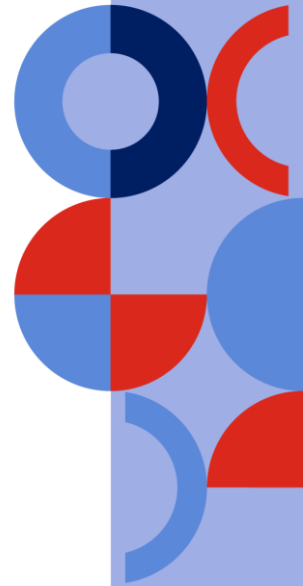


# ACCELERATING SOCIAL PURPOSE BUSINESS THROUGH PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS: CASE STUDY



## Introduction

The Canadian Purpose Economy Project (CPEP) has a vision that by 2030, at least 25% of Canadian businesses are adopting, disclosing, and authentically embedding a social purpose across their operations and relationships, and collaborating with others to achieve it. A key route to realizing this vision is to support associations to introduce social purpose business to their members and engage them in adopting and implementing a social purpose as the reason they exist.

CPEP collaborates with several associations on this journey, including Governance Professionals of Canada (GPC).

GPC is a national association representing governance professionals across public, private, crown, and not-for-profit sectors in Canada. GPC has been increasing its focus on purpose by integrating purpose governance into its educational programs, publications, conferences and professional development offerings.

CPEP defines a social purpose business as “a company whose enduring reason for being is to create a better world. It is an engine for good, creating social benefits by the very act of doing business. Its growth is a positive force in society”.

Professional associations are encouraged to review this case study, identify replicable opportunities, and contact the Canadian Purpose Economy Project for guidance and support in introducing social purpose to their members.

## Member Learning and Development

In 2020 GPC began integrating purpose education into its member offerings. As its members are corporate secretaries and governance professionals, their approach has been to embed purpose into its governance education. It refers to integration of purpose into governance as **purpose governance**.

It defines purpose governance as:

*The board's role in overseeing and stewarding an organization's purpose – the meaningful reason why an organization exists beyond profit generation. The board is responsible for ensuring the company's purpose is formally defined, relevant, and adopted by the board and effectively embedded in the organization's strategy, culture, resource allocation and decision-making processes, including its own decisions.*

GPC integrates this definition of purpose governance across its member value proposition, starting with its certification program and annual conferences, publishing thought leadership reports, including purpose governance in annual member surveys and awards, and gradually expanding across its broader platform.

### How Purpose is Embedded in Member Offerings

#### 1. Professional Designation

In 2026, GPC integrated purpose governance considerations across the Governance Professionals of Canada Education Program (GPC-EP), including the Governance in Practice Program leading to the GPC Designation (GPC.D). Purpose governance is embedded across all modules including:

- **Foundations of Governance** – Positions organizational purpose as the foundation of corporate governance, shaping the structures, processes, oversight, and decision-making through which value is created.
- **Ethics** – Demonstrates how organizational purpose and values provide the foundation for ethical decision-making, culture, conduct, and board oversight, and are embedded through codes of conduct and other ethics policies.
- **Strategy** – Positions advancing the organization's purpose, mission, or mandate as a core responsibility of the board, demonstrating how purpose informs vision, strategy, strategic planning, and long-term organizational sustainability.

- **Risk Management** – Distinguishes ESG risk from social purpose risk, explains how to embed purpose into corporate strategy, and demonstrates how purpose risk management can address corporate risks, risks to fulfilling the organization’s purpose, and risks arising from the organization’s purpose.
- **ESG, Purpose and the Role of the Board** – Defines purpose and social purpose, explains how purpose differs from mission, vision and ESG, and provides guidance on board oversight of purpose.
- **Governance & Participation** – Positions organizational purpose as a key measure of decision integrity, demonstrating how participation, legitimacy, and governance processes contribute to purpose-aligned decision-making and long-term organizational success.

## 2. Annual Conference

GPC’s Annual Corporate Governance Conference has featured purpose governance discussions every year since 2020. Recent examples include:

- *Purpose-Led Governance: The Critical Role of Governance Professionals in Turbulent Times (2025)*
- *Purpose at the Top: Board Oversight, Accountability, and Impact (2026)*

## 3. Courses

GPC periodically offers courses that focus on purpose governance or embed it within broader governance topics. Examples include:

- *Governing with Purpose: Insights for Credit Unions and Co-operatives (2025 Co-op and Credit Union Governance Summit)*
- *Purpose and Stakeholder Oversight: New Frontiers in Governance (2024 ESG Certification program)*
- *Purpose-Driven Governance (2026 Governance Leadership Program, delivered in partnership with Ivey Business School)*

## 4. Thought Leadership

GPC publishes thought leadership on effective corporate governance, including insights from conference panel discussions:

- [\*Purpose Governance: A New Role for Boards, 2020\*](#)
- [\*Purpose Governance: The Role of the Board in Developing and Overseeing the Purpose of the Organization, 2021\*](#)
- [\*The Purpose Imperative: Why and How Boards are Embracing Purpose Governance to Drive Value, 2022\*](#)

## 9. Collaboration and Field Building

GPC has played a leadership role in advancing purpose governance by convening a collaborative of five governance organizations. Together, they have:

- Published the [\*State of Purpose Governance in Canada 2024\*](#) report
- Hosted three national webinars on purpose governance (as of November 2026)
- Shared leading practices and educational resources with directors, governance professionals, and organizational leaders

This collaboration supports ongoing learning and professional development on emerging governance practices.

## 5. Library Resources

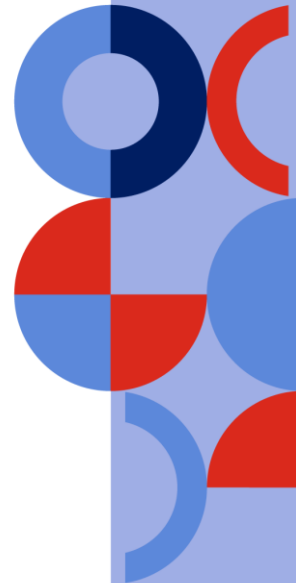
GPC’s member library includes a number of purpose governance materials, for example:

- [\*Purpose Governance Guidelines for Boards\*](#)
- [\*Purpose Governance Best Practices\*](#)
- [\*A How-to Guide on Social Purpose Risk Management\*](#)

## 5. Podcasts

GPC hosts members-only podcasts on purpose governance, including:

- *Introduction to Purpose Governance (2021)*



- *Stakeholders and Purpose: A New Governance Era (2024)*

### 6. Annual Governance Survey

GPC's *Corporate Governance Best Practices Report* is an annual corporate governance survey. It includes questions on purpose governance, providing insights into adoption trends and emerging practices in Canadian boardrooms.

### 7. Awards and Recognition

Purpose governance is recognized in GPC's annual Excellence in Governance Awards in the *Sustainability and Purpose Governance* category. Criteria cover board adoption and oversight of corporate purpose, committee purpose roles, integration of purpose into executive incentives and succession planning, and embedding purpose in strategy and governance policies.

### 8. Chapter Meetings

Provincial chapters meet to discuss topics of local interest. In 2025, GPC's BC Chapter hosted a session titled *Defining Our Value: The Evolving Role and Influence of the Governance Professional*, highlighting purpose governance and disclosures.

## Resources

Additional resources associations can use to develop their program that engage their members on social purpose include:

[An Association's Social Purpose: A Benchmarking Tool](#)

[The Social Purpose of Associations: A Call to Action to Serve the Greater Good](#)

[CSA SPE #116 ESG \(environmental, social and governance\) and SDG \(United Nations Sustainable Development Goals\) Guidance](#) for associations includes "social purpose" as one of 19 performance requirements.

## ABOUT THE CANADIAN PURPOSE ECONOMY PROJECT

The Canadian Purpose Economy Project exists to accelerate the transition to the purpose economy. It engages national ecosystem actors to create an enabling environment for social purpose businesses to start, transition, thrive and grow. This paper is one in a series of reports exploring the roles of key actors to advance social purpose in business including accountants, boards, investors, associations, business schools and others. We are grateful to Coast Capital, our Founding Purpose Champion, for its support. The Canadian Purpose Economy Project is a project of the Canadian Business for Social Responsibility Education Foundation. Subscribe to our updates at: [www.purposeeconomy.ca](http://www.purposeeconomy.ca).

