

GOVERNANCE IN OUR HANDS PROGRAM

OVERVIEW AND REVIEW



NATSIHA
National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander
Housing Association



RECOGNITION

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First People of Australia and the Traditional Custodians of the lands, rivers, seas and sky throughout.

We pay our respect to Elders and acknowledge the continuous living Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, diverse languages, customs and traditions, knowledge systems and governance.

We acknowledge the significance of our Elders, for they hold the memories, the storylines, the traditions, and the cultures of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across our nation.

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NATSIHA

National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander

Housing Association



Australian Government
National Indigenous
Australians Agency



NIAA

CONTEXT

The NATSIHA Governance In Our Hands Program was designed to support capability development for all levels of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisation, from frontline staff and operational workers through to senior executives and board directors. The program created space for each individual to understand their role in supporting the broader organisational purpose, including how day-to-day work contributes to strong decision-making, board accountability, and community responsibility.

The program seeks to demystify governance. It gave staff the tools to see how their actions support the leadership of the organisation, while also providing board members with strengthened knowledge around their legal obligations and financial governance whilst acknowledging their cultural responsibilities. This included targeted work on financial literacy and internal financial controls to ensure greater transparency and confidence across the organisation.

The program's design has been shaped by extensive sector consultation. It directly responded to issues raised through the development of the Housing Sector Strengthening Plan and the 2022 National Engagement Workshop, and has since been tested and refined through NATSIHA's ongoing engagements with the sector. The design process ensured the program reflected real challenges and strengths across housing organisations of different sizes and geographies.



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This workshop not only provided knowledge of governance and of being a Director but a chance to network with other organisations.

BUILDING TOGETHER

A PROGRAM GROUNDED IN SECTOR PRIORITIES AND LEGAL EXPERTISE

The Governance in Our Hands program development was driven by strong sector feedback. National consultations, including the 2022 National Engagement Workshop and the Housing Sector Strengthening Plan, which clearly identified that mainstream governance training did not reflect the cultural, legal or operational realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled housing organisations. The sector called for a tailored program that was culturally grounded, legally robust, and delivered in a way that reflected community values and expectations.

In response, NATSIHA and KWM co-designed a program that would equip housing organisations with the tools they need to meet their legal responsibilities while staying true to community leadership and practice. The content was developed based on:

- Legal expertise: KWM's experience in governance law and reform, and its trusted role supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations across Australia to establish and maintain governance structures, including bespoke advice on native title and fiduciary obligations.
- Sector Insight: NATSIHA's deep understanding of the housing sector's priorities and the barriers faced by organisations seeking to strengthen governance capability at all levels.

The result was a shared program architecture that reflects what matters to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations, built in partnership, tested with the sector, and refined through multiple delivery rounds.

A key part of the design process was early testing and iteration. A number of participants were invited to attend multiple rounds of training. Their ongoing engagement directly influenced refinements particularly in pacing, clarity of legal concepts, and inclusion of real-life governance scenarios.

Feedback confirmed the strength of the program lay not just in the technical content, but in the way it had been shaped by and remained accountable to the sector.

This is not a static training product. It is a living program, designed with and for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector, with co-design embedded at its foundation and carried forward into each new round of delivery.

Built with the sector,
shaped by experience, and
designed to grow with us.

”

“Excellent session, easy to understand and very informative.”

“Great course. All LALCs should do this course.”

CULTURAL GOVERNANCE AND SAFETY

The Governance in Our Hands program is grounded in the understanding that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance is inherently cultural. In community-controlled organisations, governance is not just about legal compliance, it is about honouring cultural authority, maintaining relationships, and making decisions that reflect responsibility to Country, Kin and Community.

Cultural governance is not treated as a standalone topic in this program. It is embedded across every module, and is visible in the way content is delivered, not just in what is delivered.

The program explicitly supports participants to:

- Explore how cultural governance and corporate responsibilities can operate side by side;
- Reflect on their roles not only as board members or staff, but as cultural leaders and community representatives;
- Identify how cultural authority is exercised within their own organisations and communities, and how that strengthens legitimacy, trust, and sustainability.

A Delivery Model Centred on Cultural Safety

The way Governance in Our Hands is delivered is as important as the content itself. From design through to facilitation, the program creates learning environments that are culturally safe, relational, and grounded in respect.

Cultural safety in delivery is achieved through:

- Yarning-based facilitation, ensuring knowledge is shared through conversation, story and experience, not lecture.
- Small group formats, allowing participants to ask questions, speak freely, and reflect without judgement.
- Real-world scenarios, drawn from the sector, that reflect the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations.

Facilitators who listen, adjust pace, and make space for people to work through complex material in ways that make sense to them.

These are not generic training techniques. They reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of learning and decision-making, grounded in respect, listening and reciprocity.

“Simple and nicely broken down to understand.”

“Excellent session, easy to understand and very informative.”

“Informative and respectful training session. Thank you.”

RESPONSIVE, ADAPTIVE AND COMMUNITY LED

Cultural safety has not been assumed, it has been earned through continuous feedback and adjustment. After each session, participant input was used to refine structure, language, and delivery flow. This included increasing the time allowed to workshop difficult issues, simplifying legal explanations, and improving the relevance of case-based discussions.

Participants were not passive recipients of information, they were active in shaping how the program continues to evolve.

”

I'm very happy
and gained much
knowledge, thank you”

”

Spend More Time Workshopping
Issues Like Financial Management
And Conflicts Of Interest”

”

Enjoyed the case study examples
to explain risks/issues”

This approach has resulted in consistent demand for more. After completing the training:

- **94%** of participants said they wanted to continue building governance capability;
- **85%** preferred future learning to be delivered face-to-face, where cultural safety, trust and peer learning are strongest.

“Great course. All LALCs should do this course.”

“Never get this kind of training on TI – need more.”

Governance in Our Hands is not just a program about governance. It is an affirmation of the way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations lead. By embedding cultural governance in the core content and delivering it in a culturally safe way, the program strengthens capability, builds confidence, and respects the systems of governance that have always existed in our communities.

PARTNERSHIP

Governance in Our Hands supports long-term strength by embedding shared governance knowledge across the organisation. It ensures the next person stepping into a governance role won't be starting from scratch—they'll be walking into a culture of clarity, confidence, and readiness.

”

I learnt a lot from this session, great presenters. Thank you for all your knowledge.



The partnership with King & Wood Mallesons ensured all materials and frameworks meet legal requirements and can withstand the pressures of changing policy or legislative environments. This legal grounding was critical in supporting organisations to remain confident and compliant in a fast-moving sector landscape.

One of the program's defining features was its attention to cultural governance, recognising and affirming the role of cultural authority and decision-making alongside formal board structures. The program helped organisations explore how cultural governance strengthens the integrity and accountability of the organisation overall, and how it is often misunderstood or overlooked by mainstream systems. This work also brought to light the additional complexity and expectations placed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and their leaders, and the need to ensure governance approaches are culturally safe, locally legitimate, and sustainable.

By addressing both compliance-based and culturally embedded governance, this program has supported 116 housing organisations to clarify responsibilities, strengthen operations, and prepare for the sector's future role in delivering more housing solutions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

PARTNERSHIP

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The attendees of the governance training held across the country for community-controlled organisations in the housing sector have been an amazing group of committed, purpose-driven leaders. Representing a range of organisations, they came together to strengthen their understanding of key aspects of mainstream governance and, most importantly, to learn from each other.

It is clear that the unique knowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders hold of housing circumstances in their communities and of local cultural ways is critical in the effective delivery of appropriate housing solutions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Combining this knowledge with a deeper understanding of corporate governance responsibilities has hopefully assisted these organisations to strengthen and grow better enabling them to achieve their objectives.

**Berkeley Cox,
Delivery Partner**



PARTNERSHIP

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

A key feature of the Governance Training Program is a formal partnership with the University of Adelaide, which recognises the depth and rigour of the program through a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) arrangement. This partnership affirms the quality of the content and delivery, and provides participants with the opportunity to translate their learning into academic credit towards a Graduate Certificate or Master's degree in Business.

This offering reflects a growing recognition that community-led governance training—rooted in cultural authority, lived experience, and sector expertise—has equal value alongside formal education. It also represents an important step in creating clear, supported pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to continue their development beyond the program.

Through this collaboration the University of Adelaide and NATSIHA are working together to strengthen the leadership pipeline by validating and elevating First Nations governance knowledge within the higher education system. Further information about eligible units and how to apply for RPL will be provided to all participants as part of the training journey.

KING & WOOD
MALLESONS
金杜律师事务所



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Governance in Our Hands was designed as a tailored, whole-of-organisation initiative to ensure governance is embedded in every part of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisation, from front-line staff to board directors. Each component of the program has been developed in response to lived realities raised by the sector and reflected the unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, which must navigate both cultural and corporate systems.

Throughout all modules, cultural governance was embedded as a key theme, acknowledging the unique responsibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to uphold cultural values, maintain community trust, and lead through local governance structures. The program made space to explore how cultural authority and corporate accountability can work together, rather than in tension.



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Thank you so much - Stories used from real life were very helpful.

The Governance in Our Hands program ensures that governance is not confined to boardrooms but is actively supported by all staff in their day-to-day work.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

01

WHOLE-OF-ORGANISATION GOVERNANCE CAPABILITY

Embed a shared understanding of governance responsibilities across all levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Housing Organisations, ensuring that governance is not confined to boardrooms but is actively supported by all staff in their day-to-day work.

02

SUPPORT BOARDS TO MEET LEGAL AND STRATEGIC RESPONSIBILITIES

Equip directors with a clear understanding of their legal duties including director responsibilities, financial governance, related party benefits, and conflict management

03

BUILD FINANCIAL LITERACY AND RISK AWARENESS

Improve financial governance capabilities across boards and executive leadership, enabling organisations to engage with budgets, financial reporting, and funding compliance from a position of confidence and accountability.

04

INTEGRATE CULTURAL GOVERNANCE AS FOUNDATIONAL PRACTICE

Elevate cultural governance as a core strength of the sector and support organisations to formalise and communicate their cultural governance approaches alongside corporate structures.

05

PREPARE FOR SECTOR CHANGE AND FUTURE-READINESS

Ensure organisations are well positioned to respond to emerging legislation, policy reform, and sector transformation by building internal systems and practices that are both culturally grounded and legally sound.

06

FOSTER A SHARED GOVERNANCE LANGUAGE ACROSS ROLES

Create a common language and understanding between board members, CEOs, staff, and communities that strengthens communication, reduces internal silos, and supports aligned decision-making.

07

ENSURE CULTURALLY SAFE AND SECTOR-OWNED DELIVERY

Deliver training that is shaped by the voices of the sector, led by trusted facilitators, and grounded in First Nations governance values, ensuring the program reflects the lived reality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations.

08

IDENTIFY TARGETED TRAINING NEEDS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Gather insights into where the sector requires more focused or advanced training—for example, in audit and risk committee governance, succession planning, governance of partnerships, or housing-specific compliance frameworks—so that Phase Two of this work can deliver deeper, more targeted governance development in response to sector-identified priorities.

09

SCOPE THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR DEEPER IMPACT

Assess the need for advanced, fit-for-purpose governance tools and templates that support implementation beyond training—helping to institutionalise governance capability and ensure resources are tailored to the housing sector's needs in the next phase of this work.

PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

COURSE DESIGN PURPOSE

- Supports a whole-of-organisation approach to understanding governance
- Builds confidence across teams by embedding a shared understanding of what strong governance looks like now and into the future.
- Reinforces the cultural governance principles already embedded in community-controlled organisations, supporting the alignment of cultural authority and corporate accountability

CONTENT AREAS COVERED

- Directors' duties
- Related party benefits
- Financial governance
- Emerging trends
- Managing internal and external conflicts
- Delegation of Board powers
- Emerging trends and risk management

DELIVERY MODEL

- Sessions designed for 20–25 participants
- Format encourages:
- Interactive delivery
 - Peer learning
 - Organisational reflection
 - Mix of structured learning, scenario-based discussion, and reflective practice

FUTURE FOCUS

- Prepares organisations to embed governance knowledge across their teams
- Builds a strong governance culture that can be sustained even as leadership evolves



CONTENT AREAS

DIRECTORS DUTIES

WHAT IT COVERS

A clear breakdown of the legal obligations of directors under the Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006 (CATSI Act) and other relevant frameworks. Topics included duty of care and diligence, acting in good faith, avoiding conflicts of interest, and using position and information appropriately.

WHY IT MATTERS

Many board members come to their roles with deep cultural authority and community trust, but limited formal training in corporate governance. This module helped directors understand their personal liability, how to meet their legal obligations, and how to balance these with cultural leadership responsibilities. It gave directors clarity and confidence to make decisions within the law while continuing to lead in culturally grounded ways.

RELATED PARTY BENEFITS

WHAT IT COVERS

Guidance on identifying related parties (such as family members, business partners, or entities with shared interests), how benefits must be disclosed, and how boards can manage or avoid perceived or actual conflicts. This included the importance of proper registers, reporting obligations, and transparent decision-making.

WHY IT MATTERS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are interconnected, and relationships often span personal, cultural, and organisational boundaries. This can create complexity around decision-making. Boards valued learning how to remain transparent and accountable while operating in close-knit communities. The module helped protect both the organisation and the individual directors from reputational or legal risk.

FINANCIAL GOVERNANCE

WHAT IT COVERS

Strengthening understanding of organisational finances, including reading financial reports, understanding budgets, identifying financial risks, setting financial policies, and ensuring internal controls are in place. Participants were provided real world examples to explore.

WHY IT MATTERS

Financial mismanagement—whether accidental or systemic—can lead to funding loss, reputational damage, and in some cases, legal penalties. Many boards expressed that they didn't feel confident reading financial statements or asking questions about finances. This module built shared responsibility across the organisation for financial health, while giving directors tools to ask the right questions and exercise informed oversight.

CONTENT AREAS

EMERGING TRENDS

WHAT IT COVERS

An overview of key policy, legal, and funding trends relevant to the housing sector—including changes to the CATSI Act, funding reform, increased scrutiny from regulators, and expectations around data, performance, and compliance.

WHY IT MATTERS

Many organisations operate at full capacity and have limited time to scan the horizon. This component helped directors and senior staff step back and understand what's coming, so they can prepare and adapt. It provided space to think strategically and invest in building long-term capability.

MANAGING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CONFLICTS

WHAT IT COVERS

Practical tools and culturally informed processes to identify, address, and resolve internal disputes (e.g. between board members, or board and staff) and manage external conflict (e.g. with funders, regulators, or local stakeholders). It also covered the importance of having policies in place before conflicts arise.

WHY IT MATTERS

Conflict is a natural part of leadership, but unresolved conflict can derail an organisation's work and damage relationships. Many participants said they hadn't had space to talk openly about how to manage conflict, especially when cultural or kinship dynamics are involved. This module provided structured approaches that respected cultural protocols while supporting organisational integrity.

DELEGATION OF THE BOARD'S POWER

WHAT IT COVERS

Clarified what powers the board holds and how they can be delegated responsibly to CEOs, managers, or subcommittees. Emphasis was placed on setting clear boundaries, documenting delegation, and monitoring performance.

WHY IT MATTERS

Understanding where the role of the board ends and the CEO or staff responsibilities begin is essential to strong governance and effective leadership. This component helped boards create clarity around who is authorised to make decisions and under what conditions. It reduces micromanagement while strengthening oversight, enabling directors to focus on strategy and accountability, not daily operations.

CONTENT AREAS



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Great course. All Local Aboriginal
Land Councils should do this course

The strength of the program lay not only in the depth of its content but in its responsiveness to the needs of participants. Sessions were shaped by an understanding of who was in the room—what types of organisations were represented, and what specific challenges they might face. This allowed for case studies and examples to be tailored, making the content directly relevant and immediately applicable.

Having legal experts with a deep understanding of governance and law present in each session meant participants could ask real-time questions and explore complex issues as they arose. This expertise added clarity and confidence, helping translate high-level legal concepts into practical understanding for community-controlled organisations. The ability to respond to real organisational scenarios as they emerged reinforced the program’s strength-based, adaptive approach.

PROGRAM REVIEW

This review reflects on the delivery, outcomes, and lessons of the Governance in Our Hands program. It explores how the program has supported strong governance practice across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector and highlights where further investment and support can continue to build capability.

Drawing on participant feedback, insights from delivery partners, sector leaders, and NATSIHA's own tracking of tool uptake and participation trends, the review presents a strengths-based reflection on what worked well, what was learned, and how future efforts can deepen impact.



PURPOSE

The purpose of this review is to assess the impact, reach, and effectiveness of the Governance in Our Hands program, which was funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency under projective objective G of the Culture and Capability Programme Grant.

This review provides an overview of how the program was delivered, what outcomes were achieved, and where further support is needed. It also ensures accountability for the investment and informs future directions for governance development across the sector.

APPROACH

This review draws on participant feedback, internal reflection, and qualitative input from delivery partners and sector leaders. NATSIHA also tracked uptake of tools and participation trends to understand how the program translated into practice.

”

That was excellent. I enjoyed the training and the new skills I have learned and need to investigate. Cheers

”

I'm very happy and gained much knowledge, thank you.

REACH, DESIGN AND PARTICIPATION

ITERATIVE IMPROVEMENT

Each delivery of the program included a feedback and reflection loop. Sessions were evaluated in real-time through participant input, and the program was continuously adapted and built upon to reflect what was working well and where further clarity or emphasis was needed.

This iterative approach ensured that Governance in Our Hands remained responsive to the sector, grounded in community experience, and capable of addressing emerging governance challenges as they arose.



6
States &
Territories



212
Participants



116
Organisations



23%
Sector
Coverage

FINDINGS

The program design enabled high engagement across job roles and geographies. Whole-of-organisation delivery was a key success factor, breaking down silos and helping everyone see where they fit into the governance ecosystem.

Participants especially valued the space to engage with governance concepts in ways that were practical, relevant, and culturally informed. This inclusive and adaptive design contributed directly to increased uptake of tools, shared language around governance, and a stronger culture of accountability.

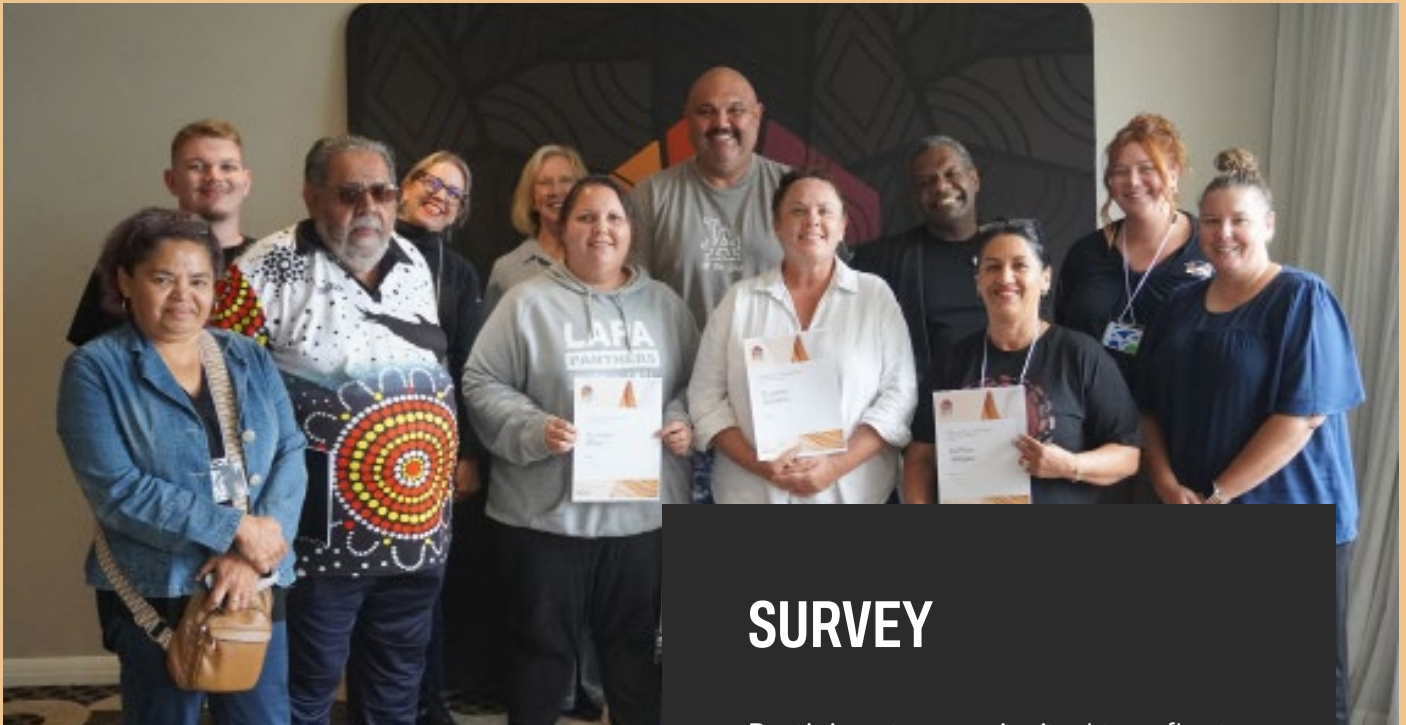


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Simple and nicely broken down to understand.

REVIEW

Strong governance is already practiced across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations—grounded in cultural authority, collective decision-making, and accountability to community. Governance in My Hands builds on this strength, providing a shared foundation for whole-of-organisation readiness, so that anyone stepping into a leadership role in future understands their responsibilities and the standards expected.



BUILDING CONFIDENCE

Before the workshop, participants rated their organisation's understanding of governance at 3.6 out of 5.

After the program, this increased to 4.4, with 52.2% rating their understanding at the highest level.

Individual understanding also rose to match—showing a shift toward shared confidence across roles.

SURVEY

Participants were invited to reflect on their existing governance knowledge across key areas before and after the training, allowing them to assess how the program deepened their understanding and confidence.



**EXCELLENT
SESSION, EASY TO
UNDERSTAND AND
VERY INFORMATIVE**

PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES

Below reflects the shift in understanding before and after attending the Governance In Our Hands Program:

FINANCIAL GOVERNANCE

Participants deepened their confidence in understanding key financial responsibilities. Post-training scores rose to 84.6%, reflecting stronger financial oversight capabilities.

74.2%

Understanding
Before

84.6%

Understanding
After

MANAGING DISPUTES

Participants reported clearer understanding of how to resolve issues within governance structures. A rise from 74.2% to 86.2% demonstrates strengthened conflict resolution knowledge.

74.2%

Understanding
Before

86.2%

Understanding
After

DIRECTORS DUTIES

Clarity on legal and ethical duties of directors significantly improved. Understanding increased from 69.4% to 84.6%, supporting more informed decision-making.

69.4%

Understanding
Before

84.6%

Understanding
After

MANAGING CONFLICT

Participants gained tools to approach internal conflict with accountability and respect. Showing deeper capacity for culturally responsive resolution.

66.1%

Understanding
Before

86.2%

Understanding
After

RELATED PARTY BENEFITS

This area saw the largest improvement, indicating clearer understanding of transparency. Scores jumped from 46.8% to 89.2%, reinforcing integrity in organisational dealings.

46.8%

Understanding
Before

89.2%

Understanding
After

RISK MANAGEMENT

Participants became more confident in identifying and managing governance risks. Scores increased from 69.4% to 74.2%, with room for ongoing strengthening.

69.4%

Understanding
Before

74.2%

Understanding
After

STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE ACROSS OUR SECTOR: LOOKING AHEAD

This review draws on survey data and participant feedback, alongside NATSIHA's commitment to sector-wide capability and cultural integrity. It builds a foundation for future investment and program development, shaped by community priorities and whole-of-organisation aspirations.

GOVERNANCE STRENGTH EMBEDDED

Organisations bring strong cultural governance, community accountability and deep relational ways of working. This program affirms those strengths and supports people to grow their understanding of how cultural and corporate governance work together, creating readiness for future leadership and succession.

SHARED LEARNING

Survey insights highlighted a strong desire to share knowledge across whole boards, not just with those who attended. Participants called for practical tools to support this, including self-assessments, templates, and guides to embed learning and support succession planning.

A Governance Toolkit would provide a clear pathway for participants to continue applying their insights, strengthening governance across their organisations and building shared understanding at every level.

DEMYSTIFY GOVERNMENT AND POLICY

As the sector strengthens its voice and influence, there's a need for practical insight into:

- How government processes and funding decisions work
- How to navigate agreements, contracts and reporting
- What current policy shifts mean for housing organisations (e.g. HPP, NASHH, Closing the Gap)
- Including these insights helps organisations advocate and lead with even greater clarity.



Government training (how government works would be great!)

GOVERNANCE IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

Participants saw clearly that strong governance doesn't sit only with Boards or senior leaders - it lives in how decisions are made every day. Staff at all levels saw their role in upholding integrity, transparency and cultural authority. The program supported that understanding across roles, creating a shared foundation.

MAKING THE PROGRAM AVAILABLE ANNUALLY

Participants were clear: governance is not a one-off event but part of a continuous learning journey. Making the program available every year in every state and territory will ensure that more people can engage over time, that new leaders are continually supported, and that the content evolves alongside changing policy environments and sector priorities.

PEER LEARNING MATTERS

One of the strongest pieces of feedback was the value of learning from each other. Participants want to hear what works, what's possible, and how others are navigating change. Embedding peer exchange, mentoring, and shared practice into the program will strengthen it even further.

This program is not about starting from scratch. It's about recognising and reinforcing the strength that already exists in our organisations — and creating tools and pathways to ensure that strength is passed on. Everyone in an organisation has a role to play in strong governance.



NATSIHA

National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander
Housing Association

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