

Grassroots to governance

Director perspectives, sport governance research
and sector evidence in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Contents

Executive summary	03
--------------------------	-----------

Key insights at a glance	04
---------------------------------	-----------

Why sport board leadership matters now	09
---	-----------

Sport governance in Aotearoa New Zealand: capability and complexity	10
--	-----------

What recent sporting issues reveal about governance practice	15
---	-----------

The boardroom view	18
---------------------------	-----------

How governance pressure shows up	21
---	-----------

Wider research and sector evidence	24
---	-----------

Key themes	28
Theme 1: System complexity, structure and distributed authority	
Theme 2: Board culture, relationships and behaviour	
Theme 3: Board practice, capability and decision-making	
Theme 4: Adaptation, reform and future models	

Board practices that strengthen sector capability	45
--	-----------

Further resources	47
--------------------------	-----------

Acknowledgements	48
-------------------------	-----------

References	50
-------------------	-----------

Executive summary

Over the past decade and more, the sport sector has strengthened guidance, evaluation programmes, board composition work, gender equity policy, chair support, peer learning and integrity infrastructure. That work has enhanced governance capability, although access to support remains uneven.

The workload and responsibilities carried by sport governance bodies have grown. Directors are expected to provide oversight of strategy, safety, culture, inclusion, integrity, finance, legal duties, stakeholder relationships and system alignment. Many organisations carry those responsibilities through federated structures, volunteer foundations and funding models that were built for a different era.

The central finding of this report is that sport governance capability has developed, but in many parts of the system expectations have professionalised faster than the management support, administrative capacity and funding available to meet them. Some organisations have strong board practice and access to support. Others carry similar expectations with far less capacity, especially at the local and regional levels.

This report draws on interviews with 19 chairs, directors, executives and sector leaders, including 13 Institute of Directors (IoD) members, who bring extensive governance experience

across multiple sports. It also draws on sport governance research, Sport New Zealand material and governance capability resources, public reviews and recent sport issues, club-level data and governance comparators. Together, these sources provide a practical picture of where sport leadership is under pressure and where board practices could be strengthened.

The report uses the IoD's [*Four Pillars of Governance Best Practice*](#) to test recurring issues against the fundamentals of determining purpose, building an effective governance culture, holding to account and effective compliance.

The interviewees included current and former chairs, directors, executives and advisors across national, regional and community sport, with experience spanning high-performance, participation, integrity, disability sport, community clubs, professional sport and sector capability. Directors described federated systems that create legitimacy and constraint, boards pulled towards operations by limited capacity, pressure sitting low in the system, chair-chief executive relationships as early warning points, and governance problems that often become visible only after trust, information flow and role clarity have already deteriorated.

Academic research on sport governance explains why sport differs from a single-entity corporate model. Sport New Zealand material shows where governance support has developed. Reviews and club data show where governance expectations and pressures have increased: safeguarding, integrity, funding, member expectations, commercial tension, representation, behaviour, public scrutiny and volunteer sustainability.

Key insights at a glance

Across the interviews, research and sector evidence, several recurring pressures emerged. They show where sport governance capability is being tested, how those pressures are showing up in practice and where boards can strengthen their response.



Key findings

1.

Public controversies often sit on top of cumulative pressure: funding strain, stakeholder fragmentation, thin management capacity, volunteer fatigue, information gaps and unclear authority can build before an issue becomes public.

2.

Expectations have outpaced support in parts of the system. Boards are asked to oversee integrity, safeguarding, culture, legal compliance, finance, strategy and stakeholder alignment. Those expectations often cascade to clubs and regions faster than resources, training or administrative support.

3.

Clarity is often one of the first things to weaken. Weak signals include board papers that obscure rather than clarify, poor escalation, informal conversations replacing formal processes, recurring unresolved matters, and a chair-chief executive relationship that no longer enables candour. Boards need ways to notice and act on these signals before issues become harder to manage.

4.

Formal authority and practical influence are shaped by relationships. A national body may hold formal decision-making authority, while regions, clubs, volunteers, athletes and communities are where much of the delivery happens and where trust, legitimacy and influence are built.

5.

Board behaviour matters as much as structure. Constitutions, appointment settings and policies help, but they do not replace trust, chair craft, constructive challenge, information quality, psychological safety and collective leadership.

6.

Future models need both capability and legitimacy. There is no simple preference for elected or appointed boards. The challenge is to protect member voice, while building the skills, independence and decision discipline needed for modern sport.

Key themes

- 1. System complexity, structure and distributed authority**
Federated systems, uneven capability, volunteer dependence, funding insecurity and rising expectations shape sport governance.
 - 2. Board culture, relationships and behaviour**
Trust, candour, chair leadership, information flow and stakeholder pressure affect whether boards see and act on issues early.
 - 3. Board practice, capability and decision-making**
Role clarity, board papers, management capacity, induction, evaluation, succession and chair-chief executive dynamics influence board effectiveness.
 - 4. Adaptation, reform and future models**
Future models need to balance member voice, capability, diversity, legitimacy, implementation support and system-level capability.
-

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Practical governance changes

Induction, evaluation, succession and continuing governance development emerged from the interviews and supporting material as the key areas where boards can act directly:

- **Strengthen director induction** so directors understand the sport system, not only governance basics.
- **Make board, chair and committee evaluation** regular and action-focused so weak signals are identified earlier.
- **Plan succession deliberately** to support capability, diversity, renewal, chair pipelines and legitimacy.
- **Support ongoing governance development** and peer learning, especially for chairs, newer directors and boards under pressure.

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Why sport board leadership matters now

Sport brings together community identity, public funding, volunteer effort, athlete wellbeing, commercial activity, national pride and local participation. Board decisions therefore affect more than organisational performance. They affect trust, access, safety, belonging and the future of the sport.

Sport governance uses familiar governance fundamentals, including strategy, oversight, accountability, risk management and stewardship, in a distinctive setting. Sport boards often govern interconnected systems of clubs, regions, athletes, coaches, volunteers, funders, sponsors, members and communities.

This makes sport governance unusually exposed. A board may be dealing with strategy and finance one day, a selection dispute the next, then safeguarding, member pressure, coach behaviour, media scrutiny or a funding shortfall. In larger codes, commercial rights, high-performance expectations and public reputation add further pressure. In smaller organisations, the same issues can exist with fewer staff, less money and a heavier reliance on volunteers, under the scrutiny of friends, neighbours and colleagues.

Sport boards are also asked to balance multiple purposes at once: participation and performance, community connection and commercial opportunity, tradition and reform, inclusion and competition, member voice and organisational independence. Those purposes do not always align neatly, and the board's role is often to make trade-offs visible rather than allow them to remain unspoken or unresolved.

Recent reviews and public issues across sport show how pressure can build before it is visible: information fails to reach the board, relationships fray, complaint pathways are unclear, structures limit accountability, or culture becomes harder to question. These moments are not all the same, but they offer governance lessons for the wider sector while recognising the substantial progress many organisations have made.

Community clubs are facing affordability pressures, volunteer fatigue, compliance obligations and behaviour concerns. National and regional organisations are dealing with integrity systems, safeguarding, commercial and high-performance tensions, funding uncertainty and changing participation expectations. Boards are expected to lead through this while many still rely on volunteer directors and limited management capacity.

The directors interviewed described a sector where commitment is often carrying more weight than it should. Volunteer energy, historical loyalty and community ownership remain strengths, but they are now being tested by greater accountability and public scrutiny.

Sport governance in Aotearoa New Zealand: capability and complexity

The sport governance support system

No single organisation owns sport governance capability. Support comes from national and regional sport organisations, clubs, Sport New Zealand, the Sport Integrity Commission Te Kahu Raunui, the IoD, academic researchers, independent reviewers, legal and risk specialists, funders, chairs, directors, chief executives and volunteers.

That ecosystem has changed in recent years. The Sport Integrity Commission opened on 1 July 2024 as an independent Crown entity, following reviews and public consultation that identified gaps in how sport and recreation dealt with harm, complaints and integrity. Its role includes setting integrity standards, supporting organisations to lift integrity capability, providing independent complaints and dispute resolution services, and continuing New Zealand's anti-doping functions.

Since 2018, the National Sport Club Survey, delivered by the Auckland University of Technology's Sport Performance Research Institute New Zealand and the New Zealand Amateur Sport Association, has provided annual insights into community sport. In 2025, 747 clubs across more than 78 sports and all 16 regions participated, adding to rich longitudinal data on the management, operation and governance of community sport.

National sport organisations and sector bodies have contributed through reviews, reforms and public debates in rugby, cycling, gymnastics,

football, netball, hockey and other codes. These have tested questions of structure, athlete welfare, safeguarding, board composition, complaints processes, member voice, commercial pressure and social licence. The next section considers what those issues reveal when read through a governance lens.

Capability has also been strengthened by organisations and advisors working directly with sport boards. Sport New Zealand has supported governance capability across the sport system through governance evaluations and the Governance Mark, board and director recruitment, education and development, practical resources and advice, and the Sector Chairs Community of Practice. The IoD adds cross-sector governance expertise, including director development, board evaluation, recruitment support, mentoring and diversity initiatives, practical guidance, and cross-sector insight from public, private and not-for-profit settings. Independent reviewers, legal advisors, researchers and integrity specialists have also contributed to changes in structures, systems, culture, conduct and decision-making.

Many of the issues facing sport boards – role clarity, conflicts, board culture, succession, stakeholder voice, information quality and chief executive relationships – are not unique to sport, even though they play out differently in federated, volunteer-based and community-connected settings.



Governance support has developed

Sport governance capability has developed through many channels, including sport-led reforms, board reviews, director development, integrity standards, peer learning, governance guidance, research and club-level data. Support exists, but awareness, access and capacity to use it vary across the system.

Sport New Zealand notes a material shift over the past decade in the voluntary adoption of good governance programmes at the national and, more recently, the regional level of the system. Programmes have shifted from compliance-based assessment to a developmental approach focused on continuous strengthening of governance performance.

Its [*Nine Steps to Effective Governance*](#) gives sport and not-for-profit boards practical guidance on role clarity, work planning, meetings, chief executive relationships, monitoring, board evaluation, composition and induction. Its governance evaluation programmes have also shifted from a lengthy audit-based Governance Mark model to a more principles-based development approach.

The Sport Integrity Commission adds a further layer through integrity standards, guidance, complaints and dispute resolution services, anti-doping functions and support for organisations adopting the Integrity Code. The IoD contributes through governance training, board evaluation, director development and practical guidance for boards and directors. Researchers, sector surveys and independent reviews add evidence about what is happening inside clubs, boards and sport systems.

The practical question is whether boards can recognise weak signals early, know where to find support, and have the time, confidence and capacity to use it before issues escalate.

Boardroom insight

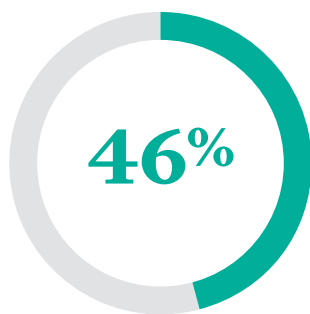
Good sport governance is not only about responding well when pressure becomes visible; it is about having the discipline to see weak signals early, test what they mean and act before trust, clarity or information flow deteriorate.

Sector Chairs Community of Practice

Sport New Zealand's Sector Chairs Community of Practice, formerly the Horizontal Governance Initiative, was established in 2021 to strengthen connections between Regional Sports Trusts (RSTs), National Sporting Organisations (NSOs) and other sector leaders. It now supports peer learning, leadership development and work on shared sector issues, including the Incorporated Societies Act, the Integrity Code and gambling legislation. Through hui, online learning and peer exchange, participants share governance experience and work through sector-wide issues. By 2025, the initiative had participation from all 18 RSTs, 36 NSOs and key sector organisations, with 177 unique participants across the wider programme.

The design of the initiative is relational. It is built around whanaungatanga, kōrero, knowledge enhancement and continued exploration of how the sector can operate more cohesively. Research on sport governance similarly emphasises relationships, shared leadership and collaboration across the wider system.

Women made up an average of 46% of sport club board members over seven years.



Women made up 28% of chairs on average from 2021-2024.



Under-30s made up only 9% of board members on average from 2019-2024.



Board composition has changed

Sport New Zealand's National Policy for Gender Equity in Governance requires qualifying partners receiving more than \$50,000 in Sport New Zealand Group funding to have at least 40% self-identifying women on their boards. The 2022 evaluation reported that, by December 2021, 65 of 66 qualifying partners had reached that threshold.

The evaluation found that success depended on building a pool of board-ready women, improving recruitment processes and supporting chairs. It also found benefits for board quality, dynamics, conversations about women and girls, women in chair roles and wider diversity considerations. Sustainability and translation into strategy still require attention.

Club-level data shows a related but different pattern. The National Sport Club Survey's 2018-2024 overview found women made up an average of 46% of sport club board members over seven years, but only 28% of chairs on average from 2021-2024. Under-30s made up only 9% of board members on average from 2019-2024 and more than half of club board members had served for five years or more in 2024.

The figures point to wider questions about chair pathways, youth voice, succession, tenure and board renewal, as well as overall representation. Appointment and election systems need to draw from the widest relevant talent pool, apply merit with discipline, and create conditions where different perspectives can influence decisions.

The workload of boards has grown

Club-level data and sector reviews help explain why board work feels more demanding. The National Sport Club Survey describes clubs as mainly volunteer-led and community-driven, while dealing with economic pressure, severe weather disruption, compliance changes and shifting participation patterns. The 2025 survey media release noted that the number of clubs reporting financial deficits had doubled compared with pre-Covid-19, with rising costs for facilities, insurance and operations placing pressure on budgets.

The same 2025 material records that grant funding accounts for about one-fifth of a club's annual income on average, with more than half of clubs receiving grants relying on gaming machine trusts. Clubs are also reporting affordability pressure on families, programme reduction, heavy reliance on volunteers for maintenance and administration, and behaviour concerns during sport activities.

Sport Integrity Commission material and club-level survey data reflect the widening integrity expectations on sport organisations, including how complaints, safeguarding, conduct and participant welfare concerns are identified, escalated and addressed.

At national level, recent reviews show the breadth of expectations now placed on sport boards, from structure and stakeholder trust to culture, wellbeing, safeguarding, accountability and role clarity. The next section considers those issues through a governance lens.



What recent sporting issues reveal about governance practice

Recent reviews and public controversies have involved different facts, people, organisations and codes. Sports such as rugby, cycling, gymnastics, hockey, netball, cricket, football and water polo have their own context, governance arrangements, stakeholder pressures and histories. The value in looking across them is not to collapse those differences, but to see whether similar governance pressures recur.

Across these cases, governance problems have surfaced through some familiar conditions: unclear authority, weak escalation, strained relationships, poor information flow, contested stakeholder voice, gaps between policy and practice, culture and welfare concerns, and uncertainty about who is responsible for acting.

Those recurring conditions can often be seen before an issue becomes public or harder to manage. The question for boards is whether they are noticing and testing them early enough.

Recent reviews show how those conditions can appear in different ways. The Black Ferns review identified challenges in the high-performance environment, misalignment between players and management, communication issues, health and wellbeing gaps, and New Zealand Rugby structures that had not sufficiently supported women's high-performance rugby. The Cycling New Zealand/High Performance Sport New Zealand inquiry identified a gap between policies created on paper and what had changed in day-to-day practice, alongside issues relating to welfare, recruitment, debriefs and athlete protection.

Complaints, safeguarding and integrity issues can expose weaknesses in whether systems are understood, trusted and used. The Gymnastics New Zealand review was established after allegations of abuse and was designed to identify common themes, including inadequate processes and areas where change was required. The Sport Integrity Review found a lack of capability across the sports sector to deal with integrity-related issues, particularly the reporting and management of complaints.

Structural reform and stakeholder disputes expose different governance questions. The [New Zealand Rugby Governance Review](#) framed rugby's challenge as one of leadership, whole-of-game perspective, clearly defined roles, social licence, board composition, voting rights and the ability to make decisions in the best interests of the sport as a whole.

The IoD's *Four Pillars of Governance Best Practice* provides a way to examine those recurring conditions through purpose, culture, accountability and compliance. The scorecard below turns them into practical questions boards can use to test their own governance practice.

Boardroom insight

When sport issues become public, the visible problem is rarely the whole governance problem. Boards should look beyond the presenting issue and ask which pillar is under pressure: purpose, culture, accountability or compliance. That diagnosis helps determine whether the board needs clearer trade-offs, stronger challenge, better information or more reliable systems and controls.

Governance scorecard: recurring issues through the Four Pillars

IoD pillar	What recent sport issues have revealed	Governance questions for boards
Determining purpose	Tension between participation and performance, commercial opportunity and community legitimacy, tradition and reform, member voice and organisational independence.	Are we clear about purpose, strategy and trade-offs? Do we know what we will prioritise when pressures conflict?
Effective governance culture	Trust weakens, challenge becomes personal, informal influence grows, difficult issues are avoided and board dynamics depend too heavily on the chair or dominant voices.	Does our board culture support candour, constructive challenge, psychological safety and collective responsibility?
Holding to account	Information is delayed, filtered or too operational; escalation is weak; board papers obscure choices; the chair-chief executive relationship no longer surfaces issues early.	Are we receiving board-quality information? Are we holding management to account without drifting into management? Do we see weak signals early enough?
Effective compliance	Policies exist but are not understood or used; complaints pathways are unclear; safeguarding, integrity, selection, welfare and conflict of interest settings are not embedded in practice.	Do our policies and controls work in real situations? Do people know where to raise concerns and do we know whether the system is working?

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The boardroom view

The interviews show how these pressures surface inside sport organisations – in board papers, chair-chief executive relationships, member dynamics, informal influence and the boundary between governance and operations. Contributors included current and former chairs, directors, executives and advisors with experience across national bodies, regional and community sport, professional and high-performance settings, participation-focused organisations, disability sport, integrity, governance capability and sector leadership.

Many issues they described are already known in sport governance research and sector capability work. The value of the interviews is they show how those issues play out in practice: fragmented accountability, poor information, operational pull, informal influence, contested reform, or a chair trying to hold relationships together while the organisation is under pressure.

[A boardroom pattern, not a single story](#)

Across different codes and roles, the same pressures recurred in different forms: federation and representation, unclear authority, funding strain, volunteer reliance, escalating expectations, poor information flow, chair-chief executive tension, stakeholder pressure and reform fatigue.

A recurring point was that public crises are often late-stage symptoms. Directors described early signals such as weakening trust, poor information flow, recurring unresolved agenda items, informal conversations outside the boardroom, stakeholder misalignment, staff turnover, papers that obscure strategic choices, or a chair-chief executive relationship that no longer supports candour.

What directors consistently described

- **Complexity is moving down the system.** Many pressures are felt most strongly by clubs and regions, where volunteers and thin administrative support carry expectations set nationally.
- **Federated systems create both legitimacy and friction.** Local ownership and member voice are strengths, but they also come with slower decision-making, political dynamics and blurred accountability.
- **Operational pull is often structural.** Boards do not always drift into management because they lack discipline. Sometimes there is no one else to do the work.
- **Weakening trust is an early warning signal.** When trust weakens, information can become filtered, challenge becomes harder and issues become more personal.
- **Money does not always match the mandate.** Boards are expected to oversee more sophisticated risks while relying on funding settings that are uncertain, short-term or insufficient.
- **Representation and capability need to be held together.** Member voice and democratic legitimacy can be retained while boards strengthen the skills, independence and decision discipline needed for current conditions.

Interview phrases that capture recurring themes

“Governing through influence, not control”

“Both a blessing and a curse”

“Where sport is governed and where sport is experienced”

“The money does not match the mandate”

“The first thing that usually goes is clarity”

“Systems failures before they become public failures”



How governance pressure shows up

Across the interviews, recurring pressures appeared in board papers, relationships, member dynamics, funding decisions, integrity concerns, reform processes and the boundary between governance and operations.

System pressure and complexity

Pressure is being felt at several levels of the system at once. The presenting issue might be a selection dispute, funding shortfall, safeguarding concern, media story, board conflict, staff turnover or member disagreement. Behind these issues were often legacy structures, volunteer capacity, stakeholder expectations and modern accountability requirements colliding.

Several interviewees described boards that were trying to govern contemporary complexity through inherited arrangements. Those arrangements have supported participation, local ownership and strong pathways. The question is whether they continue to give boards the clarity, agility and authority needed when decisions are high stakes, public and contested.

Complexity is not evenly distributed. National bodies may carry public accountability, but clubs and regions often carry the delivery burden. Volunteer fatigue, funding scarcity, behaviour issues and compliance expectations are often most visible at club and regional level.

Federated systems and authority

Federated sport is a source of legitimacy and friction. Federated systems provide a connection to regions, clubs, members and volunteers. Interviewees also described decision-making that can become slow, political or fragmented when different parts of the system hold different views of success.

Authority in sport is often formal and informal at the same time. A constitution may give the board decision rights, but member voting patterns, relationships, influential personalities, athletes, sponsors, funders and regional

histories can all affect what is possible. Directors who had led through reform stressed the need to understand those informal pathways before assuming a formal decision will hold.

Mixed models were raised as one way to retain community legitimacy while creating a board with the skills, independence and collective discipline to govern the whole sport.

The chair, the chief executive and the flow of information

Governance problems often show first through the chair-chief executive relationship and the quality of information reaching the board. Where the relationship is strong, bad news can come early and board papers can frame choices clearly. Where the relationship weakens, information may become reassuring, delayed, too operational or too filtered.

Weak signals include papers that report activity rather than choices, repeated deferral of difficult issues, staff turnover treated as background noise, member concerns that do not reach the board and board discussions that become reactive because directors are not seeing the issue soon enough.

One phrase from the interview analysis captures this: “The first thing that usually goes is clarity.” Once clarity weakens, relationships begin to carry too much weight, decisions are relitigated, formal processes lose authority and informal channels become more influential.

Capability, courage and board behaviour

Board capability was described in terms of more than qualifications and skills matrices, including courage, judgement, mandate and the willingness to hold difficult conversations. Some boards may have capable people on paper but still struggle to act when a decision is unpopular, reputationally risky or likely to upset influential stakeholders.

Board behaviour matters most when pressure rises. Boards need directors who can challenge without personalising disagreement, keep the organisation’s purpose in view, maintain collective responsibility and resist being pulled back into sectional interests.

Chair craft becomes particularly important under pressure – drawing out quieter voices, managing dominant personalities, protecting psychological safety, working with the chief executive and keeping the board focused on what it is there to decide.

Volunteerism, funding and sustainability

Volunteerism is both a strength and vulnerability. Volunteers bring loyalty, history, relationships, technical sport knowledge and enormous service. They also absorb pressure when funding is thin, staff are limited and expectations increase.

When there is no staff capacity, boards do the work. When boards do the work, oversight and challenge can weaken. When financial survival dominates the agenda, strategy, integrity systems, induction, evaluation and succession planning are more easily deferred.

The phrase, “the money does not match the mandate,” captures a recurring frustration. Boards are expected to oversee sophisticated issues while many organisations remain dependent on uncertain income, short-term grants, volunteer labour and a small number of people who hold key relationships and knowledge.

Integrity, safeguarding and culture

Integrity and safeguarding require board-level visibility and assurance. Athlete voice, complaints, bullying, selection processes, wellbeing and harm prevention all need to be part of that oversight. The board does not need to manage every matter, but it does need assurance that systems are working and that concerns can be raised safely.

This can be particularly difficult in tightly connected communities. People know each other. Relationships are longstanding. Volunteers may be coaches, parents, selectors, committee members and friends. Those connections can build trust, but they can also make complaints harder to raise and harder to handle independently.

Integrity also depends on culture and practice. Policies have little value unless people know what counts as a concern, where to go, who will respond and whether they will be protected from backlash.

Reform and future models

Reform was described as a process of building mandate, explaining purpose, listening to members, separating voice from decision rights, and supporting people through the loss of familiar influence.

A recurring risk was reform being treated as technical when it is also emotional and political. Members may experience structural change as a loss of voice. Volunteers may hear professionalisation as a judgement on their contribution. Regions may worry about centralisation. Communication and implementation therefore need to be built into the governance reform process.

No single future model emerged. Instead, the interviews repeatedly returned to clearer decision rights, better appointment systems, genuine member voice, stronger chair capability, better induction, consistent evaluation, and board practice that recognises the community foundations of sport.



Wider research and sector evidence

Research and sector evidence provide context for the interview findings, showing what is already known about sport governance, where practice has developed, and where similar pressures are evident across research, reviews, national sport and sector organisations and club-level data.

[Sport governance scholarship: from structures to systems](#)

Research on sport governance has moved from a narrow focus on board structures and roles towards a wider view of governance as relational, strategic and system-wide. Dowling, Leopkey and Smith's scoping review distinguishes organisational, systemic and political governance. The distinction helps explain why many sport issues cannot be solved by looking at a single board in isolation.

Ferkins, Shilbury and colleagues add a New Zealand and Australian perspective. Their work on strategic capability and collective leadership is particularly relevant because it focuses on what happens inside and around the boardroom: leadership, dialogue, relationships, strategy, board dynamics and influence across federated systems. In their research on not-for-profit sport boards, they identified a continuum ranging from collective voice to "first among equals" and "the individual in charge". They also found that leadership is distributed across the board, with both the chair and other directors contributing to the leadership dynamic.



Community sport research: behaviour, operations and local reality

Kerwin and colleagues' community sport study is especially relevant because it examines board behaviour at local level. The research drew on observations of six boards over a year and interviews with 30 board members in one sport in Canada. It found that operational demands can overtake strategic priorities, and that individual assumptions, sense of community and informal groups can influence board decision-making.

Although the study was Canadian, the conditions it describes provide a useful comparison with New Zealand. Community sport boards often operate with limited resources, deep personal histories and people who move between governance and delivery roles – conditions also described by New Zealand interviewees. It also shows why board practice cannot be reduced to formal structures. Constitutions and committee arrangements tell only part of the story. The same structure can operate differently depending on who holds influence, how meetings are run, whether disagreement is safe, and whether operational issues crowd out strategy.

Sport New Zealand and sector infrastructure

Sport New Zealand material shows that capability work is already well established. *Nine Steps to Effective Governance* and the Governance framework for the sport and recreation sector provide a practical foundation. Voluntary governance evaluation programmes provide pathways for accreditation, foundational development, individual board member development and self-evaluation.

The Sector Chairs Community of Practice responds to a system-level need. Rather than focusing only on vertical relationships between Sport New Zealand and individual partners, it builds horizontal relationships across chairs, RSTs, NSOs and sector organisations. Its scale by 2025 – all 18 RSTs, 36 NSOs and 177 unique participants – shows this is a significant sector capability platform.

The gender equity policy and evaluation show a concrete area where board composition changed. By December 2021, 65 of 66 qualifying

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partners had reached at least 40% self-identifying women on their boards and this has remained consistent over time. The external evaluation of the policy and its intent found improvements in board quality and dynamics but also warned that change needed to be embedded and translated into strategy.

Club-level data and integrity preparedness

The National Sport Club Survey provides evidence from the community level of sport. The 2023 integrity topic, involving 800 clubs, showed overconfidence in preparedness: 56% of club committees felt prepared, yet more than 80% rarely discussed most identified integrity issues. It also showed reliance on open-door culture and approachable committees, which can be valuable but reactive.

Some clubs had appointed athlete representatives, peer supporters, welfare officers, coach integrity officers or child protection officers; others used anonymous reporting mechanisms, regular integrity messaging or intentional check-ins.

The 2025 National Sport Club Survey media release adds evidence of rising financial pressure. Deficits had doubled compared with pre-Covid-19, grant funding remained vital, and clubs were sharing facilities, leasing space, swapping uniforms, scaling back programmes or reducing service levels to avoid fee increases. Those pressures affect the choices boards make about affordability, service levels, facilities and financial sustainability.

Comparators

Australian commentary reinforces the need for sport boards to be prepared before issues become public. Speaking to the Australian Institute of Company Directors, Kate Palmer AM, former Australian Sports Commission chief executive and current AusCycling chief operating officer, emphasised the breadth of integrity issues sports boards need to understand, including child safeguarding, member protection, doping, anti-doping enforcement and high-profile conduct issues. Her comments emphasise the need for boards

to understand these risks before a serious issue reaches them.

The Australian Sport Governance Standards Benchmarking Report provides a more structured sector comparator. It uses self-assessment and development planning to help sport organisations understand governance maturity and improvement priorities. Its finding that succession planning was the lowest-scoring national standard is relevant because succession and director pipelines also appeared repeatedly in the interviews.

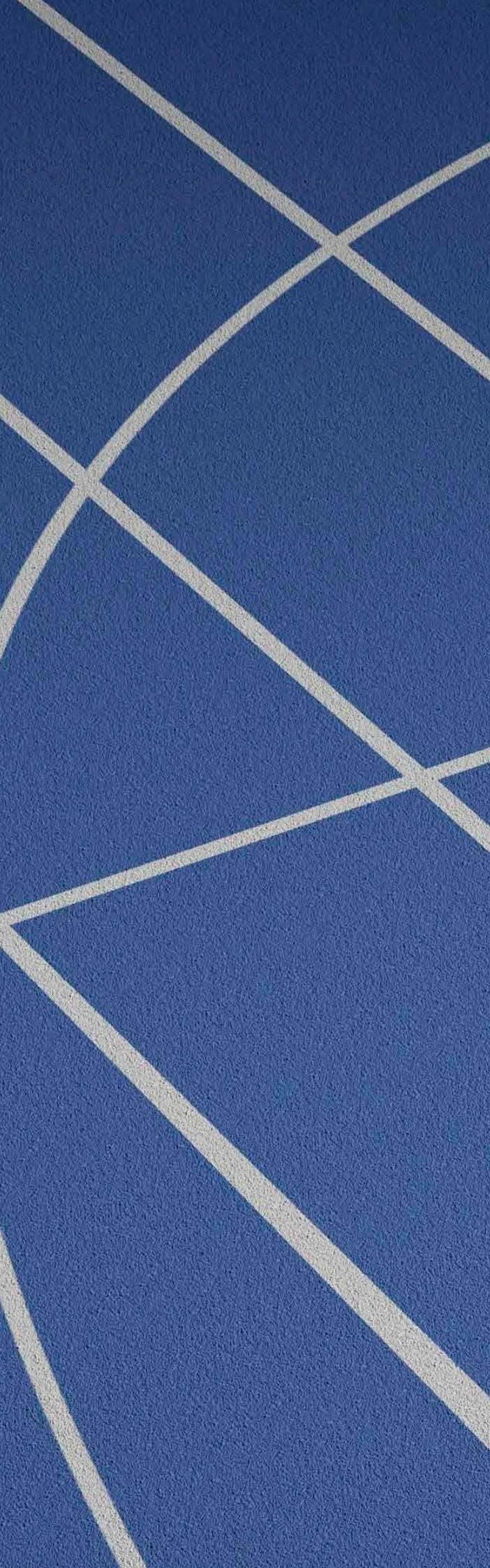
Canada provides another useful comparator. Federally funded national sport organisations are required to meet governance requirements linked to Sport Canada funding, covering areas including governance structure, induction, diversity and financial transparency. The Canadian Sport Governance Code remains a recognised source of governance best practice.

The [*RBNZ/FMA Governance Thematic Review*](#) provides a useful cross-sector comparator. Although financial services are very different from sport, its focus on role clarity, board capacity, challenge, conflicts, information, evaluation and behaviour is transferable. Its findings reinforce the value of boards regularly testing whether their systems and behaviours remain fit for current conditions.

Governance expectations can be strengthened through funding conditions, sector codes, benchmarking, self-assessment, induction, board development, evaluation and peer learning. In New Zealand sport, those expectations need to remain proportionate to size, risk, public funding and volunteer capacity, with capability supported rather than assumed.

Key themes

1. System complexity, structure and distributed authority
2. Board culture, relationships and behaviour
3. Board practice, capability and decision-making
4. Adaptation, reform and future models



1.

System complexity, structure and distributed authority

This theme explores the structural and system pressures shaping sport boards, including federated models, distributed authority, uneven capability, volunteer dependence, funding insecurity and rising expectations.

1.1 Structures built for one era, governing another

Interviewees broadly recognised that many sport arrangements evolved incrementally over decades within largely amateur, community-based and representative environments. Directors described models built around volunteer leadership, federated structures and local representation that historically provided stability, legitimacy and participation pathways. Many were clear that these systems had served sport well and remain central to community ownership.

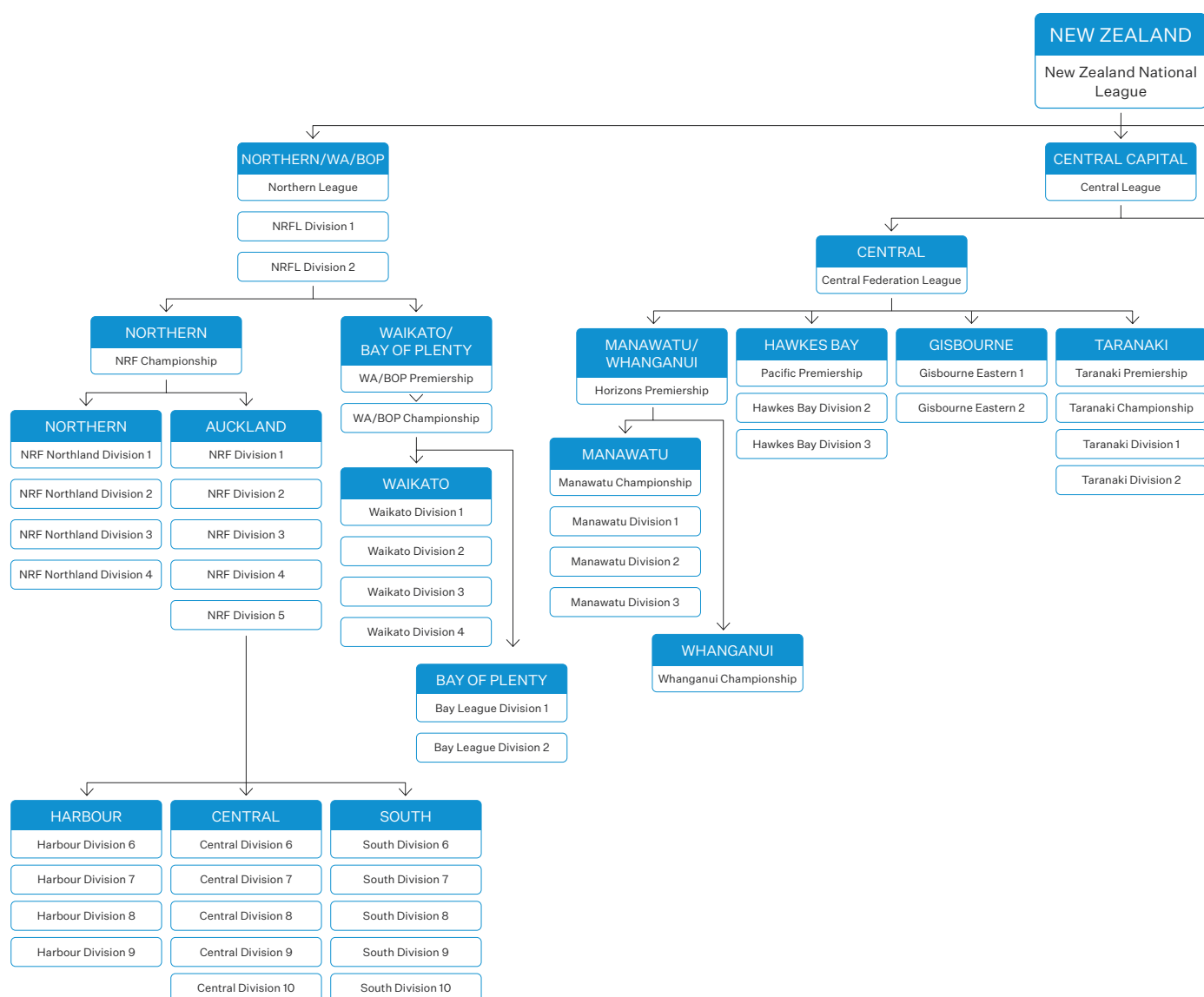
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Planet Volumes on Unsplash

Boards now work in settings marked by public scrutiny, social media amplification, safeguarding and integrity obligations, legal and regulatory change, shifting participation patterns, inclusion expectations, athlete voice, financial pressure and commercialisation in some codes.

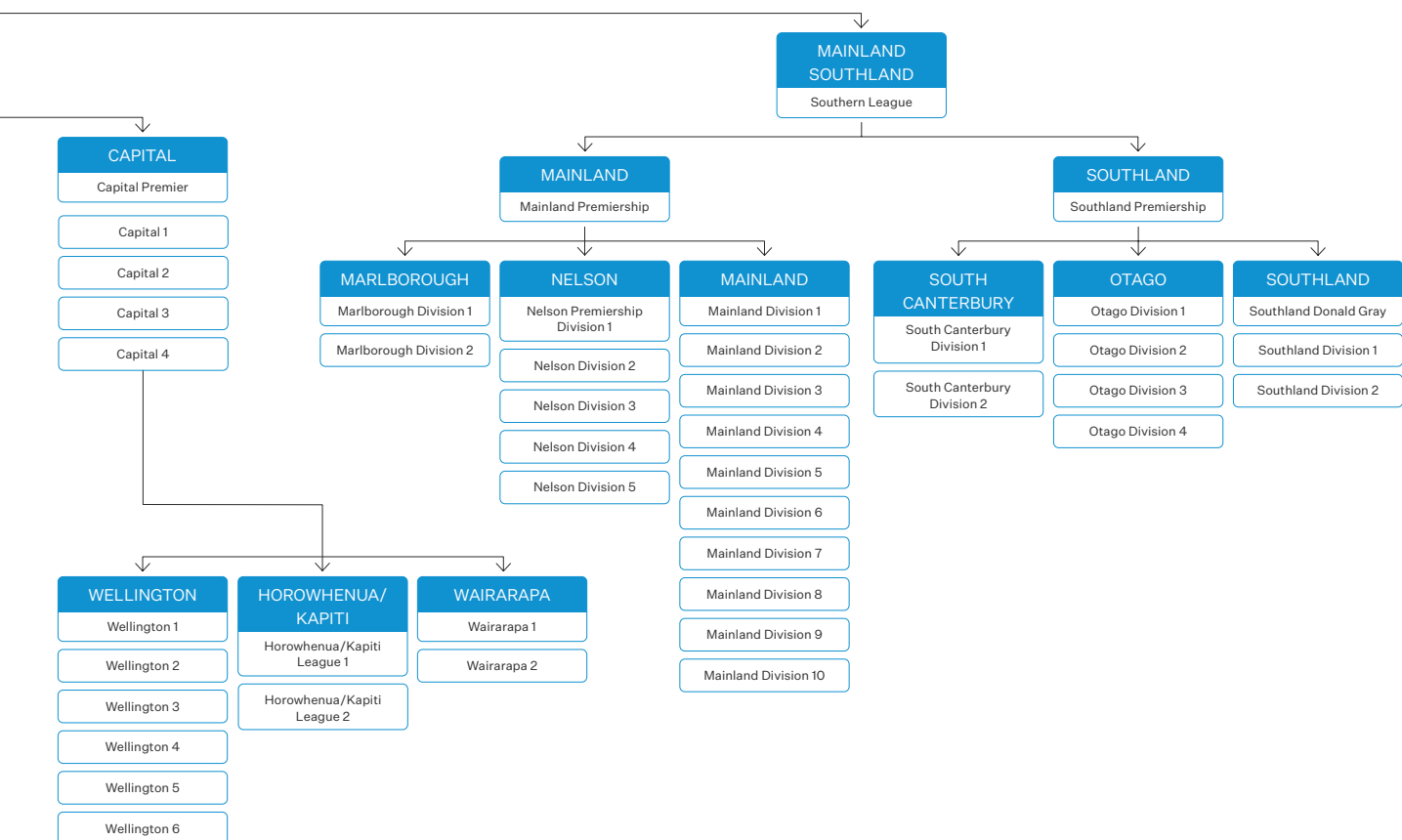
The New Zealand Rugby Governance Review provides one high-profile example. Rugby's circumstances are specific, but the review's themes are relevant to sport more broadly: professionalisation, commercial complexity,

stakeholder fragmentation, member influence, voting rights, whole-of-game leadership and social licence. The review framed reform around long-term sustainability, legitimacy and constitutional design.

Federated and representative systems can continue to provide legitimacy, local commitment and participation. Their effectiveness under current conditions depends on whether they support timely decisions, system alignment, accountability and board capability.



Illustrated example of layered sport system structure:
New Zealand football league system, 2022.
Source: Kezyfooty, CC BY-SA 4.0.



1.2 The federated model: legitimacy and constraint

Federated structures were one of the most frequently discussed issues. Directors did not produce a simple answer that federated models are good or bad. They described models that provide local ownership, regional voice, volunteer connection and democratic participation, while also creating fragmented accountability, duplicated effort, inconsistent capability and slow decision-making.

One interviewee described federated models as “both a blessing and a curse”. National organisations rely on clubs and regions for legitimacy, participation and delivery. Clubs and regions often rely on national bodies for funding, strategy, visibility and system leadership. Conflict can emerge not because relationships are absent, but because the relationships are so interconnected and difficult to separate.

Formal decision rights tell only part of the story. A constitution may give the board authority, while longstanding relationships, influential personalities, historical alliances, member voting blocs, athletes, funders and commercial partners can materially affect decisions. In a federated system, understanding how decisions are actually made can be as important as reading the constitution.

The New Zealand Cricket debate over the proposed NZ20 franchise league illustrates how commercial priorities, member interests and governance authority can collide. Public reporting showed differing perspectives between the board, management, member associations and the players’ association. The case illustrates a wider question in federated sport: how are authority, legitimacy and influence exercised when reform is contested.

Boardroom insight

Both elected and appointed board models raise questions about where stakeholder voice sits, how it is heard, who has decision rights, and whether directors can act in the best interests of the organisation as a whole while retaining credibility with members and communities.

1.3 Pressure falls heavily on clubs and regions

Capability and support are unevenly distributed, with many pressures absorbed by clubs and regional organisations operating with limited infrastructure and heavy volunteer dependence.

One interviewee described this as a disconnect between “where sport is governed and where sport is experienced.” Most people encounter sport through local clubs, volunteering, coaching and community participation. Yet scrutiny, policy attention and investment often focus on national bodies and elite outcomes.

The National Sport Club Survey reinforces this point. Its 2018-2024 overview describes community clubs as mainly volunteer-led and community-driven, and records that average membership among responding clubs had recovered above pre-Covid-19 levels by 2024. In the 2019 survey, about 15% of participating sport clubs reported having a paid administrator for at least 15 hours per week, and clubs with paid administrative support were more likely to be growing and in surplus.

Larger clubs are growing, while smaller clubs, particularly those with fewer than 100 members, are becoming less common and in some cases closing. Smaller clubs therefore have less administrative support, fewer volunteers to draw on, and less capacity to absorb new expectations.

The survey’s integrity findings add a further club-level perspective. They show that perceived preparedness does not always translate into regular discussion, clear reporting pathways, policy use or practical readiness. The gap is particularly significant for clubs and committees, where integrity, safeguarding and complaints expectations may exceed the governance and administrative support available.

The 2025 survey also records behaviour concerns at club level: around one-third of clubs reported inappropriate or concerning verbal behaviour, one-fifth reported physical behaviour issues and 15% said incidents or poor behaviour had increased in the past five years.

Safeguarding, integrity, financial oversight, employment obligations and culture expectations may apply across the system, but scale, resourcing and maturity vary widely.

Smaller organisations can find themselves carrying duties that resemble those of much larger entities without equivalent access to governance expertise, executive support or administrative infrastructure.

1.4 Funding insecurity and volunteer strain

Funding pressure was repeatedly linked to shorter planning horizons, burnout, capability gaps and operational pull. Several directors said organisations adapt themselves to funding settings and reporting requirements, sometimes at the expense of longer-term strategy. Others noted that spending on governance can be seen as diverting money from participation, even when lack of board support creates risk.

The phrase, “the money does not match the mandate”, captures the concern. The 2025 National Sport Club Survey adds current evidence of that pressure. It reported that the number of community sport clubs in deficit had doubled compared with pre-Covid-19, with rising costs for facilities, insurance and general operations putting pressure on budgets. Grant funding remains a major part of the financial picture, accounting for about one-fifth of club income on average, and more than half of clubs receiving grants rely on gaming machine trusts. Clubs are responding by sharing facilities, leasing space, swapping uniforms, relying heavily on volunteers for maintenance and administration, scaling back programmes or reducing service levels to avoid raising fees.

Boards are expected to oversee complex obligations while operating within uncertain, short-term or insufficient funding models. In many parts of the system, expectations have professionalised faster than the governance infrastructure, management support and administrative capacity available to meet them. Where there is no money for staff, directors do operational work. Where there is no staff capacity, policy, integrity work and strategic development are delayed. Where keeping competitions running takes all available effort, board development becomes a luxury.

Volunteer involvement remains one of sport’s defining strengths. Volunteers bring institutional memory, relationships, practical knowledge and commitment. Its sustainability becomes harder as roles become more time-intensive

and publicly exposed, particularly where safeguarding, integrity, media scrutiny and compliance obligations have increased.

The same survey reported that volunteer numbers had slightly improved in 2025 but remained well below pre-pandemic levels, with many clubs still relying on a small group of highly committed people and widespread concerns about workload and burnout.

The [2025 IoD/EY directors’ fees data](#) gives useful context: 54.9% of respondents in not-for-profit roles said they were not remunerated. In sport, that unpaid contribution is often combined with public expectation, community pressure and operational involvement.

54.9% of respondents in not-for-profit roles said they were not remunerated.



Questions for boards

- Which parts of our structure still serve our purpose, and which are creating delay, confusion or duplicated effort?
- Who holds formal authority in our system and where does practical influence come from?
- What expectations are we placing on clubs, regions or volunteers that are not matched by capability or support?
- Where does funding dependence affect our strategic choices?
- What risks are clubs and regions carrying that are not reaching the national board?
- What club-level data are we using to understand where pressure is landing, rather than relying only on national-level reporting?

2.

Board culture, relationships and behaviour

This theme explores how boards behave under pressure: trust, chair leadership, information flow, informal influence, psychological safety, stakeholder pressure, representation and collective leadership.

2.1 Problems often become public late

Board problems rarely arrive as sudden events. Deterioration is often gradual: trust weakens, information becomes less useful, difficult issues are softened or delayed, challenge becomes harder, and informal conversations begin to carry more weight than formal discussion.

Several directors used the idea of “systems failures before they become public failures.” It shifts attention from the crisis itself to the conditions that allowed it to develop. Public failure may be the last stage of a pattern already visible inside the board, management team or stakeholder system.

The RBNZ/FMA Governance Thematic Review emphasises that formal structures and processes need healthy behaviour, open communication, challenge, capacity and evaluation to work in practice. Sport boards face different risks from

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banks and insurers, but the governance lesson transfers: good documents are not enough if difficult issues do not surface early.

2.2 Trust, candour and information flow

The chair-chief executive relationship appeared repeatedly as an early warning point. Strong relationships allow the chief executive to bring bad news early, test choices and seek board guidance. When the relationship weakens, information can become filtered, board papers too operational or too reassuring, and the board can lose sight of organisational reality.

One director's observation that "the first thing that usually goes is clarity" describes what can happen as those relationships deteriorate. When clarity weakens, roles blur, decisions are relitigated, information becomes contested and informal influence grows. The board may still be meeting regularly, but its ability to govern has narrowed.

Staff turnover, athlete concerns, complaints, selection disputes, volunteer fatigue and stakeholder sentiment may remain outside routine board reporting until they become public. Boards may need independent or triangulated information, particularly about athlete experience, staff wellbeing, culture, complaints and stakeholder confidence.

Research on sport governance supports the focus on behaviour and relationships. Collective leadership research suggests that leadership inside the boardroom is not only the chair's work. Board performance depends in part on board member contribution, collective voice and the conditions for constructive participation. Community sport research similarly shows that individual board member assumptions and values can affect priorities, power and decision-making.

Boardroom insight

A board can have the right agenda, committees and policies while still lacking candour. Boards need to know who filters information, what reaches the board, what is missing and when independent assurance is needed.

2.3 Stakeholder pressure, identity and public scrutiny

Sport is closely tied to identity. Decisions about structure, funding, selection, participation pathways or commercial change are rarely only technical. They can be tied to region, club history, athlete experience, volunteer identity, community belonging and personal loyalty.

Issues can escalate quickly through media or social media, sometimes long before formal processes have concluded. Once a matter becomes public, decision timeframes shorten and positions harden. Boards can then feel pushed towards reactive communication rather than deliberate process.

Longstanding relationships, influential personalities, historical alliances and stakeholder networks can influence decisions, particularly during reform or organisational stress. Social licence and stakeholder management can become as influential as formal authority in highly connected sport systems.

Integrity, welfare and safeguarding require board-level attention. Athlete voice, complaints handling, wellbeing, bullying, harassment and harm prevention all need appropriate oversight and assurance. The [Integrity in Community Sport](#) report reinforces this point: absence of reporting does not mean absence of issues, and clubs may over-rely on an 'open door' culture and friendly committees rather than proactive systems.

2.4 Representation, legitimacy and independence

Interviewees valued member voice, regional connection and democratic legitimacy. They also described the risk that representative models can encourage sectional advocacy, reduce collective accountability or make reform harder when directors feel pressure from the constituency that supported them.

The discussion was not a simple argument for corporate-style boards. Excessive centralisation can weaken a board's connection to grassroots participation, volunteers and community ownership. Sport derives authority from people who play, coach, volunteer, fund, watch and care. A board's technical capability, therefore, needs to develop without weakening that community legitimacy.

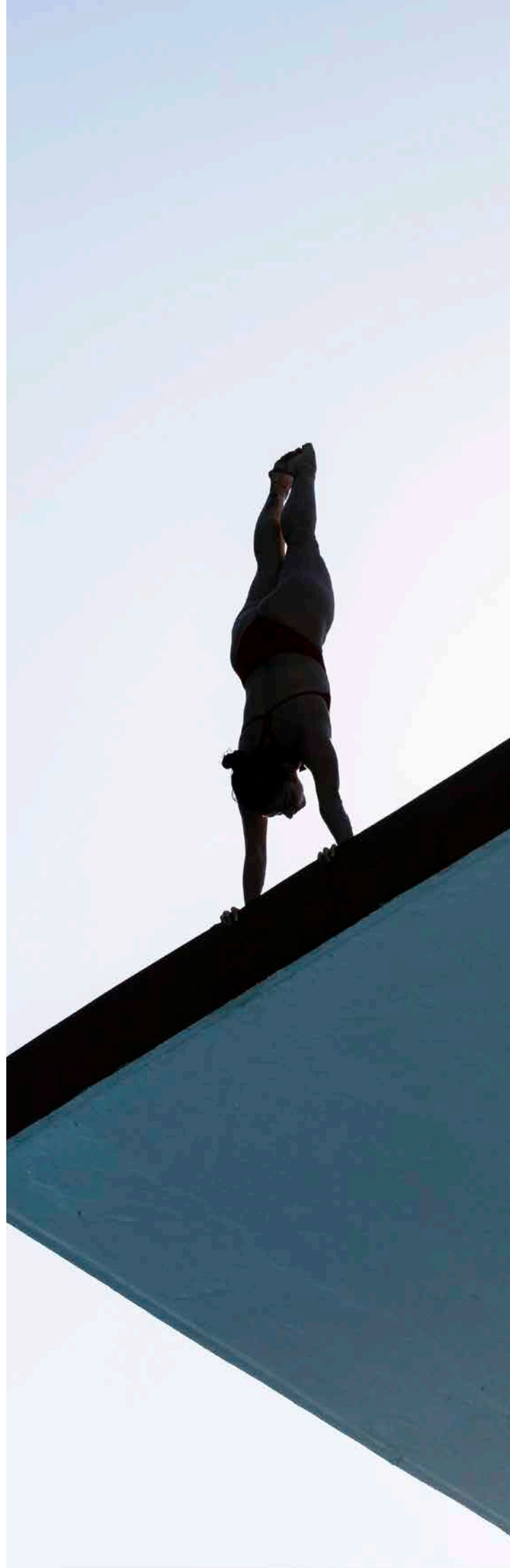
Voice and decision rights can be designed differently. Stakeholder councils, advisory groups, athlete voice mechanisms, regional forums and structured consultation can strengthen legitimacy without turning the board into a representative debating chamber. Appointment and nomination processes can build capability while still respecting the community base of the sport.

The gender equity evaluation shows how board composition change can improve board dynamics and broaden conversations, while also showing that change requires chair support, recruitment practice, better pipelines and sustained expectations. It raises practical questions about who is invited in, who is considered capable, who sets the criteria and whose knowledge counts.

Questions for boards

- What would tell us that trust is weakening inside the board or between the board and chief executive?
- Are difficult issues reaching the board early enough and in a useful form?
- Do directors feel able to challenge dominant voices and test assumptions?
- Where is informal influence affecting decisions and do we understand its effect?
- How is member voice heard while the board retains collective responsibility for decisions?
- Which weak signals would tell us that our purpose, culture, accountability or compliance is under pressure?

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3.

Board practice, capability and decision-making

This theme looks at the board practices and capabilities that affect decision-making: role clarity, operational pull, management capacity, board discipline, induction, evaluation, succession and the chair-chief executive interface.

3.1 Role clarity under real-world pressure

The boundary between board and management came through strongly. Smaller or volunteer-dependent organisations may have boards involved in delivery because there is limited staff capacity. In those settings, operational involvement may be unavoidable. It becomes a governance risk when the roles are no longer explicit.

Sport boards need role clarity that reflects the organisation's size and management capacity. A large national organisation may require formal delegations, committees, assurance and a clear management structure. A small club may need the same principles expressed more simply: who decides, who does, who checks, and when matters escalate.

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Jorgen Hendriksen Bomu on Unsplash

Operational pull can crowd out strategy. Boards can spend meetings reviewing events, discussing personalities, revisiting historic decisions or responding to immediate crises. If papers do not frame choices, risks and decisions clearly, the board is more likely to drift into management detail.

3.2 What board capability requires

Strong practice exists, particularly where boards have access to evaluation, skills-based recruitment, Sport New Zealand support, experienced chairs and peer learning. Other organisations rely on a small group of long-serving volunteers, limited paid staff and inherited processes.

Capability on paper does not guarantee courage in practice. Boards can still struggle to make unpopular decisions, challenge management, confront stakeholder pressure or hold the line through public scrutiny. A skills matrix may show technical expertise. It is less able to show mandate, courage, psychological safety or collective discipline.

Board capability also depends on the systems supporting the board. Capable directors still need clear delegations, useful papers, reliable reporting, escalation pathways, administrative support and enough management capacity to allow the board to govern rather than simply fill operational gaps.

3.3 The chair-chief executive interface

Several interviewees described the chair-chief executive relationship as a key part of the board's early warning system. Where it works well, the board receives timely, candid and decision-useful information. Where it weakens, the board may become distant from organisational reality or overly involved in operational matters.

Research on the board-chief executive interface highlights that sport often involves voluntary boards and professional chief executives. Chief executives may need to support the board's governance role while also managing limited staff, stakeholder pressure and operational delivery. The board must ask for the right information, while management must have the capacity and confidence to provide it.

Boards should also consider whether they have visibility beyond the chief executive without undermining management. Staff turnover, culture, wellbeing, complaints, stakeholder concerns and delivery pressures may require structured reporting, independent assurance or agreed board-level touchpoints.

The chair has a particular role in keeping that interface effective – setting the tone for challenge, maintaining the flow of information and ensuring difficult issues are surfaced early enough for the board to act.

Boardroom insight

The chair-chief executive relationship is part of the board's early warning system. Candour, timely escalation and board-quality information help the board to see issues early. When it weakens, the board may still be meeting regularly but be further away from what is really happening.

3.4 Benchmarking, evaluation and development plans

The Australian Sport Governance Standards Benchmarking Report shows how self-assessment can identify maturity, development needs and priorities across a sport system. Succession planning received the lowest national score, echoing concern raised in the interviews.

Induction, evaluation and succession planning were also repeatedly identified in the interviews as essential. These practices are not new to the sector. Sport New Zealand's *Nine Steps to Effective Governance* already covers board role, work planning, meetings, strategic leadership, chief executive support, monitoring, board performance review, composition and induction. The practical issue is consistency, reach and quality of implementation across different contexts.

Evaluation should not be a once-every-few-years compliance event. Regular board and chair evaluation gives boards a structured opportunity to identify issues with trust, role clarity, information, challenge and succession before they become

embedded. Interviewees valued regular review and development planning as a way to surface these issues early. This is consistent with feedback from boards participating in Sport New Zealand's governance programmes and with the IoD's wider board evaluation work, where regular review is used to strengthen board practice, clarify development needs and support continuous improvement.

The form of that development should reflect the organisation's size and capacity. A small community organisation may need a lighter approach than a large national sport organisation. It still needs clarity of purpose, roles, delegations, conflicts, financial oversight, risk, induction and succession. Tiered tools, templates and shared services may be more useful than generic governance manuals.

Questions for boards

- Do our board papers and agenda help us govern, or do they pull us into management detail?
- Where are role boundaries genuinely unclear because capacity is thin?
- What is our board development plan for the next 12 months?
- How do we induct directors into the sport system, as well as board basics?
- Where are we relying on one person's knowledge, relationships or history?
- What information and support does the chief executive need in order to provide the board with useful, timely reporting?



4.

Adaptation, reform and future models

This theme examines how sport governance may need to adapt, including constitutional reform, nomination committees, mixed appointment models, stakeholder voice, diversity, implementation and system-level capability.

4.1 Reform beyond constitutional change

Reform in sport is often framed around constitutions, voting rights and board composition. Legal and structural form is not neutral; it shapes power, accountability, risk, culture and behaviour. In sport, constitutions, member rights, appointment settings and voting thresholds can determine whether a board can act.

A new constitution may create better conditions, but lasting reform depends on trust, behaviour change, strategic alignment or collective leadership. Reform can fail when treated as a technical exercise without enough attention to relationships, communication, mandate and implementation support.

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The [New Zealand Rugby Governance Review](#) separated stakeholder voice from board composition, recommending both a more independent appointments process and a stakeholder council. That kind of model recognises that sport needs legitimacy and capability. It also recognises that a board is not the only place where voice can be heard.

4.2 Elected, appointed and mixed models

Directors did not present a single preferred model. They described trade-offs between independence and connection, skills and legitimacy, professionalism and community ownership, speed and participation, commercial capability and member trust.

Several directors saw value in mixed models that combine democratic legitimacy with skills-based processes. The practical concern was whether boards can access the right skills and perspectives while retaining credibility with members, clubs, athletes and volunteers.

Nomination committee research by Molloy, Dickson and Ferkins adds useful New Zealand evidence. Molloy's study examined 88 New Zealand national sports organisation constitutions and identified four types of nomination committee structure, based on committee composition and powers. The research shows that nomination committees have to accommodate community representation and democratic legitimacy on one hand and more corporate, skills-based approaches to director selection on the other. Effective selection systems therefore need clear criteria, transparent processes and legitimacy within the sport they serve.

Boardroom insight

Elected, appointed and mixed models can all work when stakeholder voice has a clear place, decision rights are understood and directors can act in the interests of the organisation as a whole, while retaining legitimacy with members, clubs, athletes and communities.

4.3 Diversity, merit and the future director pipeline

Interviewees held different views on quotas and representation mechanisms, but there was broad agreement that diversity of thought, lived experience and constructive challenge strengthen board quality. Several directors specifically raised Māori representation, Pasifika representation, athlete voice and youth participation as important given changing demographics and participation patterns.

New Zealand research on Pasifika and Māori voices in national sports organisation governance also points to the importance of pathways, board culture and role models. Holland's 2013 study found that Pasifika and Māori directors entered governance through family engagement, active participation in sport and educational engagement, while also facing barriers such as stereotyping, tokenistic appointments, lack of full integration into boards and limited visible role models. Although the research is older, its findings draw attention to pathways, board culture and whether different knowledge is genuinely able to influence decisions.

The Sport New Zealand gender equity policy evaluation shows what can change when expectations are clear and support is available. It also shows what remains: changes are not automatically embedded or sustainable, and greater representation does not automatically translate into strategy unless boards have the leadership, culture and decision processes to make different perspectives count.

Clearer merit-based appointment systems can widen the field of people considered capable, make criteria explicit, reduce reliance on shoulder-tapping, and create boardroom conditions where different knowledge can influence decisions.

Director pipelines can begin before formal board appointment. Committees, advisory groups, observer roles, internships, mentoring and athlete or youth voice mechanisms can help emerging directors understand governance responsibilities, build confidence and develop judgement before taking on full board accountability.

4.4 Capability across the system

Many of the pressures identified in the interviews lie beyond individual boards: federated structures, funding dependency, volunteer reliance, uneven capability, unclear escalation pathways and contested ideas of who owns the sport.

The Sector Chairs Community of Practice recognises this. It focuses on relationships, chair peer learning, trust, shared governance experience and common issues across the sector. It is a horizontal capability model in a sector often structured vertically by code.

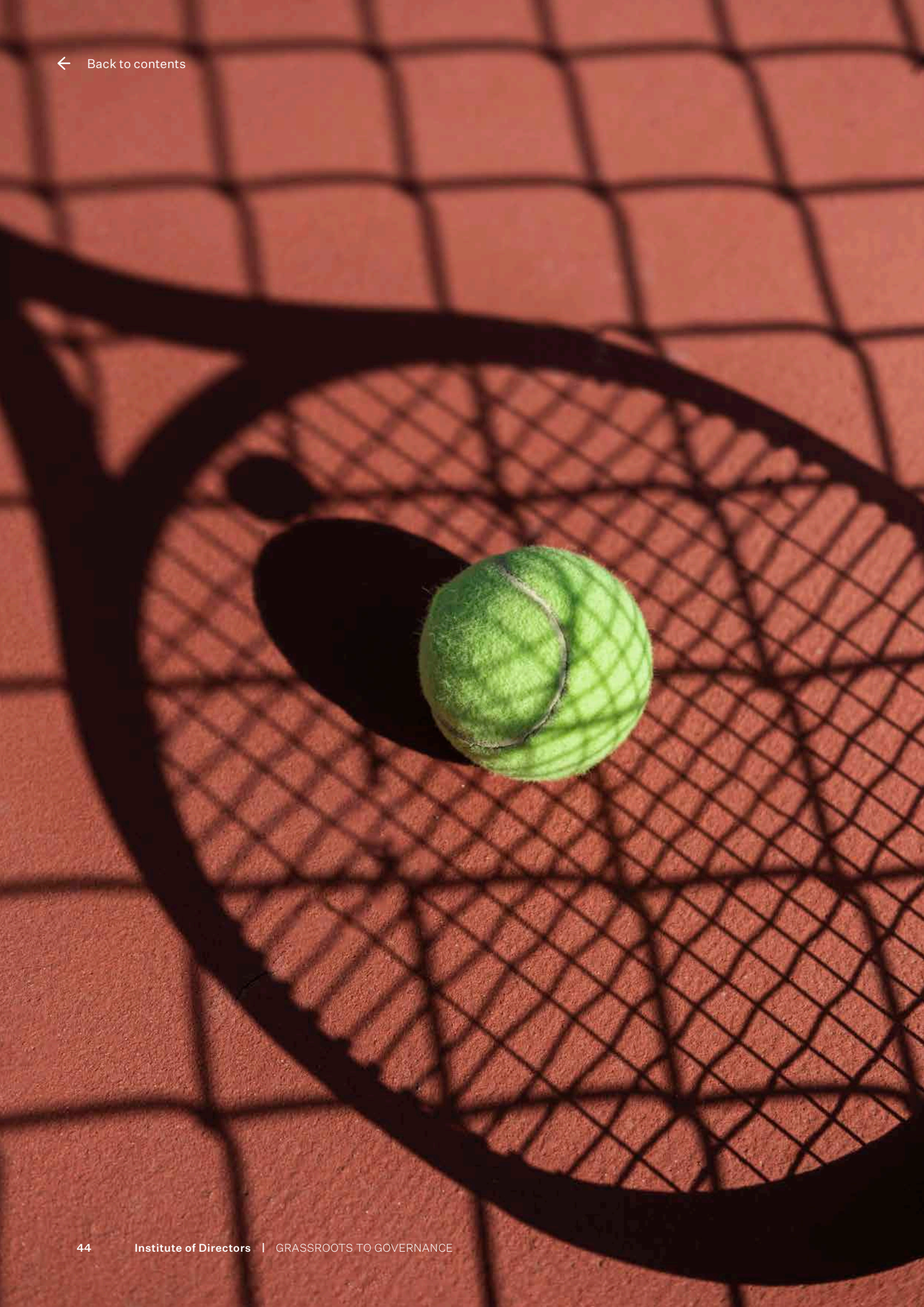
The National Sport Club Survey points to a similar need at club level. Its integrity findings, in particular, show clubs need support that is practical, proportionate and usable by volunteer committees.

The interviews identify several priorities for capability support: federated structures, member voice, chair leadership, board-chief executive relationships, integrity oversight, succession and reform. Further work can build on existing sector capability work and connect sport-specific experience with broader governance practice.

Questions for boards

- What problems are we trying to solve: structure, behaviour, capability, legitimacy or implementation?
- How do our appointment and election processes identify the skills, perspectives and behaviours our board needs?
- Are nomination or appointments committees operating with clear criteria and legitimacy?
- How do we communicate change so members understand the purpose rather than experience only loss of voice?
- What implementation support is needed after structural change is approved?
- Are our tools, templates and expectations realistic for the clubs and regions expected to use them?





Board practices that strengthen sector capability

Directors repeatedly returned to induction, evaluation, succession planning, ongoing governance development and peer learning, with the supporting material reinforcing those priorities. These practices address several of the weaknesses identified throughout the report – poor understanding of the system being governed, issues that go unexamined, over-reliance on a small number of people, and boards or chairs without enough support when pressure rises.

These practices also connect to the IoD's Four Pillars through clearer purpose, stronger governance culture, better accountability and more effective compliance.

Each practice should be applied with sport's context in mind: federated systems, member voice, volunteer dependence, limited management capacity, integrity and safeguarding expectations, and the need to balance capability with community legitimacy.

Working alongside existing sector capability work

Sport New Zealand's Sector Chairs Community of Practice already provides a platform for peer-to-peer learning, governance development, succession support and discussion of emerging issues.

Future capability work can build on that foundation by helping boards ask better questions, recognise weak signals earlier and strengthen the practices that support good governance across organisations of very different sizes and resources.

The four disciplines below show where that support can be focused.

Applying the practices

- **Induction:** induct directors into the sport system, including federated structures, member voice, club and regional realities, funding dependencies, integrity and safeguarding expectations, and the difference between formal authority and practical influence.
- **Evaluation:** review board, chair and committee performance regularly, including role clarity, information quality, meeting discipline, board culture, constructive challenge and whether the chair-chief executive relationship is supporting candour, timely escalation and board-quality information.
- **Succession:** build director and chair pipelines that support capability, diversity, renewal and legitimacy, with transparent appointment criteria and development pathways before formal board appointment.
- **Ongoing development and peer learning:** support chairs, directors and boards to keep learning through peer networks, mentoring, board reviews, practical guidance and cross-sector governance insight, especially where boards are dealing with reform, stakeholder pressure, chair-chief executive dynamics, integrity issues or limited management capacity.

A national body, regional organisation and community club will apply these practices differently. At every level, directors still need to understand the system they govern, review how the board is working, plan for renewal and know where to turn when pressure rises.

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Further resources

Institute of Directors

- [*Board Evaluation quick guide*](#)
- [*Four Pillars of Governance Best Practice*](#)
- [*New to governance*](#)
- [*Not-for-profit governance hub*](#)
- [*Mastering the art of managing conflict of interests*](#)
- [*Professional Development quick guide*](#)
- [*Stepping into the chair toolkit*](#)

Sport Integrity Commission

- [*Participation protection*](#)
- [*The Integrity Code*](#)

Sport New Zealand

- [*Governance evaluation programmes*](#)
- [*Governance framework for the sport and recreation sector*](#)
- [*Governance lite*](#)
- [*Nine Steps to Effective Governance*](#)

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