



Leanne Gibbs

Early Childhood Consultant and experienced
Board Member, Sydney (NSW)



How would you describe the nature of governance in EC settings?

Governance is what holds the EC setting together and is the foundation for quality. If you are paying attention to regulations, and paying attention to your statutory responsibilities and the overarching management, then you can dedicate time and effort to strong leadership and sound practice. A high-quality educational program and practice is founded upon establishing a sound methodical approach to governance.

What are the key components of good governance?

The broad components of good governance include (but are not limited to) the management structure of the organisation; legal responsibilities; strategic and business planning; risk assessment and management of risks; compliance and monitoring of standards; staff performance monitoring and management; and ethical codes and practices. Together, these components influence how an organisation is run. They provide the foundation for quality provisioning in each centre and we need to first get these components set up right.

Why is it important for EC leaders to understand governance matters?

Of all the things that enable us to run an organisation well, the laws and legislation which set up the structural elements in relation to the management, and the style and type of management that is behind the individual service, are of critical importance. This is why whether it's a community committee, a larger auspicing body, or it's a private individual or a large corporation, it's essential that we understand the governance framework and the policy context in which we work as EC educators.

How can a leader contribute to improving governance of EC settings?

Leaders perform an important role in governance in ensuring the service is compliant in Quality Area 1. They must be an authority on the NQS and the EYLF. This ensures that leaders are a central point of interest, and information for management, and this means making themselves absolutely indispensable with their knowledge, and as an advocate for high standards in their service. Sometimes EC leaders might say, 'Oh, I don't have anything to do with the governance' but in actual fact they perform this absolutely key role in the governance of a service. Other areas of the NQS are more broadly understood by people who are driving the business, or who are managing the business or driving the strategy. Knowledge of the EYLF is critical professional knowledge and it must be present in order for every service to fulfil their mission in promoting children's learning.

What are some of the challenges of governance that you have encountered in EC settings?

I'll focus on challenges and opportunities within governance for community management. There are incredible benefits in community management and these contribute greatly to the EC landscape, but some say that is an outdated form of management because governance has become quite complex. I think that's a great shame because the value in having community management provides experience for peoples' civic contribution, for exercising influence, and for running and operating a community-based business. The challenges of complexity could be alleviated through professional development offered at an affordable fee, and offered by peak organisations or through funded government support

in recognition of the largely un-costed contribution made by parent-led committees of management on a voluntary basis. It is also the responsibility of the managing committee to stay up to date on governance matters and take up every opportunity to explore resources and undertake professional development.

How are good governance and quality linked, and how does this impact on children and families?

When we have good governance we free ourselves to perform the important work that we do with children and with our team. Rather than being sidelined or side-tracked by governance matters, we can focus on the important work of relationships and of the programs and practices. Efficiency of governance allows people to have that time. Just as an example—if you have good processes in a service, even around something like paying fees, and it's understood and managed well, that means a family, a parent or a carer may not come into the service and wonder how they could pay their fees, and divert someone to provide that information. Instead, that is clearly understood and actioned seamlessly, and everyone is satisfied.

Another example is a director who wants to think about developing their people really well within the service. Good governance will free up time and the funds, because good governance saves money. Well-managed budgets, well-administered services, can in turn ensure that services are on track and retain a strong focus on the core business of EC settings—the pedagogy and programs for children's learning. It frees up funds for professional development and allows the director more time to be in a mentoring and coaching role with staff. It also ensures that a service is operating legitimately with a legal framework. When they're doing that there's less stress, less crisis management, and services will be focused on the mission of achieving positive outcomes for children and families.

I believe good governance is absolutely essential. It is intricately linked with quality and you just cannot have equality without having really strong governance in the service.