



GBAS
GOLF BUSINESS ADVISORY SERVICES

A 2026 NATIONAL CLUB GOVERNANCE REPORT

Making Par in Golf Club Governance

The most comprehensive picture of
Australian golf club governance assembled to date.



Board
Benchmarking

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Foreword



James Sutherland
Chief Executive Officer
Golf Australia

Golf in Australia is experiencing a period of unprecedented growth, transformation and opportunity. More Australians are engaging with the game than ever before, across traditional golf clubs, public courses, driving ranges, simulators and social golf experiences.

That growth brings enormous opportunity, but it also brings increasing complexity and expectation for the organisations that sit at the heart of the game: our clubs, courses and venues.

Golf clubs are significant community assets, employers, volunteer-led organisations and increasingly sophisticated businesses managing major infrastructure, people, risk and community expectations. The quality of governance within those organisations has never been more important.

This 2026 report, *Making Par in Golf Club Governance*, provides the most comprehensive picture of golf club governance assembled in Australia to date. With contributions from more than 1,100 respondents across over 600 clubs nationwide, it offers an important and practical assessment of the opportunities and challenges facing governance across the sector.

Importantly, the findings show encouraging progress. Over the past two years, there has been growing recognition across the industry that strong governance is not a compliance exercise, it is fundamental to sustainability, strategic decision-making, long-term planning and creating welcoming, modern and resilient clubs.

That thinking is central to the new shared industry strategy, *BIG SWINGS 2026–2030: The Next Evolution of Golf in Australia*. One of the strategy's core priorities is ensuring clubs, courses and venues are growing in number, thriving, sustainable and inclusive, supported by modern governance that enables organisations to adapt to the changing needs of golfers and communities.

Clubs today are navigating increasingly complex issues including financial sustainability, capital planning, workforce and volunteer management, inclusion, member expectations, risk and regulatory compliance. Supporting clubs through that evolution is a critical responsibility for Golf Australia.

That is why we are proud to partner with the Australian Institute of Company Directors through the Golf Australia Club Governance Program. Since launching in pilot in 2025, we have already seen strong engagement from clubs and volunteers across the country, alongside clear evidence that improved governance practices are leading to positive change within club environments.

Importantly, this work is not about making golf clubs more corporate. It is about helping clubs and their leaders build the capability, confidence and structures required to make better long-term decisions, support their communities and harness the significant opportunities currently in front of the game.

The insights and recommendations within this report provide an important roadmap for that journey. I encourage all clubs, directors, managers and industry leaders to engage with the findings and reflect on how governance can continue to evolve across the Australian golf landscape.



Mark Rigotti
Managing Director & CEO
Australian Institute of
Company Directors

Sport provides a powerful lens for understanding governance. From the smallest of volunteer-led community clubs to complex national sporting organisations and peak bodies, governance is ultimately about how decisions are made, how accountability is exercised, and how organisations remain sustainable and focused on their purpose over the long term.

It is what enables organisations to perform effectively, manage risk responsibly and earn the trust of the communities they serve.

Golf itself illustrates both the scale and significance of the challenge. Over the past year more than four million Australians engaged with the sport in some form, contributing to an industry worth more than \$10 billion annually. Golf is a deeply embedded part of our communities; bringing people together, supporting wellbeing and creating economic value.

But across Australia, organisations are operating within increasingly complex environments. Many rely heavily on volunteers, clubs and member-driven organisations. At all levels, they must balance passion with professionalism, short-term pressures with long-term sustainability, and the expectations of diverse stakeholders. This is no small task, particularly where volunteers play such a central role.

A consistent theme in this report is the importance of clarity. Clarity of purpose gives boards the confidence to make difficult decisions. Clarity of strategy provides a line of sight from day-to-day activities to the bigger picture and long-term outcomes. And clarity of roles – the clear delineation between a non-executive volunteer administrator and paid professional staff for example - is essential to avoid confusion, duplication and governance risk. When these elements are in place, organisations are far better positioned to operate effectively and deliver on their mission. This can transform governance from a burden into a strength.

Equally important is capability. Good governance doesn't happen by accident. It requires investment in skills, ongoing education and a commitment to continuous improvement.

Strong governance is also central to maintaining an organisation's social licence. As expectations continue to grow, particularly in areas such as safety, integrity and inclusion, boards must lead with consistency, transparency and sound judgement.

That's why the AICD is proud to partner with Golf Australia to improve governance outcomes for golf club leaders, directors and volunteers across the country.

This report highlights both the challenges and the opportunities facing the diversity of golfing clubs and organisations today. It identifies and provides insights on the gaps that persist and offers guidance on ways to lift governance effectiveness. More importantly, it reinforces a simple but powerful principle: good governance, applied well, is the foundation on which sustainable, effective organisations are built and can continue to improve to meet the increasing demands of this vastly popular sport.



Introduction

Golf clubs in Australia are big businesses. There are approximately 1,300 clubs catering to over 477,000 members nationwide, with the top 150 clubs collectively managing revenues nearing \$900 million and total assets beyond \$2.4 billion in value. The expectations placed on club boards have never been higher and the evidence from three consecutive years of research suggests too many board are still not meeting those expectations.

The 2026 National Club Governance Survey is the most comprehensive of the three, supported by the active involvement of Golf Australia. With 1,139 respondents representing over 600 clubs across every state and territory, spanning all-volunteer country clubs through to large metropolitan facilities with full executive management structures, it provides the most complete national picture of Australian golf club governance assembled to date.

This is the third year of formal governance research into Australian golf clubs, and the picture is increasingly clear. Structural challenges persist: role confusion, operational overreach and interference, limited strategic focus, and a gap between how boards assess themselves and how management experiences them.

Many boards are doing a commendable job under real constraints, but the data highlights opportunities to strengthen governance,

particularly in role clarity, board composition and long-term strategic focus. It also suggests that many boards view their effectiveness more positively than management does, which can slow the pace of improvement.

This report is designed to be practical. Each section brings together findings, trend insights and recommendations, so that context, data and action remain closely connected. Specific guidance for both board leaders and club managers is provided throughout. A dedicated section also addresses the distinct context of smaller, volunteer-run clubs, which make up a significant portion of the industry and operate under different constraints to larger organisations.

The next phase of governance improvement will not come from greater awareness; it will come from boards making deliberate, sustained changes to how they operate.

Jeff Blunden
Managing Director, GBAS

Nicholas Barnett
Founder, Board Benchmarking

Executive Summary

The 2026 National Club Governance Survey confirms a consistent pattern across Australian golf clubs: governance is functioning, but underlying structural weaknesses remain unresolved. Based on the perspectives of golf club directors, governance performance is similar to comparable not-for-profits and member organisations.

There is a persistent gap, however, between how boards see themselves and how management experiences them. In 2026, 80% of directors believe their board is effective, compared with only 70% of managers. This gap has been evident in every year of this research and is most pronounced in role clarity, director behaviour and long-term planning. It suggests that many boards are overestimating their effectiveness, and therefore underestimating the need for change.

At the core of this issue is role clarity, which remains the lowest-rated governance measure for the third consecutive year. Only 57% of respondents believe directors clearly understand where their role ends and management's begins. This lack of clarity continues to drive operational overreach and interference, limiting the board's ability to focus on its primary responsibilities: setting direction and governing long-term performance.

The practical consequence is often seen in board meetings themselves. Agendas become a jumble of operational matters, routine reporting and disconnected discussion while important business, strategic and long-term decisions receive insufficient attention. Meetings lose focus and purpose because role clarity, behaviour and decision-making discipline are not working as they should

Board capability and composition further constrain effectiveness. While 63% of respondents believe their board has the right skills, this still leaves more than one-third of clubs with capability gaps. Combined with low gender diversity and election processes often driven by availability or popularity rather than expertise, and lacking effective nominations processes, many boards are not structured to meet the strategic demands of increasingly complex organisations.

Board–management relationships, chair–GM dynamics and overall teamwork are rated highly but no higher than comparable not-for-profits. These high ratings are not matched by accountability. Boards continue to struggle to address underperformance and manage difficult dynamics, resulting in governance that is functionally collaborative but not consistently disciplined or effective.

Finally, the survey highlights a growing risk around strategy and long-term planning. Many clubs report performing well today, yet lack embedded strategy, funded capital plans or formal risk frameworks. With over half of clubs operating under \$1 million in revenue and heavily reliant on volunteers, the challenge is not just capability, but capacity.

FIVE PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

1

CLARIFY THE ROLE OF DIRECTORS INDIVIDUALLY AND THE BOARD COLLECTIVELY - AND ENFORCE IT

Good governance starts with how each director shows up at the board table, understands their responsibilities, especially the distinction between governance and management, contributes to discussion and supports collective decision-making.

2

BUILD A MORE CAPABLE BOARD - DELIBERATELY

Shift from informal, popularity-based selection to skills-based recruitment, the use of nominations committees and thoughtful succession planning.

3

STRENGTHEN BOARD LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Equip chairs to set standards, manage behaviour and address underperformance by directors individually and the board as a whole.

4

FOCUS THE BOARD ON BUSINESS AND STRATEGY, NOT OPERATIONS

Rebalance agendas and discussions toward long-term direction, performance and risk.

5

STRENGTHEN LONG-TERM PLANNING - ESPECIALLY CAPITAL

Develop and maintain funded capital plans and embed strategy into ongoing governance.

These findings and recommendations must be viewed in context. Australian golf clubs range from small, volunteer-run organisations to large, professionally managed businesses, and this diversity shapes how governance operates in practice. While the core issues are consistent across the industry, their causes and the related solutions vary by club size, structure, resources and an understanding of the business imperatives of running significant organisations where member interests and happiness are paramount.

Research Methodology & Terminology

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

The 2026 survey was conducted between January and March 2026. Respondents rated 13 governance statements on a 1-to-7 Likert scale and provided written commentary on their club's biggest governance challenges. A total of 1,139 responses were received from over 600 clubs. Of these, 922 were full responses. These 922 respondents comprise 636 directors (chairs, captains, treasurers, secretaries) and 281 club management leaders (GMs, CEOs and paid managers), with five others. All analysis and statistics throughout this report are based on these 922 full responses.

Responses are benchmarked against Board Benchmarking's database of over 700 board reviews, including many boards of small to medium not-for-profit organisations of comparable scale. The WhatWhoHowDo Board Effectiveness Framework used to structure this research is described in Appendix A1. Where results fall in the bottom quartile of comparable not-for-profit boards, this is noted explicitly. No results were in the top quartile of comparable boards.

Survey statements were rated on a 1-to-7 point Likert scale. To aid comparison and benchmarking, responses are consolidated into three categories throughout this report, as shown below. This approach is consistent with the methodology used in the 2024 and 2025 research, enabling direct year-on-year comparison.

Disagree

- › Strongly disagree (1)
- › Disagree (2)
- › Slightly disagree (3)

Neutral

- › Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- › Slightly agree (5)

Agree

- › Agree (6)
- › Strongly agree (7)

TERMINOLOGY

In this report, the governing body of a golf club is referred to as a Board (not Committee) and its members are referred to as directors (not board members or committee members). Committees of the board are referred to as board committees or just committees (not sub-committees).

The Chair of the board is referred to as the chair (not President, Captain or committee chair). The GMs and CEOs are referred to as GMs in this report.

Respondent Profile

The profile of the 922 responses analysed for the purpose of this report is set out below.

DIMENSION	CATEGORY	% OF RESPONDENTS	WHAT THIS TELLS US
Role	Director	~69%	Strong governance perspective in dataset
	Management	~31%	Enables comparison between governance and execution views
	Other	<1%	Minimal impact on analysis
Location	Regional	74%	Industry is predominantly regional and community-based
	Metropolitan	26%	Smaller but more professionally resourced cohort
Club Revenue	<\$1m	51%	Majority are small, resource-constrained clubs
	\$1m–\$3m	~20%	Transitional governance complexity
	>\$3m	26%	Larger, more complex organisations
Governance Structure	Volunteer-run (full/mostly)	~47%	Governance and operations often overlap
	GM/Executive structure	~50%	More formal governance environments
Board Size	7–9 members (avg. 8)	Majority	Typical governance structure across industry
	<7 or >9	Minority	Limited variation in board size
Committees	≤5 committees	82%	Relatively simple governance structures
	>5 committees	18%	More complex governance (typically larger clubs)
Experience	3+ years board experience	73%	Respondents are generally experienced
	5+ years tenure	46%	Potential risk of limited renewal
Gender	Male	~80%	Significant gender imbalance
	Female	~20%	Limited diversity of perspective
Club Type Context	Small/Volunteer clubs	High proportion	Capacity constraints shape governance
	Larger/Managed clubs	Smaller proportion	Capability and structure drive performance

Detailed survey results by each of these cohorts are shown in Appendix A2. These tables highlight how responses vary from the overall average and where the most significant differences in perspective occur. This additional detail is intended to support deeper analysis and allow clubs to better understand how their context may influence governance performance relative to the broader dataset.

Board Motivations

MOTIVATIONS FOR BOARD SERVICE

Understanding what motivates directors to serve is foundational to good governance. Motivation shapes how individuals engage with their duties, the issues they prioritise in the boardroom, and their willingness to invest discretionary effort in strategy, oversight and member representation. Boards composed of directors with aligned, constructive motivations tend to evidence stronger cohesion, sharper accountability and longer tenure stability (subject to constitutional term limits), while mismatched or transactional motivations are a common precursor to disengagement, factionalism and governance drift.

For clubs, where directors are typically unpaid volunteers carrying significant fiduciary responsibility, motivation is also a practical recruitment lever: knowing why current directors stepped forward helps boards target succession pipelines, design induction that reinforces purpose, and frame the value proposition for prospective candidates. Tracking motivation across cohorts further allows the industry to detect structural shifts - for example, the gradual professionalisation of larger clubs - and to adapt governance frameworks, training and director development accordingly.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Respondents were asked what primarily motivates their service on a club board or committee.

Passion for the Club emerged as the single strongest driver across the entire sample, cited by 37% of respondents, reinforcing that emotional connection to the institution remains the foundation of volunteer governance in Australian clubs.

Skills and Experience (23%) and **Giving Back/Volunteering** (19%) followed, with **Influencing Club Direction** (17%) and **Time and Opportunity** (4%) trailing.

Time availability is a negligible motivator at every cut of the data, suggesting most directors are stepping forward despite competing demands, not because of spare capacity.

Somewhat understandably, material differences emerged by cohort. **Club revenue** is the sharpest discriminator: at clubs turning over less than \$1m, "Giving Back" rises to 29% and "Skills and Experience" falls to 12%, while at clubs above \$7m the pattern inverts (15% and 32% respectively).

The same balance appears by **operating structure**; fully volunteer-run clubs are dominated by Giving Back (39%) with Skills at just 10%, whereas clubs with full executive-level management draw directors who cite Skills (31%) over Giving Back (11%).

Location mirrors this divide: metropolitan directors weight Skills (31%) and Influence (20%) more heavily, while regional directors lean toward Giving Back (23%). **Gender** differences are modest; women report marginally higher Giving Back (21% vs 19%) and Time/Opportunity (6% vs 4%) motivations than men.

The implication is that smaller, regional, volunteer-run clubs are recruiting boards based on community spirit, while larger and metropolitan clubs are increasingly attracting directors who frame their contribution in professional, skills-based terms.

Board development, induction and recruitment messaging should be calibrated accordingly.

Table - Primary motivation for board service (% of respondents)

MOTIVATION CATEGORY	OVERALL	< \$1M	\$1M TO \$3M PER YEAR	\$3M TO \$7M PER YEAR	\$7M+	METROPOLITAN AREA	REGIONAL AREA
Giving Back/ Volunteering	19%	29%	13%	11%	15%	11%	23%
Influencing Club Direction	17%	13%	23%	16%	15%	20%	15%
Passion for the Club	37%	43%	28%	37%	36%	35%	38%
Skills and Experience	23%	12%	28%	32%	32%	31%	19%
Time and Opportunity	4%	3%	8%	3%	2%	3%	5%

MOTIVATION CATEGORY	OVERALL	FULLY RUN BY VOLUNTEERS, NO PAID STAFF	MAINLY RUN BY VOLUNTEERS, MINIMAL PAID STAFF	PAID GENERAL MANAGER OR CLUB MANAGER, OVERSEEN BY BOARD/ COMMITTEE	FULL EXECUTIVE LEVEL MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE (GM, DEPARTMENT HEADS), OVERSEEN BY BOARD/ COMMITTEE	FEMALE	MALE
Giving Back/ Volunteering	19%	38%	16%	17%	11%	21%	19%
Influencing Club Direction	17%	6%	22%	19%	16%	15%	17%
Passion for the Club	37%	41%	41%	32%	40%	39%	37%
Skills and Experience	23%	10%	19%	25%	31%	19%	23%
Time and Opportunity	4%	4%	2%	6%	2%	6%	4%

Source: 2026 National Club Governance Survey



Recommendations

The findings of this 2026 survey point to five priority recommendations for improving governance across the Australian golf industry.

1

CLARIFY THE ROLE OF DIRECTORS INDIVIDUALLY AND THE BOARD COLLECTIVELY - AND ENFORCE IT

Good governance starts with how each director shows up at the board table, understands their responsibilities, especially the distinction between governance and management, contributes to discussion and supports collective decision-making

2

BUILD A MORE CAPABLE BOARD - DELIBERATELY

Shift from informal, popularity-based selection to skills-based recruitment, the use of nominations committees and thoughtful succession planning.

3

STRENGTHEN BOARD LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Equip chairs to set standards, manage behaviour and address underperformance by directors individually and the board as a whole.

4

FOCUS THE BOARD ON BUSINESS AND STRATEGY, NOT OPERATIONS

Rebalance agendas and discussions toward long-term direction, performance and risk.

5

STRENGTHEN LONG-TERM PLANNING - ESPECIALLY CAPITAL

Develop and maintain funded capital plans and embed strategy into ongoing governance.

Each recommendation includes the underlying data, illustrative voices from the field, the changes required now, and practical tips for chairs, boards and club managers, including those operating in smaller, volunteer-run environments.

1

Clarify the role of directors individually and the board collectively - and enforce it

Establish clear boundaries between governance and management and ensure they are consistently applied.

Director role clarity is the single worst-performing dimension of Australian golf club governance; and it has been every year since this research began. Only 57% of all respondents agree that directors demonstrate a clear understanding of their role and how it differs from management's. This is the lowest-rated item in the survey, it sits in the bottom quartile of the NFP benchmark, and the 12-point gap between directors (61%) and managers (49%) is the largest perception gap of any survey item. Three years of data leaves no room for doubt: this is a structural problem, not a one-off.

The operational/strategic balance data makes the same point differently. When asked to score their board's balance between operational and strategic focus, 44% of respondents placed their board on the operations side of the scale, rising to 51% among small volunteer-run clubs, compared to 38% at large clubs. Only 60% agree that board meetings have the right balance between strategic, performance and compliance matters.

- **GMs report that director overreach into and interference in day-to-day operations continues. This has been the single most frequently reported governance challenge across all three years of this research.**
- **It is not a new problem. It is a persistent one that boards keep failing to solve; one for which managers keep paying the price.**

“ Directors believing they are there to make operational decisions and “manage” the club.

Club Management Leader, Metropolitan area

“ Future nominees knowing their role is strategy not management.

Club Management Leader, Regional area

57%

Agree directors clearly understand their role

Board: 61% | Management: 49%

Bottom Quartile

NFP benchmark for role clarity

3rd consecutive year as the lowest-rated item

60%

Meetings have appropriate strategic balance

Board: 61% | Management: 57%

44%

Of respondents place their board on the operations side

51% in small volunteer-run clubs
38% in large clubs

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE - NOW

The solution to operational overreach is not primarily structural; it is cultural and deliberate. Boards need to stop treating this as an abstract governance principle and start treating it as a practical problem with practical consequences: managers who are second-guessed or overridden lose confidence; staff whose boss is the manager, get directions from someone who is not their boss, causing distress and confusion; and boards that spend their time on green speeds and bar prices have no time left for business decisions, strategy and capital planning. That is a direct cost to the club.

Stop accepting operational overreach as inevitable, as something that is just par for the course. Name it when it happens. Agree on a Board Charter. Redesign meeting agendas so that strategy leads rather than follows. And make director induction, including a clear explanation of the boundary between governance and management, mandatory, not optional.

<p>Tips for Chairs & Boards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Adopt a Board Charter that clearly states what the board does and what management does - and enforce it. ✓ Stop discussing operational matters at board level. If it can be delegated to management, delegate it. ✓ Redesign meeting agendas: strategy and performance first, financial reports next and operations last. ✓ Induct every new director within 30 days. Cover legal duties, role boundaries and behaviour expectations. No exceptions. ✓ Audit every sub-committee. Eliminate those that duplicate management’s work. The rest need a current, strategic terms of reference. 	<p>Tips for Club Managers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Write structured board papers addressing strategy and performance, not operational detail, so directors can make informed decisions and govern, not manage. ✓ Establish, with the chair’s explicit support, clear protocols for how directors interact with staff. ✓ When directors step into operational territory, call it out constructively. Do not let it become normalised. ✓ Track strategic KPIs and bring them to every board meeting. Give the board something meaningful to focus on.
<p>Advice for Smaller & Volunteer-Run Clubs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ In a fully volunteer-run club, the same people usually handle both governance and operations. This is a practical reality, not a governance failure. The goal is awareness, not an impossible ideal. ✓ Even without a paid GM or CEO, try to distinguish “board hat” from “doing hat” in your meetings and structure the agenda with business first and operations second. Strategic decisions should be made differently from operational task updates. ✓ Ensure directors receive structured board papers to focus on the matters for decision and reinforce the business vs management distinction. ✓ Document who is responsible for what, even informally. A simple one-page role summary prevents most of the arguments about who should be doing what. ✓ Focus governance energy on the things that create the most long-term risk: financial oversight, asset maintenance, and member communications. 	

2

Build a more capable board - deliberately

Shift from informal, popularity-based selection to skills-based recruitment and succession planning.

Only 63% of respondents agree that directors, as a whole, have the skills and experience that match the current and future strategic needs of their club. This figure is lower among managers (59%) than directors (65%), and consistent with the pattern seen in the 2025 research, where GMs/CEOs were more critical than directors of the skills available at the board table. The problem is structural in part: elections at many clubs remain member popularity contests, not competency assessments. Constitutions in many clubs still allow the entire board to be replaced at a single AGM.

Gender diversity remains low and is showing limited improvement. With women representing only 20% of survey respondents, golf club boards continue to reflect the broader structural imbalance in participation and leadership pathways across the sport. While this is partly a consequence of the current composition of the golfing community, it also highlights an opportunity for the industry to broaden representation and strengthen the diversity of perspectives and experiences contributing to board decision-making.

The 2025 research documented that 56% of directorships were up for election or re-election at the most recent AGM, with 39% of roles contested and an average 24% change in board composition after each AGM. This year's data confirms that instability continues and, that the GMs feeling that disruption most acutely, are the same GMs already rating board effectiveness lower than directors do.

- **Boards that are elected on popularity rather than capability will not build the strategic, financial and governance skills the club needs.**
- **This is not an opinion, it is what GMs have told us every year for three years.**

“ Poorly educated and inexperienced directors elected by a popularity contest rather than their ability is our biggest governance challenge.

Club Manager, Regional Victoria

“ Implementing a 3-year board term with election of one third each year would be transformative. At the moment the complete board could be replaced in a single year — which is not good governance.

Board Chair, Metropolitan Club

63%

Directors have skills matching the club's strategic needs

Board: 65% | Management: 59%

20%

Female representation among respondents

Male: 80% — negligible change on prior years

76%

No measurable disruption after last AGM

Management more concerned: 74% vs board: 77%

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE - NOW

Governance improvement plans are often undermined by sub-optimal election outcomes. Clubs need to take board composition as seriously as they take course maintenance. That means constitutional reform, a deliberate recruitment and succession process, and an induction program that actually prepares new directors for the work ahead. None of this is impossible, but none of it happens by accident.

Tips for Chairs & Boards

- ✓ Review your Constitution. If the entire board can be replaced at a single AGM, change it. Staggered 3-year terms are the desired minimum standard.
- ✓ Establish a Nominations Committee now, before the next AGM. Task it with identifying, attracting and preparing candidates who have the skills the club actually needs.
- ✓ Publish a skills matrix before each election. Tell members specifically what capabilities the board is seeking and why.
- ✓ Actively recruit women and younger candidates. If your board is entirely male and over 60, you are missing talent and perspective.
- ✓ Deliver a structured induction within 30 days of election. It must include role boundaries, legal duties, the strategic plan and key relationships.
- ✓ Begin educating your membership about why board stability and competency matters. These are very valuable assets.

Tips for Club Managers

- ✓ Flag constitutional problems to the chair with data. If AGM disruption is materially affecting club performance, document it and make the case for change.
- ✓ Help the board communicate the director role to members. Demystify what governance actually involves; it will improve the quality of candidates who put their hand up.
- ✓ Quantify the cost of board churn: management time, strategy disruption, relationship reset. This data makes the case for reform more persuasively than any governance principle.
- ✓ Co-design and co-deliver director induction. You know what new directors need to understand, make sure they understand it.

Advice for Smaller & Volunteer-Run Clubs

- ✓ When the candidate pool is small, focus on complementary skills rather than ideal credentials. At minimum, you need someone who understands finances, someone who understands the course, and someone who can communicate effectively with members.
- ✓ Legal experience can also be valuable, particularly where GMs have progressed through operational pathways and may have had limited exposure to broader business, governance or regulatory matters.
- ✓ Co-opt people onto working groups before asking them to take on formal committee roles. It is a lower-risk entry point that lets you assess fit before committing.
- ✓ Succession planning is existential for small clubs. If the same three people have been running the club for 20 years and none of them has a successor, that is a governance emergency.
- ✓ Even an informal handover between outgoing and incoming committee members makes a significant difference. A one-hour briefing can save six months of confusion.

Strengthen board leadership and accountability

Equip chairs to set standards, manage behaviour and address underperformance within the board.

The interpersonal dimensions of board governance are the strongest in the survey, and have been consistently so across all three years of research. Board–management relationships (80%), the chair–GM relationship (80%), and board teamwork (75%) all score in the middle quartiles of the NFP benchmark. These results are genuinely positive and reflect the commitment that most people bring to their club leadership roles. They should be acknowledged and protected.

However, accountability is weaker than collegiality. The handling of individual director issues - poor conduct, low contribution or inappropriate behaviour - scores only 65% overall, with directors (67%) significantly more comfortable than managers (61%). The pattern is persistent: boards tolerate poor behaviour among their own members, and managers pay the operational and cultural cost. Pleasingly, the chair–GM relationship is the single strongest differentiator of governance quality across every cohort in the survey - by revenue, structure, location and gender alike.

A board that cannot manage the conduct of its own members is not likely to manage anything else effectively. Tolerating underperformance and inappropriate behaviour is not kindness, it is a failure of leadership that flows directly into management and staff culture.

“ Unless you have a strong chairperson with a clear understanding of governance and the willingness to hold people accountable, it can go wrong very quickly.

Board Chair, Regional NSW

“ Strong governance needs strong leadership and skilful club management. Without those, things don't get done or they don't get done well.

Board Chair, Metropolitan Club

80%

Board and management have an effective working relationship

Board: 81% | Management: 79%

80%

Chair and GM have a constructive working relationship

Board: 79% | Management: 83%

75%

Board works constructively as a team

Board: 78% | Management: 69%

65%

Director issues are addressed appropriately

Directors: 67% | Management: 61%

Persistent

Boards are too tolerant of poor director behaviour

Consistent finding with 2025 research

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE - NOW

The chair is not just the person who runs the meeting. The chair sets the culture, holds the standards, and is an important determinant of board effectiveness. If the chair is not actively managing director conduct and contribution, including having the difficult conversations, nobody will. The board that avoids those conversations is choosing short-term comfort over long-term performance.

On process: boards get information in the form management provides it. If board papers are long, backward-looking and operationally detailed, even the most capable board will struggle to have strategic conversations. The chair and GM share responsibility for fixing this.

<p>Tips for Chairs & Boards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Set written expectations for director commitment, contribution and behaviour at the start of each board cycle. Make it explicit, not assumed. ✓ Address underperformance and inappropriate behaviour promptly and directly. Avoidance is not neutrality, it is a signal that standards are optional. ✓ Invest time in building trust among directors, especially after AGM changes. Trust is the foundation of good boardroom dynamics; it does not happen automatically. ✓ Establish explicit protocols for how directors interact with staff. Protect management’s authority. ✓ Redesign meeting agendas: strategic items first, compliance items last. Allocate time in proportion to where the board creates most value. 	<p>Tips for Club Managers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Give the chair specific, factual feedback when director conduct is adversely affecting the club or its staff. Vague concerns will not be acted on. ✓ Seek structured feedback from the board on the quality of papers; volume, format and strategic relevance all matter. ✓ Invest in the chair relationship; it is the most important professional relationship you have at the club. ✓ Where board dynamics are damaging, raise it early. Problems that are allowed to fester become crises.
<p>Advice for Smaller & Volunteer-Run Clubs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ In small volunteer committees, addressing conduct issues feels intensely personal when everyone knows everyone. Written expectations established at the start of the year make difficult conversations more about process and less about personality. ✓ Where relationships have broken down badly, an external facilitator for a single session is often more effective than any internal process. ✓ Meeting structure matters even in small clubs. A simple agenda, clear action items and brief notes are the difference between productive and wasted committee time. 	

4

Focus the board on business and strategy, not operations

Rebalance agendas and discussions toward long-term direction, performance and risk.

Boards continue to spend too much time on operational matters and the gap between larger and smaller clubs on this dimension is the starkest in the entire survey. Forty-four percent of all respondents describe their board as operations-focused, rising to 51% among small volunteer-run clubs. Clubs with full executive management structures score +18 on the strategic balance scale; fully volunteer-run clubs score between -17 and -19. These two types of club are operating in almost opposite governance cultures, and the distance between them has not narrowed.

Only 60% of all respondents agree that board meetings strike the right balance between strategic, performance and compliance matters, with managers (57%) less satisfied than directors (61%). The 2025 research found 35% of GMs felt their board focused too much on operations; the broader 2026 sample suggests the problem is even more widespread than previously measured.

The issue is not that boards never discuss strategy. The issue is that too many meetings remain dominated by operational detail, short-term problem solving and matters that management should be handling without board involvement.

- Boards add the most value when they are looking forward, not downward. Every hour spent reviewing operational detail is an hour not spent on strategy, capital planning or long-term risk. That is not a trade-off boards should be making, but too many are.

44%

Boards described as operations-focused

Volunteer clubs: 51%
Large exec-structure clubs: 38%

-17 to +18

Strategic balance score range

Volunteer clubs at the low end;
full exec structure at the high end

60%

Meetings have appropriate strategic/compliance balance

Board: 61% | Management: 57%

35%

GMs in 2025 said their board focused too much on operations

2026 sample suggests an even more widespread problem



Ensuring strategic planning is the core focus of meetings, rather than operations.

Board Chair, Regional area



Working towards a sustainable future rather than the here and now.

Club Manager, Regional Queensland

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE - NOW

Improving strategic focus is less about writing better strategy documents and more about changing how boards operate. Boards that govern strategically protect time for forward-looking discussion, maintain discipline when conversations drift operationally, and structure meetings around priorities rather than detail. This requires better agenda design, clearer separation between governance and management topics, strong chair leadership, and a willingness to stay focused on long-term business and strategy issues even when short-term operational matters feel more immediate and easier to deal with.

<p>Tips for Chairs & Boards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Structure agendas so strategy and performance discussions and decision-making occur before operational reporting.✓ Agree on a balanced scorecard of financial and non-financial performance metrics and review it at every meeting.✓ Reduce time spent reviewing operational matters that are management's responsibility.✓ Review committee purpose and composition regularly to ensure they support governance rather than operations which so often blurs the lines with management.	<p>Tips for Club Managers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Structure board papers around strategic implications, not operational detail.✓ Keep reporting concise and focused on performance, priorities and risk.✓ Make it easy for directors to govern rather than manage. A balanced scorecard will help.✓ Escalate matters requiring governance input and resolve routine operational issues through management.
<p>Advice for Smaller & Volunteer-Run Clubs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Structure board papers around strategic implications, not operational detail.✓ Keep reporting concise and focused on performance, priorities and risk.✓ Make it easy for directors to govern rather than manage.✓ Escalate matters requiring governance input and resolve routine operational issues through management.	

5

Strengthen long-term planning - especially capital

Develop and maintain funded capital plans and embed strategy into ongoing governance.

Long-term planning remains one of the weakest governance areas in the survey and the board–management perception gap here is among the largest of any dimension. While 72% of directors agree that their board actively governs long-term capital planning, only 60% of managers agree. That 12-point gap represents a material difference in how well-prepared clubs actually are for the infrastructure costs coming their way. And with capital and infrastructure cited as a top challenge by 10% of respondents, the consequences of inaction are not theoretical.

The findings point to a growing gap between current performance and future preparedness. While many clubs report performing well today, far fewer demonstrate evidence of funded long-term capital plans, structured risk management, asset replacement planning, or clear alignment between strategy and financial capacity. Strong current performance does not necessarily mean a club is well prepared for the future, and in many cases ageing infrastructure, deferred maintenance and unfunded future liabilities are emerging as governance risks rather than simply operational issues.

The same themes identified in the 2025 research continue to appear in the 2026 data: weak alignment between strategy and execution, and insufficient long-term planning discipline. Clubs that focus only on annual budgets and short-term operational performance risk making decisions that compromise future sustainability.

- Clubs that report performing well today but lack a funded capital plan, a current strategic plan and a formal risk management framework are not well-governed. Unfunded future liabilities create a significant sustainability risk.

“ Getting all directors to understand that our key strategic objectives are more likely 5-10 years and not 1-3 years!
Club Management Leader, Metropolitan area

“ Disciplined capital planning, adequate funding and long-term financial sustainability.
Club Management Leader, Metropolitan area

72% / 60%

Board actively governs long-term capital planning

Directors: 72% | Management: 60%
 12-point gap

10%

Cite capital & infrastructure as a top challenge

Often absent from formal capital plans

14%

Cite strategic planning as a top challenge

18% at large clubs - consistent with 2025

24%

Cite membership as a top challenge

The most common challenge; needs a strategic response

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE - NOW

Long-term planning is not a compliance exercise, it is one of the board's core responsibilities. Boards that govern effectively understand future asset requirements, align capital investment with long-term financial capacity, and actively monitor risk alongside performance. The evidence across three years of research is that too many golf club boards are either not doing them or not doing them well enough to make a difference. That needs to change.

Tips for Chairs & Boards

- ✓ Maintain a current strategic plan and review progress regularly. Ensure the GM is involved in its development or execution is likely to fail.
- ✓ Develop and annually refresh a 10-year capital replacement plan.
- ✓ Align capital investment decisions with long-term financial capacity.
- ✓ Conduct a formal risk review at least annually.
- ✓ Monitor long-term sustainability indicators, not just short-term financial performance.

Tips for Club Managers

- ✓ If the board has not yet developed a strategic plan, commence the development process yourself, with appropriate board involvement. Do not wait to be asked.
- ✓ Present long-term capital forecasts and revenue gaps clearly to the board.
- ✓ Use board reports that link strategy, risk and financial performance.
- ✓ Maintain a practical risk register and escalate major risks regularly.
- ✓ Ensure management planning aligns with board-approved strategic priorities.

Advice for Smaller & Volunteer-Run Clubs

- ✓ Capital planning matters more for small clubs because financial buffers are limited.
- ✓ Start with a simple list of major assets, expected replacement timing and approximate costs.
- ✓ Keep strategic plans short, practical and regularly discussed, and reported against in board papers.
- ✓ If your club needs help, seek it from Golf Australia and state associations who have resources and facilitation support available.

Summary & Next Steps

Three years of research have produced a consistent picture: Australian golf club governance has real strengths, persistent structural weaknesses, and a troubling tendency for boards to overestimate how well they are doing. The strengths - strong chair-GM relationships, good board teamwork, genuine commitment from volunteers - are worth protecting. The weaknesses - role confusion, poor board composition, inadequate strategic focus, capital planning deficits - have been identified, named and analysed across multiple years. The industry now has no excuse for not acting on them.

The most urgent finding in this research is not the low score on role clarity or the capital planning gap. It is the persistent, systematic perception gap between how boards view their own performance and how their managers experience it. Boards that are systematically

overestimating their effectiveness will systematically underinvest in improvement. The most important governance action any board can take right now is to find out what their GM actually thinks, and to listen without defensiveness when they hear the answer.

For smaller and volunteer-run clubs, the principles are the same but the application must be realistic. Scaled-down versions of the same governance practices - a one-page strategic plan, an informal capital checklist, a simple role description for committee members - are not lesser governance. They are appropriate governance for the context. What is not appropriate, at any size, is a board that meddles in operations, tolerates poor conduct, avoids strategic conversations, and mistakes a healthy current membership for long-term financial viability.

SIX THINGS EVERY CLUB SHOULD DO NOW

1

ASK YOUR GM FOR AN HONEST ASSESSMENT

Ask your GM to give you an honest assessment of the board's governance, and create a genuine safe space for them to do so.

2

ADOPT A BOARD CHARTER

If you have one, dust it off and ask whether directors are actually living by it. If you haven't, draft one that addresses contribution and behaviour expectations in a standalone document, not another paragraph in the bylaws.

3

REFORM YOUR CONSTITUTION IF NEEDED

If your constitution allows the entire board to be replaced at a single AGM, start the process of changing it now. Best practice is 3 year terms for a maximum of three terms or 9 years.

4

DEVELOP A 10-YEAR CAPITAL PLAN

If you have one, update it. If you don't, you are governing without a balance sheet.

5

BENCHMARK YOUR BOARD'S EFFECTIVENESS

Board Benchmarking and GBAS provide structured, confidential and benchmarked assessments. You can't improve unless you know where you are at. This report will be a good start to giving you this context.

6

USE THE GOLF AUSTRALIA CLUB GOVERNANCE PROGRAM, POWERED BY THE AICD

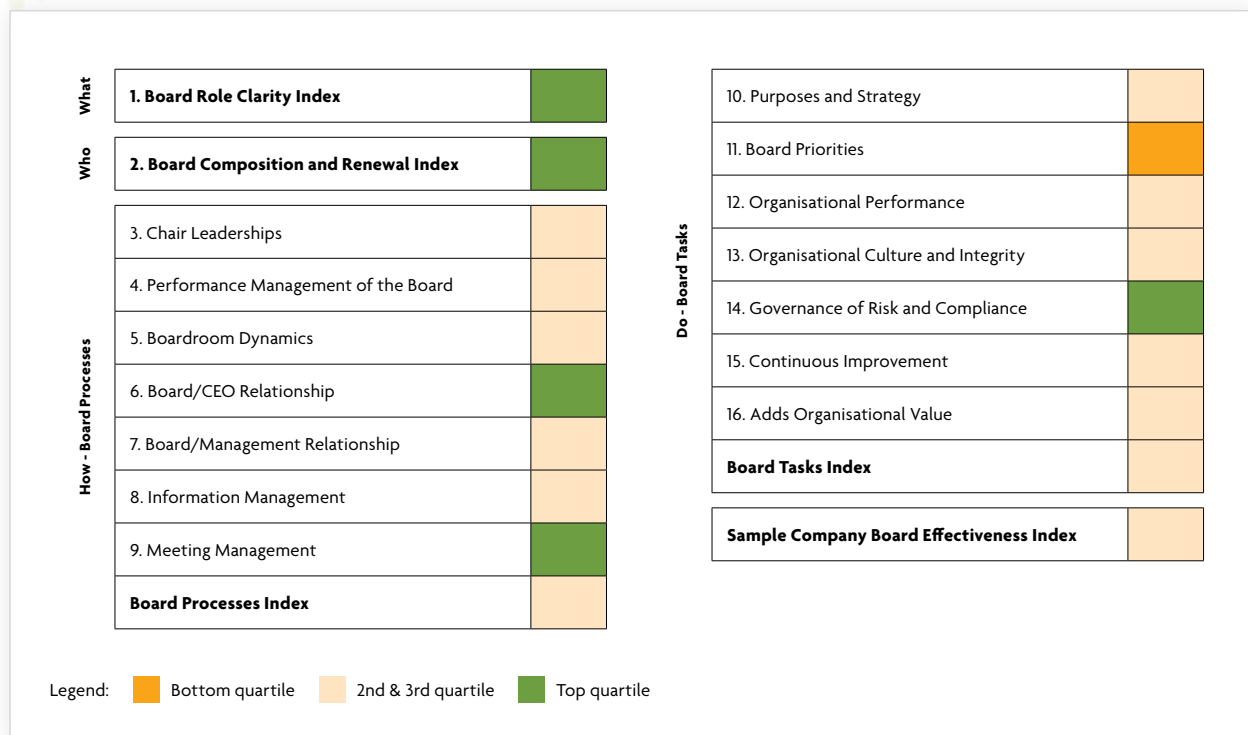
The Golf Australia Club Governance Program in partnership with the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) gives golf club directors access to governance education, resources and development opportunities. Use that too.

Appendix A1: Board Effectiveness Framework

This report and the survey it derived from are based on the WhatWhoHowDo Framework of board effectiveness. The framework includes 16 discrete categories of a board's effectiveness, all of which are important for the effective functioning and performance of a board.

The five recommendations in this report align with the What, Who, How and Do categories of effectiveness set out below. Each dimension of effectiveness is explained in detail on Board Benchmarking's website.

The graphic below is taken from the summary page of the sample Essentials version of a benchmarked Board Effectiveness Report.



Appendix A2: Survey Data Overall & by Demographic

The following tables summarise detailed survey data overall and by demographic cohort - by role, location, club revenue, governance structure, board size, committee count, experience, gender and club type. These tables support deeper analysis and allow clubs to see how their context may influence governance performance relative to the broader dataset.

		DIRECTORS UNDERSTAND GOVERNANCE VS MANAGEMENT ROLES	BOARD SKILLS MATCH STRATEGIC NEEDS	SMOOTH TRANSITION AFTER DIRECTOR CHANGES	BOARD WORKS AS A COHESIVE TEAM	CHAIR-CEO RELATIONSHIP IS EFFECTIVE	BOARD-MANAGEMENT RELATIONSHIP IS EFFECTIVE	DIRECTOR ISSUES ADDRESSED EFFECTIVELY
All respondents	922	57%	63%	76%	75%	80%	80%	65%
Role								
Board	682	60%	65%	77%	78%	79%	81%	68%
Management	239	48%	58%	72%	68%	83%	78%	59%
What is your Gender?								
Female	182	54%	64%	75%	75%	75%	82%	66%
Male	737	58%	64%	76%	76%	81%	80%	65%
What is your Club's location?								
Metropolitan area	242	56%	68%	74%	75%	84%	81%	67%
Regional area	680	57%	62%	76%	75%	78%	80%	65%
Which of the following reflects your Club's total revenue band?								
Less than \$1m per year	471	57%	63%	75%	75%	74%	78%	65%
\$1m to \$3m per year	180	56%	59%	75%	77%	82%	77%	66%
\$3m to \$7m per year	167	56%	65%	76%	74%	85%	84%	64%
\$7m or more	104	62%	70%	77%	77%	86%	88%	69%
Which of the following best represents the structure of you club?								
Full executive-level management structure	231	58%	66%	76%	76%	86%	84%	65%
Paid club manager overseen	228	53%	64%	73%	74%	81%	81%	66%
Mainly run by volunteers, minimal paid staff	168	52%	55%	73%	69%	74%	73%	57%
Fully run by volunteers, no paid staff	270	63%	66%	79%	80%	76%	81%	70%
What length of time have you been/were you on your Club Board/Committee?								
Less than 1 year	29	55%	66%	66%	72%	70%	68%	52%
1 to 2 years	84	51%	60%	68%	77%	83%	80%	62%
3 to 4 years	114	62%	66%	79%	81%	80%	89%	67%
5 years or more	197	63%	68%	82%	81%	84%	85%	71%

Legend: ■ Bottom quartile ■ 2nd & 3rd quartile ■ Top quartile

		MEETINGS BALANCE STRATEGY AND COMPLIANCE	BOARD ADDS ORGANISATIONAL VALUE	DECISIONS MADE IN LONG-TERM INTERESTS	BOARD GOVERNS LONG-TERM CAPITAL PLANNING	ORGANISATION PERFORMING STRONGLY	OVERALL, THE BOARD IS EFFECTIVE.
All respondents	922	60%	82%	75%	69%	78%	77%
Role							
Board	682	62%	85%	78%	72%	79%	80%
Management	239	56%	74%	67%	60%	76%	69%
What is your Gender?							
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3 to 4 years	114	59%	88%	81%	75%	86%	84%
5 years or more	197	67%	88%	82%	73%	81%	83%

Legend: ■ Bottom quartile ■ 2nd & 3rd quartile ■ Top quartile

Appendix A3: About the Authors

GOLF AUSTRALIA

Golf Australia is the national governing body for golf in Australia. Our goal is to raise the level of interest and participation in the game from grassroots golfers through to the elite levels, spectators, volunteers and associated industry bodies. Key responsibilities include conducting national tournaments and championships, including the Australian Opens, managing the Rules of Golf and the national handicap system, and developing programs and opportunities to engage as many people as possible into the game.

Working in a commercial and inclusive manner with government, business and community, Golf Australia ensures the value of golf is understood and supported in all policy and business decisions.

BOARD BENCHMARKING

Board Benchmarking is Australia's leading board survey and benchmarking specialist, built on a simple belief: better boards means better organisations. Its surveys are available to organisations of every size, from small volunteer-run clubs through to large listed companies.

Board Benchmarking uses the globally recognised WhatWhoHowDo framework, validated with the assistance of Deakin University, and benchmarks results against comparable organisations from its database of more than 700 boards. Board Benchmarking's database underpins the industry comparisons throughout this report.

Clubs wishing to benchmark their own board can access Board Benchmarking's survey tools, confidentially and affordably, at boardbenchmarking.com.

GOLF BUSINESS ADVISORY SERVICES (GBAS)

With consultants located across Australia, GBAS is acknowledged as Australia's leading provider of independent golf business advisory services. The company has extensive experience across the full spectrum of golf facility operations and leverages its unrivalled insights to deliver tailored client outcomes.

Through its many strategic planning engagements, GBAS is a regular visitor to board rooms around the country and is well positioned to observe the governance processes in place in Australian golf clubs.

GBAS works with Boardroom Excellence Australia to deliver practical on-site governance workshops to golf club boards around the country.

For further information, to discuss this research, or to access board benchmarking and governance support services for your club, please get in touch with any of our partner organisations.



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Club Governance Program

The Golf Australia Club Governance Program, powered by the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD), provides golf-specific governance, leadership and director development opportunities for current and aspiring club directors, General Managers, administrators, committee and club members. Through Golf Australia's exclusive partnership with the AICD, participants can access industry-leading education at subsidised rates, helping clubs strengthen governance capability, make better decisions and build more sustainable, inclusive and successful organisations.

Course	Delivery	Time Commitment	Investment
Governance Awareness Webinar	Online	45-60 minutes	Free
Governance Essentials for Golf	Online	2-2.5 hours	\$150 pp + GST
Governance Foundations for NFP Directors in Golf	In-person	1.5 days	\$1,460 pp + GST
Company Directors Course	Online/in-person	5 days	\$9,650 pp + GST



Questions

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Information & Registration

[Click here](#)



Good to Great Governance

Golf clubs need governance that supports faster decisions, clearer accountability, and stronger alignment between Boards and Management. GBAS helps clubs move beyond compliance to build governance that strengthens performance and confidence.

WHY GOVERNANCE MATTERS

Across the sector, common governance challenges persist:

- » Unclear Board and Management roles
- » Directors drawn into operational matters
- » Governance frameworks not fully used
- » Insufficient focus on strategic priorities

When governance is effective, decision-making improves, accountability is clearer, and Boards can stay focused on long-term success.

THE OUTCOME

Clubs that invest in governance excellence achieve:

- » Faster, more effective Board decisions
- » Stronger alignment between Board and Management
- » Greater strategic clarity and execution
- » Increased member confidence and trust

GREAT GOVERNANCE IS NOT JUST A FOUNDATION—IT IS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE.

THE GBAS APPROACH

We begin with an **independent Board Effectiveness Survey**, providing a confidential and objective view of how the Board is functioning across key dimensions of governance.

This is followed by a **Governance Review**, where your club's frameworks, charters, and key documents are assessed against contemporary best practice standards to identify gaps, risks, and opportunities.

The process culminates in a **facilitated Board Workshop**, where findings from both the survey and review are explored collaboratively and translated into clear priorities and practical improvement actions.

The result is a governance roadmap that is tailored, achievable, and grounded in real world club experience.

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