

Is Your Professional Association Running Like a Business — or a Club?

The Association Health Check

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Professional associations are fascinating. Some run like well-oiled machines — strategic, efficient, member-focused and built for the future. Others run like a club that's been around so long, nobody can quite remember why they do things the way they do.

With most associations facing declining membership, rising costs and increasing competition for members' time and attention, the ones that operate on sound business principles will not just survive — they'll thrive. The ones that don't? They'll struggle.

So which one is yours?

Governance & Structure

- Is your association correctly constituted — and when did you last review it? (Incorporated Association or Company Limited by Guarantee)
- Does every member of your governing body have a current copy of the Constitution?
- When did you last deliberately examine your constitution to determine if amendments are necessary?
- When did you last evaluate whether your current structure is still the best way to operate?
- Is there a crystal clear understanding of the role of the elected arm versus the staff arm — and does each group know exactly where the line is drawn?

Strategy & Direction

- Do you have a well-written strategic plan — and do your meetings actually measure progress against it?
- Does your association think and act strategically, or does it tend to be reactive?
- Do your meetings look forward and plan — or look backwards and reminisce?
- What is the balance in your meetings between finding solutions and finding problems?
- Do members genuinely understand the issues you make decisions about on their behalf?

People & Leadership

- Are the people on your elected arm there because they want to be — or because nobody else put their hand up?
- Are they the best people for the role, or simply the willing ones?
- Is there a clear succession plan for future leaders — and are those people being actively developed?
- Do you have a membership committee? Is it chaired by a future leader of the organisation?
- Is serving on your association executive considered a privilege — or has it become a burden?
- If you have sub-committees, is each chaired by a different governing body member to share the load and spread the knowledge?

Meetings & Productivity

- Does everyone arrive at meetings prepared — or do you waste time accommodating the disorganised?
- If you have professional paid staff, do you use the recommendation system — encouraging them to bring major issues with recommendations to adopt, modify or reject?
- Does everyone with a portfolio give a written summary at each meeting?
- Do you operate on the portfolio system — where each member has a specific area of responsibility?
- Do you have a planned mechanism to ensure you don't lose the corporate memory of your association?

Membership & Administration

- Do you receive a regular report on membership numbers, prospects, conversions and resignations at every meeting?
- Do you have a finance committee that approves all payments and reports on performance against budget?
- Does your association have a modern website with solid back-office functionality for managing membership and administration?
- Are you still sending paper-based agendas and minutes — or have you moved to email and digital distribution?
- Does your association use email decision-making for minor administrative matters to keep meetings focused?

After 35 years working with boards, committees, professional associations and not-for-profit organisations across Australia and internationally, David Price has a clear picture of what separates high-performing associations from the ones quietly running out of road.

Whether it's a governance review, a board effectiveness session, strategic planning facilitation or simply an independent set of eyes on how your meetings are actually running — David can help.

Because a great association doesn't happen by accident. It happens by design.