

Notes from the first meeting of the Julia Farr group governance community-of-practice

1. Introduction

This community-of-practice event took place on Tuesday 28th April, with 21 participants.

It is the first of a series of events designed to support current and aspiring board members to deepen confidence and capacity in governance work.

These notes are confidential, and are intended only as a reference for members and invited officers of the following:

- JFA board
- inhousing board
- JFM board
- Julia Farr group governance committees
- Disability Elders of All Ages working group
- Julia Farr Youth committee
- Our Voice SA committee

Across the initial four events the group will explore a range of topics. At this first meeting the group looked at:

- 1) The responsibilities people carry as governors
- 2) How to look at the money stuff

The conversation was facilitated by a governance specialist, Virginia Hickey.

2. The responsibilities people carry as governors

Key ideas that came from the discussion were:

- Your responsibilities as a director of a not-for-profit organisation are no different from a director of a big commercial organisation like Woolworths or Qantas. You must:
 - Act with honesty, do what a reasonable person would do, and not have a conflict of interest that could influence what you do on the board
 - Act in ways that support what the organisation is trying to achieve on behalf of its stakeholders. This is all about the trust that is placed in the person by the members of the organisation
 - Make sure the organisation is able to pay its bills (the technical term for this is 'solvency')
- People living with differing cognitive capacity (such as people living with intellectual disability or an acquired brain injury) can be successful members of a board. It's all about how the board does its work. The board will need to think through how best to conduct its work in a way that support the person's involvement. There may be insights from the

Supported Decision-Making methodologies that can help boards think about how best to do this.

- There may be other ways a person can assist governance but where joining a board may not yet be the right time. This could include joining a committee/advisory group that reports to a board
- You don't need to be an expert on every topic, and this includes being the chair, whose job is to help make sure everyone at the table contributes to the discussion and decision
- Putting simple questions simply, is a very good thing. The simple, or 'silly' questions, are usually the best ones to ask
- If you are the chair of the board/committee/group, use that power carefully. A big part of the job is to serve your fellow board members, so that everyone contributes to a shared decision

During the above discussion, the idea emerged that it would be good to have a document that folk can refer to that explains what key things mean in governance.

ACTION:

- **Bob will kick off the 'guide' document**
- **Linda/Chris/Mark to add to it**
- **Trish and Kathryn to test it**
- **Karen and Tiffany to reframe to a words and pics version**

3. How to look at the money stuff

Key ideas that came from the discussion were:

- While some board members will know more about some things than other board members, it is important that all board members develop their understanding of the money stuff
- It's ok to keep asking questions until you're happy with the answers
- One way to think about the money stuff is to find ways to relate it back to your own situation: your payslip, your bank balance, your rent or mortgage payments, your grocery bill, and so on
- The importance of each of us reminding ourselves that we 'deserve to be here'
- Give yourself time. It may take you a lot of board meetings to get into the flow of the work and to build your experience and insight. That's ok, so don't give yourself a hard time early on for not knowing stuff
- 'Non-financial brains' add a lot more value on boards than some people think
- Asking, 'so what do you mean?' is a good way to get folk to simplify something

ACTIONS:

- **Bob will kick off the 'guide' document**
 - **Then Linda/Chris/Mark to add to it**
 - **Then Trish and Kathryn to test it**
 - **Then Karen and Tiffany to reframe to a words and pics version**

- **We will look at how to remove the jargon from the financial report dashboards that currently go to JFA/inhousing/JFM**
- **Linda is available to all people receiving the JFA/JFM/inhousing financial papers, and Linda/Geoff/Robbi are also first points of contact for people on the other groups who have questions about the money stuff**
- **We will set up arrangements for 1:1 board member support. So if you would like help with something individually, let us know and we will put a call out to other members of this group for someone to help you with that**

4. Date of next community-of-practice event

1pm-3pm, Wednesday 6th May 2020