



# BOARD CANDIDATE GUIDE

This Guide is for Candidates who are seeking appointment to a Board or Committee of Management. It also provides advice for Boards seeking to improve Board membership diversity. The Guide is an outcome of the People With disability Western Australia (PWdWA) On Board with Me Project!

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Being Board Director or a member of a Committee of Management can be a very rewarding and benefit your career and personal development. It can also be challenging in terms of time and commitment, and brings with it financial and regulatory responsibilities that need to be considered before accepting a position.

This Guide is designed for potential Board Candidates as a reference to the steps to take to help secure a board nomination, and the issues that should be considered before accepting a role with an organisation.

Information includes how Candidates can find a “good fit”, and how Boards can improve board diversity by understanding lived experience value and supporting increased access for people with disability.

## 2.0 WHERE TO START?

### 2.1 Why be on a Board?

Being appointed to a board role can be personally and professionally very rewarding. It also brings with it considerable responsibilities and obligations that should not be taken lightly.

Some of the advantages to being a Board Director include:

- It can help open up and build strong professional networks that you would not normally access
- You can build your skills and knowledge in strategy and risk, governance and financial management
- It can introduce you to a new type of industry or sector that you may never work in professionally
- It provides a means to offer yourself to an organisation that would benefit from your skills, knowledge, lived experience and contribution. It is a great opportunity to give something back to an organisation or a community
- Board director roles may lead to other board opportunities. Given the high value placed on previous board experience, an individual can be in a position to build a portfolio of roles over time
- Your experience on a board may lead to other senior employment opportunities

Before you accept a Board role, it is important to reflect on why you want to join a Board, and what board is a suitable placement for you.

### 3.0 BOARD SELECTION

Understanding the Board Director obligations is vital. If you have not attended formal governance or board competency training beforehand, it should be provided once you are appointed to the role.

There are a wide range of courses available, with leading organisations including:

- Australian Institute of Company Directors
- Governance Institute of Australia

#### 3.1 Your Candidacy

The great majority of Board appointments are sourced through networks or professional recruitment consultants. Putting effort into your professional profile will help your candidacy stand out and improve your chance of successful appointment.

How to improve your Board candidacy:

- **Good Professional Resume**

There is a high level of competition for Board and employment roles. Your application may first be reviewed by a human resource advisor or screened by a computer program.

Putting effort into ensuring your Resume or Curriculum Vitae is professional and is catered to the role you are applying for can make a significant difference to your success.

You can use the [Professional Resume Template](#) as a guide to help build your resume.

- **Professional Profile**

Being active in discussion groups and professional associations will help you to be noticed by a wider audience. Discuss your interests with colleagues and other professionals so they are aware of your Board aspirations.

Managing your professional profile through social media, particularly professional sites such as LinkedIn™, can also be a very effective way to build your professional profile. This is an important recruitment site, and understanding how to increase your visibility to your network and to recruiters will help with your prospects.

It can be a useful tool to engage in professional discussions online and remotely, which can help manage the unconscious bias faced by many people with disability.

- **Professional Network**

Consider those in your professional network. How can they assist you in your search? You should aim to build contacts in the areas and organisations you are targeting, and seek introductions through your network to help to get you known.

Do you know any current or past Board directors in the organisation, or have connections to them? Having a conversation with them may give you some insight into the Board's expectations and if it is a suitable role for you.

- **Understand the "Good Fit"**

It helps to have some "self-awareness" of your skill-set to get yourself ready for considering a Board role. Reflect and ask yourself:

- Do you have past board experience?
- What is my skill-set?
- Where do I live?
- Who are my contacts and to whom are they connected?
- What is my motivation for being on a board?
- How much time do I have?
- How much preparation am I willing to do to be appointed?
- What are my potential conflicts of interest?
- What is my approach to risk?

It may help to seek a mentor or fellow directors for their input on what may work for you.

Have an understanding of whether you have the right skills and experience for that role, or that organisation. Do not overstretch yourself, particularly if this is your first Board appointment, as you want this to be successful to all parties.

### 3.2 Board Workload

The Board workload is often underestimated. Generally, Boards will meet for at least 3-hours every month, but this does vary.

In addition to regular meetings, you may be involved in a sub-committee, Eg. Governance or Audit and Risk Committee. The Board may also need to meet more frequently in the event where multiple decisions are required within a short time frame, Eg. a crisis management event, critical organisational change, merger discussions.

However, overwhelmingly the bulk of the workload is preparing for each Board meeting. As a Board Director you have the responsibility to understand the decisions being taken and this requires:

- Reading and analysing the information in the board papers;
- Considering issues raised and contributing to the discussion on agenda items; and
- Ensuring you understand the risks associated with any decision and are adequately informed to make decisions required.

To achieve this, you will require Board information and discussion to be accessible. You may require additional reading time, for the information to be provided in a specific format or other support to ensure you are fully informed and prepared for the meeting discussion and for the decisions to be taken. Board accessibility is discussed further in the Guide below.

### 3.3 The Right Board Role

Being a Board Director takes a considerable amount of time and responsibility, so it's important to choose wisely. Being appointed to a board where the fit is not right may result in wasted time and effort, frustration and damage to the reputation of both parties.

The appointment needs to suit you, and you need to be a good fit for the Board and the Board's culture.

Board selection can be a lengthy process, and both parties should undertake appropriate *due diligence* to ensure the appointment is sustainable and rewarding to all.

Opportunities do not come up very often, and it could take a year or longer for an opportunity to arise. Be patient, choose wisely. Getting on the wrong Board can create risks that are best avoided, such as:

- Not being able to adequately contribute to board discussions and decisions (and thereby not fulfilling one's obligations as a Director)
- Becoming frustrated and disgruntled
- Suffering longer term damage to your professional and personal reputation
- Lack of new opportunities or referrals as a consequence of performance

To help select the Board for you, consider how your skills and lived experience could benefit the Board membership. Some examples are provided in the Table below.

Selection Considerations	Example Board Opportunity	
	Board Opportunity	Good Fit Skills and Lived Experience
Does the organisation's business operations and values align with your own?	Start up NFP in plastics recycling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ I have experience in business development</li> <li>✓ I have strong environmental values</li> </ul>
Do you have specific skills in the Sector that may benefit in a Board strategic discussion?	Urban Development and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Member of local government Disability Advisory Committee</li> <li>✓ Active in my local community and input to disability design and planning projects</li> <li>✓ Participated in local planning co-design workshops</li> </ul>
Understand the organisation's business financials. Is it performing well, where can you add value? Review recent annual reports and financial statements.	Community Housing NFP that has experienced significant growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Strategic planning experience</li> <li>✓ Understand long-term financial planning statements</li> <li>✓ Community Housing experience or tenant</li> <li>✓ Have completed risk management training</li> <li>✓ Certified Practicing Accountant</li> <li>✓ Auditing</li> </ul>
Being a Board Director will mean you accept the "fiduciary duties" that are prescribed in legislation. You need to understand these duties.	Large Disability Support Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ On Board with Me Graduate<sup>iii</sup></li> <li>✓ LeadAbility Graduate<sup>iv</sup></li> <li>✓ Completed Foundations of Governance and/or Company Directors Courses<sup>v</sup>, or equivalent</li> <li>✓ Certified Practicing Accountant</li> </ul>
What is the board make-up?	Previous Governance Board Experience and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ You offer a lived experience that is not currently represented on the Board</li> <li>✓ You will provide increased diversity in thought, gender, disability, age and or other criteria that is not currently on the board</li> </ul>
Is it the right cultural fit for you to make a real contribution?	Board Make-up and cultural fit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ You provide a good representation of the organisation's clients and customers</li> </ul>

### 3.4 Conflicts of Interest

It is common to be attracted to boards that are in the same sector or industry that you have worked in. However, this can also raise some conflicts of interest that you may not have given due consideration. As part of your due diligence check, ask yourself:

- What potential conflicts may arise with the Board?
- Are there any real or perceived financial conflicts that should exclude you from joining the Board? Consider conflicts of interest directly to you and to your family members.
- What are the duties of the Board Director and consider what decisions you will need to make with the Board?

Remember, having a conflict does not exclude you from the Board but it will need to be disclosed and recorded in the board minutes of the meeting.

While ad-hoc issues that arise and require the conflict declared can be acceptable, any long-standing or binding conflicts should be avoided. If you have any concerns, raise this during the interview process so the appointment process is transparent and well considered.

As a Board Director, you need to demonstrate that you cannot only discharge your financial duties, but you also work to protect the organisation from any adverse risk, including reputational risk.

- Have you or do you work for the organisation?
- Are you an existing client of the organisation?
- Do you, or members of your family, have any financial or personal relationships with the Board's members or organisation that would need to be disclosed?

## 4.0 BOARD RECRUITMENT

Board recruitment processes can vary as much as the types of Board roles available. From being approached by a sitting Board Director or the CEO, through to a detailed professional recruitment process conducted by a professional firm.

However, recent studies report that 71% of Board Directors were appointed to the Board after they were approached by someone through their network<sup>vi</sup>. So we know that building and maintaining your professional network is important to improve your recruitment success. But you need to take this further, while network is important it is your performance that will determine success.

Increasingly, Boards are developing and maintaining a Board Skills or Competency Matrix to help understand and build its skills diversity. For people with disability, understanding your own skills and competency capabilities combined with your “lived experience” knowledge will help to improve your candidate offering and could convince the recruiter that you have more to offer than your competition.

People with disability who may not have had the same education and professional pathway of other candidates can fall short in a recruitment process that is heavily “merit based”. The limitations of unconscious bias that can be associated with a merit-based recruitment system is discussed in the PWdWA *Board Disability Diversity and Inclusion Report*.

Diversity Recruitment masterclass training that can help overcome these biases is available for recruitment consultants through some leadership organisations. This training is highly recommended for Boards seeking to improve diversity and inclusion.

#### 4.1 Remuneration

Board director remuneration is not common, and certainly scarce in the not-for-profit organisations. Some organisations may provide a “sitting fee” but this is rarely commensurate with the workload or work value.

It is important to consider the value you will get from being a Board director, and where the opportunity could take you in your career – whether that be on other Boards or in management employment.

### 5.0 ACCESSIBILITY

One of the bigger challenges faced by people with disability trying to secure a role relates to accessibility. We understand that accessible facilities and services are readily available and are adopted in some Boards and organisation. However, it is still not well understood by many employers.

Accessibility extends to making the boardroom, the information and the participation accessible. The barriers include not making adjustments to the Board workplace and processes, but also the perception that it is not feasible to make these changes. Board’s should be briefed on what measures can and have been adopted to be more inclusive and if it is to improve membership diversity.

As a candidate, you could make you application more appealing by describing the tools or services that will support you to participate as an effective and valued Board member.

For organisations, doing some research and asking direct questions in the recruitment process can ensure the reasonable adjustments are understood and implemented. Some examples of adjustments currently adopted are listed below.

TYPE	ADJUSTMENTS REPORTED TO SUPPORT BOARD MEMBERS
<b>Accessible Meetings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessible venues, Wheelchair access</li> <li>• Accessible location for meetings with accessible bathrooms</li> <li>• Provide transport options, Transport support if needed</li> <li>• Provision of transport or taxis</li> </ul>
<b>Accessible Information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessible board paper formats, ensure board papers to suit vision impaired board members</li> <li>• Alternative documents and formats</li> <li>• Printing off materials if required</li> <li>• Plain English used</li> <li>• Large print</li> <li>• Auslan interpreter</li> </ul>

TYPE	ADJUSTMENTS REPORTED TO SUPPORT BOARD MEMBERS
<b>Organisational Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication supports</li> <li>• Secretariat support independent of executive to ensure information is provided and understood</li> <li>• Administrative assistance</li> <li>• Extra support for participation</li> <li>• Board papers are circulated earlier</li> <li>• Flexibility to attend board meetings remotely</li> <li>• Provide details of adjustments made</li> <li>• Able to bring support person and/or support animals, if required</li> <li>• Pre-meeting support if required</li> <li>• One-one mentoring outside of board meetings</li> <li>• Time to discuss issues or opportunities</li> </ul>
<b>Skills and Capability Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding for additional training related to skills and knowledge</li> <li>• Provide board members training in vision impairment and in mental health first aid</li> <li>• Mentoring program for new board members</li> </ul>

## REFERENCES

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<sup>i</sup> PWdWA (2019) *Board Disability Diversity and Inclusion*. PWdWA, West Perth.

[https://www.pwdwa.org/documents/on\\_board\\_with\\_me/BoardDisabilityDiversityInclusionReportPUBLISHED20190724.pdf](https://www.pwdwa.org/documents/on_board_with_me/BoardDisabilityDiversityInclusionReportPUBLISHED20190724.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> PWdWA (2019) *Professional Resume Template*. PWdWA, West Perth

[https://www.pwdwa.org/our\\_campaigns/on\\_board\\_with\\_me.html#Resume](https://www.pwdwa.org/our_campaigns/on_board_with_me.html#Resume)

<sup>iii</sup> People With disabilities WA training

<sup>iv</sup> Leadership Western Australia training

<sup>v</sup> Australian Institute of Company Directors courses

<sup>vi</sup> NFP Success 2019 “Board Governance for NFP Training” May