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Information for New or Prospective ALA Board Members

Thinking of joining a not for profit board of management?

Being part of a not for profit Board and participating in governing the organisation might seem like a daunting task, especially when it is not a paid position. The basic requirements for being a good board member are common sense and having a good sense of ethics.

The key responsibilities of the Board are to set the direction for the organisation, to monitor its performance and to maintain control of the organisation, ensuring that it stays on track according to agreed priorities and planned activities. The Board doesn't run the day to day activities of ALA; this responsibility is delegated to the Chief Executive Officer.



While there are responsibilities of being a Board member, there are also many rewarding aspects that come with being part of a not for profit organisation.

An experienced community group Board member Peter Duncan commented that any frustrations of being a Board member are generally hugely outweighed by the satisfaction gained – otherwise one shouldn't do it.

“Personal satisfaction” is the phrase that most commonly crops up when various Australian leaders and community organisation Board members are asked to articulate their experiences. Most agree that while outsiders may see their contribution as selfless, the benefits derived from the experience usually outweigh the sacrifices.

Making a difference. There can be few more satisfying experiences than being able to see your goals and vision – and those of the organisation you are representing – come to fruition in the form of successfully completed projects. Contributing to the achievement of something you really believe in brings a form of satisfaction that is unlikely to be equalled in other areas of your professional life. Recognising that you are making a significant difference to people's lives and contributing to the betterment of the community is a fine reward indeed.

Gaining new knowledge. Becoming involved in a community organisation can open up whole new areas of interest, resulting in a greatly expanded appreciation for how community organisations are run and of the specific sector in which the organisation is operating. As a wise person once said, no knowledge is ever wasted.

Gaining new skills. Successfully negotiating the challenges of the community sector - those involving fundraising and advocacy, for example – can pose challenges quite distinct from those required in the commercial or government sectors. Learning how to overcome these challenges can allow Board members to develop an entirely different, and highly useful, set of skills. Meeting and working with other talented people can also lead to a valuable expansion of skills.

Expanding your networks. Most often people are invited to sit on a Board because of their particular skills or attributes – and taking a seat alongside them at the Board table can allow you to benefit from those attributes. Making connections through the development of relationships and friendships with other Board members can have long-lasting positive personal and professional implications.

Putting yourself in context. Often in the day-to-day grind of work and personal lives, it is easy to lose sight of what skills and expertise you actually have to offer the world. Joining the Board of a community organisation, and acknowledging your contribution to its success, can lead to a more finely tuned understanding of your own worth – and a realisation that what you have to say is just as important as anyone else.

Finding it's not just about the bottom line. Many Board members find a passion and commitment that is unlike the search for shareholder returns in a company boardroom. The motivation to achieve a mission rather than just increase revenues can be very inspiring.

Being inspired. Most people know the buzz that can come from being part of an effective team. Working with like-minded, dedicated people, not for material gain but for the good of the cause, is another experience opened up to community group Board members. That passion, commitment and spirit of generosity can be difficult to find in other arenas.

Being included. Participating in the community that the Board represents also presents immense rewards. Whether you are working for a lost dog's home, a sporting group, a church or a school, serving on the Board can put you in contact with people you may have not have otherwise encountered. Getting to know your stakeholders, watching them live and work and participate, can be as exhilarating as any other experience you are likely to have.

The benefits of acting on a community organisation board:

"A wonderful sense of achievement for remarkably little effort, working with really dedicated people, not for material gain but for the good of the cause. Being surrounded by people who were not selfish but community minded". John Dalziel

"The personal satisfaction of successfully completed projects". Lindsay Gaze

"The satisfaction of contributing to the achievement of something one really believes in". Peter Duncan

"Learning more about how various organisations are run, seeing the goals and vision I have contributed to come to fruition and realising that what I had to say was just as important as anyone else and that everyone's contribution is important even when there is not a consensus". Keran Howe

"The recognition that you are making a significant difference to people's lives". Kathryn Greiner AO

(Extracted from Surviving and Thriving as a Safe, Effective Board Member, Our Community Pty Ltd 2009.)

About Advocacy Law Alliance Inc

ALA employs around 25 staff and 10-20 volunteers and has an annual budget of around \$1.5 million. ALA takes good governance and management seriously as it believes disadvantaged people deserve a well-run and professional service. Good governance and management are also required because of increasing legislative, contractual, legal and ethical standards ALA must meet.

ALA needs people with the time and governance skills to oversee the organisation. ALA encourages and welcomes people from its target groups to join the board. The Board is elected each year at the annual general meeting. However, the Board may appoint Board members to fill vacancies.

Generally the Board is made up of a balance or mix of people: from the regions ALA covers, from the target groups it assists and people with legal, financial and management skills. Orientation and support is provided for new Board members. Board members also attend governance training.

As part of its commitment to good governance and high ethical standards the ALA Board have resolved to undergo police checks as do all staff and volunteers of the organisation.

Governance over distance – ALA currently covers over a 120,000 square kilometres and has six offices in northern NSW. To effectively meet on a regular basis the Board must use teleconferencing and web-conferencing. Therefore to participate, a Board member must have access to a computer (preferably with a web camera) and be able to readily communicate via email. *Meetings can be attended in this way from home, office or at one of ALA's offices.* The Board usually meets face-to face one or two times a year in one of ALA's regional offices on a weekend, so travelling may be involved. The Board usually meets 7 times a year (once every 2 months plus the annual general meeting). Sometimes extra meetings are called.



The CEO and President are always available to answer questions related to being a Board member.

ALA History

The story of Advocacy Law Alliance (ALA) began in Tamworth NSW in 1985 where a small group of locals set up an association to advocate for people with an intellectual disability (Citizen Advocacy Northwest).

In 1994 Disability Advocacy Service Hunter (DASH) was established in Newcastle NSW to advocate for all people with a disability and mental illness.

In 2006 DASH and Advocacy Northwest joined forces to become Disability Advocacy NSW (DA) and gradually expanded to cover the Mid North Coast region.

Mid North Coast advocates found that the region was one of the few in NSW that did not have a community legal centre that could ensure disadvantaged people (including people with a disability) get fair access to justice. DA advocates worked over a number of years with local groups to research the legal need and gather relevant evidence to show that a community legal centre should be based on the Mid North Coast.

In 2010 the Commonwealth and NSW governments offered funds to establish a community legal centre. Disability Advocacy NSW was the successful applicant in an open tender and the doors of the new Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre opened in mid 2011.

To reflect the diversity of the services it provided and the alliance between legal and non-legal advocacy Disability Advocacy NSW changed its name to Advocacy Law Alliance Inc and registered the business names Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre and Disability Advocacy NSW.

ALA operates in the regional and rural areas of the Hunter, Mid North Coast and New England regions of New South Wales, Australia. The service covers over 120,000 square

kilometres and services a population of over 1 million people. ALA has offices in Newcastle, Port Macquarie, Tamworth, Armidale, Coffs Harbour, Taree and Armidale.

ALA is a not-for-profit group which receives funding from the Commonwealth and State Attorney Generals Departments, Legal Aid, Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and NSW Department of Human Services (Aging Disability & Home Care). ALA has also received many one off grants from other sources, including the Department of Corrective Services, the Community Development Support Expenditure Scheme (CDSE) and the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW.

Organisational Overview and Objectives

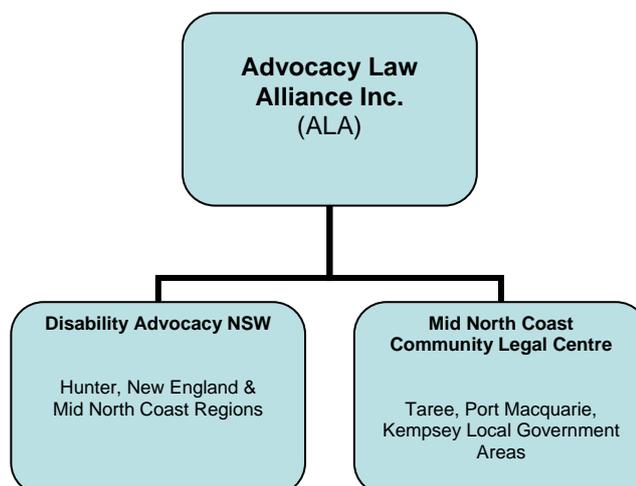
Core Values

The Service believes that disadvantaged people, including people with a disability, have the same rights and responsibilities as others.

Core Aim

The Service aims to ensure that disadvantaged people obtain these rights in practice.

Organisational Overview



Organisational Structure

The organisational structure describes the governing and management bodies of the Service, the arrangement of staff positions and the accountability relationships.

Overview

The Service is an incorporated association. Its ABN is 93 984 383 421. It is governed by an elected Board of 10 members.

Office bearer positions:

President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary

Board Duties - Governance

The key responsibilities of the Board are to set the direction for the organisation, to monitor its performance and to maintain control of the organisation, ensuring that it stays on track according to agreed priorities and planned activities. (The Board doesn't run the day to day activities of ALA; this responsibility is delegated to the CEO)

Delegation of Management

The day-to-day management of the organisation is delegated to the CEO (Chief Executive Officer who is a paid staff member) and is based on policies approved by the Board. The CEO reports back regularly to the Board.

Duties

Board members are expected to demonstrate their commitment to the organisation by attending all meetings.

Office Bearers also have additional and specific roles:

- **President:** The President has special responsibility for providing leadership. This leadership role includes ensuring that the Board is focussed on the business of the organisation, that meetings are conducted properly and that an accurate record is kept of these meetings.
- **Treasurer:** The Treasurer has responsibility for the financial management of the organisation, and must make sure those payments due to, or by, the organisation, are paid, that the financial records are kept correctly, and that the organisation is working within an agreed financial plan.

As a Board however, the group as a whole must share responsibility and decision-making and it will therefore be an important part of the Treasurer's role to ensure that other Board members understand the information that is being presented and the implications of this information.

- **Secretary:** The Secretary has particular responsibility for ensuring that the business of board or Board meetings is documented, including decisions that are taken, and ensuring that the meeting papers are circulated in advance of meetings. They may also take the minutes in the meeting, but this can also be done by someone else and checked by the Secretary.

General members of the Board:

- Attend meetings as required. Refer to constitution.
- Actively participate and contribute constructively to the productivity and outcomes of meetings.
- Declare any personal interest that might conflict with the interests of the organisation or your duty as a Board member.
- Act in accordance with the Code of Conduct/Code of Ethics.
- Keep informed about the organisation's business.
- Act as a spokesperson for the organisation when requested by the Board or CEO
- Be a member of and/or chair of sub-Boards/working groups as required.
- Sign letters or documents on behalf of the Association as required.
- Exercise delegation of authority and expenditure as determined by the Board.

With other members of the Board:

- Provide a clear and viable direction for the organisation, agree on priorities and oversee the development of an organisational plan.
- Oversee the development of an annual budget.
- Ensure the solvency and financial viability of the organisation.
- Establish clear expectations for the performance of all Board members, staff and volunteers.
- Make informed decisions on key issues.
- Establish accountability and reporting processes for Board members and staff.
- Ensure that appropriate systems are in place for recruitment and the performance appraisal and management of staff.
- Monitor the implementation of plans, budgets, policies and decisions and be able to recognise and take action when these are not implemented in an agreed way.

- Ensure sound risk management is in place by establishing and monitoring a risk management plan, including appropriate insurance cover.
- Ensure compliance by the organisation with legislation, contracts and any other legal obligations.
- Ensure the organisation meets the requirements specified in its Constitution and the current Associations Incorporation Act
- Ensure that the policies and procedures as set down in Policy and Procedures Manual are followed.
- Oversee the signing of contracts.
- Monitor the performance of the Board.
- Monitor the performance of the organisation and take action to ensure the organisation performs to its capacity and meets its contractual obligations.
- Ensure that the Board is sustainable over time and that succession is well planned.
- Address any conflicts of interest within the Board and across the organisation.
- Ensure that membership and community support are maintained.

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**Expression of Interest  
For Advocacy Law Alliance Inc. Board of Management**

This form is for people who may be interested in becoming a voluntary Board member of ALA. The above information provides a summary for perspective Board members or go to [www.advocacylaw.org.au](http://www.advocacylaw.org.au) to find out more about the organisation. If you are interesting in joining the board please fill out the form and return to ALA.

We try to get a mix of people on the Board with relevant skills, from particular geographic areas, and people from the target groups we assist. The information you provide will help us to do this.

Name:

Phone:

E mail:

Address:

Can you tell us about yourself and why you would like to be a Board member?

What skills or attributes do you think you could bring to the board?

Do you have a disability?

Are you from an indigenous background?

Are you from a non English speaking background?

ALA covers a wide geographic area. Meetings are mostly held via web conferencing (a teleconference with the computer showing a video stream of each member on the computer). This can be done from our office or your own home if you have a web camera on your computer. *Do you have easy access to a computer and email to receive and send relevant board information?*

From time to time Board members may have to do some training related to being on a non-profit board. *Do you have the time and willingness to occasionally do this?*

Most board meetings are via web conference (in the late afternoon or evening) these are organised and paid for by ALA. However, the Board meets one or two times a year at either: Tamworth, Newcastle or Port Macquarie on a Saturday (expenses paid). Would you be willing to travel to a Saturday meeting once or twice a year?

As part of its contractual obligations staff, volunteers and Board members need to have a police check. *Would you be prepared to have a police check done prior to joining the Board?*

Do you have any questions or further comments you would like to make?