



FDIO
Forum for Directors of
Indigenous Organisations

TOP TIPS for Independent Directors

(from the Seminar held in Perth on 20 February 2017)

Discussion lead by Karen Jacobs, Gordon Cole and Peter Fitzpatrick

- **Think about your board composition and conduct a skills audit before seeking a new Independent Director:** What are the important skills to have on your Board? What skills are missing? Can you identify someone who is good with numbers (financial skills), good with people and language (community consultation and relationship building), likes details (keeping on top of governance and regulatory requirements), entrepreneurial skills (commercialising assets), links to government and fund-raising skills?
- **Selecting a new director requires a proper due-diligence process (from both the organisation and the potential director).** A good Independent Director has good leadership skills and core values that are aligned with the organisation. It needs to be a good “cultural fit”.
- **Professional governance training is very important for all new board members and as a refresher for experienced directors.** It makes sure everyone is on the same page at the same time and ensures everyone knows their rights and responsibilities.
- **There are added benefits (and complexities) to being an Aboriginal Independent Director on an Aboriginal board.** Aboriginal Independent Directors need to stand their ground and make hard decisions. They often face criticism before the reason for a decision is understood and respected. But they can be an excellent advocate in user friendly language and have an innate knowledge of cultural obligations and practices.
- **Boards require consensus decisions:** Perspectives may be different but ultimately each director needs to be comfortable with the outcome. Deliberations need to be kept confidential.
- **People who are strong voices and advocates in the community are not necessarily skilled or effective board directors.** You have to leave family conflict and gossip at the door and base decisions on the facts before you.
- **Independent Directors need to commit to immense time, energy and passion for the work and getting to know the organisation and its stakeholders.** It is not an easy ride being an Independent Director.
- **All board members need to have a voice on boards and respect all other opinions.** The chairperson plays a crucial role in maintaining a board culture of respect.
- **Young people have an important role to play.** They can offer wisdom and insight, but need to be mentored. A board should pace a young person’s involvement, so they are not exposed to too much too soon. Offer an invitation for them to shadow more experienced board directors.