JBWere
Philanthropic Services

Using evidence to drive governance decisions

Sneha Lakhotia's key messages – The inaugural Governance for Social Impact course in New Zealand

In partnership with the Centre for Social Impact (Australia)

May 2026

Introduction

In April 2026, JBWere NZ's Philanthropic Services brought Australia's acclaimed **Governance for Social Impact** course to New Zealand for the first time.

Developed by The Centre for Social Impact in Australia, and accredited by AGSM, the course supports directors and trustees to govern with a purpose-first mindset, using applied frameworks and tools to help navigate complex social impact ecosystems, shape strategy, and measure what matters for long-term community impact.

To ensure relevancy for governors here, the course was reframed through a Te Ao Māori and Te Tiriti lens, to build capability and confidence in impact governance in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Grounded in academic research and delivered by experienced practitioners, the course was co-presented by Shamal Dass, Head of Family Advisory and Philanthropic Services at JBWere Australia and Te Pūoho Kātene (Ngāti Toa, Ngāti Whātua, Ngāti Tama). The programme brings in guest speakers to deepen the learning through other for-purpose practitioner perspectives. Te Pūoho Kātene interviewed Sneha Lakhotia from The Social Prism on the first day of the course who shared her insights on how boards can govern for impact through stronger questions, evidence informed decisions , and long-term stewardship.

Sneha Lakhotia's key messages

Theory of Change as a governance instrument
A Theory of Change only becomes a governance instrument when the board owns it, not just management. Too often, it sits in a document that was produced once, approved, and filed. The needed shift is to treat it as a living hypothesis that the board returns to regularly:

- What did we expect?
- What are we finding?
- What does that tell us about whether our theory is still right?

Making it part of each board agenda in a monthly or quarterly meeting can create a powerful discipline of learning. This is what separates boards that simply review reports to those that genuinely govern for impact.

Impact measurement must serve decision-making
Measurement is only useful if it is designed to change a decision. If a board cannot name the decision a piece of evidence is meant to inform, then measurement is serving compliance, not governance. Boards should need to consistently ask themselves is: "If this impact report does not change a decision, what value does it have?"

Impact is not something we measure at the end. It is something we govern throughout.

The gap between activity and impact
Most organisations do not lack passion - they lack precision.

We often confuse activity with impact because activity is visible and impact takes time. Boards have a specific responsibility to hold the quality standard, not just the quantity standard – it is not enough to ask how many people did we reach? Ask instead how many people's lives genuinely changed, in ways that mattered to them, because we existed?

These are very different questions.

The courage to ask better questions
Governance for impact is not about having more data - it is about asking better questions and building the discipline and courage to have honest conversations and act on the answers. One of the most valuable things a board member can bring to a meeting is a question nobody else is asking.

Boards that govern for impact move beyond funding allocation, compliance, and oversight towards stewardship of long-term value, trust, and outcomes. The most effective boards treat impact as a governance discipline, not a reporting exercise. They ask not only 'Are we doing this well?' but 'Is this still the right thing to do, for the people we serve?

The quality of our impact is directly shaped by the quality of the questions we are willing to ask.

Some of the questions boards rarely ask, but should include:

- For whom are we trying to create change?
- What has changed, and how significant is that change?
- Would this change have happened anyway if we did not exist?
- Is this still the right thing to do?
- Are we measuring what matters to our beneficiaries?
- When did we last hear directly from the people we serve?
- What are we afraid to find out?

The privilege of philanthropic capital
Governments chase votes. Companies chase returns. Philanthropic capital can go where neither will. For those governing granting foundations and philanthropic organisations, the opportunity is extraordinary and often underused.

The important question these boards can challenge themselves by asking is: "Are we funding for comfort, or are we funding for change?"

Sneha's reflections on the questions raised by course attendees

Q: How do organisations funded by multiple funders report back without fragmenting their evidence base?
This is one of the most real and under-discussed challenges in the sector. Too often, organisations are producing multiple versions of the same story for different funders, each with their own templates and expectations.

The answer is for organisations to build one strong impact narrative that is genuinely theirs - grounded in their own Theory of Change and what matters to their communities. Everything else is translation.

Where possible, organisations can also negotiate with funders upfront to accept standard reporting rather than driving duplication.

The board's role is critical here. The board should own the measurement framework and probably have shared tools amongst each other, and similar organisations.

Q: How do boards use frameworks well, while understanding their limitations?
There are several frameworks available and every framework is a simplification of six fundamental questions: *Why, how, who, when, where, what*. Each question carries assumptions about how change happens, whose experience counts, and what is worth measuring. The board's role is not just to apply a framework, but to understand what it can and cannot provide; and to use it with intent.

Frameworks are not competitive; they are complementary. Each serves a different purpose at different stages of an organisation's journey. Boards can start with one, build capability, and update iteratively over time to deepen insight and strengthen decision-making.

Some frameworks that serve boards include:
- A Theory of Change is the foundation — it anchors strategy and alignment.
- SROI brings an economic lens to value.
- Outcomes and qualitative tools help track change as it is experienced.

Together, they create a more complete picture.

Everything that matters can be measured - not always precisely, but sufficiently. Where needed, use proxies and build evidence over time.

Remember that the key limitation is that no framework can tell you whether you are asking the right question. That is the board's job.

Q: Where does or would the social impact space in Aotearoa New Zealand be in 5 years?
"I see Aotearoa at an inflection point. My hope is that we move from outputs to outcomes as the default language of accountability; from compliance reporting to genuine learning and embedded impact systems in our day-to-day mahi; and from funder-driven measurement to community-defined success.

Ultimately, effective governance for impact is not primarily a technical challenge. It is a relational and cultural one.

The boards that create real change invest in trust and create space for honest inquiry. And lastly, the quality of our impact will always be shaped by the quality of the questions we are willing to ask."

Sneha Lakhotia
Founder and Director, Social Prism

Social Prism

www.thesocialprism.com
sneha.lakhotia@thesocialprism.com
021-262-2687

Dr Sneha Lakhotia is the Founder and Director of Social Prism, an impact strategy and advisory firm built on a simple but demanding idea: that evidence should drive decisions, not just reports. Social Prism works end-to-end with partners – from understanding what is really happening, to measuring what it is worth, to advising what to do next.

With 15 years of experience spanning research, policy, evaluation, and social value, Sneha works at the coalface with governments, philanthropic funders, and purpose-led organisations across New Zealand and internationally. Her work spans health and social services, community development, hous investment – sectors where the stakes of good governance and honest evidence are highest.

Besides her advisory work, Sneha brings lived governance experience as a board member of Well Women Franklin and a member of the Upper Harbour Local Board Ethnic Advisory Circle at Auckland Council. She understands firsthand the tension many boards face – between good intentions and clear evidence of impact.

The Social Prism has advised a variety of organisations across a variety of sectors:

- **Iwi, Māori & Pasifika** Tupuna Partnering, Whānau Ora Commissioning Agency, Te Puawaitanga Trust o Ōtautahi, Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi, Turuki Healthcare, Ohomairangi Trust
- **Community & Health –** Well Women Franklin, Te Aka Whai Ora, Big Buddy, Growth Culture, Office for Seniors, Upper Harbour Local Board / Auckland Council, START Taranaki
- **Philanthropic & Funding –** Toi Foundation, Tindall Foundation
- **International –** UNICEF, World Bank, UNDP, Social Value International, Van Leer Foundation

Acknowledgement

The Governance for Social Impact course was designed by ***Centre for Social Impact*** Australia and hosted by the JBWere New Zealand Philanthropic Services team in Auckland.

CENTRE for SOCIAL IMPACT | The University of Western Australia | UNSW Sydney | Flinders University | Swinburne University of Technology

About JBWere Philanthropic Services

JBWere provides investment advisory, research, and wealth management services to a broad and diverse client base across Aotearoa New Zealand. This includes private wealth holders, charities, tangata whenua, local government, family offices, financial institutions, and other for-purpose clients.

We are the leading provider of philanthropic, governance, strategy, and investment advice to the for-purpose sector. These organisations have entrusted us with more than $7 billion of their financial assets.

Our Philanthropic Services New Zealand team brings more than 85 years of combined for purpose experience. This includes leading charities, conducting sector research, serving as trustees, and working and volunteering in communities across the country. We also share a long-standing strategic partnership with JBWere Australia and its acclaimed Philanthropic Services team.

Last year, JBWere released The JBWere NZ Bequest Report 2025. This follows The JBWere NZ Corporate Support Report 2022 and earlier reports in the JBWere NZ Cause and Support series. Together, these reports provide practical sector data to support decision making by our clients and the wider for purpose community.

We support private clients to move from reactive giving to a more deliberate approach. This means building a clear portfolio of philanthropic commitments while retaining space to respond to new opportunities when it matters.

We also work alongside charities and other for purpose organisations as they steward capital to sustain operations and advance their kaupapa. We recognise the responsibility that comes with intergenerational resources and long-term mission delivery. Our investment solutions focus on income stability, capital protection, and alignment with beliefs and values. Each portfolio is shaped around the purpose it serves.

Being a trusted partner to the sector goes beyond investment management. We provide strategic advice, governance support, and fundraising capability building. This includes initiatives such as our recent Gift-in-Wills masterclasses for fundraising charities and the Harvard supported Social Leadership Programme. We also use our networks to make introductions that can help our for-purpose clients unlock progress on their challenges and priorities.

If you would like to discuss our Philanthropic Services expertise and how we can work with you, please contact your JBWere Adviser or a member of our Philanthropic Services team.

www.jbwere.co.nz

Disclaimer

This material has been made available for general information purposes only and is not intended to convey any form of financial, legal, or tax advice. It reflects JBWere's views as at the time of compilation. JBWere (NZ) Limited and its respective related entities distributing this material and each of their respective directors, officers and agents (the JBWere Group) believe that the information contained in this material is correct as at the time of compilation. However, no warranty is made as to the accuracy or reliability of any information contained in it. To the maximum extent permitted by law (but, in respect of our clients, subject to the applicable terms and conditions of our engagement with them), the JBWere Group disclaims all liability and responsibility for any direct or indirect loss or damage which may be suffered by any recipient through relying on anything contained in or omitted from this material. Readers should seek their own independent legal, tax, or other professional advice before acting on any of the matters discussed.

JBWere (NZ) Limited uses the JBWere brand under licence from JBWere Limited (ACN 137 978 360), a subsidiary of National Australia Bank Limited (ABN 12 004 044 937) (NAB). JBWere (NZ) Limited is not a member of the NAB group of companies (NAB Group). No member of the NAB Group guarantees, or supports, the performance of JBWere (NZ) Limited's obligations to any party.