



INDIVIDUAL

How to find a directorship

For the aspiring director, finding a directorship involves the creation of opportunities. Many aspirants will start small, usually in the not-for-profit sector. As you gain boardroom experience and build your networks, other opportunities will arise.

It is important to understand why you are seeking board positions, what you can offer a board and the impact of your choice of boards on your future career as a director. While making a good choice can bring personal satisfaction, enhanced reputation and financial reward, a bad one can mean litigation, loss of assets and a damaged reputation.

It may be flattering to be asked to join a board but asking the right questions not only about the operations and financial health of the organisation, but also about its governance before you accept a position will be worth it if your opportunity turns out to be a poisoned chalice. For example, does the boardroom culture allow directors to speak freely and question management? Does the board have a good working relationship with the CEO and senior management team? Has the board articulated its risk appetite to management?

Consider your ultimate goal in seeking directorships and how you can build towards this goal. Define what sort of boards you would like involvement with – the industry, size and revenue range to which you could bring your best experience. You can then work backwards and find companies which meet these criteria and move you in your chosen direction.

Before you begin your search, it may be useful to understand how directors are currently appointed. In general, the most common route is through an executive career leading to a CEO or similar position. However, there are also opportunities based on alternative careers such as law, accounting, public service and similar.

The AICD has produced a number of self-paced resources in this area, including the *Board Level* podcast series¹, and the *Developing Your Director Career* book² and webinar series³.

1. Australian Institute of Company Directors, 2019, *Board Level*, Australian Institute of Company Directors and CommBank's Women in Focus, November, <https://aicd.companydirectors.com.au/membership/membership-update/board-level>, (accessed 14 November 2019).
2. E Jameson, 2017, *Developing Your Director Career*, Australian Institute of Company Directors.
3. Refer to <https://aicd.companydirectors.com.au/education/courses-for-the-director/webinars>

What are some ways to increase the opportunities for success?

Build your personal brand

More than ever, the concept of developing a personal brand has become very important. In the same way that organisations build and carefully nurture the brand of the products and services they sell, each person has his or her own brand. Brands comprise the symbols, design, name, sound, reputation, emotion, acquaintances, tone, and much more that identify and distinguish specific products and services. Importantly, the brand is the perception held by the consumer, or in the case of your personal brand, the people you are seeking to influence.

The rise of online connectivity has made the concept of managing your personal brand much more achievable. Prior to the web, personal brands could be developed and communicated largely through the traditional mass media such as press articles, radio and television interviews and similar and by undertaking activities such as publishing books and articles. Today, web-based social media sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter allow people to promote themselves to a global audience. In addition, you can develop your own website, publish your own blogs and webcasts and generally use the multitude of online opportunities available to create and publish facts and information about yourself, and in so doing, create your own brand.



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The web, however, is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, you can use it to position yourself and your competencies for board and other positions. On the other hand, it enables negative aspects of your brand, either created by yourself or by others through unfortunate social media posts and negative reports, to become readily available through searches.

Consequently, thinking about yourself as a 'brand' and actively seeking to manage this brand, is a key component of contemporary professional success. It is the starting point to position yourself for a directorship. As with any brand, developing your own unique 'value proposition' to demonstrate how your knowledge, skills and experience can add value to a board and an organisation will create a good impression on those in a position to find you a directorship or nominate you to join a board.

Network

Join and attend functions of prominent business organisations – such as the Business Council of Australia (BCA), the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA), and naturally the AICD – to develop your business networks and build relationships with decision makers. Make it known among your contacts that you are seeking board positions. Show interest in how your contacts found their first board position and ask who else they know who might be able to help you.

Become involved in the not-for-profit sector

The not-for-profit sector includes advisory boards, industry associations, arts bodies, clubs, medical research organisations and educational bodies. It is more likely to seek diversity than the commercial world. The key is to become known and to develop a track record as a useful board member. In practical terms, this gives you exposure to how boards work, what works best, what not to do, as well as extending your professional network.

Often the way to a board position in the not-for-profit sector is through organisations in which you have an interest and already are an active member. This may be a sporting club, a community organisation, a disability organisation whose services you or a family member use and so on. Undertake research and find out how board members are appointed. Become known in the organisation, assist in its management if practicable and express your interest in a board position.

Executive search firms

Write a director CV and submit it to executive search firms. More boards are turning to these firms to facilitate a more formal and objective approach to board appointments and to widen the pool of potential candidates.

Registers

Register your interest in a directorship with one of the various registries for people who are interested in finding board positions. These registries include those dealing with charities and not-for-profits as well as government entities and registers devoted to finding positions for women. Organisations regularly use these directories to find suitable candidates for their boards. The AICD offers a register which is discussed below.

Find a mentor

While contemporary corporate governance practice rightfully recommends that boards should use a wide range of sources to find new directors with emphasis on matching the individual's competencies with the needs of the board, word of mouth and personal recommendations by established well-regarded directors still play an important role in sourcing directorships.

Do you have a close contact who is well established in his or her director career and who would be willing to provide mentoring and advice? Seek this person's advice concerning your director career? What would they advise? Who would they suggest you meet?

What are the opportunities provided by the AICD?

Directorship opportunities

The AICD offers its Directorship Opportunities.⁴ This is a customised program to better assist members looking for directorships and connecting them with organisations seeking board members. This directorship search service has been designed to specifically address the issues of greater visibility and control over finding new directorships. Directorship Opportunities is a member-only subscription service.

Whether you are looking to keep up-to-date with the latest openings on Australia's private, public and not-for-profit boards – or to help your organisation find the ideal candidate to strengthen your governance team – this service may meet your needs.

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Company Directors Course

The *Company Directors Course*⁵ is recognised as the definitive program for company directors in Australia. The course focuses on the responsibilities of directors in larger organisations. It has the added advantages of providing networking opportunities for participants and demonstrating to boards that you take your duties seriously.

The AICD also offer an extensive suite of specialised courses on all aspects of governance. Some of these courses can be taken without completing the *Company Directors Course*, while other are best taken after completing the *Company Directors Course*. Having a number of these courses on your CV is yet another sign of your competence and interest in governance.

In addition, the AICD offers a Director Self-assessment Tool⁶ designed assess your current director capabilities and skills and guide your director professional development.

4. Refer to <https://aicd.companydirectors.com.au/membership/directorship-opportunities/candidates>

5. Refer to <https://aicd.companydirectors.com.au/education/courses-for-the-director/company-directors-course>

6. Refer to <https://aicd.companydirectors.com.au/membership/self-assessment-tool>

About us

The Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) is committed to strengthening society through world-class governance. We aim to be the independent and trusted voice of governance, building the capability of a community of leaders for the benefit of society. Our membership includes directors and senior leaders from business, government and the not-for-profit (NFP) sectors.

For more information **t: 1300 739 119** **w: aicd.com.au**

Disclaimer

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