



Council for
Intellectual Disability



Inclusive Governance

Including people with intellectual disability
in organisational governance

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Introduction

🗨️ *Inclusive governance is about how everyone should have the right to be part of the group that sets the rules.* 🗨️

– Fiona McKenzie AM, CID Board Member

The reform of disability services in Australia over the past two decades, driven by factors such as the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), has brought about changes that give people with disability greater autonomy as citizens. There is, however, still a long way to go to for people with disability – especially for people with intellectual disability – to feel genuinely included in all aspects of society.

Participation in governance activities of an organisation may not seem the most important aspect of inclusion, however it is a fundamental aspect of inclusion. The role of a board is to lead and direct the activities of an organisation, so it makes absolute sense that people with intellectual disability should be included in organisational governance activities across the community. It is good governance practice for any organisation to include the opinions, knowledge, and experience of community stakeholders in its decision-making processes.



The Council for Intellectual Disability (CID) has elected people with intellectual disability to the board since the early 2000s, when changes to our constitution required over 50% of our board to be people with intellectual disability. Beyond just hearing a consumer voice through advisory committees and reference groups, including people on boards is an important recognition that people with intellectual disability have the right to “**full and effective representation in society**” (Article 3c, CPRD).

In 2022, we expanded our commitment to inclusive governance when our members approved an Easy Read Constitution. We believe it’s the first Easy Read Constitution in Australia (and possibly the world). The Easy Read Constitution means that all members have access to the information they need about their rights and obligations.

CID wants to share our knowledge and experiences in supporting people with intellectual disability to participate in governance activities; including being active board members and holding positions of leadership and authority.

It is our hope that organisations and companies from any sector who support or provide services to people with intellectual disability will find it a useful resource to guide them in inclusive governance practice.

Context

The rights of people with disability to be included in all aspects of decision-making in their lives is enshrined in the United Nations CPRD. Relevant to inclusive governance is Article 29: Participation in public and political life. Article 29 says we must “**ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others**”.

Australia’s Disability Strategy has a policy priority to increase representation of people with disability in leadership roles. The strategy acknowledges that people with disability are “significantly underrepresented on boards, in politics and in other leadership roles in Australian society.” It identifies that “Increased inclusion of people with disability in leadership will enable the perspectives of people with disability to be included in decision-making, thereby making decisions more reflective of the community” (Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021-2031, p33).

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability highlighted the inclusion of people with disability on boards in its Public Hearing 13.

In its report of the Hearing, the Royal Commission noted that “people with lived experience of disability can make contributions to the deliberations of the board that people without disability, no matter how well intentioned, are unlikely to be able to replicate. In other words, the inclusion of people with disability as directors is likely to expand the range of experience, skills and knowledge available to the board and to improve the quality of services provided”.

In upholding these principles and in meeting legislative obligations, it is timely that organisations consider how they authentically include people with intellectual disability in their governance and decision-making structures.



Nothing about us without us!

Choice and control!

Experts in our own lives!



Objectives

- To uphold the rights of people with disability, particularly their rights to be decision-makers in their own lives, and to participate fully in civic life
- To promote participation of people with intellectual disability in board membership
- To provide a blueprint for organisations to improve inclusive governance practice.

Principles

- People with intellectual disability are experts in their own lives
- People with intellectual disability can be leaders and decision-makers
- Inclusion is central to good governance in organisations.



Definitions

Inclusive governance in the context of the Framework and its associated resources means governance structures and practices that include people with intellectual disability.

Other terms used in this framework and the associated resources have the following definitions:

- Boards – board of management; management committee, advisory groups
- Organisations – businesses and charities (regardless of profit or not-for-profit status)
- Senior management teams – organisation C-suites (CEOs, Executive Officers and Directors, Executive teams, Senior Managers).



Components of success

During the development of the Framework, a range of success factors for inclusive governance were identified:

- Common understanding of, and robust framework for governance
- An independent support person
- Accessible information and meeting practices
- Orientation and ongoing training
- Continuous reflection and intentional practice of inclusive governance.

There were also a range of universal challenges identified that need to be considered when developing inclusive governance practice.

These include:

- Available resources
- Values and practice
- Communication
- Organisational maturity.

These success factors and challenges are addressed within our Inclusive Governance Package. It is important to note that inclusive governance is not a linear process; rather it reflects a continuous improvement cycle, and can build on good governance practices already occurring in your organisation.

CID's Inclusive Governance Package Stages for success

CID's Inclusive Governance package is a series of factsheets and workshops designed to support organisations identify the strategic and cultural activities needed to implement inclusive governance practices in your organisation.

Stage	Resources
<p>Starting the inclusive governance conversation in your organisation</p>	<p>Starting the inclusive governance conversation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Ensuring there is a common understanding of governance and inclusion · Identifying your organisation's concerns about inclusive governance · Implementing strategies to address the concerns
<p>Preparing for inclusive governance</p>	<p>Preparing for inclusive governance looks more deeply at your organisation's culture, capabilities, and capacity. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Identifying the resources you have and the resources you will need · Considering legal issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Constitution Review - Director Responsibilities · Identifying your inclusive governance champions and key decision-makers
<p>Practicing inclusive governance</p>	<p>Practicing inclusive governance focuses on the practical issues. It covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Accessible and inclusive meeting practices · Developing accessible information · How to provide successful participation support · Evaluating your progress on implementing inclusive governance

References

The Framework has been developed through consultation with people with and without intellectual disability who are experienced board members, CEOs, and in board support roles.

The Framework's development was also informed by a review of documents relevant to inclusive governance models. The list below provides details for some of those documents that may be of interest as background reading to establishing inclusive governance in your organisation. They include information referenced in the resources associated with the Framework.

[Article 29 – Participation in Political and Public Life United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#)

[Australia's Disability Strategy 2021 – 2031](#)

[Disability Royal Commission Public Hearing Report – Public Hearing 13 – Preventing and responding to violence abuse neglect and exploitation in disability services \(a case study\)](#)

Contact Us

If you would like further information about how CID can assist your organisation with establishing and practicing inclusive governance, please contact us.



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