Report on Mandatory Board Policy 3.10 - Board Engagement and Communications with Stakeholders

November 2021

At its meeting on 1 May 2021, the Board approved this policy in draft form for circulation to stakeholders for comment. At the close of the period for feedback, responses had been received from seven people. Six people made comments which do not impact on the policy wording. This report summarises feedback received and the Board's actions.

1. A suggestion was received that for the sake of transparency and to ensure that stakeholders know what is promised in the way of engagement, instead of referring to the principles of engagement as a separate policy (policy 2.5), these should be brought directly into this policy and 2.5 be done away with.

The Board agreed and the Principles of Engagement are now included as an appendix to this policy.

2. It was said that there is no real substance or prescribed detail of what type of communications stakeholders can expect. This person suggested that the policy could inform stakeholders about the currently available channels of communication including the phone number for the Contact Centre, email lists and how to join, information on services provided by the RNZFB and how people can access information in accessible formats such as the Constitution, full names and contact details of the Directors, the Financial Statements, register of Directors' Interests, the policy framework, Strategic Plan, annual Business Plan and the Report on the Annual Plan.

The Board does not want to see a lot of operational detail in a mandatory governance level policy. The focus of this policy is on how the Board communicates with stakeholders. The Constitution requires the Board to have two policies that broadly relate to communications. This policy, 3.10, is on Board Engagement and Communications with Stakeholders: and, taken from the Constitution, is intended to "*enhance and extend the ways in which the Board engages with members and in which members may respond to the Board*". Policy 3.8 - Communications, Preferred Formats and Service of Documents - is intended to "*maintain forms of communication that are accessible to all Clients and that enable a two-way flow of information around Foundation affairs, services and activities*". The Board feels this latter policy already covers the point being raised.

Board Policy 3.10, as finally adopted, is provided below for information. The Board welcomes feedback from stakeholders and thanks everyone for their contributions.

**3.10 BOARD ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS WITH STAKEHOLDERS**

The RNZFB attaches great importance to the need to be transparent in all its activities. To this end, the RNZFB will use all communication channels at its disposal to disseminate news and information about its activities in ways that are accessible to clients. Engagement is a much wider concept however since it involves two-way communication. The Board and Management value input and feedback on all aspects of our work from all stakeholders.

This policy outlines some of the ways the Board will engage with stakeholders, including members and clients, volunteers, staff, donors, consumer organisations, community committees and support groups.

1. The Board welcomes communication with stakeholders on issues important to them. Stakeholders may ask to be heard in person at a meeting of the full Board, to meet with the Chair, committee or a Board delegation, or may make a submission in writing. The Board will do its best to accommodate such requests. If a response from the Board is requested, the Board will endeavour to respond in a manner and within a timeframe that is appropriate for the matters raised.
2. Upon receipt of any submission addressed to the Board, the Chair will place the submission on the agenda for the next board meeting, and may refer it to the relevant Board Committee or to the Chief Executive. The Chair will advise the submitter of the action taken within five working days.
3. Following each Board meeting, the Chair will write a newsletter summarising the main discussion points and outcomes. This will be circulated through the RNZFB's normal channels for mass communication with stakeholders ideally within 10 working days or as soon as practicable following the meeting.
4. The Chair will write an article summarising Board activities for inclusion in each issue of Outlook magazine.
5. The unconfirmed and confirmed minutes of each meeting of the full Board will be available for distribution in preferred formats to members upon request and may be made available through other communication channels.
6. The Board will appoint at least one director to represent it at the annual conference or AGM of each consumer organisation affiliated with the Blind Sector Network Aotearoa. In choosing the director(s) to attend a given organisation, the Board will balance the fact that a director is a member of or is already familiar with the organisation against whether there is an opportunity for another director to learn more about the organisation by attending.
7. The Board will be represented at all major forums and ‘Let's Talk’ meetings, and, at the discretion of the Chair, at any other meeting, focus group or gathering for disseminating information and/or garnering feedback.
8. All directors are required to be present at the RNZFB’s Annual General Meeting.
9. The Board will ensure that its “Principles of Engagement” (see the Appendix to this policy) are followed when the RNZFB engages with clients.
10. As part of their shared duties and obligations towards the fostering of engagement, directors are expected to strengthen links with stakeholders through attendance at local group meetings and functions run by or for stakeholders, and generally to interact with members, clients and other stakeholders wherever possible.
11. The Board will ensure that its electoral processes are clearly understood by the electorate and that every effort is made to provide voters with sufficient information about the candidates to enable them to make an informed choice.
12. In all other respects, the Board will model, foster and require effective engagement between the RNZFB and its members, clients and stakeholders and requires the Chief Executive to ensure this happens throughout the RNZFB.

Appendix

Principles of Engagement

The following principles of engagement were agreed by Board and Management in April 2012. They are based on the IAP2 Core values for Public Participation and provide a benchmark to which all engagement processes should aspire.

1. Engagement is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to have their views form part of the decision-making process.
2. Engagement includes the promise that members’ and clients’ contributions will be taken into account when making the final decision.
3. Engagement that recognises and communicates the needs and interests of all participants promotes sustainable decisions.
4. Engagement seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5. Engagement seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Engagement provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. Engagement communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.