

Five Good Ideas®

What great non-profit boards get right



Tuesday, November 25, 2025 | 1-2 p.m.

Non-profit boards don't fail because board members don't care; they fail because no one taught them how to govern well.

In this Five Good Ideas session, Aleem Punja, Executive Director, Future Ready Initiative, Aga Khan Council for Canada, shares lessons from leading and advising boards across sectors. He explores what makes boards effective and how good governance can drive impact.

Aleem will show how great boards stay in their lane – focusing on strategy, risk, and results – while empowering staff to lead. He'll highlight the importance of financial fluency, centering equity in governance, and building a strong Board–Executive Director partnership grounded in trust and clarity.

Finally, he'll share why leading with head, heart, and homework can transform governance from functional to exceptional.

Whether you're new to a board or a seasoned director, this session will help you govern with confidence.

Aleem Punja

Executive Director, Future Ready Initiative, Aga Khan Council for Canada



Aleem Punja is a Registered Social Worker and strategic leader with over 20 years of experience advancing social policy initiatives and services for vulnerable communities. As Executive Director of the Future Ready Initiative, a national agency of the Aga Khan Council for Canada, he oversees programs supporting newcomers, reducing poverty, and improving quality of life through strategy, partnerships, and policy development.

Aleem holds a Master of Public Administration from Queen's University and is a value-based, mission-driven, and collaborative leader skilled in supporting staff and volunteers. With direct experience serving on and working with Boards, he is a proven driver of innovation and operational excellence. Aleem consults with the Barnes Training Institute and serves as Vice-Chair of the Board at Toronto Lands Corporation. He is a 2023/2024 CivicAction DiverseCity Fellow and a Maytree Policy School alumnus. In 2025, the Toronto Metropolitan University recognized him as a rising star in the category of changemakers and community builders.

Five Good Ideas

- Start with purpose, not paper:** Purpose is a compass and a touchstone. Use it in every meeting.
- Govern, do not manage:** Boards add value by focusing on the horizon, not the weeds.
- Centre equity and pluralism in every decision:** Pluralism enriches equity. Equity brings pluralism to life in practice.
- Build a strong, trust-based relationship with the Executive Director/Chief Executive Officer:** Governance is a partnership built on trust, clarity, and shared purpose.
- Commit to learning, preparation, and self-reflection:** Effective boards do not improvise. They prepare for impact.

Resources

- Ontario Nonprofit Network: [Nonprofit governance and tools](#)
- Governance Centre of Excellence (Ontario Hospital Association): [Guide to Good Governance: Not-for-Profit and Charitable Organizations](#)
- Jeff Wahlstrom, Starboard Leadership Consulting LLC: [Is Your Board Ready for Self Assessment? A guide for non-profit leaders](#)
- Harvard Business Review: [The New Work of the Nonprofit Board](#)
- Harvard Business School: [Nonprofit Boards: It Is Time to Lift Your Gaze and See the System](#)
- Stanford Social Innovation Review: [The Four Principles of Purpose-Driven Board Leadership](#)



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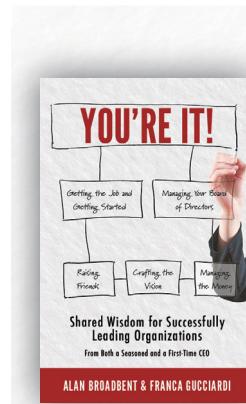
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PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR NON-PROFIT SUCCESS
Edited by ALAN BROADBENT and RATNA OMIDVAR

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