



REFERENCE HUB

The Six ACNC Governance Standards, Consolidated in One Place

Not five, six. The complete reference this series has referenced constantly but never assembled side by side

This series has referenced the ACNC Governance Standards constantly, connecting individual articles back to specific standards as the relevant discipline required. This article does something different: it puts all of them side by side, in one place, as the consolidated reference this series has not yet given them directly.

Which rules apply to your association?

The law depends on how your association is set up. A **company limited by guarantee** follows the Corporations Act 2001 (Cth) and its constitution. An **incorporated association** follows its state or territory associations Act and its rules. A **registered charity** also follows the ACNC Act and the ACNC Governance Standards, and some Corporations Act rules are replaced for charities that are companies. Check your own governing documents, and get advice before decisions with legal consequences.

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A Correction Worth Making Before Anything Else

Most governance commentary, including much of this series, refers to five Governance Standards. There are six. Governance Standard 6, addressing participation in the National Redress Scheme for institutional child sexual abuse, was added in 2021 following the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and an accurate reference needs to include it. The standards apply only to ACNC-registered charities. Non-charitable associations are not bound by them, although they are a useful benchmark. Basic Religious Charities are exempt from the Governance Standards, but a Basic Religious Charity that fails to join the National Redress Scheme when required loses that status and must then comply with all six.

The Foundational Principle Underpinning All Six

The Governance Standards are principles-based, not prescriptive rules with a single correct answer. Each charity must take reasonable steps to meet each standard, and what counts as reasonable depends on the charity's own size, activities, and risk profile. A large charity working with vulnerable beneficiaries is expected to take meaningfully more extensive steps than a small association with a low-risk membership base. Charities do not submit formal evidence of compliance to the ACNC routinely, but must be able to

produce it if the regulator ever asks, which connects directly to the records retention discipline discussed earlier in this series.

Governance Standard 1: Purpose And Not-For-Profit Status

A charity must demonstrate it is established as a not-for-profit with a charitable purpose, that it is run as a not-for-profit working toward that purpose, and that it can share information about its charitable purpose with the public. This standard sits behind the constitutional discipline this series has returned to throughout, since an association's governing document is the primary evidence of its purpose and not-for-profit status.

Governance Standard 2: Accountability To Members

A charity must take reasonable steps to be accountable to its own members and give them adequate opportunity to raise concerns about how the charity is being run. This standard connects directly to the members register access discipline, the member complaints handling framework, and the voting rights and meeting procedure articles discussed throughout this series, all of which are, in substance, different practical expressions of this single underlying standard.

Governance Standard 3: Compliance With Australian Law

A charity must not commit a serious offence (one that can be dealt with as an indictable offence) or breach a law that can attract a civil penalty of 60 penalty units or more. This is the broadest of the six standards in reach, and it sits over many of the legal obligations this series has covered, from WHS and industrial manslaughter law to privacy, employment, and tax obligations. A serious breach of those other laws can also amount to a breach of this standard.

Governance Standard 4: Suitability Of Responsible People

A charity must take reasonable steps to ensure it is not controlled by people who pose a risk to its financial position or its charitable work, specifically confirming its Responsible People are not disqualified from managing a corporation under the Corporations Act or disqualified by the ACNC Commissioner, and removing anyone who is. This requires checking both the ACNC's and ASIC's disqualification registers, and for smaller charities, asking prospective Responsible People to confirm this directly, often through a signed declaration.

Governance Standard 5: Duties Of Responsible People

This is the standard this series has referenced most frequently, and it deserves its full, precise list stated in one place. A charity must take reasonable steps to ensure its Responsible People meet these duties: to act with reasonable care and diligence; to act honestly and in good faith in the charity's best interests and for its charitable purposes; not to misuse their position; not to misuse information gained through their position; to disclose conflicts of interest; to ensure the charity's financial affairs are managed responsibly; and not to allow the charity to operate while insolvent. An easily overlooked legal nuance sits inside how this standard actually works: unlike the Corporations Act, which imposes duties directly on

individual directors, Governance Standard 5 places the obligation on the charity itself to take reasonable steps ensuring its Responsible People meet these duties. That does not leave individuals without duties. They still owe duties under general law and, depending on the entity, under state or territory association laws or the Corporations Act provisions that continue to apply. For registered charities that are companies, Standard 5 replaces some Corporations Act director duties. What the standard adds is a proactive burden on the organisation, not solely on each director personally, to build the systems, induction, and oversight that make compliance likely.

Governance Standard 6: Responding To Institutional Child Abuse

A charity must take reasonable steps to become a participating non-government institution in the National Redress Scheme if it is, or is likely to be, identified as involved in the abuse of a person, either through a redress application or otherwise. This standard, added in 2021, is less frequently discussed than the others, but it carries serious weight for any association whose history, however distant, could connect it to this scheme, and it connects directly to the Working with Children Checks discipline discussed earlier in this series.

How To Actually Use This As A Reference, Not Just Read It Once

- Confirm whether the standards apply to your association at all, since only ACNC-registered charities are bound, remembering Basic Religious Charities are exempt from the standards unless they lose that status.
- Treat the reasonable steps test as scaled to your association's actual size and risk profile, rather than assuming a single universal standard of evidence applies to every charity regardless of scale.
- Understand that Governance Standard 5 places the obligation on the charity to ensure its Responsible People meet these duties, while individuals still owe duties under general law and other applicable legislation, as covered elsewhere in this series.
- Maintain retrievable evidence of compliance with each standard, connecting directly to the records retention discipline discussed earlier in this series, since the ACNC can request this evidence at any time.
- Revisit this consolidated view periodically alongside the ACNC's own self-evaluation tool, treating governance standards compliance as an ongoing discipline rather than a one-time confirmation.

The six Governance Standards are not six separate compliance exercises. They are six facets of the same underlying expectation, that a charity is what it says it is, run lawfully, accountable to its members, led by suitable people who take their duties seriously, and responsive to society's most serious protective obligations. Nearly every article in this series ultimately traces back to one or more of these six standards, and this is the map that shows how.

This is one of the practical governance topics built into our Board Director course, alongside the papers, tools and frameworks that turn the principle into your board's actual practice. [Explore the course](#)

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BOARDROOM ACTION WORKSHEET

The Six ACNC Governance Standards, Consolidated in One Place

Turn the resource into evidence, a decision and an accountable next step. Keep the completed record in your association's approved board records system.

1 What is the issue or decision?

State the governance question in one clear sentence.

2 What evidence do we already have?

Record the facts, source documents and stakeholder evidence available now.

3 What evidence is still needed?

Identify the legal, regulatory, financial, member or operational information still required.

4 What is the agreed next action?

Capture the owner, timeframe and how the matter will return to the board.

Action owner	Review date	Board decision or resolution

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