

The NFP Legal and Governance Network: In-house Charity Sector Leadership and Collaboration

By Elaine Leong



*Photo by Christina
@wocintechchat.com.*

The NFP Legal and Governance Network is a non-profit and charity sector-wide network of in-house lawyers and governance specialists who come together with a vision to support professional development, enhance the provision of legal and corporate governance services to the sector and strengthen overall sector capability.

In-house lawyers and governance specialists face increasingly complex regulations and the need to balance legal risk with operational realities to enable their clients to deliver on charitable purpose. What started as a small group of not-for-profit lawyers

meeting to discuss common sectoral issues has grown to be a large, immensely engaged network of lawyers that provides guidance and support across a diverse range of issues to charities and not-for-profits, small and large. The Network's membership has a depth of expertise across a range of areas, and participants generously provide input on complex topics and present case studies for discussion and reflection.

For a resource-constrained sector, the Network is seen by many as being immensely beneficial. The Network provides lawyers with a platform to share ideas and resources, discuss common

issues, stay informed about developments and upcoming law reform and support each other. With many lawyers joining the sector with no or little sector experience, the Network also serves as an invaluable resource for inducting lawyers from all backgrounds and experiences. In recent years, the Network has evolved and grown substantially, establishing roundtable discussions and a regular shared learning series and specific working groups providing informal buddying and mentoring, producing targeted sector guides, contributing to best-practice good governance and setting higher standards for the sector.



The Network recognises that whilst each member assists their clients in the pursuit of their charitable purposes, together, the sector is stronger by being proactively informed and involved. The spirit of the Network is to be an open door for those with legal and/or professional responsibilities in the sector to advance their understanding of the law.



The Network was established out of volunteer efforts and is sustained due to generous sharing of expertise and time by many in-house lawyers and governance specialists. Overall, it serves to provide a network of mutual peer support based on respect, inclusion, camaraderie and professionalism.

There are over 100 individual participating lawyers/governance specialists in the Network. The Network is chaired and convened by Elaine Leong, an in-house lawyer for The Benevolent Society. Please get in touch if you are a charity and not-for-profit in-house lawyer or governance specialist and would like to join.



“ What started as a small group of not-for-profit lawyers meeting to discuss common issues has grown to be an immensely important and large network of lawyers that provides guidance and support across a diverse range of issues to charities, small and large. The collaboration and sharing of resources and approaches between charities has unquestionably saved an enormous amount of time and effort across the legal teams within the Network. Australian Red Cross is very grateful for the strong leadership provided by Elaine and the continued evolution of the Network including the creation of issue-specific sub-groups. ”

Red Cross Legal Team



“ The NFP Legal and Governance Network is a supportive community of like-minded legal and governance professionals working in charities and not for profits across Australia. The Network provides an opportunity to stay up to date on regulatory changes and upcoming law reform. Its membership has a depth of expertise in a variety of areas and it generously provides input on complex topics and scenarios presented by its members. Over recent years the Network has evolved and grown substantially, birthing many working groups along the way and making an invaluable contribution to best practice governance across the sector. It is truly a privilege to be part of such a network. ”

General Counsel, Greenpeace

MISSION AUSTRALIA

“ Mission Australia has been a part of the NFP Legal and Governance Network for approximately eight years. The lawyers in the Mission Australia legal team have benefitted enormously from the information sharing amongst the group. It is a very useful forum to raise legal issues relevant to the sector and has provided comfort knowing that other lawyers in the sector are experiencing the same issues. The Network has also provided fruitful networking opportunities and has been strongly led by Elaine Leong who as chair, has graciously volunteered a significant amount of her own time which has contributed to the Network’s success. ”

Mission Australia Legal Team



Elaine Leong is the Group General Counsel and Group Company Secretary at The Benevolent Society. With over 20 years’ experience as a lawyer and governance professional, Elaine leads practices which add value through advice, education, collaboration and advocacy. She established and led the first in-house legal team approved under the Australian Pro Bono Centre’s National Pro Bono Professional Indemnity Insurance Scheme and led the first in-house legal team in the charity and non-profit sector to become a founding signatory to the Centre’s National Pro Bono Target, committed to advancing positive social change through pro bono legal work. Elaine is a fellow of the Governance Institute of Australia and a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

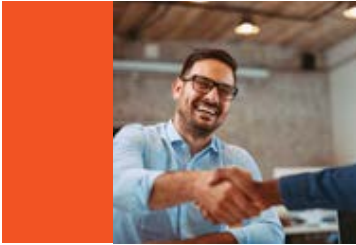
CHURCHES of CHRIST

“ It’s so great to be a part of network with like-minded people who are seeking to achieve similar goals. The NFP Network has been key in strengthening my connections and relationships across the sector including providing a space to discuss opportunities and challenges. As with most in-house General Counsel and Governance Professionals in the sector, we are all running on very lean teams, are stretched for time and resources. What the network has done successfully for Churches of Christ in Queensland is to provide a platform to sow the seeds for reciprocal assistance when we need help to achieve our goals. I can genuinely say the Network has become my extended team to a very large extent. My special acknowledgement, particularly to those that initiated such an innovative network and to Elaine Leong for selflessly giving of her time to lead and coordinate the activities of the Network. ”

Executive Director, Governance, Churches of Christ Queensland. ■

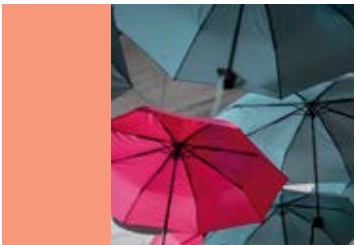
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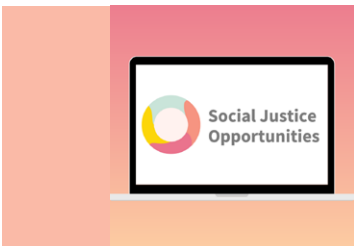
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The Centre sincerely thanks Adrian Medel for his excellent work designing this publication.



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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the various lands on which we work throughout Australia.

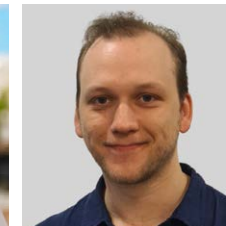
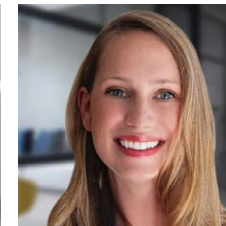
We pay our respects to the Elders – past, present and emerging – and the youth who are working towards a brighter tomorrow.



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APBC Core Team L-R: Gabriela Christian-Hare, Rebekah Farrell, Sally Embelton, Melanie Allgaeuer, Pamela Binnington, Olivia Roney, James Condren.