

Community Directors Intelligence

March 2018

The keys to collaboration

This is an extract of the March 2018 edition of *Community Directors Intelligence*. To read this and more from our series, become a member of the Institute of Community Directors Australia now.

By Chris Borthwick, Thinker in Residence, Our Community

Working in the same field as another group – having common ideals, or common goals, or even common interests – is no guarantee that you're going to be close friends. Sometimes it's the other way round. A group of like-minded people pursuing a common goal in a similar fashion is, after all, one way of describing the runners in the Melbourne Cup, but there's a certain amount of healthy rivalry going on there nonetheless. Sooner or later, the time is going to come when you will want to emphasise what separates you rather than what unites you.

As the instructional story goes, two tourists are strolling on the veldt one evening, chatting idly of this and that, until their conversation is interrupted by a noise.

"Excuse me," says the first tourist, "did you, I hope, just say 'Grrrrr'?"

Apparently not, because when they slowly turn they see behind them a large lion pawing at the ground and licking its muzzle hungrily.

The first tourist looks around and sees his companion bending over to tie his shoelaces.

"What are you thinking?" he hisses. "You can't outrun a lion!"

"I don't have to outrun a lion," his companion says calmly. "I just have to outrun you."

Competition between rivals; evolution's way of making faster tourists. And society's way of making more efficient not-for-profits.

At least, that's how the story used to go. >

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Since then, though, we've all seen [that BBC film](#) where three unfazed Dorobo hunters with pointy sticks scare 15 lions away from their fresh kill. The men track the pride down, confidently stride out towards the ravenous bloody-mouthed pack of overmuscled killing machines, shoo them away, and swiftly pillage the carcass for some wildebeest steaks.

The results are in: co-operation produces better outcomes for everybody.

In many situations, partnerships with other organisations in your field are going to be essential to achieving your ends – working together to raise funds, lobby, or deliver balanced programs. You need to engage in active outreach at all times, however busy you may be, and to keep your friendships in good repair.

In unity is strength. Which is why this month we're reminding everybody of the good sense of joining up to the [Community Council for Australia](#), a central voice for not-for-profits in the halls of government. At a time when the government is feeling increasingly cranky about criticism from the sector, and is increasingly looking to legislation to bring it to heel, we're all safer for the existence of a peak body to make the argument for us.

Mega-organisations can take care of themselves, but for small but feisty groups it has to be worth \$110 a year to have a full-time bodyguard. It'll save you a lot of work, too, not having to put in your own individual submissions to the plethora of inquiries the government throws out as a smokescreen for its manoeuvres, and you'll avoid [drawing fire](#).


We've signed on: so should you.



Thinker in Residence Chris Borthwick finds there's strength in unity.

P.S. You must remember that if you're on the board of your group, then in the eyes of the law your fiduciary duty requires you to place the interests of your group first, even in front of those of your partnering organisation. If you happen to be *stuck in a snowbound train*, for example, it's your legal duty – whatever your own feelings on the matter – to [eat the other group's board members before your own](#). It's not, to be sure, a situation that comes up very often, but there's no harm in being prepared.

MORE INFO

[Looking for help? Search the ICDA site for resources](#) 

A banner for GiveNow featuring a background image of several hands raised in a crowd. The text is centered on a dark grey rectangular background. At the top is the GiveNow logo, which consists of a stylized heart shape made of four colored triangles (purple, blue, green, red) above the word "GiveNow" in white. Below the logo, the text "Meet Crowdrisers!" is written in large, bold, white letters. Underneath that, "Harness the power of peer-to-peer fundraising" is written in a smaller, white font. At the bottom, the website address "www.givenow.com.au/crowdraiser" is displayed in white.

GiveNow

Meet Crowdrisers!

Harness the power of peer-to-peer fundraising

www.givenow.com.au/crowdraiser

The members of the Community Directors Council



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Community Directors Council members have been drawn from across community, not-for-profit, philanthropic, academic, activist, indigenous, and legal backgrounds to guide the development of the Institute of Community Directors Australia (ICDA).

Where would we be without community directors?

It's hard to imagine, in that there's such an impulse within people to do good for others. I noted it when I was on the Royal Commission into the Victorian bushfires. If you look at the way that communities responded, there was a spontaneous initiative taken from countless

people to assist others who had had a misfortune during that dramatic event. I also think that there's an impulse toward altruism, and toward nurturing either others or animals, or the environment, or the community, that you couldn't really quell in humans: it's there. And so the work that they do in civil society, generally on a voluntary basis ... is a really healthy outlet for those impulses that many of us have. ➤



Members of the Community Directors Council have met for the first time in Melbourne.

How are community directors different from company directors?

I think there are more similarities than differences between what community directors do and company directors, in that they're both responsible for the effective governance of the enterprise, and for critical matters such as sound financial management, good governance practice, and a focus on the bottom line.

Here's where we get the critical difference. For company directors, the bottom line is profit. For community directors, it's whatever the mission or purpose is. So, if it is to support animal welfare, it's healthy animals in whatever community it is in. If it's in the arts, it might be toward sustainable performing arts, and so on.

We typically think of charity in the traditional sense of welfare, or helping the vulnerable and the disadvantaged. And of course, for mission-driven organisations, that's a critical purpose as well.

I would want to emphasise as the recent and inaugural Commissioner of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) that overwhelmingly the evidence is that charities want to do the right thing, and indeed do do the right thing. And so there is great ground-level initial capability in most of the boards.

What the new Community Directors Council wants to do is build on that, enhance that.

In the same way as the Australian Institute of

Company Directors is able to promote better governance in corporate Australia, the Institute of Community Directors will be able to promote better governance in the community sector.

How do you feel about the mix that you've got on the Community Directors Council?

It's a brilliant mix of people. When you think about the breadth of backgrounds of the members, from academic through to practitioner backgrounds, people who've run very large enterprises, very large charities, and members involved in rural and smaller charitable and not-for-profit enterprises – I'm quite excited about working with them. ➤



WATCH NOW: Susan Pascoe on the importance of advocacy by not-for-profits, and her new role



ICDA members celebrated the announcement of 94 governance diploma scholarships for women at a striking feminist installation at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in March.

ICDA offers three levels of membership: associate member, member and fellow. Why should a community director consider becoming a member or fellow?

I think any means of formally recognising that a person has undertaken training, met a certain standard, and then been formally assessed as meeting that standard is good for the individual, but also good for the board that wants to take them on.

Because you can then appoint that person with confidence that they have the basics in terms of good governance.

And in a more collective sense, it's good for the governance of not-for-profits in Australia.

We are building on people who have formally fit-for-purpose recognised training. That means governance in the not-for-profit sector in Australia is in good hands.

How do you see the trajectory of ICDA under the guidance of the new council?

Given the eminent nature of the members, I'm really hoping that they will be able to use their knowledge and their skills and their creative ideas to collectively enhance good governance training



WATCH NOW: Susan Pascoe in conversation with Our Community chair Carol Schwartz at launch of 94 women's Diploma of Business (Governance) scholarships

in the not-for-profit sector in Australia. And it would be great if over time ICDA becomes a beacon, a badge of recognition of good training, and good capacity, and good governance in Australia.

MORE INFO

[About us: The Institute of Community Directors Australia](#) 