

Your role in providing good governance

Background

An unincorporated site committee of a Cluster Manager may be elected at an annual meeting of the families at the centre or on the waiting list. The responsibilities of this committee will be determined by the Cluster Manager and organisations should refer to their agreement with their Cluster Manager for details. Although they may have limited responsibilities in relation to the management of the centre it is important that the cluster manager and centre families have confidence in them. Sound governance practices with open, transparent communication about actions and decisions will help build this confidence and ensure that everyone is working towards the same outcome.

Good governance enables the organisation to endure, remain viable and carry out the purpose for which it was designed.

The components of good governance include:

- Coherent aims and goals
- Sound framework of policies and procedures
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- Ethical standards and code of conduct
- Strategic planning and risk management
- Transparency.

Overview of responsibilities

Aims and goals

The association's (Cluster manager) constitution will include a statement about the purpose of the association. This statement can be a starting point for a centre/service philosophy. The philosophy is a shared vision which reflects the interests of the membership and guides the work of the organisation. It assists in setting goals for the organisation and ensuring that all members are united in their work.

Policies and procedures

Policies guide the day-to-day decision making and provide a structure for practice when working with children, staff and families. They should be based on knowledge, understandings, beliefs and legislation. The Children's Services Regulations 2009 and the Victorian kindergarten policy, procedures and funding criteria require specified policies. Others are developed as needed. A comprehensive set of policies should be continually evolving and require ongoing evaluation and review by the cluster manager to ensure they best meet the needs of the community, reflect current thinking and are relevant in terms of current laws and regulations.

Committee members should have copies of the centre policies and familiarise themselves with those policies.

KPV's PolicyWorksv2 provides a comprehensive set of model policies for early childhood centres, including information about how to develop and review policies.

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities

Committee as a whole

It is important that all committee members are dedicated to the work of the committee by sharing the workload, participating in the activities of the committee and taking responsibility for the decisions it makes. The committee needs to have common goals and shared interests as well as respect for one another's ideas and opinions. Some members of the committee may be given specific tasks or responsibilities according to the needs of the centre or the requirements of the Terms of Reference (Established by the cluster manager) otherwise all members have equal responsibility. Committee members can assist the work of the committee by ensuring correct meeting procedures are followed. This includes attending and being prepared for meetings; using tools such as agendas; minutes and action sheets; listening to other opinions and ideas; and being prepared to participate in discussion.

President

Is the key person but not the person who 'does it all' or makes all the decisions. Their role usually includes: chairing committee meetings and ensuring committee meetings are run smoothly and efficiently; coordinating the work of the committee; knowing and utilising the skills of each committee member; understanding the role of the committee and its authority; participating in effective communication and the decision-making processes. The president may also assist with the setting of the agenda.

Vice president

Assists the president and chairs meetings in the absence of the president. It can be used as a training role and they may also be given a specific task such as cluster liaison.

Secretary

Is usually responsible for all outgoing/incoming correspondence (preparation, recording and distribution); preparing material for meetings (such as agendas, discussion papers, action sheets); writing/distributing/filing of minutes; management of centre records (filing, accuracy, privacy). The secretary may manage communication with families and the community and complete reports for organisations such as the cluster manager. This role can be separated to share the workload.

Treasurer

To share the workload the treasurer's responsibilities are often divided into a number of smaller roles. The treasurer does not make decisions solely but ensures the committee is provided with accurate information to enable it to make informed financial decisions. The responsibilities of treasurer may include managing receipts and banking of money; payment of expenses; managing bank accounts; providing a monthly and annual report; accurate record keeping; and compliance with taxation requirements. It is important that all processes for financial management are clear and transparent.

General committee members

These are usually defined as those who do not hold a specified position. They are vital to the effective operation of the committee and may be allocated a variety of tasks throughout the year. Effective committee members follow through on tasks allocated to them, respect confidentiality and support each other.

Ethical standards and code of conduct

Ethics provide standards of right and wrong. They are the principles and values that guide behaviour and inform decision making. A committee code of conduct is a useful guide for committee members.

Confidentiality

Privacy and confidentiality is critical to all organisations. Committee members will deal with sensitive and confidential information from time to time and it is essential that all members understand their obligations and are committed to maintaining confidentiality. This protects the organisation and ensures confidence in the committee and among committee members. KPV suggests that all committees adopt a Code of Conduct for committee members and that all members sign a member declaration. The Code of Conduct is a formal statement of the principles, values and standards of behaviour expected from the committee, staff and members of the association. This helps to create an environment where staff and committee members work together to achieve the same goals.

Decision making

Unless the committee has delegated authority to an individual or group of people (subcommittee) decision making is the responsibility of the WHOLE COMMITTEE (office bearers and general committee members). All members should have the opportunity to hear the issues/facts, discuss and be listened to so they can make fully informed decisions. 'Rubber-stamping' is risky and not in the best interests of the organisation.

Record keeping

Committees will be responsible for the management of a wide range of records. It is important that records are accurate and up-to-date. Privacy laws will also require that some records are stored in a secure place and committee members should understand how the centre's privacy policy relates to record keeping.

Accountability and transparency

Open, transparent communication and decision making will help build confidence and ensure that everyone is working towards the same outcome—the best interests of children and families at the centre. Committees should develop procedures which ensure that decisions are communicated to members. This may include regular newsletters, notices, bulletins, display board etc. Minutes of meetings (or a summary), excluding confidential items, should be displayed on the noticeboard as soon as possible following a committee meeting. It is also important that members are given opportunities to provide feedback to the committee.

Compliance

Cluster Manager constitution

Information Privacy Act 2000

Health Records Act 2001

Terms of Reference (developed by the Cluster Manager)

Where to get more information

KPV Governance Manual for Early Childhood Services (available Term 1 2011)

KPV CommitteeWorks DVD

Consumer Affairs Victoria website: www.consumer.vic.gov.au

Our Community website: www.ourcommunity.com.au