Professional Standard 1 – Governance and Organisational Integrity (Summary)

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1. Purpose
To ensure that all WAFA members operate with sound governance principles, maintain organisational integrity, and uphold public trust through transparent, accountable, and ethical leadership.

2. Scope
This Standard applies to the board of directors, senior leadership, and governing bodies of all Members.

3. Standard Statement
WAFA members shall demonstrate effective governance practices that promote accountability, transparency, ethical decision-making, and strategic oversight in accordance with applicable laws and best practice principles.

4. Definitions

- **Board**: The governing body responsible for the overall direction and oversight of the organisation.
- **Conflict of Interest**: A situation where personal interests could improperly influence the performance of official duties or decisions.
- **Transparency**: The practice of openly sharing governance structures, policies, and decisions with stakeholders and the public.
- **Strategic Oversight**: The board's role in setting, monitoring, and guiding organisational strategy to achieve objectives.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Board:** Responsible for governance, setting strategic direction, risk management, financial oversight, and compliance with WAFA standards.
- **Senior Leadership:** Implements board policies and manages day-to-day operations.
- **Staff and Volunteers:** Support organisational objectives under leadership direction and adhere to governance policies.

6. Requirements

6.1 Board Responsibilities

- Clearly defined roles and duties: The board must have a documented charter or governance framework that explicitly defines the responsibilities of the board and individual members. This includes oversight of the organisation's strategic direction, financial management, risk management, compliance with legal and regulatory requirements, and ensuring alignment with WAFA standards. Clear role delineation prevents overlap and confusion, enabling effective governance.
- Relevant skills and commitment: Board members should collectively possess a diverse range of skills, knowledge, and experience relevant to the organisation's

operations, including expertise in governance, finance, legal compliance, animal welfare, and disability services. Members must demonstrate a strong commitment to the organisation's mission, ethics, and values, actively participating in meetings and decision-making.

- Regular evaluation of board performance: The board shall implement a process for periodic self-assessment and evaluation of individual members to ensure effective functioning. This may include reviewing attendance, contribution quality, decision-making effectiveness, and alignment with governance principles. Evaluations inform continuous improvement and capacity building.

6.2 Conflicts of Interest

- Documented policy: Organisations must establish a formal conflict of interest policy that outlines procedures for identifying, disclosing, and managing conflicts. The policy should cover actual, perceived, and potential conflicts that may arise in relation to financial interests, personal relationships, or other competing interests.
- Disclosure and management: Board members, staff, and volunteers must promptly disclose any conflicts to the board or relevant authority. The organisation must manage conflicts transparently, which may include requiring affected persons to abstain from decision-making or voting on related matters. Proper management safeguards organisational integrity and public trust.

6.3 Transparency

- Clear communication: Organisations must maintain open and accessible communication channels with members, stakeholders, and the public regarding governance structures, policies, strategic plans, and key decisions. This transparency fosters accountability and stakeholder confidence.
- Record-keeping: Accurate and comprehensive records of board meetings, decisions, policies, and strategic plans must be maintained and securely stored. These records should be available for review by authorised parties and provide an audit trail demonstrating compliance and sound governance.

6.4 Strategic Oversight

- Alignment with WAFA mission: The board must ensure that organisational goals, objectives, and activities consistently reflect WAFA's mission, values, and professional standards. Strategic priorities should promote animal welfare, handler rights, and ethical practice.
- Strategic planning with risk assessment: The board should lead a strategic planning process that includes identification and evaluation of organisational risks, such as financial, operational, reputational, and animal welfare risks. Risk mitigation strategies must be developed and integrated into the overall plan.

- Monitoring and corrective actions: The board is responsible for regularly monitoring progress against strategic objectives, reviewing performance data, and implementing corrective actions where goals are not being met. This continuous oversight ensures organisational sustainability and responsiveness to emerging challenges.

6.5 Ethical Conduct and Accountability

- Upholding ethical standards: All governance and operational activities must adhere to the highest ethical standards, including integrity, fairness, respect, and responsibility toward handlers, animals, staff, and the wider community. The board and leadership set the tone for organisational culture and ethics.
- Accountability mechanisms: Organisations must establish clear processes for accountability, including transparent reporting on governance and operational matters. This includes implementing whistleblower protections and accessible channels for raising concerns or complaints without fear of reprisal. Such mechanisms reinforce trust and compliance.

7. Additional Recommendations and Considerations

7.1. Board Diversity and Inclusion
Boards should actively pursue diversity in their composition to enhance the quality of governance and decision-making. This includes recruiting members from a variety of backgrounds such as individuals with lived experience of disability, professionals with expertise in animal welfare, legal and financial experts, and representatives from the community. Diverse boards are better equipped to understand and address the needs of all stakeholders, foster innovation, and build organisational resilience. Organisations should establish policies or goals for diversity and regularly review progress in achieving them.

7.2 Succession Planning
Effective governance requires continuity and renewal of leadership. Organisations must develop and maintain a succession plan that identifies future board and leadership needs, outlines recruitment processes, and provides for mentoring and training new members. Succession planning ensures that the organisation is not vulnerable to gaps in expertise or leadership turnover and supports strategic stability. This plan should be reviewed and updated regularly to adapt to changing organisational needs.

7.3. Compliance with Legal and Regulatory Requirements
WAFA members must ensure full compliance with all relevant laws and regulations. This includes but is not limited to laws governing not-for-profit and charity operations, animal welfare standards, workplace health and safety requirements, and privacy legislation. Organisations should conduct regular compliance audits, update policies as legislation evolves, and train staff and board members on their legal obligations. Non-compliance risks legal penalties, reputational damage, and loss of certification.

7.4 Stakeholder Engagement
Regular and meaningful engagement with stakeholders—such as handlers, trainers, volunteers, staff, and community members—is essential for informed governance. Organisations should establish formal mechanisms for gathering input and feedback, such as surveys, focus groups, advisory committees, or open forums. This engagement supports transparency, ensures the organisation remains responsive to stakeholder needs, and facilitates continuous improvement. Feedback should be documented and considered in governance and strategic decision-making processes.

7.5 Training and Development
To maintain effective governance, ongoing training and professional development must be provided for board members and senior leadership. Training topics should include governance best practices, ethical standards, legal compliance, risk management, financial oversight, and sector-specific knowledge (such as animal training and disability rights). Organisations should develop a training plan and provide access to relevant resources, workshops, or external training providers. Well-trained governance bodies are better prepared to meet challenges and lead effectively.

7.6 Conflict Resolution Processes
Disputes or disagreements may arise within boards or organisations. Establishing formal conflict resolution processes helps maintain a constructive and professional governance environment. Such processes should include clear procedures for raising, investigating, and resolving conflicts fairly and confidentially. This may involve mediation, use of an independent facilitator, or defined escalation pathways. Effective conflict resolution protects organisational cohesion, supports ethical conduct, and fosters trust among members and stakeholders.

7.7 Financial Oversight and Integrity
Robust financial governance is critical to organisational sustainability and public confidence. Organisations must implement comprehensive financial policies and internal controls covering budgeting, expenditure approval, asset management, and financial reporting. Regular financial audits should be conducted by qualified auditors, and audit findings must be reviewed by the board. Transparent reporting of financial performance and risks to members and stakeholders is essential. Board members should have sufficient financial literacy to provide appropriate oversight.

8. Governance Considerations for Sole Proprietors and Partnerships

For sole proprietors, partnerships, or organisations operating without a formal board of directors, governance and organisational integrity remain essential. Such entities should clearly define roles and responsibilities, maintain transparent communication with clients and stakeholders, and implement policies to manage conflicts of interest. Strategic planning and risk management should be regularly conducted to ensure sustainable operations and compliance with WAFA standards. Ethical conduct and accountability mechanisms, including processes for feedback and complaints, are equally important. Additionally, seeking external advice, mentorship, or peer review can provide valuable oversight and support good governance in the absence of a board.

9. Governance Considerations for Charities

Charities operate under specific legal and regulatory frameworks designed to ensure accountability, transparency, and public trust. Effective governance in charities is critical to fulfilling their mission while safeguarding assets and complying with applicable laws.

Key Governance Principles for Charities:

- Compliance with Regulatory Standards: Charities must adhere to relevant legislation, such as the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) Governance Standards. These standards outline core governance requirements, including duties of responsible persons, financial oversight, and risk management.
- Board Responsibilities: Charities are generally governed by a board of responsible persons (directors or trustees) who provide strategic direction, oversee financial management, and ensure compliance with legal and ethical obligations. Board members should have a clear understanding of their roles and fiduciary duties.
- Transparency and Accountability: Charities must maintain transparent operations through accurate record-keeping, regular reporting to stakeholders, and disclosure of conflicts of interest. Public reporting obligations, including annual information statements and financial reports, promote accountability.
- Stakeholder Engagement: Meaningful engagement with beneficiaries, donors, volunteers, and the community helps charities align their activities with stakeholder needs and enhances organisational responsiveness.
- Risk Management: Charities should implement robust risk management frameworks to identify, assess, and mitigate operational, financial, reputational, and compliance risks.
- Ethical Conduct: Upholding high ethical standards is essential, including honesty, integrity, and respect for beneficiaries and stakeholders.

By maintaining strong governance, charities not only comply with legal requirements but also build public confidence and ensure the effective delivery of their charitable objectives.

10. References

- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*
- Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) Governance Standards
- ASX Corporate Governance Principles and Recommendations (where applicable)

11. Review, Revision and Approvals

This policy will be reviewed annually by the steering committee to ensure its effectiveness and relevance. Any revisions will require approval from the steering committee.

12. Implementation

WAFA members must integrate these standards into governance frameworks, operational policies, financial management, human resources, and client service delivery to maintain high standards of accountability and organisational integrity.

13. Enforcement

WAFA enforces these standards through its accreditation and audit processes. Non-compliance will lead to remedial actions and may impact ongoing WAFA membership and certification status.

14. Contact Information

For further information or assistance related to this standard, please contact the steering committee at the following email address: admin@workinganimals.com.au

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Document Control

Version	Date	Author	Change Description	Approved By
V1.0	17/05/2025	V. Solomon	Initial	C.Williams