more culturally diverse I hope that organisations and companies will become more culturally competent in service delivery and the barriers that people from CaLD backgrounds experience will fade. For me, being a member of an NGO board is also a great way to give back to the Australian community which has provided me with so much.”

Planning your board career

There are two main ways to plan your board career:

- a stepping stone approach—progressing from board roles in smaller or less complex organisations to roles in larger or more complex organisations
- developing your executive experience—building a successful professional career that can be applied to board roles.

You can follow either or both depending on your circumstances.

Stepping-stone approach

If you are looking for your first board role, target ‘entry-level’ roles—for example, boards attached to small organisations that operate at a local or regional level, or a not-for-profit organisation.

Taking a leadership role in your professional association or a role on the registration/disciplinary bodies for your profession (such as the Australian Society of Social Workers) is another way to get onto boards. These boards can serve as an entry point. For example, an accountant with little or no board experience may be able to serve on the Institute of Public Accountants.

Once you have held board or committee roles you can use this experience to target the boards of larger or more complex organisations.

Executive experience approach

Success in the following areas will give you useful expertise to apply as a board director:

- proven experience and successes in chief executive or second-tier management roles
- work experience in areas where you have financial management responsibilities for the organisation.

Finding board opportunities

There are a number of ways to become involved in boards. Knowledge about positions becomes available through:

- advertisement
- organisations' Annual General Meetings
- word of mouth
- networks
- direct appointment.

You may need to use either a direct or indirect approach to show your interest.

Direct (or elected) approach

The direct approach involves either:

- nominating yourself for election as a board member
- replying to a publicly advertised position
- contacting a board or organisation directly to ask for a role.

Indirect approach

The indirect approach includes:

- introducing yourself to colleagues as a skilled director who is interested in board roles (this approach is only recommended if you have built a solid reputation as a person with sound qualifications and experience)
- submitting your CV to databases such as the Interested Persons Register in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet—see: www.dpc.wa.gov.au/Consultation/Pages/GovernmentBoardsandCommittees.aspx
- connecting with relevant individuals and groups through social networking sites.

In some cases, current members nominate future board members. They identify trusted and respected associates from within their networks. They may also use board databases. Being nominated is therefore very dependent on your reputation and networks.





Where to look?

There are a number of sites that provide information about board vacancies.

Not-for-profit sector

The Institute of Community Directors Australia provides a board position matching service.

See: www.communitydirectors.com.au/

Public sector

The Western Australian Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC) has a list of State Government boards.

See: www.dpc.wa.gov.au/BoardsDocuments/Boards.pdf

You can register your interest on the Interested Persons Register.

See: <https://registry.bigredsky.com/page.php?pageID=160&windowUID=0&AdvertID=108583>

Private sector

The Australian Institute of Company Directors lists vacancies on its website.

See: www.companydirectors.com.au/In-My-State/WA

Choosing a board

It is important to gather important business information about a company or organisation whose board you are interested in joining. This process is called due diligence.

It means examining the current and potential health of the organisation. This will help identify whether the board is likely to succeed or if there are any potential threats such as financial or legal issues that could impact on the board. Information can be sourced by asking questions of office holders and researching documentation including annual reports, budgets, strategic plans and media reports.

Once you are satisfied that you have sufficient information about the board you can make an informed decision as to whether you wish to join the board and assume the responsibilities of a board member.

Some questions to ask are below.


Questions about the board:

How much time is required of a board member?

Find out how often the board meets, where it meets and how long the meetings normally last. When assessing how much time a board role is likely to demand, keep in mind that you will also need to read the meeting papers before meetings and that you may be required to attend other functions and carry out other tasks between meetings.

What can I contribute to this board and organisation?

Ask what skills or experience you can offer and what new skills you will have the opportunity to develop. Knowing the board's needs and expectations will help you to assess whether you can capably fulfil the role asked of you. It



is also important to find out what new skills and experiences you can expect to gain by serving on this particular board. It can also be helpful to ask why a board vacancy exists.

Why does the board want my involvement?

If you were approached to become a board member, it can be useful to ask why. The response may also help to confirm your strengths and talents. However, if a response is superficial (for example, only that your name was mentioned without an explanation of what knowledge or skills you might bring to the board), it may indicate that the board is not careful when thinking about its composition and future direction.

What payments are provided?

Board remuneration varies widely across sectors and organisations. It can range from unpaid volunteer work where out-of-pocket expenses (such as travel) are covered, to substantial payments (for some large companies). It is best to check with each individual board about these arrangements.

Who else is on the board? What are their backgrounds?

A properly functioning board requires a good mix of skills and experiences. Consider how you will add value to the group. Check the credentials of the other board members. Avoid boards with a lot of conflict.

What are the organisation's roles, mission and direction?

It is important to have a good understanding of what the board's organisation does, why it does it and what it plans to do in the future. This will help you decide if it is the right board for you and what contribution you can make to achieving the mission. Clear and realistic goals are important.

What legislation does the board need to adhere to?

Find out what legislation governs the board and the obligations. There may be Commonwealth and/or State legislation to consider.

At what stage is the board?

A recently formed board may be more time-consuming and challenging than one that has been operating for some time. There may be policies to write and strategies to develop. An established board that is refocusing or restructuring can also be challenging.

Does the board review its performance?

Some boards may have key performance indicators that are reviewed regularly to measure progress. Find out what these are and how often reviews are conducted and by whom. This can indicate the board's priorities and true achievements.

What will my responsibilities be? Is there a role description for board members?

Ask if there is a detailed role description that explains a board member's role and tasks. If there isn't one, ask a current member to describe what they do during an average year.

Can I review board documents such as minutes?

If possible, ask to see the minutes from several years. Some experienced board members suggest going back as far as five years. Reading the minutes will give you an idea of the type of issues and decisions that the board has considered.

Has there been any litigation or complaints about the board?

Ask about the organisation's history. A poor public image may be considered either a reason not to choose a board or an opportunity to improve it.



Does the organisation have directors and officers liability insurance?

Directors and officers (D&O) liability insurance protects directors and officers (regardless of whether they are acting in a part-time, honorary or non-executive capacity) against claims arising from official actions and decisions. This includes civil damages and criminal or regulatory defence costs.

How long am I covered for under this insurance, and what is covered?

Details of insurance policies differ. Examine the Certificate of Currency to see when coverage expires and what events and sums are included. If you are not sure about any aspect of the insurance, it may be worthwhile seeking a professional opinion.

How financially viable is the organisation? Can I see the financial plan and budget?

Make sure you are fully informed about the existing financial position before you agree to take on these responsibilities. As a board member, you will oversee the organisation's finances. You may be personally liable if things go wrong.

What information or support will be available to assist me to do my job as a board member?

Find out what resources will be available to help you in your new role, such as:

- ▣ formal or informal mentoring programs or orientation sessions
- ▣ whether there is a staff member to provide administrative support, office equipment, stationery or reimbursement for costs
- ▣ what level of support will be given by the chairperson and other directors.

What is the reputation and track record of the organisation's head?

To govern effectively, the board needs to rely on an effective manager. It is a good idea to consider the capabilities of the chief executive/executive director.

Questions for you

Once you have adequate information from speaking to board members, either informally or as part of a formal interview process, you will be in a position to consider some questions for yourself.

Can I commit the time and energy the position deserves?

Make a realistic assessment of the time required for the board position and compare this with how much time you actually have to offer.

How long am I expected to stay on the board?

Find out if there is a set term for members and how long this is. Decide how much time you are willing to devote to a board over the longer term as well as on a daily basis. Consider whether you can commit to this time and if you would consider more than one term. Let the other board members know your intentions to avoid misunderstandings.

What value can I add to this board?

Decide whether you are a suitable candidate, taking into consideration why the board wants you and what skills you will be expected to contribute. An honest self-assessment may be of more value than an assessment others have made of your skills and aptitudes.

Is this a supportive board?

Does the board atmosphere lead you to feel that board members are open and accepting? If you have special circumstances, such as a physical disability, it is important that you feel comfortable with the organisation and its board. For example, are meetings held at accessible venues?

What do I want from this experience?

People join boards for many reasons. Understanding your own motivations will help you assess whether or not your expectations are likely to be fulfilled.

Can I hold this position with integrity?

Examine the functions and past decisions of the board to assess whether there are situations that could impact your business or personal interests, or those of your family and friends. Be sure you can manage any conflicts of interest.

When you leave a board

When you leave a board, consider the ways in which you could assist and promote an aspiring CaLD board member. From your networks, you may know a suitable candidate for the board. You could offer your services to the board to find a potential replacement, and approach the candidate to determine whether they would welcome you as a mentor or sponsor.



Dr Bernadette Wright is a board member of Arafmi, the Association of Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors (ASeTTS) and the

Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre (EDAC). She has previously been a board member of the Northern Suburbs Migrant Resource Centre (now the Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre) and Special Olympics Australia.

Born in Indonesia, Bernadette arrived in Australia in 1993. While English is her preferred language, she also speaks Bahasa Indonesian and French. She obtained her qualifications, including a degree in psychology and French, in New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Australia. Bernadette is currently a Clinical Psychologist with a special interest in transcultural mental health issues.

Bernadette says that she sought board membership to use her personal and professional experiences and knowledge to enhance service delivery to vulnerable groups so that it is culturally responsive to their needs.

She says that gaining a board membership initially was a challenge.

“It was like having to learn a new complicated game”, she says. ‘The process of needing to submit my CV, and to prove that I could be a worthy board member, and then to be ‘elected’ by the membership based on my personal and professional



Case study—Dr Bernadette Wright

history were all processes I had not anticipated. I often considered abandoning the idea as it seemed to be all too difficult at the outset to ‘get votes.’

She says that understanding why these requirements exist helped her overcome these difficulties.

Bernadette notes that one of the challenges in first joining a board was to understand board processes and ‘board speak’. She says that other board members were patient with her and took time to assist her.

“Comprehending governance and operational issues, and discerning where the respective boundaries lie were new areas of learning for me”, she says. “Initially, I was embarrassed about this as everyone else seemed so knowledgeable and confident about their role. However, the supportive environment generated by other board members made me realise that a board is organic and that I was not the only one who is on a learning curve but so is every other board member as well as the agency that it governs.”

Bernadette noted that having a different cultural background and having resettled in a ‘host country’ that has now become her homeland enable her to contribute effectively as a board member. She said that all the experiences that are associated with being in a host society that is so culturally different in terms of norms and values allowed her to provide insight into what the board or the agency may not otherwise consider as hurdles for some of the people they may have been funded to service.

She considers her interests in mental health and culture, and how these two elements interact to potentially create a problem for an individual or family who has language and cultural barriers as they settle in a new country, have been of value as a board member.

Bernadette also observes that, where the board membership profile is not multicultural, vocalising the issues and concerns of ethnic community groups could sometimes be challenging. These issues/concerns may not be regarded as a priority by other board members as they may not relate to these experiences.

She urges people from diverse backgrounds to consider becoming board members:

“It is an opportunity to help others who are undergoing some of the experiences you may have experienced in your own life’s journey. Your personal insights and lived experience are so invaluable and can only strengthen the board”, she says. “If you find it daunting at first, rest assured that in all probability, you are not the only one feeling this way around the board room table. The first time is always going to provoke anxiety. However, camaraderie develops amongst the members—give it time and you will enjoy the experience. Do not allow your different cultural values or beliefs become a deterrent from joining. Consider it always as a strength, not a weakness. It can only add value to the board membership.”



Section 5—Useful links and references

Useful links

Links to some organisations that provide information and resources to support your professional learning for governance roles are listed below.

- Australian Institute of Company Directors: www.companydirectors.com.au/In-My-State/WA
- Better Boards: betterboards.net/about/
- Governance Institute of Australia: www.governanceinstitute.com.au/
- The Institute of Community Directors: www.communitydirectors.com.au/
- Western Australian Council of Social Services: www.wacoss.org.au/home.aspx
- Women on Boards www.womenonboards.org.au/

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