

Feminist Governance Toolkit

For boards of specialist gendered violence services in Queensland

Section 1: Connection to Purpose



WorkUp
QUEENSLAND

In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



Taking Care

This resource discusses domestic, family, and sexual violence.

It is important to understand that people working in the sector, including board members, may have lived experience of gendered violence and trauma and, at times, need support.

As you go through these materials, please take a break and access help if you need to.

Here are some expert organisations that offer both personal and professional support when you may need it:



WorkUP Queensland is the Sexual Violence, Women's Health and Wellbeing, and Domestic and Family Violence sector's partner in supporting a strong, skilled and engaged workforce.

We bring together The Healing Foundation's strong connection to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and healing, backed by the expertise of Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) in facilitating evidence-based policy and practice.

Informed and driven by frontline providers, WorkUP aims to address workforce-related challenges while taking opportunities to grow and equip the workforce and better support current and future workers.

Funded by the Queensland Government, we are proud to support the people who work in this sector who make such a significant, often pivotal impact in ending violence against women.

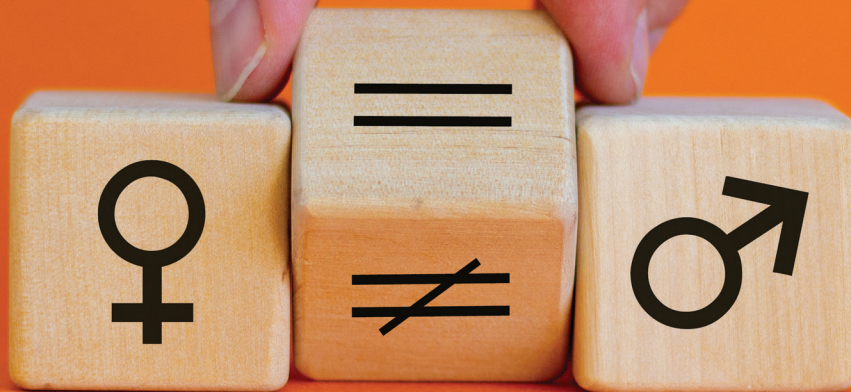
Together, WorkUP Queensland and the sector have created a plan to grow, retain, develop, support, connect, and sustain the workforce. This Feminist Governance Toolkit is one part of our important work. We hope that you may be able to use it to guide your thinking and complement your practices as a professional, diligent and compassionate board member.

Acknowledgment

The Feminist Governance Toolkit was developed by WorkUP Queensland in partnership with Inner Vision Consulting and Red Bandana Productions.

Representatives from the Domestic and Family Violence, Sexual Violence and Women's Health and Wellbeing sector contributed their ideas, knowledge, and practice wisdom to inform its development.

We thank everyone involved for their input and commitment to supporting good governance in the gendered violence sector.



Connection to purpose



In this section, we explore the purpose of gendered violence services and how a board and its members can best contribute to the achievement of their vision and mission.

This content will be helpful to build our knowledge of why gendered violence services exist, understand how they operate and suggest important considerations that could be meaningfully factored into strategy development.

Importantly, we look at ourselves to understand why and how we wish to contribute to the board and the values and beliefs we bring.



SHOWING UP – BELIEFS, VALUES AND SKILLS



This is an important question to ask ourselves because our motives impact how we show up in our leadership, our decisions, and our impact on others. This section is about being reflective and self-aware so that we can contribute most effectively to the board of a gendered violence service.

Being reflective and self-aware helps us to:

- > Understand our strengths, weaknesses, values, and motivations, as well as our impact on other people
- > Develop empathy, compassion, and respect
- > Foster a culture of learning, reflection, and genuine feedback
- > Enhance communication and interpersonal skills
- > Identify and address stereotypes, assumptions or biases that may affect our behaviour or decision-making
- > Recognise and manage our emotions, stress, and vicarious trauma, and seek support if we need to
- > Act with accountability and integrity and align our actions with the values and goals of the organisation we serve
- > Notice and appreciate the strengths and diversity that our fellow board members, clients and workers bring.

Strong self-reflective practice helps us to:

- > Lead in a way that enables effective service operation, high-quality services and the wellbeing of workers
- > Operate in the best interests of the service we govern.



Dot down your thoughts

What am I hoping to achieve by contributing to the board of a gendered violence service?

.....

How might I bring reflection and self-awareness to my role on the board?

.....

How do I want to show up in my role as a board member?

SHOWING UP – BELIEFS, VALUES AND SKILLS

Self-awareness is often defined as conscious knowledge of one's own character, feelings, motives and desires. It's key to self-control, decision-making, creativity, learning, growth and self-fulfillment. It creates value and helps you to influence others. It is a tool to proactively manage your beliefs, thoughts, emotions, decisions and behaviours.

Cultivating self-awareness requires an introspective approach, a system and a process to actively and consciously engage in the recognition of ourselves as an individual.

It is an acceptance of all the good parts of ourselves and the areas that need improvement. It's about who we are and what we do daily in each moment.

It takes courage to look at yourself deeply and honestly assess your being.

(Harris, Lori. Self-Awareness Is Key to Leadership Excellence, 2020).



Workforce Capability Framework and Reflective Practice toolkit

[CLICK HERE](#)



My experience in both frontline DFSV work and organisational management provided a strong foundation for my role on the board through the ability to balance strategic oversight with understanding the practical realities of the organisation's day-to-day operations. Despite this significant and transferable experience, undertaking a position on the board was daunting, and it took some time for me to practically apply my skills to the role.

Hannah

SHOWING UP – BELIEFS, VALUES AND SKILLS

Beliefs and values

Our beliefs are shaped by our experiences, relationships and what we have been exposed to. The way we understand the world, and especially our understanding of the nature of gendered violence, impacts the decisions we make in both our personal and professional lives.

Core beliefs are the deeply held assumptions or convictions that guide our attitudes, decisions and behaviours. They are the fundamental opinions that we hold about ourselves, others, and the world around us. Core beliefs are often absolutist and are not fact-checked.

Values are what we consider important and meaningful in our lives. They serve as a guiding compass, directing our choices, behaviours, and priorities. Our values form the foundation of our core beliefs about what constitutes a well-lived life. They provide us with a sense of direction and self-identity.

Living and working in ways that align with our values is conducive to our wellbeing – we are more likely to experience a sense of authenticity and fulfillment. Consistently practicing our values shapes who we are. It models the behaviour we want to present to ourselves and the world.

When we are clear about our values and how they align with the organisation we choose to be involved with, we make informed decisions that are useful and relevant to the purpose of the organisation while remaining ‘true’ to ourselves.

Values are not just abstract concepts, they shape our lives, influence our choices, and contribute to our overall wellbeing and fulfillment.

Feminist values encompass a set of principles and beliefs that advocate for gender equality and challenge traditional norms and power structures. These values emphasise the importance of recognising and addressing systemic inequalities faced by women, girls and marginalised genders.

There are a lot of myths about feminism, such as feminism is not useful or inclusive of men and it aims to take away men’s rights. This is not the case. Feminist values focus on co-creating a global society where there is equality and equity for all people irrespective of sex, gender, sexuality, race, ability, belief, etc.

Feminist values focus on social justice, advocating for a fair and just society for all, while challenging the rigid gender roles and stereotypes that keep us all disadvantaged in various and diverse ways.



Jot down your thoughts

What have I been taught about relationships and families?

What messages have I been taught about gender?

What beliefs do I hold about relationships, families, and gender and how might these beliefs influence my agenda and decision-making on a board?

curiosity truth responsibility Pro-choice
 fairness freedom nature caring gender justice initiative
 housework is a political issue The personal is political
 contribution power wholeheartedness independence dignity
 Accountable behaviour
 Gender equality and equity
 actively stand against any form of oppression
 self-discipline grace honesty learning
 belonging kindness reliability trust accountability health excellence
 love creativity teamwork wellbeing wisdom
 Respectful feedback justice recognition uniqueness
 accountable collaboration cooperation
 vulnerability Self-awareness self-care and care for others
 commitment traditional equality vulnerability simplicity
 family serenity leadership Sharing power altruism
 work to eradicate systemic power imbalances and inequalities
 risk taker connection generosity success risk taker
 integrity eliminating gendered violence co-creating
 openness growth Compassion and empathy intuition
 connection intersectional analysis applied to practice safety humour
 kindness balance fairness compassion
 cooperation comparable worth
 ethics self-discipline
 inclusion responsible and transparent use of power equity
 Influence respect harmony order
 Women are not responsible for their oppression
 community competence service diversity inclusion
 optimism Women are the experts of our own lives
 wellbeing adaptability gratitude



IDENTIFY YOUR OWN VALUES

From the word clouds on page 11, identify 10 values that align with your values.

- | | |
|---------|----------|
| 1. | 6. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |

Of those 10, identify the five that resonate the most with who you are?

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Now, what are the top three?

1.
2.
3.



Jot down your thoughts

How are these three core values important to me in my governance role?

.....

What do these three core values mean for how I make decisions in this role?

.....

How might these three core values show up in my role on the board?

Case Study



You are the Chairperson on the board of a gender-based violence organisation. The organisation's focus is on managing risk and improving safety for women while holding perpetrators to account. At the last AGM, a retired male frontline responder was voted to join the board.

The CEO regularly provides the board with a report including key information about service delivery. The report outlines systemic challenges that women are facing as they manage trauma and navigate a range of services. It also describes instances of limited or discriminatory support women experienced from frontline responders and the challenges frontline staff experience when advocating with them.

You have noticed that when these issues are raised to the board to provide information and discuss how the organisation might be able to back clients and staff strategically, this board member becomes defensive. He appears to take this information personally and spends a lot of time and space defending frontline responders rather than listening and working with the group at a strategic level. At times, his comments communicate a belief that he blames women for the poor responses.

The board member also raises questions about operational matters and provides advice on

how women should interact with frontline responders. Other board members, all of whom are women, struggle to get a word in when this happens.

How might you approach this issue with consideration of the following:

- > Power dynamics and privilege in the group
- > Conflict of interest
- > Delineating what is operational management and what is strategic board-level governance
- > Defining the purpose of this information being brought to the board and shifting back to that purpose
- > Confidentiality of clients
- > Respect and care for each other as well as the clients, the staff team and CEO
- > The original purpose, or identified value of a former frontline responder's contribution to the board.

SHOWING UP – BELIEFS, VALUES AND SKILLS

Skills

The board is a group of people working together to govern the gendered violence service. The right mix of skills, knowledge, and representation on the board will ensure it can fulfill its role effectively. The skills and experience of board members must be documented and reviewed regularly so that gaps are identified, and succession plans are put in place for any upcoming changes.

Skills-based boards collectively have the skills, knowledge, and experience to effectively govern and direct the organisation. This blend helps the organisation achieve its strategic goals, enhance its performance, manage risks and ensure accountability.

A skills-based board aims to have a balance of appropriately identified skills and experiences, with regard to the nature of the business and affairs of the organisation. Some of the common skills and experiences that a skills-based board may look for are:

- > Governance
- > Risk and compliance
- > Finance and accounting
- > Audit
- > Creativity and innovation
- > Technology and technology transfer
- > Service promotion, marketing, and communication
- > Industry knowledge, including practical service delivery experience in the sector
- > Policy and administration experience.

Representative boards are elected or appointed based on their affiliation with a certain group or stakeholders. For example, lived experience or lived experience of a family member.

A representative board can provide a transparent and visible connection to clients and broader community interests. It can ensure that the board is accountable to the organisation's clients through the representative directors themselves.



A mix of skills and representation on the board ensures an inclusive and comprehensive approach to governance.

TIP



Dot down your thoughts

What skills and experience do I bring to the board?

.....

Are there any gaps in my knowledge or skills that I need to develop?

.....

What do I understand about the skills and representative mix of our board?

STRATEGY AND SUSTAINABILITY

A successful organisation has a clear purpose, mission, and vision, as well as a well-defined and communicated strategy to achieve these over the long term. These are supported by values and beliefs that shape the organisational culture and guide decision-making, behaviours, and actions.

The purpose of a gendered violence service might be, for example, to:

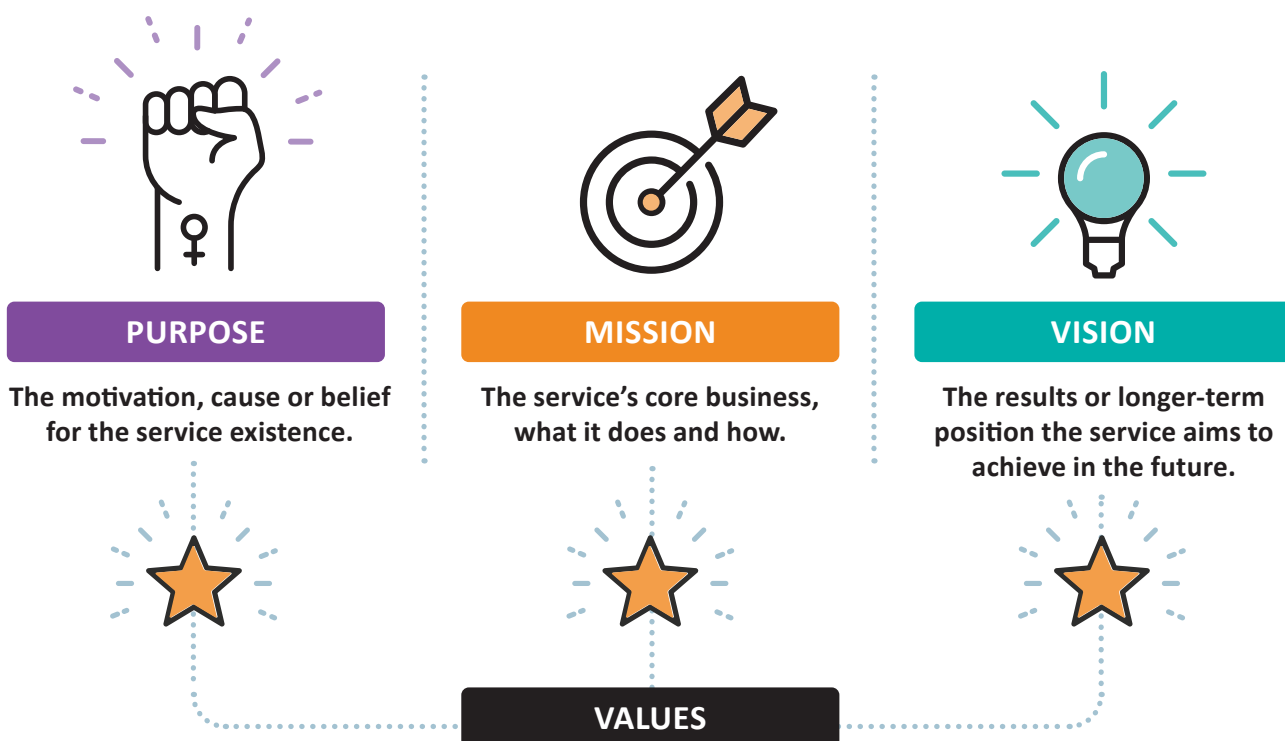
- > Enhance women's safety
- > Educate and empower women
- > Eliminate sexual violence
- > Heal victim-survivors of family violence
- > Promote health equity
- > Prevent violence.

The board and organisation share a common understanding and commitment to the purpose of the organisation and work in solidarity to achieve its mission and vision. In doing so they each have specific roles and responsibilities.



The board may have a diversity of views and robust conversations, but everyone works together to centralise the cause of victim-survivor rights and safety.

TIP



The beliefs that shape organisational culture and guide decision-making, behaviours and actions.

STRATEGY AND SUSTAINABILITY

The board of a gendered violence service plays a crucial role in the development and approval of the strategic plans and makes decisions that contribute to and further the purpose, vision and mission of the organisation.



It is important for board members to be aware of:

- *The legal structure of the organisation*
- *How to access the organisation's constitution*
- *The objectives of the organisation as stated in the constitution.*

TIP

As board members, we understand that the board connects to the organisation's purpose when we:

- > Co-design strategic plans to achieve the organisation's purpose, vision and mission
- > Understand and operate within the purpose and scope of the organisation
- > Bring a gendered analysis to our decision-making
- > Keep our focus on purpose and strategy and out of operational matters
- > Understand, value, and support the workforce in decision-making and strategy implementation.



Jot down your thoughts

How do I contribute to furthering the cause of the organisation?

.....

Have I been tempted to step into operational matters?

.....

How do I ensure I am not stepping into operational management processes?

Governing a Victim-Survivor Centred Organisation

As board members of gendered violence services, we oversee services that work from a client-centred framework.

This is a continual process of reflection and learning, and application of a gendered analysis to board decision-making and strategy.

Critical to this practice is strong connection to the CEO and purpose of the organisation, as well as an understanding of how a victim-survivor-centred service operates.

A victim-survivor-centred service will focus on the client's strengths, resilience, needs, and the impacts of what has happened to them.



It's important to have a board that is reflective of the strategic intent of the organisation. What are we trying to achieve? What skills and backgrounds do we need to do this?

Melissa



STRATEGY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Here are some examples of intersectional feminist governance practice and governance:

A victim-survivor-centred service will:	Intersectional feminist governance examples:
Have a focus on managing victim-survivor risk and increasing their safety	Centre victim-survivor risk in strategic decision-making
See things from the victim-survivor point of view, validate their experiences and never place pressure or blame on them	Represent victim-survivors on the board Use a careful and considered response to victim-survivor feedback
Actively involve the victim-survivor, when possible, in program development and service provision	Ask questions about proposals/board reports – how did victim-survivors contribute, what could be the consequences for victim-survivors?
Ensure systems and processes are in place to minimise the need for victim-survivors to retell their story	Budget for appropriate software/resources Encourage/support integrated service delivery
Respond to meet individual risk levels and patterns of coercive control by perpetrators	Budget to ensure staff have the skills and resources required
Work collaboratively with the victim-survivor and the perpetrator if your organisation provides services to him	Maintain focus on the safety of victim-survivors in strategic decision-making
Be trauma-informed, have a gendered analysis, and be confident in assessing who is the predominant aggressor and who is most in need of protection	Be aware of values and beliefs and how they may impact board contributions
Not collude with the perpetrator's use of violence or coercive control or put the victim-survivor at further risk through service provision	Ensure programs and structures do not replicate coercive control experienced by victim-survivors
Treat children as individuals and acknowledge the impact of the violence and the strength they bring to the family in developmentally appropriate ways	Ensure children are considered in budgets for new programs
Recognise community strengths and resilience when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	Encourage representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the board
Inform clients about the organisation's feedback and complaints processes to ensure they have an opportunity to provide input into service delivery and design	Consider client feedback in planning and decision-making
Support staff development, wellbeing and sustainability through training, supervision and support to debrief	Prioritise wellbeing in budgets and tenders for existing and new programs
Advocate for ending gendered violence.	Advocate for ending gendered violence.

Case Study



Your board has identified a lack of representation of a woman with lived experience of gender-based violence, and so recruited specifically to fill this gap on the board. The woman your board selects is well known in the community and is open about her lived experiences.

You have noticed that the woman is a strong advocate for ensuring that the focus of service delivery stays on managing risk and centering victim-survivors in the work.

You also observe that your Chairperson, who is a retired ex-government employee, is focussed on compliance, outputs, and outcomes, and can come across as dismissive of this woman's expertise.

The Chairperson can be dominating in meetings, and you feel hesitant to raise this growing ethical issue that needs to be addressed.

How might you approach this issue with consideration of the following:

- > Approaching this respectfully and clearly with the Chairperson
- > Supporting the board member with lived experience when she is not being heard or valued and encouraging other board members to do the same
- > Incorporating ongoing consideration of unequal power dynamics on the board
- > Guiding internal policies and procedures as well as the constitution
- > Recalling the original purpose, or identified value of including a person with lived expertise as a board member
- > Considering the stated or explicit values of the board and the organisation.

GENDER EQUITY, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND TRAUMA AWARENESS



We refer to the domestic, family, and sexual violence sector as the gendered violence sector because we acknowledge and understand that this form of violence, abuse, and control is informed by our social and cultural beliefs about gender.

The DFV Practice Principles, Standards and Guidance as well as the Regulatory Framework highlight the importance of services having a gender analysis. It is critical that a board of a gendered violence service understands what this means and ensures it is incorporated at a strategic level.

Gender remains the most substantial variable when considering differences in patterns of victimisation and perpetration. (Cox 2015)

Learn more about community attitudes towards violence against women.

[CLICK HERE](#)



GENDER EQUITY, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND TRAUMA AWARENESS

Gender equity

Gender equality is a Human Right. Queensland is one of only three states and territories that have their own Human Rights legislation. The other two are Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory.

Please check out the video from the Women's and Girls Emergency Centre -

What are the Impacts of Gender Based Violence to find out more using the link or the QR code below.



Gendered violence and human rights	Tactics by perpetrators that breach these human rights
Right to live (section 16)	Taking a life through the violence
Protection from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (Section 17)	Torturing or punishing the victim in cruel and humiliating ways
Freedom of movement (Section 19)	Not allowing the victim to move freely or choose where they live through intimidation
Freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief (section 20)	Making the victim doubt their own thoughts or denying their right to practice their religion or beliefs
Freedom of expression (section 21)	Denying the victim the right to express their own opinion or ideas through belittling these or the threat of consequence if voicing them.

Queensland Human Rights Act, 2019

GENDER EQUITY, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND TRAUMA AWARENESS



What is gender analysis?

When we employ a **gender analysis**, we understand that domestic, family and sexual violence is gendered in nature.

A gender analysis distinguishes between the terms “sex” (biological distinctions) and “gender” (the different roles, attributes and conduct that society deems socially appropriate for men, women, transgender people, and non-binary people).

It refers to the relative status and position of people, and the greater disadvantage experienced in most societies by women and people not conforming to or identifying with their society’s gender norms. It considers the interaction between gender and the other social categories such as class, race and ethnicity; and holds that as gender inequities are socially conditioned, they can be changed at an individual and societal level in the direction of justice, equity, and partnership between genders.

Gendered violence happens in all societies, across all social classes, as mentioned in all relationships, with women particularly at risk from men they know.

It is important to note too that gendered violence occurs in both public and private spheres. It occurs in the family behind closed doors and out in the general community. It may also be perpetuated by the state through policies or actions of institutions such as the police, military or immigration authorities.

What is gender?

Gender refers to one’s concept of their own gender. A person may identify as being male, female, neither, or both. Gender, and gender identity exist on a spectrum. Gender is a distinct identity from biological sex. Typically speaking, sex is assigned at birth by a medical professional based on gender markers. Gender identity may differ from biological sex and can’t be seen by others.

The term ‘gender inclusive’ refers to policies, language, and other societal frameworks that respect and acknowledge all gender identities.

This definition acknowledges the diversity and fluidity of gender identities and experiences and highlights the importance of inclusivity and respect for all individuals.

Applying a gendered analysis to our strategic planning and decision-making means we acknowledge and examine:

- > How different gender expressions result in different experiences across lifetimes
- > That gender inequity and inequality is socially conditioned
- > That gendered violence is violence sanctioned by our beliefs about gender
- > That most cultures, traditional beliefs, norms and social institutions legitimise and therefore perpetuate violence against women and gender diverse people
- > That people along the gender spectrum are impacted by DFV/SV in different ways and are also impacted by strong socially conditioned beliefs and work to bring awareness to the underlying causes of these inequities
- > Our role in creating positive change for people of all genders.

(Pytlik, 2023)

Case Study 3a



You are a board member of a regional DFV service that supports women, children, and young people. The board has recently recruited a male board member.

The man is working in a not-for-profit in the mental health sector and considers himself to have a good understanding of domestic violence. He appears passionate about the work and has disclosed that he grew up with violence in the home.

You have noticed his internal tension with the focus on men as the perpetrators of violence. He wants people on the board to understand that not all men are bad. This board member has driven a push to acknowledge that men can be victim-survivors too. He regularly mentions this in meetings and has added to the next agenda the possibility of opening the service up to adult men who identify as victim-survivors.



An effective board will hold themselves and each other accountable for acting consistently with feminist governance principles.

Louise



How would you approach this matter with consideration of the following:

- > Supporting board members' understanding of gendered violence
- > Role expectations about personal agendas, service values and purpose
- > The potential unintended consequences of opening the service to adult male victim-survivors, including:
 1. For existing service users and other key stakeholders
 2. Operationally, and strategically
- > Board actions if members are unable to incorporate a gendered analysis into their decision-making
- > The original purpose or value of including a male as a board member of this service.



You are the Board Chair of a women's wellbeing service. The CEO presents to the Board the findings of a recent service evaluation.

The CEO reported that some LGBTQIA+ individuals have expressed that they do not feel safe accessing the service. The CEO acknowledged that their longstanding focus on women's wellbeing may need to evolve to ensure inclusive and culturally safe support for all people who identify as women, including trans women and gender-diverse individuals.

In presenting these findings, the CEO sought the board's support and leadership to guide the organisational shift required to improve cultural safety and inclusion. The board responded constructively, recognising the feedback as a catalyst for positive change. One board member reflected on what helps her feel safe in unfamiliar settings, another raised questions about whether LGBTQIA+ communities might prefer other services—highlighting the need for further education and discussion.

How would you approach this matter with consideration of the following:

- > Board members' understanding of diverse gender identities
- > Assumptions in governance practices that may unintentionally exclude
- > Barriers or enablers created by current governance structures, policies, and strategic priorities
- > The boards' role in leading cultural change
- > Key stakeholder relationships and gaps.

GENDER EQUITY, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND TRAUMA AWARENESS

Gender analysis in board decision-making

In the context of governance, applying a gender analysis means that the board actively considers how its decisions may impact people of different genders — recognising that these impacts are not always equal. It involves embedding principles of gender equity and inclusion into the organisation's strategic direction, policy oversight, and risk management.

A gender-informed board ensures its governance practices actively promote fairness and work to address systemic barriers in practical and measurable ways.

This can involve asking reflective questions such as:

- > Who is affected by this decision, policy, or strategy — and in what ways?
- > Whose voices, experiences, or data are included in this process — and who might be missing?
- > Do people of different genders experience unique barriers, risks, or benefits as a result?
- > Are we making assumptions about gender that need to be examined?

Gender analysis examples

Application of a gender analysis in consideration of opening a **regional DFV service that serves women, young people, and children to adult male victim-survivors** may include asking:

- > How does expanding our service to include adult male victim-survivors align with our stated organisational purpose, values, and strategic priorities?
- > How would we ensure our workforce is adequately supported, skilled, and equipped—both professionally and personally—to undertake this work safely and effectively?
- > What are the governance and ethical implications of altering our service model to include men? How does this affect our accountability to current service users, stakeholders, and funders?
- > Does the board have sufficient evidence and understanding to assess whether male victim-survivors require different support approaches, and whether we are the most appropriate or best-placed organisation to meet those needs?
- > Could introducing services for men unintentionally reinforce false equivalences between male and female experiences of violence, or undermine the gendered understanding of domestic and family violence that underpins our model?
- > What are the strategic and reputational risks of changing our client cohort? How might this impact perceptions of safety, trust, and accessibility for women and children currently using our services?
- > Do we have governance oversight of the frameworks and risk assessments in place to distinguish between victim-survivors and perpetrators, particularly in complex presentations? What are the potential unintended consequences if these are inadequate?
- > What are the potential impacts of serving male victim-survivors on the existing workforce culture, staff wellbeing, and retention, particularly for staff with lived experience of gender-based violence, and how would we mitigate these risks?
- > What else?

GENDER EQUITY, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND TRAUMA AWARENESS

Gender analysis examples continued

Application of a gender analysis in consideration of the **inclusivity of gender diverse people** in a women's wellbeing service may include asking:

- > How well do our governance frameworks, strategic priorities, and policies reflect contemporary understandings of gender diversity — particularly for those who identify as women, including trans and gender-diverse people?
- > What is the board's role in ensuring that the organisation is culturally safe, inclusive, and accessible for all women, including trans women and gender-diverse people who align with our service's purpose?
- > How does the board monitor and evaluate whether organisational practices (eg, communication, client pathways, staffing, partnerships) support inclusion and do not unintentionally exclude or marginalise gender-diverse people?
- > Do our current risk management and accountability mechanisms consider the reputational, cultural, and service delivery risks associated with exclusion or harm toward LGBTQIA+ people?
- > Are there lived experiences or voices missing from our strategic discussions or decision-making processes? Who do we need to engage with to inform inclusive governance?
- > What do we know about the organisational readiness to work with gender diverse people? How might we uncover and address any biases or exclusionary attitudes that may cause harm?
- > What else?

To govern a gendered violence service, board members must show up with authenticity and curiosity – this means being genuinely committed to understanding and addressing the complex issues of gendered violence.

Anonymous



Not down your thoughts

In this section, what was I surprised or challenged by and why?

.....

What have I learned about gender in this section?

.....

What am I curious about?



Case Study



You are on the board of a women's shelter where a recent incident has left staff feeling intimidated by a victim-survivor. Another service provider reported the incident to the Minister and it has now been referred to your board as a severe complaint.

The incident concerned an 18-year-old woman who had recently arrived at the shelter from a remote Aboriginal community with her two-year-old daughter and six-month-old son. The family was brought directly to the shelter by police. According to the incident report, the woman did not speak English well and seemed anxious when she arrived. She was talking to herself and appeared agitated.

According to the report, staff tried to complete an intake with her, but she could not understand them and began yelling, pacing and banging on the reception desk. The staff felt threatened and called the police back to the service. Police arrived and took the woman and her two children to the watch house.

They contacted a local Aboriginal health service for support and that service filed a complaint with the Minister about the shelter's response.

How would you manage the incident review considering the following:

- > Leadership of the investigation
- > Steps to be taken according to the incident review policy and procedures
- > The intersections of disadvantage and oppression that the women may be experiencing
- > Responsibility for providing culturally and physically safe environments for clients and staff
- > Access and support for people with English as a second or third language
- > Staff understanding and responses to complex mental health and trauma
- > Power and privilege differences between the organisation, staff and women seeking support
- > Consequences for the woman, your staff, and relationship with the Aboriginal health service.



IDENTIFYING PRIVILEGE

From the list below, tick whether you belong to the privileged group, or the non-privileged group in the community, society, or country you live in. It is not a sin to hold privilege and we don't control what privilege we hold. This activity is about increasing self-awareness.

Identity marker	Privileged group	Non-privileged group
Race	☐	☐
Ethnicity	☐	☐
Class	☐	☐
Gender	☐	☐
Sexual orientation	☐	☐
Ability	☐	☐
Religion	☐	☐
Education	☐	☐
Marital status	☐	☐
Citizenship	☐	☐
Language	☐	☐
Age	☐	☐
Employment	☐	☐
Geography	☐	☐
Appearance	☐	☐
Wealth	☐	☐
War/conflict free living	☐	☐
Owning own home	☐	☐
Health	☐	☐



Diverse perspectives foster creativity, innovation, and cultural safety – workforce diversity is good not only for the workforce itself, but for the broader organisation, its external relationships and the community it serves.

TIP



Jot down your thoughts

How do I describe the privilege and power that I bring to my board role?

.....

What could help our board to bring an intersectional lens to our work?

.....

How do I bring an intersectional approach to my strategic decision-making?

GENDER EQUITY, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND TRAUMA AWARENESS

How a trauma-informed service works

Gendered violence services work with people who are impacted by complex trauma. This means it is critical for board members to be clear about what our organisation offers and how services are provided so that they don't trigger further trauma.

In being trauma-aware, we should try to:

- > Understand the people we support are impacted by complex trauma
- > Understand the people we support may act or behave in ways that are directly related to the complex trauma they have been impacted by
- > Understand the people who work in our organisation and on the board may also experience trauma and exhibit the symptoms of trauma
- > View symptoms as expectable and adaptive responses to severe trauma
- > Apply a strengths-based approach to work with the existing resources that clients have
- > Remain clear about what we offer and how to avoid re-traumatising clients
- > Ensure all staff are trauma-aware and trauma-responsive. We invest in in-depth training in understanding and responding to trauma which may include de-escalating deregulated behaviour
- > Understand our legislated responsibilities – e.g. psychosocial hazards legislation.



(Blue Knot Foundation, 2017)



Governing a trauma-informed gendered violence service means:

- *Making decisions and developing strategies that do no harm, and;*
- *Ensuring staff are resourced, well supported and skilled to do the work.*

TIP



Boards must operate with a gendered and cultural lens. The community looks to see cultural understanding and a decolonised way of functioning whether the service is community controlled or not. First Nation people will use the service and expect to be provided with inclusive and culturally safe support.

Anonymous



GENDER EQUITY, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND TRAUMA AWARENESS



Being trauma-informed from a governance perspective means:

Principle	The board will:
Safety	Ensure that all premises and support provided to clients, stakeholders and staff are physically, emotionally, and culturally safe. <i>This is an ongoing and involved process that requires self-auditing and reflection.</i>
Trustworthiness	Ensure that all services the organisation promises to provide are consistent, followed through on, and of ethical and professional quality. <i>For example, the board supports internal systems that minimise the re-traumatisation of clients as much as possible – such as easy-to-use, secure and thorough client databases that ensure client information is available to the appropriate staff.</i>
Collaboration	Ensure that all support provided is strengths-based, acknowledging that the client is the expert of their own experience and that staff focuses on a practice of ‘doing with’ rather than ‘doing to or for’. <i>For example, the board endorses processes for co-creation and service improvement.</i>
Choice	Ensure that options and choice are a core aspect of the work with victim-survivors of gender-based violence. <i>For example, the board ensures programs or service delivery do not replicate the coercion and control that victim-survivors experience.</i>
Empowerment	Support internal service delivery systems that focus on empowering victim-survivors and holding perpetrators of gender-based violence to account. <i>For example, the board examines the power and privilege they hold and how that might inform judgments about victim-survivors, program or strategy developments.</i>

GENDER EQUITY, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND TRAUMA AWARENESS

Lived experience and governance

Lived experience of domestic, family and/or sexual violence is a reality for many working in the gendered violence sector.

‘Lived experience’ means the direct impact that social justice issues, or a combination of issues such as gendered violence, have on individuals.

‘Lived expertise’ describes the knowledge, insights, understanding, and wisdom that people gain throughout their own lives.

(Sandhu, 2017).

There are at least three distinct ways lived experience and expertise can be integrated into gendered violence services. All people bring valuable and diverse perspectives and knowledge, and we should honour the crucial role of women with lived experience in establishing the first refuges and support services for women and children.

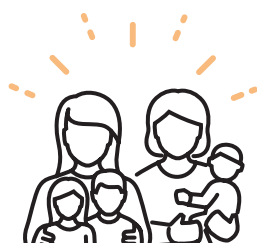


THE WORKFORCE

The workforce includes allied workers, practitioners, leaders and us as board members.

Women with lived experience were crucial in establishing the first Australian and international refuges and support services. As the sector has professionalised, lived experience has become less visible and can even have taboo or judgement attached to it.

Lived experience in the workforce should be acknowledged and appreciated for the significant value it brings, however it is not essential to working in the sector.



SERVICE USERS

The knowledge and experiences of clients is crucial in ongoing quality improvement of service delivery. Their feedback and involvement in service reflection and improvement processes is critical.

Specialist gendered violence services are accountable to the clients they support, and client knowledge should form the basis of a collective understanding of diverse experiences and journeys within the system.



SURVIVORS & ADVOCATES

Survivors and advocates who use their lived experience to influence policy development, service planning, practice, and contribute to broader systems reform, social change, and community awareness.

Involvement of survivor advocates in projects can have a profound and invaluable impact. Their contributions help identify systemic gaps and drive service improvements.

No single one of these ways can fully represent the entirety of lived experience and none is more valuable than another. There are multiple ways in which the lived experiences and expertise of victim-survivors can be incorporated to inform and inspire the work of the whole sector.

Adapted from Wark et.al. (2022)

GENDER EQUITY, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND TRAUMA AWARENESS

Responding to disclosures

Acknowledging the lived experience of gendered violence in our work, we will inevitably have conversations about it and it's important to know how to respond sensitively and appropriately if a disclosure is made. This could occur in a range of personal and professional settings, including in a board meeting.

A disclosure is when someone tells an individual or group about their experience, for example, about domestic, family or sexual violence which may be recent or historical.

Firstly, it's important to ensure we are aware of internal policies and procedures about responding to disclosures and what support is provided by the organisation. This information may be provided in board induction.

Try to remember these three key points when responding to disclosures:

- > Listen, without interruption or judgment
- > Believe and validate experiences
- > Provide information that will support.

1800Respect provides detailed information about how to respond sensitively to disclosures. It is a useful referral point not only for the person making a disclosure but also for people making referrals who would like more information or to debrief following a disclosure.



Develop a board commitment/guideline that outlines specifically how you support each other if you have lived experiences as well as how your commitment to supporting workers in the organisation to ensure their safety and wellbeing.

TIP



People applying to be on board of gendered violence services may have experienced abuse or violence in their family of origin or relationships.

A safe, respectful and appropriate opportunity to discuss this should be built into the recruitment process. Board members may be exposed to information and stories and that could touch nerves they have no control over. Intentional and overt care is required to ensure sustainability of board members.

Rosie



It can take a lot of courage to disclose an experience of domestic, family, or sexual violence.

TIP



Jot down your thoughts

What inspired me to get involved in the gendered violence sector?

What life experiences have accompanied me to this work as a board member?

How might my life experiences impact how I engage with others on the board?



1800Respect

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Connection to Purpose



Key Take Aways

- > Knowing ourselves and understanding our motives enable us to make effective and ethical decisions
- > An appropriate skill and representation mix is important for effective and ethical governance
- > Understanding and connecting to the purpose of the work enable us to make appropriate and effective strategic decisions
- > We are responsible for employing a gendered analysis in our leadership and supporting the workgroup to have an intersectional and trauma-informed practice framework and skills base
- > Managing victim-survivor risk at all levels and in all programs is core to gendered violence services alongside advocating for systemic change
- > We are responsible for holding ourselves and each other as a board accountable as well as the organisation
- > Working in the gendered violence sector can be confronting and triggering. Looking after ourselves and each other is critical.



We work in solidarity to further the cause of ending gendered violence

TIP

Group Activity and Reflection



Create a safe meeting guide to establish a basis for dealing with psychological, physical and cultural safety based on trauma-informed principles.

Engage a facilitator:

- > Set a collective intention for what we hope to achieve
- > Brief the facilitator on the process and desired outcome – co-create a process to develop a safe meeting guide and commitment to the process
- > Arrange a time and find a space that fosters coming together and the ability to get into an important and potentially challenging conversation about what meeting safety looks like
- > Provide feedback and ratify the meeting guide once approved
- > Make sure the guide is clear about what to do when it isn't followed.

Chairperson facilitator:

- > Host a conversation about the key things we need to have in place to make sure everyone has a voice and is listened to – (i.e. respect, honesty, listening, not interrupting, no side talk outside of meetings, adhering to the code of conduct, taking turns, etc)
- > How will we manage when we don't follow the communication commitment?
- > How will we celebrate when we are communicating in solidarity?
- > How often should we review our commitment?

The Workforce Capability Framework

CLICK HERE



Reflective Questions

- > Are we clear about the purpose of the organisation? What it does, who it serves how it will achieve its mission?
- > Are we clear about the purpose of the board and our roles?
- > How are we continuously checking ourselves as a board to make sure the work we do is useful to the clients, workforce and organisation?
- > What processes do we have in place to ensure we regularly connect with the organisation's purpose, mission and vision?
- > Is anything getting in the way of our focus on strategy and sustainability?
- > How do we ensure we bring a gender analysis to our decision-making and strategy development?
- > Do we have the right mix of skills and representation on our board?
How do we track this information and make it visible?
- > Are we clear about our role in contributing to a trauma-informed service?
- > How do we know we operating effectively as a board?



Hannah - Board Story

I joined a board because I am passionate about supporting those affected by gender-based violence and working towards a society in which it is eradicated.

Non-profits, especially those addressing gendered violence, play a crucial role in both supporting survivors and driving social change. Volunteering as a board member allows me to contribute meaningfully to these issues, leveraging my skills while recognising the importance of effective governance in non-profit success.

The board's makeup of various professionals and its commitment to inclusion created an environment where questions were always welcome and thoroughly explained. This supportive atmosphere helped me to grow my knowledge and contribute effectively to the board's work.

I found it challenging and rewarding to navigate diverse perspectives within the board, aiming to achieve consensus while respecting differing viewpoints. While a group of people can have shared values and shared goals, there will always be a diversity of lived experience, ideas, and approaches which take time and dedication to navigate. This experience has deepened my appreciation for collaborative decision-making and the importance of clear, consistent communication.

Having worked in the DFSV sector, I was fortunate to have engaged with the organisation through coordinated client support before joining the board. I admired and respected their approach to innovation, education, social justice, and systemic change, and felt a strong connection to the purpose and work of the organisation. I saw joining the board as an opportunity to deepen connection to, and support, an organisation that provides invaluable assistance to marginalised members of the community.

The board was made up of individuals with diverse backgrounds and professional experience, therefore board members brought an array of practical knowledge and varying perspectives to our discussions. The different professional backgrounds and skill sets of our board members enabled us to leverage everyone's strengths when assigning tasks, making decisions, or when we required particular expertise. This ability to draw on specific skills ensured that we could address challenges effectively and take advantage of the unique contributions of each board member.

Whilst the professional backgrounds and areas of expertise amongst board members varied, there was a high level of alignment in our values and ethics, which also proved beneficial. This strong alignment allowed us to reach consensus quickly and work efficiently toward the goals of the organisation with a clear strategic direction.

Board service is serious and at times, demanding, a reality that is frequently overlooked due to the fact that most nonprofit board members are considered "volunteers."

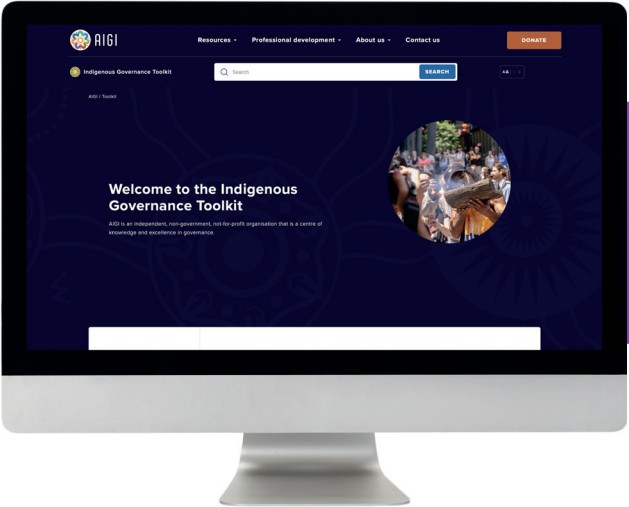
Serving on a board requires that members operate in accordance with financial requirements, legal requirements and statutory obligations in the relevant Acts and Regulations, the Constitution, Policies, and Strategic Plan, and manage the risks faced by the organisation.

.....

While the responsibility can be great, nonprofit board membership provides an opportunity to serve our community and to gain a sense of fulfillment.

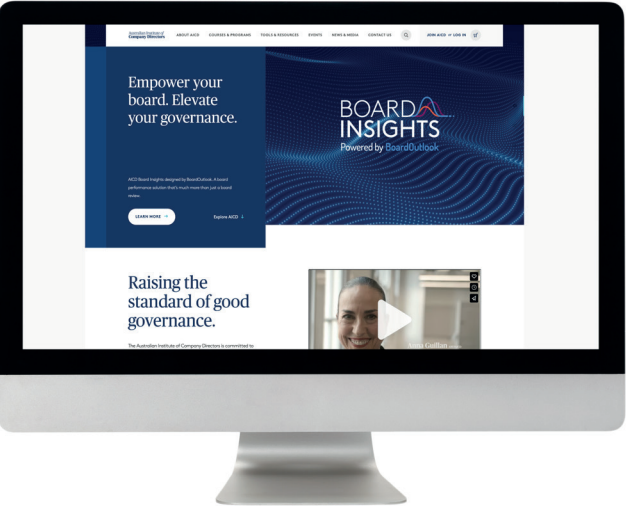
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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



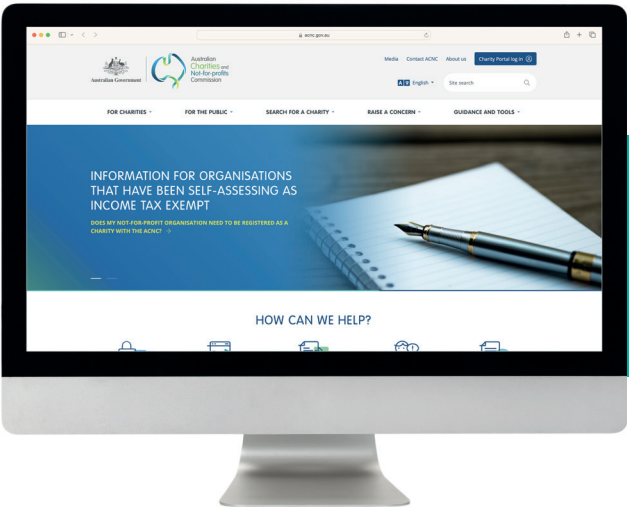
Indigenous Governance Toolkit

CLICK HERE



ACNC Governance Standards

CLICK HERE



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