

Aboriginal Participation on Boards Register

The Department of Planning and Community Development would like to thank and acknowledge the Wathaurung people for allowing the use of the word Wayaperri (meaning 'to meet') for the name of this initiative.

Help Sheet 5

Are you Ready? Questions to ask and answer when considering or being interviewed for a Board position

The easiest way to ensure that you have all the information you need before accepting a Board position is to make yourself a list of questions. There are two types of questions you should ask: those aimed at the Board and those you should ask yourself. The former should be asked before or during a formal interview. The latter questions – those to ask yourself – will help you to reflect on whether you are ready for a particular Board role.

This list is intended as a guide only – there are sure to be other questions specific to your own circumstance that you will no doubt want to add.

Questions for the Board

How much time is required of a Board member?

Make sure you ask 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, bear in mind that you will also be required to conduct a thorough reading of the meeting papers before meetings and may be required to attend other functions and carry out other tasks between meetings.

Why do you want me on the Board? What skills or experience are sought from me?

Knowing the Board's needs and expectations will help you to assess whether you can capably fulfill the role asked of you. It can also be helpful to ask why a Board vacancy exists

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

A properly functioning Board requires a good mix of skills and experiences. If all the other Board members have similar backgrounds to you, you may want to think about whether or not you can offer something extra. Equally important is finding out the type of skills possessed by existing Board members. Would you want to join a Board that does not have a financially literate member, for example?

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

It is important that you have a good understanding of what the Board does, why it does it and what it plans to do in the future. This will help to assess whether you can support and work diligently towards the mission.

What will my responsibilities be? Do you have a job description for the Board members?

Most Boards will have available a detailed job description to help incoming Board members get a handle on the tasks they will be expected to perform. If the Board hasn't yet developed such a document, you could ask an existing member to jot down some of the roles s/he undertakes during an average year.

May I inspect some recent meeting minutes?

You should ask to see the minutes for as many years back as possible – some experienced Board members suggest you go back as far as five years. Reading the minutes will give you a feel for the type of issues the Board has to consider, as well as the type of decisions that have been made in the past. This will help you to decide if this is a Board you could feel comfortable being part of.



Has there been any litigation, or have there been complaints about the Board?

You need to ask about the group's history before you agree to join up. A Board with a less than appealing public image may be a turn-off for some prospective members; others will see it as a challenge. Whatever the case, you should be given the opportunity to make an informed decision about whether or not you would like to join.

How financially viable is the organisation or facility I will be governing? May I have a copy of the financial plan and the budget?

As a Board member, you will be custodian of the organisation's finances. You may even be held personally liable if things go really wrong. You need to be fully informed about the existing financial position before you agree to take on these responsibilities.

Does the Board offer insurance for its members? How much?

To ensure you are covered in the unlikely event that your Board is found to be negligent, it is important that you ascertain the level of insurance the Board has purchased for its members. You should also find out when your coverage will expire as your liability may continue after your term as a Board member finishes.

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

It is a good idea to find out what resources will be available to help you in your new role. These could include formal or informal mentoring programs, orientation sessions, a staff member to provide administrative support, office equipment, stationery, compensation for costs, etc.

Questions for Yourself

Can I commit the time and energy the position deserves?

Making a realistic assessment of the time required to carry out a Board position fully, and comparing this with how much time you actually have to offer, is the first step in deciding whether or not you are ready to join a Board.

Why am I being approached to take on this position (presuming you have been approached)? Can I add value to this Board?

Once you have found out why the Board wants you – and what skills you will be expected to contribute – you need to decide whether you are a suitable candidate for a seat. An honest self-assessment may be of more value than an assessment others have made of your skills and aptitudes (although bear in mind that is important not to underestimate your own potential).

Am I the right person for this Board at this point in time?

Different groups require different levels and types of commitment at different times. Personal circumstances also change over time. A person with a young family and in the full throes of a demanding career may be less inclined (or able) to volunteer their time to serve on a Board than, for example, a retiree looking for further challenges.

What do I want out of this experience?

People join Boards for a huge number of reasons. Assessing your own motivations will help you assess whether or not your expectations are likely to be fulfilled.

Can I hold this position with integrity and without conflicts of interest?

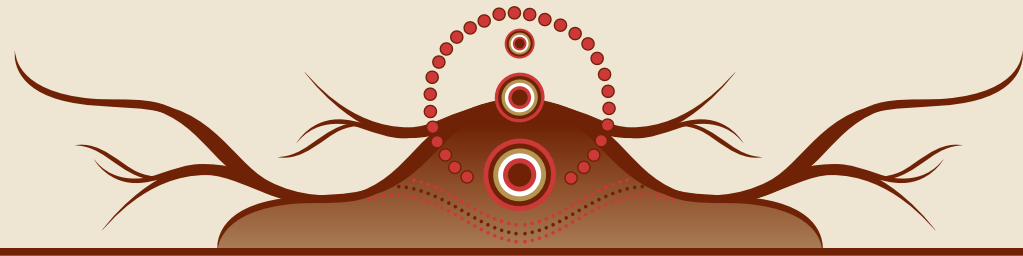
It is important that you think about this issue before you accept a Board position. By examining the functions and past decisions of the Board you can assess if there are decisions you will encounter that could impact on your business or personal interests, or those of your family and friends. Conflicts of interest are examined in greater detail in the Handling Conflicts of Interest help sheet.

Can I trust, and work with, the other Board members? Will this team be effective?

The way you relate to your Board colleagues will probably define the quality of your experience – and your ability to work together is of paramount importance to the effectiveness of the Board.

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

In order to govern effectively, the Board needs to be able to rely on an effective manager so it is a good idea to think carefully about the capabilities of the CEO you will be required to work alongside.



Does the Board clearly understand what its aims are, and are those aims achievable (even if ambitious)?

A Board that does not know where it is going is a difficult one to oversee: decisions will most likely be inconsistent and performance patchy. Getting it back on track will require hard work and may not be possible at all. Like having no aims at all, a Board that has unrealistic aims is setting itself up to fail.

Do I share those aims?

Once you've found out that the Board (a) has aims and (b) has achievable aims, you need to decide if they are aims that you believe in. If your heart's not in it, it is unlikely you will be able to enthusiastically contribute to the Board's achievements.

Have I spoken to the organisation's head, current Board members and/or past Board members about this position?

Asking someone directly about what will be required from you as a Board member will help to take you beyond the abstract and paint a picture of what will be required. This is an invaluable tool in making a decision of whether or not a particular Board will be right for you.

For more help sheets visit the following website and follow the links to Wayaperri:
<http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/indigenous/>

Queries should be directed to wayaperri@dpcd.vic.gov.au

