

Innovation in NFP boards - Research takes PhD candidate Sarah Richardson from Queensland to Oxford

9 September 2023

Longtime WOBer Sarah Richardson FAICD FGIA FAMI is on the home stretch of her PhD on nonprofit innovation governance. With national and international conference presentations under her belt, along with two published journal papers and a third under review, she took time out to update Women on Boards co-founder Claire Braund on her topic interest and PhD rationale.

Inspired by her board and executive background helping organizations to scale, seasoned governance practitioner and University of Queensland PhD candidate Sarah said she had wanted to find out if innovation could help resolve the nonprofit industry obstacles and build organizational and sectoral sustainability, and whether nonprofit boards could learn how to foster it.

"As a nonprofit chair myself, and having led many a discussion on organisations' livelihood at the board table, Sarah's topic resonated," said Claire, who then asked Sarah what the main takeaways were from her important research.

"This phased study of a systematic literature review, nonprofit director interviews, and nonprofit director survey identified that innovation is different in nonprofits, and is characterized by small, incremental steps and connectedness," said Sarah, who had invited WOB members who are nonprofit board members to share their lived experience as part of the survey.

"I also found it is important here for financial viability, growth, and social impact. And effective boards use a blend of levers, some which are new to nonprofit innovation research, to foster "innovation for growth" in nonprofits.

Sarah concluded her fascinating glimpse into this critical research with highlights from her recent presentation at the 8th International Conference on Business, Management and Economics, which was held in Oxford.

"It was a fabulous experience! Speakers hailed from far-flung countries such as the Czech Republic, Germany, China, Uganda, and the United States. As the keynote promised, the conference showcased innovation's increasing pace and an amazing breadth of innovation research across all sectors globally!"

Confirming her topic's contemporary significance, Sarah's first research tranche, the literature review, has been published by Nonprofit Management & Leadership (a Wiley journal) in May 2023., the second phase, the interview study, has been published by Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, an A-ranked journal (by the Australian Business Deans Council) and part of the Sage family of publications in August 2023. And the survey paper is currently under review by a separate journal.