

Conflict of Interest Tool



Mapping Responsibilities

In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, decisions are rarely made in isolation. People often bring a range of responsibilities to the table – to family, community, culture and the organisation itself.

These responsibilities are an important part of Indigenous governance and are often a source of strength. However, they can sometimes overlap or create competing expectations when decisions need to be made.

Conflict of interest is not simply about financial gain or doing the wrong thing. More often, it is about recognising when our different responsibilities have the potential to influence organisational decisions and taking steps to manage them openly and fairly.

Effective governance does not mean removing relationships from decision-making. It means understanding them, being transparent about them and putting processes in place that support fair and accountable decisions.

This activity is designed to help individuals, boards and organisations reflect on how decisions are made, identify where responsibilities may overlap and consider whether existing governance systems are supporting effective decision-making.

There are no right or wrong answers. The aim is to encourage thoughtful conversations about governance practices and identify opportunities to strengthen them.

Use the table below to reflect on how decisions are made within your organisation and identify opportunities to strengthen governance practices.

Step	Reflection Questions	Notes
1. Identify the decision	What decision or situation are you reflecting on? (e.g. employment, funding, procurement, partnerships, community support or strategic planning)	Describe the situation briefly.
2. Identify the different hats	What different hats were present in this situation? (e.g. board member, staff member, family member, community member, cultural leader, business owner)	There may be more than one hat being worn at the same time.
3. Consider responsibilities	Who or what were people responsible to?	Consider responsibilities to family, community, culture, the organisation, funding bodies, law and policy, and future generations.
4. Explore competing responsibilities	Were there any competing responsibilities or expectations? What made the situation difficult?	Think about whether any responsibilities pulled people in different directions.



Step	Reflection Questions	Notes
5. Reflect on governance	What helped the organisation make a fair and transparent decision?	Consider policies, processes, leadership and communication practices that supported effective governance.
6. Consider improvements	Looking back, is there anything that could have been done differently?	Are there any governance practices that could be strengthened?
7. Take action	What is one practical action your organisation could take to improve how conflicts of interest are identified or managed?	This could be as simple as introducing a standing agenda item or reviewing your Conflict of Interest Policy.

Reflection Scenarios

Reflection Scenario 1 - Community Partnerships

Your organisation has been approached to partner on a community project. One of your board members has a long-standing relationship with the organisation seeking the partnership and is passionate about the project's potential benefits for the community.

Before making a decision, consider:

- What responsibilities are present in this situation?
- Are there any personal, community or organisational interests that should be acknowledged?
- What processes could help ensure the decision is fair and transparent?
- Would others understand how and why the decision was made?

Reflection Scenario 2 - Recruitment and Community Connections

Your organisation is recruiting for a new position. Several applicants are known to members of the organisation through family, community or previous working relationships. Some candidates bring strong community knowledge and connections, while others bring different skills and experiences.

Before making a decision, consider:

- How does your organisation balance community connections with recruitment processes?
- What responsibilities do decision-makers have in this situation?
- Are there any relationships or interests that should be declared?
- What governance practices help support fair and transparent recruitment decisions?



Reflection Scenarios

Reflection Scenario 3 - Making Decisions in Small Communities

In many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, leaders and decision-makers wear multiple hats. It is common to be connected to people and organisations through family, culture, work and community life.

Think about a recent decision your organisation has made. Reflect on the following questions:

- Who was involved in the decision?
- What different responsibilities or relationships were present?
- Were there any competing expectations or pressures?
- What helped the organisation make the decision fairly?
- Are there any governance practices that could be strengthened in the future?

Have a Yarn

Every organisation is different. Relationships, responsibilities and governance challenges will look different depending on your community, organisational structure and the work you do.

Use the questions below to start a conversation about how your organisation navigates competing responsibilities and makes fair and transparent decisions.

There are no right or wrong answers. The aim is to reflect on what is working well and identify opportunities to strengthen your governance practices over time.

Have a yarn about:

- How comfortable are people in your organisation talking about competing responsibilities or interests?
- What helps people feel safe speaking up when they think a relationship or responsibility may influence a decision?
- Are there situations that are particularly difficult to navigate in your organisation?
- What governance practices are currently working well for your organisation and community?
- Are there any processes or practices that could be strengthened?
- How do leaders in your organisation model transparency and accountability when making decisions?
- What is one thing your organisation could do over the next six months to strengthen how relationships, responsibilities and conflicts of interest are identified, discussed or managed?

Final Reflection

How does your organisation think about relationships, responsibilities and decision-making?