

Your role in providing good governance

Background

At the Annual General Meeting (AGM) the members of the association (usually families with children at the centre or on the waiting list) elect the committee to manage the affairs of the association on their behalf. It is important that the members have confidence in the elected members. 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 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 committee and ensuring that all members are united in their work centre.

Centres in cluster management arrangements should develop their philosophy in consultation with the cluster manager.

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 policies, 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 management body to ensure they best meet the needs of the community, reflect current thinking and are relevant in terms of current laws and regulations.

In cluster management arrangements, operational policies will often be developed by the cluster manager and many are developing governance policies. Committee members should have copies of the centre policies and familiarise themselves with those policies.

KPV's PolicyWorksv2 provide 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 association's constitution otherwise all elected 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 staffing 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 enrolments; communication with families and the community and complete reports for organisations such as DEECD. This role can also be divided to share the workload.

Public officer

All incorporated associations are required to have a public officer. They are the point of contact between Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) and the association. Their role is to maintain the register of members, notify CAV of any changes to the association details and complete an Annual Statement (within one month after the AGM) for consumer affairs. CAV must be notified within 14 days if there is a change of public officer or their contact details. The constitution will define who the public officer of the association is to be and in many cases the secretary is the public officer. Proposed changes to the Associations Incorporation Act 1981 include replacing the term Public Officer with Secretary.

Treasurer

The constitution will outline the responsibilities of the 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 preparation of budgets; managing receipts and banking of money; payment of expenses; managing bank accounts; providing a monthly and annual report; organising the annual audit;

accurate record keeping; compliance with taxation requirements and invoicing and receipting of fees. It is important that all processes for financial management are clear and transparent.

The executive

It is common practice for the office bearers (normally the president, vice president, treasurer and secretary) of the committee to be called 'the executive'. The executive has no decision making powers of its own unless these have been stated in the constitution or delegated at a committee meeting. The executive is a type of subcommittee and should follow the same guidelines. It is common practice for the executive to be authorised to deal with urgent issues such as child safety/regulations, which may arise between meetings.

General committee members

These are usually defined as those who do not hold a position specified in the constitution. 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.

Subcommittees

The basic function of a subcommittee is to undertake a specific task on behalf of the committee. They require clearly defined roles and responsibilities ('terms of reference'). These need to be determined by the committee and recorded in the minutes of a committee meeting. It is particularly important to determine the scope of decision-making responsibility. Subcommittees may be permanent, short term or investigative. Subcommittees can be a useful way of spreading the workload and can include parents and other interested people. KPV recommends that all committees elect at least two specific standing committees: a grievance/complaints subcommittee and a staffing subcommittee. Other subcommittees may include maintenance, fundraising, policy, quality or planning.

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. A variety of legislation requires committees to collect and maintain specific records and committees need to be familiar with these requirements. 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.

Strategic planning and risk management

Committees need to plan beyond the end of their term of office to ensure the ongoing viability of the centre. Strategic planning helps to focus the committee, staff and parents on working together towards the same long and short-term goals and thus providing a better service.

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 who are members of the association. 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. The committee of management is accountable to the members of the association. An AGM must be held each year to provide a report to the members about the activities of the committee.

Compliance

Incorporated Associations must comply with the Associations Incorporation Act 1981
Centre constitution
Information Privacy Act 2000
Health Records Act 2001

Where to get more information

KPV Employer Management Manual (New version available Term 3 2010)
KPV CommitteeWorks DVD
KPV PolicyWorks v2
Consumer Affairs Victoria website: www.consumer.vic.gov.au
Our Community website: www.ourcommunity.com.au