**The Observership Program – Frequently Asked Questions**

Our Frequently Asked Questions page is here to help you understand The Observership Program.

If you still haven’t been able to find your answer, please do not hesitate to contact info@observership.com.au

**Q: Accessible FAQs and 2026 Application form**

The Observership Program has created an accessible word version of the FAQs and 2026 Application form.

Please click below for the accessible documents.

[2026 Program Application Form\_Website Sample](https://www.observership.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2026-Application-form_Website-Sample.docx)

Please [click here](https://vimeo.com/842738931/98785d176f?share=copy) to see our tips and hints for applicants

**Q: What are the key dates for the 2026 Observership Program?**

The dates below are for all three programs of the 2026 Program, delivered in Sydney, Brisbane and Victoria.

Applications Open:  9am, Monday 30 June 2025

Applications Close: 11.59pm, Sunday 3 August 2025

Observership Program review and interview: August – September 2025

Matching and Board Interview Process: October – December 2025

2026 Observership Placement Confirmed: 23 December 2025

2026 Observership Program Launch Events: February 2026

Training Session\* Dates for Sydney, Victoria and Brisbane Programs: *To be confirmed*

*Attendance at training sessions\* is mandatory for Observers.
\* Additional training and networking events may be organised throughout the year.*

[2026 Program Application form\_Website Sample](https://www.observership.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2026-Application-form_Website-Sample.docx)

[Click here](https://vimeo.com/842738931/98785d176f?share=copy) to see a video on Hints and tips for successful applications.

**Q: Do you have an example of the Program Observer Handbook?**

Below are examples of the Program Handbook provided to the Observers at the Launch event detailing the year ahead.

[2024 Observer Handbook\_Sydney Program](https://www.observership.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2024-Sydney-Program_Handbook_No-bios-WCAG.pdf)

[2025 Observer Handbook\_Victorian Program](https://www.observership.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2025-Victorian-Program-Handbook_Accessible-1.pdf)

**Q: When will the 2026 Observership Program applications open?**

The 2026 Observership Program will open at 9am, 30 June 2025 for Sydney, Victoria and Brisbane Programs and close 11.59pm, Sunday 3 August 2025.

Details of the application opening dates can be found on the [Key Dates page](https://www.observership.com.au/key-dates/).

The ‘Apply Now’ button on the top right hand corner of the website, will be live 9am Monday 30 June 2025.

[2026 Application form\_Website Sample](https://www.observership.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2026-Application-form_Website-Sample.docx)

[Click here](https://vimeo.com/842738931/98785d176f?share=copy)to see our tips and hints for successful applications.

**Q: What should I include in my CV?**

Creating a board-focused CV is a critical part of your application. Our guide will help you develop a CV that showcases both your professional skills and the unique perspective you would bring to a boardroom. Your CV and your application summary both play a crucial role in the candidate selection and matching process.

What to include:

Here is a concise version that highlights the key language:

* A CV for board positions differs significantly from a standard job application CV.
* Board CVs focus on transferable skills, strategic thinking you bring to a boardroom.
* Our host boards seek Observers who can contribute fresh, diverse perspectives.
* The boards want to understand how you show up in the world, your core values and how you want to contribute to community.
* Rather than detailed career history, emphasise impact and outcomes.
* Your CV should highlight how your professional skills, personal background and lived experiences have shaped your values and perspective while offering insight into the difference you’ve made both professionally and in your day-to-day life and the unique perspective
* Our guide will help you create a distinctive, board-focused CV that stands out.

[Click here for the CV Guide](https://www.observership.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/CV-Guide.pdf).

**Q: What are the key steps in the application process?**

Prior to the commencement of the Observership year, the Observership Program matches Candidates with participating host boards. The right fit is paramount.

There is a competitive application process, which includes:

* A detailed application form, [2026 Program Application Form\_Website Sample](https://www.observership.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2026-Application-form_Website-Sample.docx)
* Application period: June 30 – August 3, 2025
* Notification of application receipt: 7 August 2025
* Application review: August 4 – September 1, 2025
* Notification of application status: September 3, 2025
* Observership Program interviews (if selected): September 4 – October 10, 2025
* Notification of application status: October 13, 2025
* Board interviews (if selected): October 14 – December 20, 2025
* Notification of application status: December 23, 2025

It is important to note that this is a highly competitive process and only the strongest candidates will progress through each stage to the next.

Click below to review the current Program’s Sample application form.

[2026 Program Application Form\_Website Sample](https://www.observership.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2026-Application-form_Website-Sample.docx)

**Q: Do I get a say in what Board I’m matched with?**

To a limited extent. The matching process is driven by board preferences for the skills they are looking for in an Observer.

Past Observers report getting more value from their Observership experience where their skills can be applied for the benefit of the organisation with which they are matched.

Notwithstanding this process, each Observer is given an opportunity to indicate his/her cause preferences and we do our best to take areas of personal interest into account.

**Q: How does The Observership Program support applicants with a disability?**

The Program actively encourages applicants who identify with a disability to apply.

The Observership Program has undertaken Disability Confidence Training delivered by Australian Disability Network, so the team can support all our candidates and Observers who identify with a disability.

Participating Boards are offered a “toolkit” comprising links to “Confidence with Disability Training” plus resources including a Check List on accessible meetings and Guidelines on “How To Run Accessible and Inclusive Board Meetings”, plus and tips on how to best support Observers placed on their boards.

The Observership Program has established its own Accessibility Advisory Committee that meets 4 times a year to discuss and advise on accessibility improvements and practices as the Program grows and develops.

**Q: If I have completed the Program before, can I do it again?**

Unfortunately, not. To encourage and develop a wide range of young professionals, the Program can only be completed once per person.

If you would like to be referred to a not-for-profit organisation that is seeking new board candidates, please contact us on alumni@observership.com.au

**Q: How much does The Observership Program cost?**

For a general candidate (not a Corporate Partner candidate) the cost is a $50 non-refundable administration fee. If you are selected to be an Observer all that is required is a commitment of time for board meetings and training session attendance.

**Q: What makes for a successful Observership experience?**

Contribution is key, while respecting the culture of the Board and gauging when it is appropriate to contribute. Exercising sound judgement about the level and nature of your involvement at board meetings is important, as is joining a board subcommittee or getting involved in a strategic project if possible. Observers get the most value from their experience when they attend all board meetings and training sessions, network with the cohort and get involved with a board project.

**Q: Who is Eligible to Apply for the Program?**

The eligibility requirements for The Observership Program is as follows:

* Applicants must be aged between 25 and 40 on the application closing date.
* Applicants must be resident in the state in which the Program operates and be either an Australian citizen or permanent resident.
* Applicants must also be available for all board meetings and training sessions, both in-person and on-line, if placed with a Board.

The Program is designed to support the development of the next generation of leaders, hence the age eligibility requirements.

**Q: Does the Program welcome applications from all sections of community?**

Yes. The Observership Program is committed to diversity. We are looking for high level candidates with a passion for the for-purpose sector, from all sections of the community.

**Q: Is prior board experience necessary?**

No prior board experience is required to apply to the Program. An experienced board director is less likely to benefit from the Program as much as someone without board experience. Presenting to a board as part of an existing job isn’t the same as sitting on a board.

**Q: What is the role of the participating Host Board in the selection process?**

On signing up as a Participating Board:

* the organisation will be asked to provide preferences for the profile, skills and experience they look for in an Observer. If a Board either does not specify or does not have any preferences, organisations will be offered the most suitable candidate.
* Host boards receive 2-4 candidate CVs to review and rank.
* Host boards interview at least 2 of the proposed candidates.
* Host boards provide post-interview feedback to The Observership Program which informs the final matching.
* Host boards are invited to attend the Program launch event to meet The Observership Program community.

**Q: What are we looking for in an Observer?**

We are looking for talented, highly motivated, established professionals from a diversity of backgrounds, with strong credentials and most importantly with a passion for the for purpose sector with a willingness to contribute.

Emotional quotient (EQ) is as important as intelligence and experience, as is an ability to conduct yourself appropriately and contribute to board discussions when invited to, in keeping with the culture of your board.

**Q: What can I expect from the Program if I am placed as an Observer?**

Observers can expect:

* High level training for not-for-profit directors delivered by AICD and The Ethics Centre;
* A year long program to build your experience and confidence in serving on a not-for-profit board;
* Access to experienced Board directors from both the not-for-profit and corporate sectors;
* Possible involvement in a strategic project or board subcommittee;
* Networking opportunities with fellow and former participants in the Program. The Observership Program will connect you with the previous year’s Observer on your organisation’s board; and
* A rewarding professional development experience that facilitates your contribution to society in a meaningful way.

An example of an Observership year can be found in the Observer Handbooks below:

[2024 Sydney Observer Handbook](https://www.observership.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2024-Sydney-Program_Handbook_No-bios-WCAG.pdf)

[2025 Handbook\_Victorian Program](https://www.observership.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2025-Victorian-Program-Handbook_Accessible-1.pdf)

**Q: What is a Corporate Candidate?**

A Corporate Candidate is an employee of one of the Program’s Corporate Partners who is nominated for the Program.

For a list of the current corporate partners please follow this [link](https://observership.com.au/our-partners/).

**Q: What is a General Stream Candidate?**

General Stream candidates are those candidates who apply to the Program via the online application process.

The Observership Program is open to everyone who meets the eligibility criteria. Applicants must be aged between 25 and 40 on the application closing date. Applicants must be a resident in the state in which the Program operates and be either an Australian citizen or permanent resident.

Non-general stream candidates are provided with a specific link from The Observership Program or employer / network.

**Q: Who are the Program’s Strategic Partners?**

Our valued partners play a consistent role in supporting and promoting the Program by providing important warm introductions to good governance boards and significant support and services to the Program.

They are the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD), The Ethics Centre, the JCA and Philanthropy Australia, Australian Disability Network (AusDN).

Visit our Partners page [here](https://observership.com.au/our-partners/)**.**

**Q: Who are the Program’s Corporate Partners?**

We are grateful to all our corporate partners. They are Boston Consulting Group, Gilbert + Tobin, Macquarie Capital, Macquarie Group, Microsoft, PWC, SBS, UBS, and Vivcourt

These organisations commit to putting their young leaders through the Program, providing high calibre candidates for selection as Observers.

The organisations also provide valuable support to the Program in other ways including the provision of venues for events and training sessions, as well as guest speakers and introductions to not-for-profit organisations.

Visit our Partners page [here](https://observership.com.au/our-partners/).

**Q: Where can I find further information about the Program?**

The Program operates in NSW, VIC and QLD and runs on a calendar year. If you would like further information about participating in the Program, please contact:

* Rachel Exton for the Sydney and Brisbane Program:
 rachel.exton@observership.com.au
* Catherine Reiser for the Victorian Program:
 catherine.reiser@observership.com.au
* General inquiries: info@observership.com.au

[Click Here](https://vimeo.com/842687261/22c261a00c?share=copy) to see a video about The Observership Program.

**Q: Can my organisation participate in The Program?**

We are always expanding the reach of The Program and welcome approaches from and introductions to suitable NFP and Government appointed Boards.

If your organisation would like to participate in The Program, please complete [this form](https://www.observership.com.au/nfp-request-form/)

**Q: Is the Board Liaison the same as a Mentor?**

A Board Liaison is not expected to act as an official mentor. However, offering informal mentoring can add a great deal to the Observers’ experience while on the Program. We recommend that Board Liaisons touch base with Observers prior to and after board meetings in circumstances where additional context to board deliberations may be helpful.

[Click here](https://vimeo.com/842041449/9d398a6fef?share=copy)to see a video explaining the Observer and Board Liaison relationship.

**Q: What are the Responsibilities of a Participating Host Board?**

The participating organisation invites its Observer onto the Board for a year and agrees to:

* Distribute board papers to Observers;
* Appoint a Board Liaison to serve as the primary point of contact for the Observer and The Observership Program. This liaison will ideally be a senior member of the Board and agrees to induct and introduce the Observer at the first board meeting and to encourage the Observer’s participation and involvement in Board meetings and to facilitate the Observer joining any relevant sub-committee and/or special project;
* Provide feedback to The Observership Program upon request;
* Provide The Observership Program with current logos for inclusion on all publicity and marketing platforms; and
* Inform the Program of any issues in relation to the Observer that may arise over the course of the Program that have not been able to be resolved directly.

If your organisation would like to participate in the Program, please complete [this form](https://www.observership.com.au/nfp-request-form/)

**Q: What are Host Boards looking for in an Observer?**

Boards participate in the Observership Program for a number of reasons and there are many different qualities and experience they may look for in an Observer.

Many boards are simply looking for a talented, committed Observer who brings age diversity and a fresh perspective. Some boards have a particular project they want help with and are looking for an Observer with a particular skill set to assist. Others may have a noticeable skill set gap they might like to fill. Other boards may be looking to enhance gender diversity on their board. Some boards may be looking to strengthen succession planning options and are looking for an Observer who may be appropriate to step into the shoes of a departing director.

**Q: What is the role of the Observer and the Host Board in managing the Observership throughout the year?**

An open relationship between Observer and Board is essential to a successful Observership for both the organisation and the Observer. The Observership Program always encourages direct communication between the Board and their Observer and specially to clarify any issues or concerns that may arise. In the unlikely event of an issue arising which can’t be resolved, The Observership Program should be notified so that it can work with both parties to find a mutually satisfactory solution.

The Observership Program undertakes a quarterly progress review with all NFPs and Observers to check that the relationship is functioning smoothly and both parties are benefiting from the experience.

This takes the form of a scheduled phone call focused on the Observers’ contributions, and the organisations’ experience and provides an opportunity to identify and discuss any issues or concerns.

For details on how to engage with the observer during the Observership year [Host Board information\_Handbook](https://www.observership.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Host-Board-information_Handbook.pdf).

If your organisation would like to participate in the Program, please complete [this form](https://www.observership.com.au/nfp-request-form/)

**Q: Is the benefit greater for the Observer or for the participating Board?**

In the most effective Observerships, the benefits, although different for Observers and Organisations, are nevertheless mutual. Please refer to the FAQ outlining benefits for participating NFP and Government appointed board organisations.

Please refer to “What You Can Expect From the Program” in the “About the Program” section of the website to review the benefits of the Program to Observers.

**Q: What are the benefits to an NFP and Government Appointed Board in participating in the Program?**

The Program provides a range of benefits to NFP and Government appointed board organisations, including:

* Injecting the next generation’s perspective into the boardroom;
* Filling a particular skill set requirement on your board (e.g. social media, law, finance, digital, communications, marketing business planning etc.) with an emerging leader;
* Involving your Observer in a strategic project to deliver concrete benefits to the organisation;
* Participating in developing the next cohort of leaders in the non-for-profit and for-profit sectors;
* Strengthening a board’s renewal strategy with no ongoing commitment to retain the Observer at the end of the 12 month program; and
* Invitations to attend the Program launch and closing session events, with opportunities for informal networking and access to high profile guest speakers.

Click [here](https://www.observership.com.au/testimonials/) to review our Participating Not-For-Profit testimonials

If your organisation would like to participate in the Program, please complete [this form](https://www.observership.com.au/nfp-request-form/)

**Q: What is the role of the Board Liaison?**

Each participating board allocates a Board Liaison person who is responsible for being the point of contact for the Observer. The role of the Board Liaison is to be a point of contact for Observers and to answer any questions about serving as an Observer on the board.

The Board Liaison should ensure board meeting details and reading materials are sent to the Observer and that the Observer understands expectations around his/her contribution/participation and the general culture of the board.

[Click here](https://vimeo.com/842041449/9d398a6fef?share=copy)to see a video explaining the Board Liaison role.

**Q: What happens at the end of the 12-month Observership period?**

Any further relationship between the Observer and the NFP is by mutual agreement. There is no obligation on either party to continue the relationship.

At the end of the 12 month Program, Observers transition to our Alumni Program.

**Q: Where can I participate in The Program?**

The Program operates in NSW, VIC and QLD. Although the majority of the participating boards are concentrated around central Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, some are further afield.

If you are not able to travel to board meetings outside of these areas, you must alert the Program team at interview, or you may not be matched. All training sessions are held in the CBD.

**Q: What if I can’t make a scheduled board meeting or training session?**

Attendance at both board meetings and training sessions is critical. The Program is unique in Australia as it offers practical board experience alongside accredited training and exposure to high level directors on issues relevant to the sector.

Accreditation is dependent on full attendance. We ask those with extenuating circumstances to provide as much notice as possible if you are unable to attend either a training session or a board meeting.

**Q: What are the Roles and Responsibilities of Observers?**

The following commitments are required of all Observers participating in the Program. Please consider these commitments carefully before deciding whether to submit an application to the Program. Observers must:

* Attend all board meetings, training, networking and guest speaker events. Observers are ambassadors for The Observership Program and failure to demonstrate adequate commitment jeopardises opportunities for future candidates.
* Treat all materials, discussions and activities associated with the Program and your organisation with strict confidentiality.
* Contribute to the board meeting discussions only when invited or appropriate.
* Engage with a board subcommittee or strategic project if requested by your board.
* Ensure your employer is aware of your participation in the Program and understands you may need to leave the office early to attend training sessions or board meetings.

Please refer to the sample handbooks below:

[2024 Sydney Observer Handbook](https://www.observership.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2021-Sydney-Observer-Handbook.pdf)

[2025 Victorian Observer Handbook](https://www.observership.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2025-Victorian-Program-Handbook_Accessible-1.pdf)

**Q: What confidentiality obligations will I be required to meet during the Observership year?**

All Observers sign a confidentiality agreement that provides detailed information about confidentiality obligations. This agreement is made available to NFPs on request. Some organisations may ask their Observers to sign another confidentiality agreement specific to their not-for-profit organisation.

An example of the Terms and Conditions can be found [here](https://www.observership.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Employer-Guide.pdf)

**Q: What kind of training materials can I expect?**

Observers can expect pre-recorded session content followed by an online session for the AICD sessions.  The rest of the training sessions will not receive pre-reading.

Training sessions are facilitated by experts and practicing board directors deliver training session content live with no additional pre-reading.

**Q: Where are the training sessions held?**

The training sessions are delivered through a combination of online or face-to-face training sessions.

Face-to-face sessions are held in either the Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane CBD.

**Q: What if I can’t make a training session?**

Attendance at both board meetings and training sessions is mandatory.

The Program is unique in Australia as it offers practical board experience alongside accredited training and exposure to high level directors on issues relevant to the sector. Accreditation is dependent on full attendance.

We ask those with extenuating circumstances to provide as much notice as possible if you are unable to attend either a training session or a board meeting.

**Q: What accessible information and documentation do you offer?**

The Observership Program follows the social model of disability and acknowledges our obligation to ensure any environment, employment or service opportunity is inclusive of people with disability. We have a range of accessible documentation and collateral including but not limited to:

Documentation and Collateral

* We have an accessible website; we have ensured that our website and the application platform meets the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) version 2.1 to at least a level AA compliance.
* An accessible copy of the [2026 Sample Application form](https://www.observership.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2026-Application-form_Website-Sample.docx)
* An accessible copy of the FAQs can be found [here](https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/yhm77vj5nh9e6zuegwgle/FAQs_2024-Program.docx?dl=0&rlkey=zxk4si0e673e7ua9m4sw5hdxd).
* An accessible copy of the 2025 Handbook can be found [here](https://www.observership.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2025-Victorian-Program-Handbook_Accessible-1.pdf).
* An accessible copy of our [Terms and Conditions](https://www.observership.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Observership-Terms-and-Conditions_2026.pdf)
* Emails and invitations are accessible.
* An accessible video [‘An introduction to The Observership Program’](https://vimeo.com/842687261/22c261a00c?share=copy).
* An accessible video explaining [‘Tips and hints for Successful Applications’](https://vimeo.com/838143702).

**Q: Is food provided at Training Sessions?**

We recognise that Observers are coming straight from work and that face to face sessions finish by 8.30pm. Catering is provided in the form of easy to eat, finger food and considers all Observers’ dietary requirements. Non-alcoholic drinks are provided at all sessions except for Networking and the Final session, where alcohol is served alongside soft drinks.