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TRENDS, STATISTICS
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ARTS & HERITAGE
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INTRODUCTION

With over 170,000 registered charities in the UK, and a further 20,000 organisations with charitable status, trustees play a crucial role in ensuring the charities that they govern operate effectively and ethically, and in the best interests of the beneficiaries and the communities that they serve.

The commitment and dedication of volunteer trustees is essential to the impactful and sustainable functioning of the charitable sector. However, one of the biggest challenges lies in the myriad of responsibilities that trustees must navigate, all as volunteers. Continued changes to regulation and compliance mean that trustees must do more to remain up-to-date and to ensure that they are carrying out their role effectively.

Every time the sector faces a high-profile issue with charitable governance, trustees receive more regulation to deal with. And while, to some extent, this is understandable, there is a worry about just how much more pressure volunteer trustees can reasonably sustain. Boards face multifaceted challenges in relation to areas such as sustainability, financial resilience, collaboration, diversity and digital adaptation.

To ensure effectiveness, trustees need ongoing support and training, to ensure inclusive, innovative and effective governance.

This issue of *Now, New and Next* explores some of these challenges and opportunities in more detail. We hope that it is a useful guide for charities looking to enhance and support their governance.

Thank you to all the contributors to this issue. If you would be interested in contributing an article to a future issue, please send an email to artsfundraising@cause4.co.uk and we look forward to being in touch.

MICHELLE WRIGHT DIRECTOR,
ARTS FUNDRAISING & PHILANTHROPY
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Chair of the Board – Is the job even doable?

BY MICHELLE WRIGHT, CEO, CAUSE4



Our system of charity governance is very strange when you think about it. A group of volunteer trustees hold all the responsibility for the strategic direction, financial viability and safe operations of the charity, whilst paid staff, or other groups of volunteers acting as executive, carry out the day-to-day operations. All being well, paid staff provide trustees with all the detail and information they need to make effective strategic decisions.

There are necessarily high levels of trust involved in such a model. Trustees have to trust the executive to run the organisation and executive staff have to trust that volunteer trustees have sufficient knowledge, time and understanding to steer the charity in the right direction.

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The most responsible volunteer position in the world?

Larger, well-resourced charities are usually able to attract trustees with experience and to support them to carry out these roles effectively. However, in smaller charities, without resources or a recognised brand name, it can be much harder to recruit trustees in the first place to undertake these roles and then to find the capacity to support them to carry out their responsibilities.

And then there are the responsibilities themselves, which are growing every day for this band of hardy volunteers ([about 900,000 according to the Charity Commission](#)). In recent years, we've seen increased legislation, enhanced administration from the Charity Commission, a more complex operating environment, scarcer funding and far greater expectations from statutory funders.

Understandably, when investing public money, funders such as Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund want to ensure that boards are carrying out their duties effectively.

The responsibilities trustees bear, arguably, makes this the most responsible volunteer role in the world. In a sector and environment where we need to ensure that boards are robust, diverse and reflective of the communities and beneficiaries that they serve, charities have an uphill battle in balancing compliance with excellence in equity, diversity and inclusion.





Could paying trustees help?

The commitment - in time, in reading, in scrutiny - demanded of trustees makes the role challenging to access for those without the funds to support themselves, or those with full-time jobs, health needs or caring responsibilities.

For chairs who take the lead in steering a charity, the constant need to be available is further exacerbated.

Whether trustees should be remunerated for their contribution comes up regularly. It's possible that an honorarium might help to recruit younger trustees at the start of their careers.

It might also help if we address issues such as high travel costs incurred by trustees supporting charities in rural areas. But we are not there yet, and the demands of governance need to be met within the existing volunteer framework.

The burden of the chair role

Inevitably, it's the chair that carries much of the load in ensuring a board's effectiveness. Chairs have to deliver, to galvanise other volunteer trustees and to ensure that the charity takes the right path.

Those that are effective may find it hard to secure a successor. Chairs are often behind the scenes, invisible, with little profile. Frankly, for ambitious younger professionals, there are other, less demanding ways to give back.

The complexity of the role is highlighted in the work that Cause4 is undertaking with Arts Council England through its [Transforming Governance programme](#). There are no easy answers to the challenges of governance, our charitable models being as they are. But there are some straightforward ways that the role of chair could be made more viable.



Measures to improve viability

CO-CHAIR MODEL:

This model is becoming more popular. As demands on chairs increase, splitting the time commitment involved between two or more people is an obvious answer. Research such as that by [Claire Antrobus](#), outlines the potential of co-chair models in terms of increasing diversity and managing risk. One charity that I worked with split the chair role four ways, including the treasurer within the quartet. A drastic solution perhaps, but one that the charity felt was right for them in managing the demands of the role.

SUCCESSION PLANNING:

The saying 'give a job to a busy person' is particularly pertinent for charity chairs. Often, they shoulder most of the board's work, so charities can be reluctant to let them go. They are like gold dust.

Developing written succession plans is a simple but positive way for charities to focus on the next leader of their board. Rather than hoping that the chair won't leave, we should focus on the likely length of term of the incumbent, and what is needed to ensure effective succession.

This also allows time to develop pathways for would-be chairs from less experienced or diverse backgrounds, giving them opportunities to shadow an existing chair for a period of time.

CAPTURING A BOARD'S JOURNEY:

Chairs are concerned with retaining organisational memory. When a chair leaves, there is often scant handover for a new generation of trustees. So, finding ways to capture aspects of strategy and key decisions for the next cohort is invaluable.

This is not to encourage collection of vast reams of data, but rather to find simple ways for chairs to pass on knowledge. Capturing such detail via podcasts, for example, can be extremely effective. It can give a simple overview to new trustees of why particular decisions were taken, and it encourages boards to reflect on lessons learned.

WRAP-AROUND SUPPORT:

Boards need administering. If you're lucky, you might have some available resource in house, but more often it is absent. So, what can be put in place to support boards without placing extra strain on already overworked executives?

One solution is to invest in flexible administration support from outsourced companies working directly to the board, at minimal cost, perhaps £2-300 a month. Similarly, outsourced HR support can be very effective in helping boards deal swiftly with often complex and urgent HR issues.

Is the role of chair doable? Well, yes, it is certainly. But given the complex environment in which charities operate and with the need to ensure excellence in equity, diversity and inclusion, chairs need support to ensure viability of the role.

Consideration of the structure of the Chair role, paying attention to succession, retaining organisational memory and putting in place efficient administration, are straightforward ways that charities can ease the load.

Overcoming Imposter Syndrome - Governing with Confidence:



Perspectives from

Liam Smyth (Ikon), Helen Jenkins (Manchester Jewish Museum), Srimoyee Sarker (Bluecoat), Debbie Richards (Northern Broadsides) and Abiodun Michael Olatokun (Advicenow)

WITH ANNIE JARVIS,
DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY AND
PROGRAMMES, CAUSE4



Whilst a trustee position is a privilege to undertake, it is also a highly responsible role.

With the increased administrative pressures placed on the cultural sector by funders and regulators; higher competition for funding opportunities and a more complex operating environment, it is no surprise that trustees and chairs can feel under pressure at times.

As is often human nature, many trustees find themselves in a cycle of self-doubt - that feeling that they aren't skilled, qualified or talented enough to lead a board or govern a charity, or that they should be doing more to 'know the art inside out', or to 'unlock doors to donors and give'.

This sense of self-doubt is said to **affect more than 70% of leaders** and 75% of women in leadership positions. In fact, this sentiment is so common, that it has a name: **Imposter Syndrome**.

We chatted to some trustees to understand their experiences of imposter syndrome and to see what top tips they may have to help others.

Liam Smyth

Trustee of IKON



I have been a trustee at [IKON](#), a contemporary art gallery and Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation based in Birmingham, for nearly three years. This is my first trustee role.

It can be daunting to take your first step as a trustee. As in all walks of life, it is difficult to purposefully put yourself in a room where you are the least experienced and least knowledgeable.

You can quickly feel overwhelmed and out of depth, and nothing can really prepare you for the different personalities, obstacles, opportunities, values and beliefs that are unique to each organisation.

Even the most dedicated trustees can struggle to absorb all the information. A big learning curve for all new trustees is in adapting a more direct communication style – ask the questions! This can be necessary to gather the data that you need to provide proper oversight and scrutiny.

You also need to learn when to challenge authority figures to meet charitable aims, whilst also ensuring that you are not overreaching from governance into management. Creating a supportive, yet accountable environment, requires a lot of care and commitment.

One of the best reasons to become a trustee is that it continually pushes you to learn, adapt and respond. I don't believe that anyone is born a great trustee – it can be a lifetime pursuit, and it is a marathon, not a sprint! You can't buy experience, and your future self will thank you for pushing yourself out of your comfort zone today. There is no such thing as a standard day-in-the-life as a trustee and early exposure to the tests and trials of trusteeship will build invaluable resilience over time.

Having a chair that is alive to the value of diverse perspectives is also key. I was fortunate to join a board under the stewardship of Helen Higson, who is one of the most passionate and experienced governance professionals that you could meet. Helen was keen to pass on her knowledge and would generously offer her time to new trustees for annual appraisals, as well as to provide real world constructive feedback. I hope to build enough experience to be able to offer similar levels of support to new trustees in the future.

Helen Jenkins

Trustee of Manchester Jewish Museum



“Are you sure? I don't think I've got the experience you need.”

That was my gut reaction the first time I was asked to sit on a board – and not just any board, but one for an organisation I really admired.

Imposter syndrome is loudest for me when someone compliments my professional skills. Being asked to join a board felt like the biggest compliment – so of course, I assumed there had been a mistake. Maybe everyone else had said no. Maybe they'd confused me with someone else.

Why did I think this? Logically, I know I have skills and experience. I've worked in fundraising my entire career, over ten years of that as a consultant. I've held senior roles and worked with some of the most talented people in the sector. I'm always busy with complex and exciting projects.

But logic is rarely louder than imposter syndrome.

Imposter syndrome amplifies your insecurities. It reminds you of the funding bids that didn't come through, the time a

colleague made fun of you, the fact that you didn't visit a museum until university, your accent. All the things that don't matter – but feel like they do.

Right now, I sit on the board of the Manchester Jewish Museum. I'm not Jewish, which of course fed directly into my imposter feelings. Why on earth would they want me on the board? I must remind myself – it's my skills and advice they need, not my faith.

There are also practical things I do to help. I read all the board papers in advance, so I know what's coming up and can research anything I'm unsure about. I also mark-up the questions I want to ask before each meeting.

I also undertook trustee training, which was probably the single most important step in quietening down my imposter syndrome. It helped me understand exactly what's expected of me and gave me confidence that I can deliver and contribute positively to the role.

Abiodun Michael Olatokun

Trustee of Advicenow



I am a trustee of Advicenow (Law for Life), the foundation for public legal education, and I was the Chair of the University of Westminster Students' Union from 2016-2018. I am also a former trustee of the British Youth Council and the Diana Award.

I suffer from anxiety and can sometimes struggle to speak in a group conversation. Sometimes, I also feel like I do not have enough experience, or knowledge, to contribute to the discussion. That can make me feel that I shouldn't say what's on my mind.

I work to overcome these issues by indicating that I want to get in on the conversation. That was a lot easier during the pandemic, when Zoom allowed you to raise a digital hand. This can certainly be more challenging in a group setting today, as it doesn't feel polite to interrupt

the flow of a conversation. Trying to catch the eye of the chair is my tactic for ensuring that I have a platform to speak, at the time that I'd like to contribute.

I also think that it's important to take your ego out of the situation; sometimes you don't need to make the point because someone else made it. In the context of charity/board decision making, it is ultimately about acting in the best interests of the charity and ensuring that it is steered in the right direction. Therefore, a simple nod or an "I agree", can serve the vital function of supporting a good idea in a group setting.

Critical to inclusive discussions, is often in the Chair's ability to facilitate conversations in ways that promote participation. That can be as simple as asking "Did anyone have anything else to add?" or canvassing opinions beforehand when there are more contentious items to be discussed. No one should leave the room with a bugbear, so short post-meeting questionnaires to assess whether board members felt there was healthy discussion and debate and that all views were heard, can really help to identify any challenges with communication.

Debbie Richards

Chair of Northern Broadsides



Our success is summed up by Kate Mroczkowski, who joined Northern Broadsides as a first-time trustee:

I've learned so much, and if you've not sat on a board before, I highly recommend it. I was a bit nervous at first, and the imposter syndrome has been an unwelcome friend in most board meetings. But the team have been so supportive and worked hard at creating a safe and enjoyable space for new and first-time board members. A year in, and I feel more confident and useful. Like any new role - it takes time to settle in, and that's ok.

I joined my first board over 25 years ago and am lucky to have had various governance experiences including: for-profits, charities and membership organisations.

Every board is unique and there is always lots to learn, but this can be much harder for a first-time trustee. First-timers are committing to new legal and strategic leadership responsibilities, and imposter syndrome is a particular challenge, as they worry whether they really have the skills.

As part of our commitment to diversifying our board, we encourage first-time trustees to apply. This starts with the recruitment process - advertising vacancies to reach people under-represented on boards and stating explicitly that first-time applicants are actively welcomed.

We provide new trustees with an access rider¹ to understand how we can support them, an induction pack, introductory meetings and the option of mentoring. At initial meetings, we take time over introductions and explain any jargon or organisational shorthand. We also offer specialist learning sessions, such as how to approach financial papers as a Trustee.

¹ An access document tailored to an individual

Srimoyee Sarker

Trustee of Bluecoat



Since 2018, I have been a trustee with Bluecoat – a contemporary arts centre housed in a striking Grade 1 listed building in central Liverpool. I previously held Executive roles working with a Board and wanted to put this experience to good use as a trustee.

Being a Bluecoat trustee, is my first and currently my only trustee position. I joined the board with a mix of curiosity and a desire to support. However, alongside this impulse to learn, was a seed of self-doubt. Though I had been appointed after an open call and interview, there was a constant nag in my mind about my value, especially amongst my fellow trustees, who were experienced leaders in their respective fields.

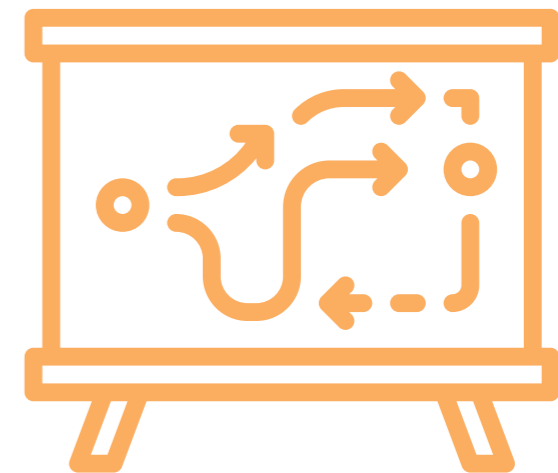
In a (good and diverse) board, you are chosen because you can complement existing trustees and ultimately join as a peer. Yet strangely, this immediate sense of having equal status fuelled my imposter syndrome. Others seemed so assured, and in many instances, their knowledge was more explicitly useful (e.g. finance, HR, Law) and applicable during the meetings.

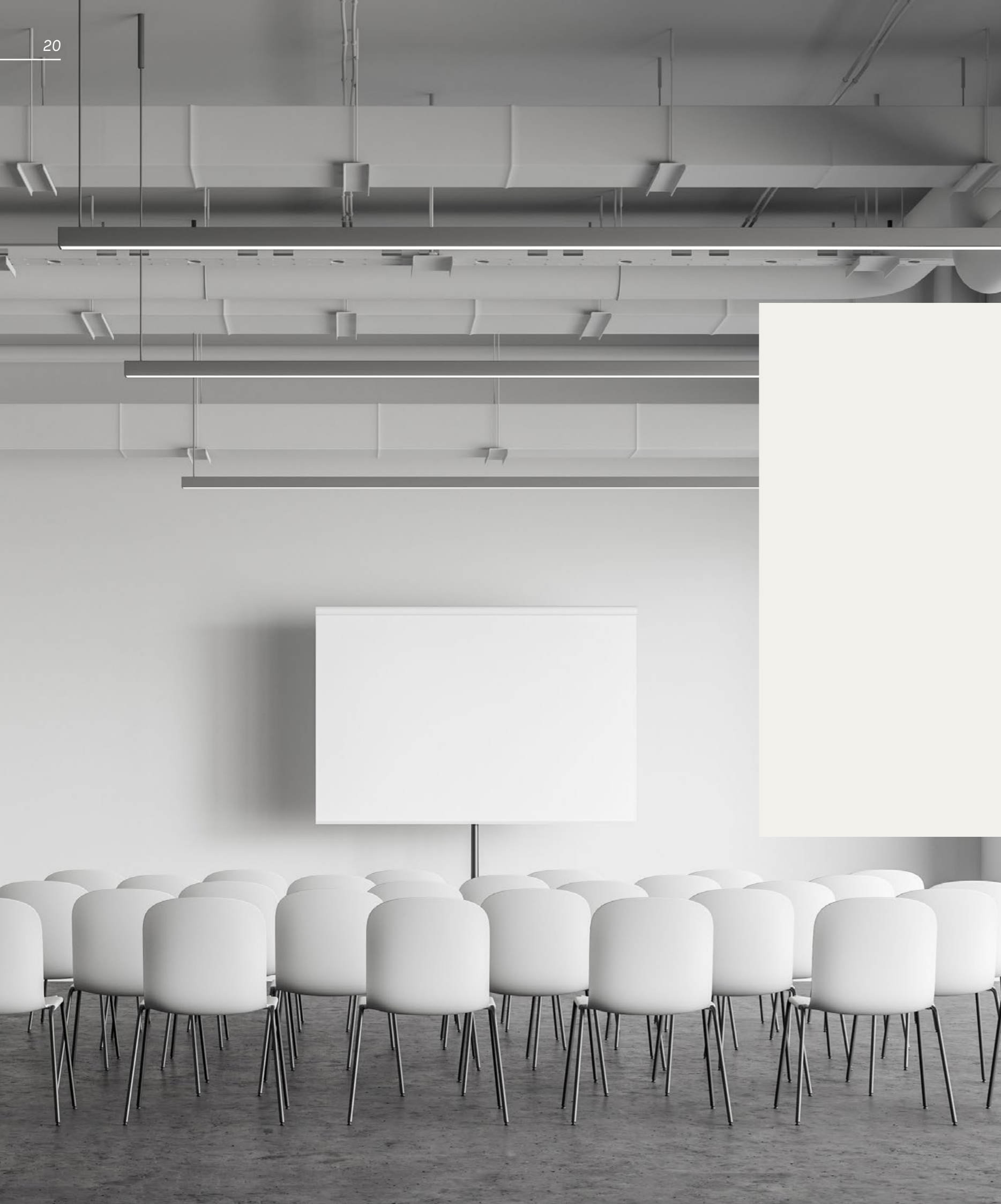
For the first few meetings I was in observer mode, noticing the issues, responses and ideas. Listening was key to improving my sense of understanding. As I acclimatised to the Board and the rhythm of our meetings, I found the best way to counter my self-doubt was to ask questions. And soon the questions being asked, or issues being raised, fell into areas that I was able to contribute confidently in.

The ability of the Chair to invite opinions from all, was also key to eroding my sense of self doubt. The Chair and Chief Executive positively acknowledged my contributions, and with that my confidence grew – not only in asking the questions, but also in knowing when NOT to ask and instead listen.

A few tips for inducting new board members (both with and without imposter syndrome):

- If possible, share a recording of your meeting, as well as the notes. This helps get a sense of the structure, rhythm and culture of the board. I remember a new trustee asking me what to wear to board meetings – a recording would help give a sense of the meetings themselves (how formal they are etc).
- Spend time with new trustees looking at your board papers in detail. Every organisation presents its information in a different format and becoming more familiar with this before a meeting can be helpful.
- If you are using a Buddy system (matching a new trustee to an existing trustee) make sure that there is a clear understanding of what time the existing trustee has to offer to the new trustee.
- Allow trustees to offer observations on papers ahead of the meeting, if contributing in-person in large groups feels intimidating.





DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

Interview with
Debbie Richards, Chair of Northern Broadsides

BY THOMAS WILLIAMS,
PROGRAMME MANAGER, CAUSE4





Northern Broadsides

Northern Broadsides is a theatre company based in Halifax, renowned for its bold, accessible productions.

Debbie Richards is Chair of the Board and has a rich background in theatre and arts marketing. She has been involved in governance since her early 20s, when she joined the board of the Arts Marketing Association (AMA). She later co-founded Baker Richards, a business strategy consultancy, and in 2020, oversaw Baker Richards' transition to employee ownership.

In our conversation with Debbie, we discussed the strengths of Northern Broadsides' distributed leadership model and its ability to both engage trustees and drive the organisation forward.

Debbie also offered some thoughts on the challenges that charity governance faces and how governance can be improved across the sector.

What is Distributed Leadership?

Underpinning Northern Broadsides' governance model is the concept of distributed leadership - a model of governance which emphasises distributing tasks and responsibilities across all trustees to ensure they are actively engaged in leading and driving the organisation forward. It keeps ultimate responsibility with the chair, but seeks to spread work across the board, capitalising on the strengths of individuals and reducing the overall workload of the chair.

As Debbie mentioned to us, trustees can often feel under-utilised, or that their role is reduced to rubber stamping and compliance, leaving little room for them to offer their valuable skills and experience. The distributed leadership model seeks to negate these issues and ensure that all trustees are actively engaged and utilised for the good of the organisation.

“The model fosters innovation and ambition, with multiple people driving the organisation forward”



The requirements of this governance model are something trustees must understand and the Trustee Role Description and board pack at Northern Broadsides make it clear that new trustees will be expected to contribute their time and skills in meaningful ways.

A key requirement is that, as well as joining the board, trustees must join at least one sub-committee or 'Squad' to drive progress in a particular area. Whilst Squads are mainly comprised of a mix of trustees and staff, they also bring together a broader mix of people connected to the organisation.

For those who lack the time or appetite for trusteeship, the Squads offer a more informal and less involved way of contributing to the development of the organisation.

To cement the roles of trustees in line with their skills and experience, each trustee is given a title in the organisation's Trustee Role and Code of Conduct document. These include Community Champion, Ambition and Quality Champion, and Digital Champion and correspond with the skills of the trustee and the sub-committee or Squad on which they sit.

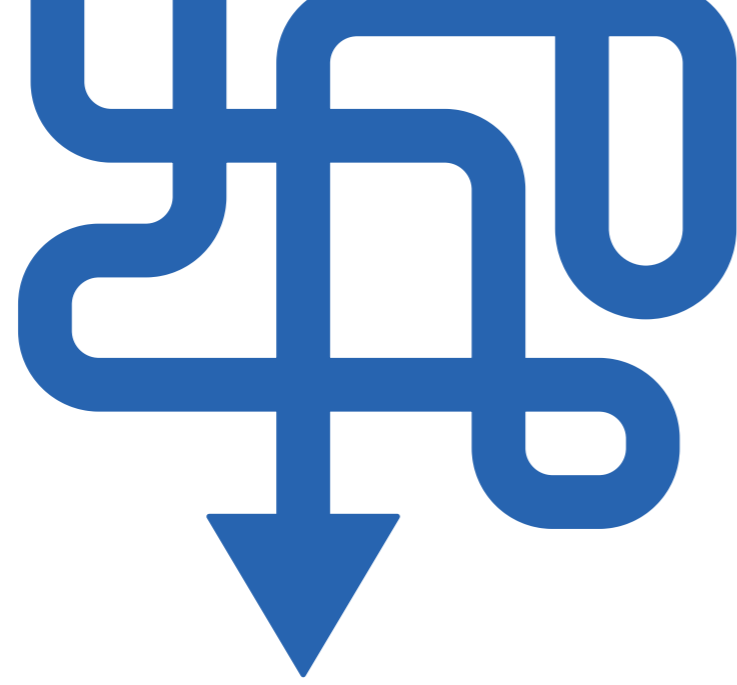
“The model of distributed leadership drives the organisation forward as a whole, with all trustees committed to taking responsibility for independent areas. This helps bring the board together, fosters a culture of shared responsibility and keeps trustees engaged, knowing their skills are valued and utilised.”

The distributed leadership model also impacts how the senior members of the board operate. On assuming the role of interim Chair, Debbie initially hesitated about taking the position permanently due to her other commitments and the fact that Chairs are typically heavily involved in the organisation and shoulder large and expansive workloads.

“A key challenge is around capacity and the breadth of skills required to do the role. Typically, the role of the chair can be a wide-reaching and particularly onerous one, seeing chairs expected to be closely involved in a wide array of operational areas and with a consistent in-person presence around the organisation. This requires both large amounts of time and a rich and varied skillset, two things that can be hard to come by.”

A two Vice Chairs model offered a solution to this problem, distributing leadership across three individuals, whilst keeping ultimate responsibility with the Chair. This approach allowed for shared decision-making, knowledge distribution, and a more manageable workload.

Whilst it is essential that there is understanding and acknowledgement that the Chair retains ultimate responsibility, a key benefit of this model is the way that it reduces reliance on a single leader, allowing the organisation to operate more efficiently and making the role of Chair a less daunting one for prospective candidates. It also, by engaging all trustees and giving them ownership of governance areas, best utilises the skills of the board and gives trustees valuable experience of leading certain areas, something which would benefit them should they wish to take on more senior roles.



“I think a key piece of advice is to understand that you can make governance work for you and the organisation. Models like distributed leadership are an example of this, ensuring that people can engage and support in a way that suits and benefits them. Whilst it is essential you understand that, as chair, the buck stops with you, this doesn’t mean you have to be directly involved in all areas of governance. Overseeing the work of trustees and allowing their skills to come to the fore, is an essential part of being a good chair.”

Alongside the distributed leadership model, Northern Broadsides has taken several other steps to maintain strong governance.

The joint CEO structure at the executive level mirrors the board’s collaborative governance model. Trustees maintain strong relationships with the executive team through regular check-ins and work on sub-committees, giving them a good understanding of how the organisation is operating.

There is also a process of values-driven recruitment, with the priority of recruiting trustees who align with the organisation’s values, fostering a strong organisational culture. Skills, experience and perspective gaps are identified through the annual trustee skills and perspectives review and, during recruitment, emphasis is placed on ensuring that candidates can demonstrate both the necessary skills/experience and adherence to the vision, mission and values of the organisation.



Northern Broadsides Dance – photo by Andrew Billington

“We need to improve the ways we support and encourage trustees to get involved in organisations and develop their skills and responsibilities once they join. I am passionate about seeing more young and first-time trustees enter the sector over the coming years. An investment in, and recognition of the value of training will be key here, but we also need to be realistic about the time available to trustees to engage with this. Training will need to be tailored and could stem from processes such as skills audits, to ensure it benefits both the individual and organisation.”

Leading with Lived Experience – Best Practice in Recruitment

BY REBECCA CHURCHER-SODEN, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, CAUSE4 AND BRYONY SALMON, PROGRAMME MANAGER, CAUSE4



It is widely acknowledged in the charity sector that engaging individuals with lived experience of the cause being championed brings about valuable, varied perspectives, enriches thinking, informs better decision-making and increases impact and relevance.

As the Deputy CEO of Governance, Risk and Compliance for Proud Changemakers, **Suneet Sharma puts it:** “Embedding lived experience is key to entrenching equity of representation, beneficiary voices and ensuring that you remain engaged with the right stakeholders in fulfilling your charity’s mission.”

Yet despite our best intentions, promise far exceeds progress. Latest data outlines that **51% of charities** still do not have a single minority ethnic woman on their board and 92% of trustees are white, older, and above average income and education.

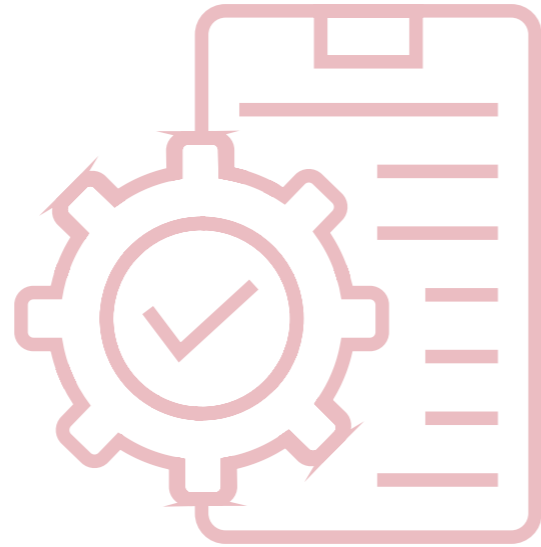
Many charities highlight the challenges they face in trustee recruitment and the lack of applications from diverse communities as a barrier to making real change. But as **research from Reach Volunteering suggests**, these perceived barriers are nothing more than a myth.

In reality, what it often comes down to is a lack of time, energy, funds, and **ultimately discomfort** around the topic, confusion about what diversity means in our own organisational and community contexts and a fear of looking tokenistic in an increasingly polarised political climate.

Yet when we look at this issue more strategically, the benefits can't be ignored:

- Whole communities remain largely untapped when it comes to philanthropy and engagement. Almost [one in five people in the UK](#) are from global majority backgrounds, yet donor bases in the arts, culture and heritage sectors remain overwhelmingly white and affluent.
- Research shows that Black, Asian, Muslim and Jewish donors often give through identity, faith or cultural traditions, but many charities lack the infrastructure or understanding to engage these donor groups effectively.
- Studies by GiveBLACK and UCL highlight that Black donors are motivated to give but are held back by a lack of trust and information within the sector. UK Muslims donate around £100 million annually during Ramadan, yet many charities are not equipped to build the cultural understanding needed to connect with this generosity.

When we know that there is real value in meaningful board diversification, the main question becomes, how do we overcome these fears and make true progress?



Start with an honest self-assessment

Assessing your board's skills, experiences and current make-up is an important starting point to understanding the importance of diversity in your own organisational context. By conducting a skills audit, or scoring your board's performance against key areas in the [Charity Governance Code](#), you will have a clearer picture about the gaps that need to be filled.

From here, your board will be able to develop new Trustee role descriptions, defining the role, responsibilities, and desired attributes of new trustees, enhancing the skills, knowledge and diversity of your board.

Consider an honest reflection of your current structure and support systems. [When 40% of people are experiencing barriers to inclusion in joining a charity board](#), it is clear that we need to do more to identify what these barriers might be and how we overcome them.

Embedding EDI Through 'Listen and Learn'

World Vision UK adopted a comprehensive approach to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), emphasising continuous learning and open dialogue. Recognising that EDI is an ongoing journey rather than a one-time initiative, the organisation implemented 'Listen and Learn' forums to foster understanding and inclusivity.

[In June and July 2020](#), six sessions were conducted where the CEO and senior leadership engaged directly with Black, Asian and Global Majority staff. These forums provided a safe space for employees to share personal and professional experiences, shedding light on challenges faced both within and outside the workplace. This initiative aimed to deepen leadership's understanding of the diverse experiences of their staff, and to inform subsequent EDI strategies.

Building on these insights, World Vision UK introduced [book circles](#) in Autumn 2020, facilitating discussions on EDI topics through literature such as 'Sway: Unravelling Unconscious Bias' by Pragya Agarwal. These circles created informal settings for staff to explore and discuss complex issues related to diversity and inclusion.

The organisation also launched "[Promising Conversations](#)", structured dialogues led by managers using provided scripts and guides. These conversations aimed to encourage open discussions on various topics, including EDI, without requiring the organisation's leaders to be subject matter experts.

World Vision UK's commitment to EDI is further reflected [in its policies](#), which emphasise respect for diversity and the creation of an inclusive culture where the whole organisation can thrive. Its multifaceted approach serves as a model for organisations seeking to embed EDI principles into their operations and governance effectively.



Change up your recruitment process

Openly promoting trustee vacancies through various platforms, including those that target underrepresented groups such as the Trustee Leadership Programme, Reach Volunteering, Young Trustee Movement, Action for Trustee Racial Diversity, Women on Boards, and local volunteer centers will support you to reach candidates more effectively.

Also consider implementing an unbiased selection process, including anonymising applications, using standardised questions and a scoring system to help minimise biases. This will ensure that all candidates are assessed fairly.



Six Steps to Inclusive Trustee Recruitment

Historic Buildings and Places (HB&P), one of the UK's oldest heritage charities, undertook a **major shift in its board recruitment process** to improve diversity and inclusion.

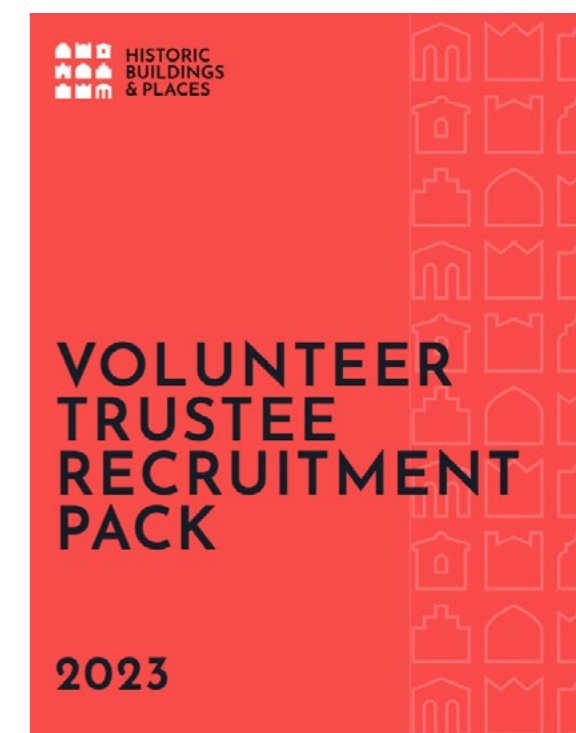
Previously reliant on informal networks, the board lacked representation across age, ethnicity and lived experience. In response, HB&P adopted the six-step inclusive recruitment framework developed by Historic England, aiming to remove barriers and open up access to trustee roles.

The organisation began by redesigning its recruitment materials to be clear, transparent and welcoming to individuals with no prior board experience. The trustee pack outlined the responsibilities, time commitments, meeting schedules and available support, while an informal chat with the CEO was offered as a first step to build trust and demystify the process.

To reach underrepresented groups, HB&P used a small budget strategically. It advertised through its own channels and inclusive platforms such as Young Trustee Movement and Women on Boards. A targeted, paid LinkedIn campaign helped amplify the call-out, especially to younger candidates and those outside of traditional heritage circles.

A points-based shortlisting system was also introduced to ensure that candidates were evaluated on potential and lived experience, rather than conventional CVs. This, alongside an interview panel including both internal and external voices, reduced bias and encouraged fresh perspectives.

As a result, HB&P successfully appointed younger and more diverse trustees, who brought new energy and insight to the organisation. The process demonstrated that, with thoughtful planning and willingness to challenge the status quo, inclusive board recruitment can be both achievable and transformative.



Look at how you support your trustees

Offering training on unconscious bias, cultural competency, and inclusive practices for board and team members increases awareness and fuels healthy conversations. If you're concerned about organisational cost, there are several free resources and courses such as the [Race and Ethnicity Hub from the Open University](#) or the [Arts Council England Resource Hub](#).

Also consider inviting candidates to observe meetings so that they can see how the Board operates. This can allow potential trustees to build familiarity informally and to gain a better understanding of the culture of the organisation and how meetings are run.



Empowering Women Through Board Shadowing

In 2021, the Smallwood Trust launched a pioneering Board Shadowing Programme to embed lived experience into its governance and decision-making processes.

Aimed at women with firsthand experience of gendered poverty, the initiative sought to bridge the gap between beneficiaries and boardrooms, ensuring that policies and grant-making strategies are informed by those that they intend to serve.

The inaugural cohort comprised of three women, who shadowed Dr. Ambreen Shah. Participants attended board meetings, engaged in pre and post meeting briefings and received mentorship, providing them with insights into board operations and governance. This hands-on experience demystified the trustee role, bolstering their confidence to pursue leadership positions in other organisations. Notably, two members have since secured trustee roles elsewhere, exemplifying the programme's impact on diversifying charity leadership.

The programme's success prompted its continuation, with subsequent cohorts expanding the initiative's reach. Evaluations highlighted benefits for both members and the Trust, including enhanced understanding of governance, increased diversity of thought and strengthened community connections.

Recognised by the Centre of Charity Effectiveness as a model for inclusive governance, Smallwood's Board Shadowing Programme underscores the value of integrating lived experience into leadership structures. By doing so, the Trust not only empowers individuals but also enriches its strategic approach to tackling gendered poverty.



If your existing board can dedicate more time to supporting new trustees, a **buddy system** where all new trustees are paired with experienced board members can help with onboarding and integration into the wider board.

Youth On Board

Rising Arts Agency, a youth-led creative organisation based in Bristol, launched the **OnBoard** programme in 2018 to address the underrepresentation of young people in governance roles within the cultural sector. Recognising that traditional board structures often exclude diverse voices, OnBoard aims to recruit, train and support young leaders, particularly from underrepresented backgrounds, to become active board members.

The 12-month programme begins with a thorough assessment of an organisation's existing governance structure, identifying gaps in skills and lived experiences. Rising then facilitates the inclusive recruitment of at least two young trustees to ensure peer support and to mitigate tokenism.

These new board members receive bespoke training in areas such as financial literacy, fundraising and public speaking, alongside ongoing mentorship and peer networking opportunities. Regular evaluations and board away-day sessions are conducted to embed inclusive practices and to ensure the meaningful integration of young trustees into decision-making processes.

Since its inception, OnBoard has successfully placed **over 39 young people** onto the board of more than 20 organisations across the South West, including notable institutions like Watershed, We The Curious and St George's Bristol. Participants have reported increased confidence and a sense of agency, with some progressing to trustee roles in other organisations.

OnBoard exemplifies how targeted initiatives can disrupt traditional governance models, fostering inclusivity and ensuring that the perspectives of young, diverse individuals are integral to organisational leadership.



OnBoard programme – photo by Olumide Osinoiki

There is no doubt that the arts and charity sector has a passion for and good intentions to embed lived experience in leadership. But real change is only possible when we look at our existing systems and make room for new ones.

Could Paying Trustees Strengthen Charity Governance?

BY THOMAS WILLIAMS,
PROGRAMME MANAGER, CAUSE4



The issue of trustee remuneration is a well discussed topic, which arouses passionate views on both sides. In 2012, it even drew the focus of central government – a feat that the charity sector would love to emulate more regularly these days – appearing in the Government commissioned review of the Charities Act.



The issue of remuneration keeps coming up for various reasons: could it help in encouraging the recruitment of trustees from lower income backgrounds, or freelancers, or those with caring responsibilities?

There is also the intractable issue that NCVO describes as the ongoing “**trustee crisis**”. Reports in 2024 revealed that **80% of charities are operating with a least one vacancy at board level** and 43% of charities with vacancies said that they were **struggling to follow good governance principles** as a result.

Given this situation, we thought that it might be a good time to ask: could trustee payment be the solution?

What does the guidance say?

The Charity Commission says that the payment of trustees is normally only acceptable when a trustee’s work extends beyond the typical remit of trusteeship. This can include **providing goods or services** for a charity, such as plumbing, painting, secretarial work or any specialist service like IT consultancy. **Expenses incurred in the carrying out of trustee duties** can be remunerated as well.

Payment is also possible in “**exceptional circumstances**... when paying a trustee clearly brings a significant advantage to the charity over other options”. Here the Commission references the unexpected departure of a CEO, or responding to an external review, or identifying the need for rapid restructuring. However, we must be mindful of conflicts of interest and reputational issues.

That said, when it comes to paying trustees to carry out their duties, the guidance is different. The Charity Commission states that:

“Being a trustee is generally a voluntary role. This is what makes the charity sector unique and promotes trust and confidence in charities. As a result, external reaction to paying trustees is often negative.”

If a charity wants to transform trusteeship from a voluntary to paid role, it must either have this provision outlined in its governing document or seek permission from the Charity Commission. It must also show that it has considered all other options and is encouraged to draw up written agreements which will cover the trustee role and outline what is expected.



Should all trustees be volunteers?

According to **Civil Society**, Trusteeship is worth around £3.5bn a year to the charitable sector, if you factor in the time commitment for the role (an average of 4.88 hours a week for each trustee, paid at a median hourly wage).

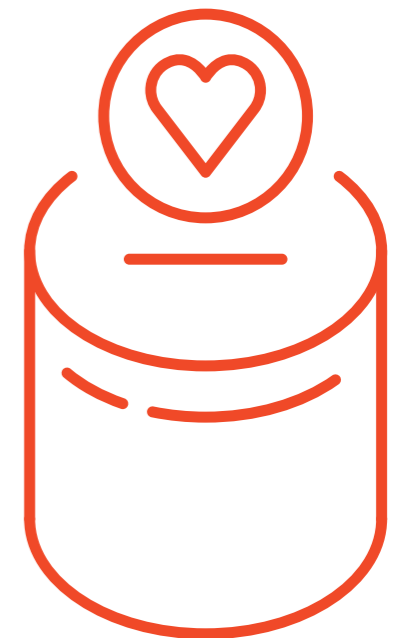
Yet a key argument for keeping trustees unpaid, is that it fits with the ethos of the sector. When the Charities Act Review was conducted in 2012, some leaders from the charity sector rejected the call for payment on the grounds that “**voluntarism is a defining characteristic of charity**” and a crucial way of preserving public trust.

This sentiment continues today. As the Charity Commission’s guidance references, public opinion can be fiercely critical of those who seek to make personal gain from a charity. Just think of the recent news and enquiry into the **Captain Tom Foundation**. What would the consequences be for public support, if trustees were seen to be supplementing their income through trusteeship?

Another concern is whether paying trustees would mean that trusteeship was no longer reserved for those with a genuine passion for the charitable cause that they represented. Whilst there are certainly trustees today who join boards solely for social cache, would payment see this increase and extend to individuals who are more concerned with making money than they are with helping the charity achieve its mission?

A key issue for me also seems to be the one of time. Would trustee payments ever be sufficient, to offset the time constraints of trusteeship encroaching on working hours and caring commitments? Very few charities would be able to remunerate trustees to such an extent that they could work less or afford more caring support. As such, would remuneration end up going to the individuals who would have more easily been able to volunteer their time anyway?

There are also the practicalities. If a charity finds itself struggling to fundraise and running down its reserves, would trustees continue to be paid whilst operations were reduced? Similarly, would smaller charities be outbid by larger rivals that could pay trustees more, and find themselves in a similar “trustee crisis” to now, unable to offer the necessary financial incentives to strengthen their boards?





What is the case for paying trustees?

UK charity trustees face a huge level of responsibility as volunteers. They must be clued up on finances and accounting, charity and company law, safeguarding, fundraising, and marketing to name but a few areas. For large charities, this can come alongside deep public scrutiny and responsibility for activities and programmes worth millions of pounds. In smaller charities, trustees are often on the frontline, volunteering and taking active roles in daily operations. Given this responsibility and workload, is it not fair that we pay individuals willing to take this on?

Whilst only a few charities would be able to pay sufficiently to free up an individual's time, this is not to say that even limited financial support could not have some impact. Even a small fee could allow more individuals to get involved in charity governance and to offset their time.

The work of [Art & Homelessness](#) demonstrates this. In April 2024, the charity gained permission from the Charity Commission to pay its trustees, citing that 50% of its board were, or had been homeless, and as such, some remuneration would help those facing financial barriers to take on governance roles. The charity now pays small sums to trustees with lived experience of homelessness who are not on a full-time salary, reporting that this has allowed individuals to take up and hold onto trustee roles in greater numbers.

Large charities are already paying trustees. In 2017, [18 of the top 100 UK charities reported paying at least one trustee](#). This recognises the scale of the work that trustees at these organisations undertake and could also help with trustee retention.



Are there other ways to tackle the trustee recruitment crisis?

If remuneration serves to be too high a barrier to overcome, we need to make more of the non-financial benefits that trusteeship can bring and invest additionally in training and upskilling young, diverse and new trustees.

Trusteeship can, and should, be about supporting a cause that you are passionate about and gaining valuable experience and expertise at the same time. Charities should do more to celebrate their ability to incubate, as well as utilise talent. [Black Swan Arts](#) and [Beam Arts](#) provide strong and simple examples of this, offering training, support and exciting incentives for those looking to take on the role.

Writing in 2019, [Grant Taylor of Peridot Partners](#) made the case that improving recruitment processes for trustees could have more impact than financial incentives. Trusteeship is still frequently passed through the 'tap on the shoulder' method, seeing small social groups fill large numbers of trustee roles. Would recruitment improve if charities more effectively advertised positions, invested in trustee training, and celebrated the wealth of non-financial benefits that a trustee position can bring?

There are also innovative models of payment/financial reimbursement to explore. Could new forms of support, like [social impact bonds](#), be utilised to both fund charity action and remunerate trustees? Or how could corporate CSR and volunteering agendas be aligned with the need to recruit trustees with strong financial and other professional backgrounds? If corporates built charitable trusteeship as an option as standard into their company volunteer programmes, we could see a whole swathe of new trustees with the skills and time to contribute to the charitable sector.

It's a polarising debate - paying trustees might solve some immediate problems, but whether it would provoke sustained and transformative change still feels up for dispute.



CLIMATE ACTION IN GOVERNANCE

Ensuring Sustainability at All Levels

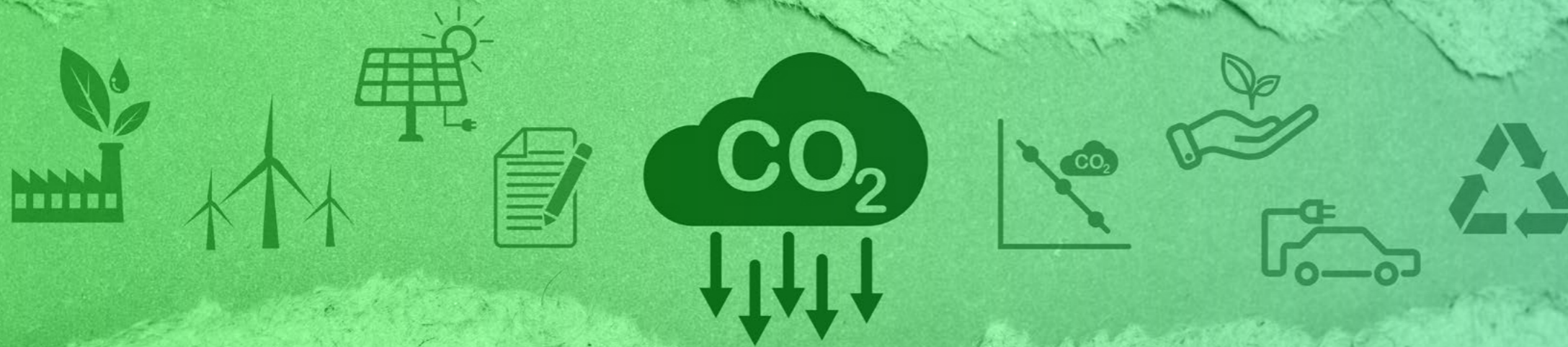
BY WILL HARRISS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, CAUSE4
AND ANNIE JARVIS, DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY AND
PROGRAMMES, CAUSE4



Whether you think that climate change is an existential threat, scaremongering by malign actors, or somewhere in between, there is no denying that this topic remains front and centre of public debate and is a key focus for the arts and cultural sector.

The narrative held by the majority of climate scientists, is that the world is getting warmer as a direct effect of human activity, and if we don't take action to stop or slow the rate by which our planet is heating, then the implications are serious.





The global challenge

This issue has been taken seriously by many governments across the globe, with the **2015 Paris Agreement** signed by nations worldwide, and the UK Government committing to Net Zero by 2050 through the **Climate Change Act**.

However, despite best intentions, there have been significant recent political shifts that suggest a step backwards in plans to tackle climate change globally. Across the pond, President Trump has already **abandoned** the US' long term strategy towards net zero, whilst here in the UK, Reform (which is currently leading in polls) has made a **public commitment to ditch net-zero**.

Alongside this, the Climate Change Committee's **2025 report** to Parliament, suggests that the UK's plans are inadequate, and that the government is not doing enough to change its approach, stating that "the slow pace of change indicates that adaptation is not yet a top priority across government."



The practical challenge

Alongside the imperative for organisations to support climate initiatives, given the rise of the **eco-friendly donor** and the investment decisions being made by funders such as **Arts Council England**, we cannot ignore the practical challenges that we might face when trying to create change.

For some charities, there is a tension between balancing improvements in sustainability, whilst maintaining a focus on the core values and charitable objects of an organisation. For arts organisations within the Arts Council England National Portfolio, trustees not only need to consider the Investment Principle of Environmental Responsibility, but also need to factor in their artistic delivery and their focus on other Investment Principles such as Dynamism.

Ecclesiastical's 2024 **Charity Risk Barometer** outlined this juggle, with 46% of charities saying that they were not taking any steps towards net zero. When asked why, 35% said that they lacked the knowledge to make change and 25% said that they were concerned about the costs.



Recognising the benefits

Despite these challenges, progress on the environmental agenda is urgent and requires leadership from trustees. As such, when boards are faced with competing priorities, a lack of funding and strained capacity, it is important to ask, what are the broader benefits?

Prioritising a commitment to environmental change has the potential to build organisational resilience, attract more funding, and strengthen an organisation's relationships with the communities that it serves.

Firstly, in terms of funding, UK charitable foundations (which distribute more than £4bn in funding each year) are pledging to create change, with more than 130 funders signed up to the **Funder Commitment on Climate Change**, solidifying their aims to invest resources into work that addresses the impact of climate change. On top of this, UK businesses are increasing their commitment to Environmental, Social and Governance factors (ESG), with 72% of FTSE 100 companies giving to environmental causes in 2024.

The **2024 Act Green survey** also showed that 72% of audiences think that cultural organisations have a responsibility to influence society to make radical change in response to the climate emergency, suggesting that by committing to eco-friendly practices, organisations can build loyalty and trust amongst their supporters.





Creating change

Given the pressures to focus on environmental responsibility and the practical challenges that we face, how can trustees in the cultural sector take practical steps towards change?



STARTING WITH DATA:

Before seeking to create change, we need to understand exactly what needs to change. Using tools like Julie's Bicycle's [free carbon tracker](#), [Ecologi](#), or the [Greenhouse Gas Protocol](#) can help you gain a sense of your starting position, and enable you to understand what is under your direct control (the amount of energy you use), indirect control (the sources you use), or out of your control (caused by your supply chain or audiences).

[Festival.Org](#), a leading producer of outdoor arts, used data tracking to begin its own journey. Firstly by using Creative Climate Tools, and then recording artist travel and accommodation and audience data to better understand what could and couldn't be changed.

MAXIMISING GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT:

The [Charity Commission](#) has created some useful guidance for trustees that want to take steps for their organisations to become more environmentally friendly, and [Arts Council England's environmental responsibility Investment Principle](#) provides criteria and support on how to monitor and reduce an organisation's carbon footprint, use sustainable materials, and manage resources responsibly.

Julie's Bicycle has also created a [Board Environmental Champion's Programme](#), supporting trustees of National Portfolio Organisations to lead environmental change at a governance level. The Programme has engaged several organisations across the sector, including Bow Arts Trust, Bristol Old

Vic, Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust and Cheltenham Festivals, which all now have Board Environmental Champions.

FORMULATING A PLAN:

Creating an environmental sustainability policy can help ensure that staff, volunteers and participants become aware of their roles in implementing eco-friendly practices, the specific actions they can take to support sustainability initiatives, the resources and training available to them, and the positive impact of their contributions on the environment and the community.

One of the UK's leading professional performing arts company's of visually impaired artists and theatre practitioners, [Extant](#), has embedded environmental responsibility into its governance practices. The board has updated its environmental policies, set up a working group and appointed an Environmental Responsibility Officer onto the Board to lead the charge.

DEMONSTRATING COMMITMENT:

With a myriad of priorities to tackle, a board of Trustees can't do everything at once, but a public commitment to environmental responsibility can go a long way to building confidence with funders, audiences, staff and stakeholders.

[The Glasshouse](#) (formerly the Sage Gateshead) demonstrates its commitment to the environmental agenda by highlighting its ambitions publicly and providing regular updates on the work achieved to date, from upgrading its building to reducing meat consumption in its venue.

The organisation also has an Environmental Policy and [Public Statement](#), as well as an Environmental Action Plan driven by the board, which acts as the charity's to-do list.

COLLABORATING WITH OTHERS:

Given the resources that may be needed to implement environmental change, it's worth considering whether working in partnership could help ease the load or financial burden.

In 2021, Manchester Museum, The Carbon Literacy Project and Museum Development England launched their innovative '[Roots and Branches](#)' project - developing new ways for museums to care for both people and the planet, aiming to create a sector that fully understands and is equipped for environmental challenges.

The 'Roots' component, based at Manchester Museum, has established a coworking hub that engages local climate action groups, transforming an underused area of the museum into a vibrant community space. Meanwhile, the 'Branches' initiative has provided training in Carbon Literacy to over 3,500 individuals from more than 500 organisations across the UK, supported by a [Carbon Literacy Toolkit](#) specifically designed for museums.



The Glasshouse International Centre for Music - photo by Mark Savage

Protecting Organisational Memory Through Succession Planning

An interview by

Annie Jarvis (Director of Strategy and Programmes, Cause4) with Doric Bossom – Chair of Wiltshire Creative, Hilary Knight – Chair of Company of Others, and Anna Starkey – Co-Chair of Unlimited



The departure of a trustee or staff member can cause significant turbulence when we don't have a plan. Even with a relatively lengthy notice period, a departure can lead Trustees and Executive teams scrambling to find a replacement, whilst also pressurising the outgoing individual to write down absolutely everything they know in a handover document to pass along to the next person taking on the role.

In general, we don't capture organisational knowledge in relation to governance as well as we should. Trustees often start the role, with no real awareness of what has gone before.

Despite the challenges that come with recruitment, relatively few cultural organisations spend sufficient time on succession planning. For many, it can feel overwhelming, complex and far less of a priority than day to day activity and strategic or financial planning.

Yet, succession planning can play a vital role in strategy and effective governance, enabling organisations to hold on to knowledge, minimise disruption, ensure smooth transitions and ultimately save time and money.

So how can we approach the issue of succession planning at a much earlier stage?

We spoke to Doric Bossom (Chair of Wiltshire Creative), Anna Starkey (Co-Chair of Unlimited) and Hilary Knight (Chair of Company of Others), to find out how they focus on succession planning:



Thinking Ahead and Acting Fast – DORIC BOSSOM, CHAIR OF WILTSHIRE CREATIVE

The saying "no plan survives contact with the enemy" is attributed to Helmuth von Moltke, a Prussian military strategist. In my experience as Trustee and now Chair of Wiltshire Creative, I have found this observation to be alarmingly applicable to the topic of succession planning, where the best intentions are frequently overtaken by events.

Wiltshire Creative comprises the Salisbury Playhouse; the Salisbury Arts Centre; and Salisbury International Arts Festival and is run jointly by an Executive Director and Artistic Director, supported by a Board of between nine and twelve Trustees.

Given the mission-critical positions of both executives, one would like to think that there would be an oven-ready plan to activate when a vacancy crops up. Proving von Moltke's point in my first year as Chair, Wiltshire Creative instead faced the sudden, unexpected and imminent departure of our Executive Director (ED), for which we were ill-prepared. Developing a search and recruitment programme in such circumstances will always take several months. Our campaign, fortunately, attracted several, high-quality candidates (and an excellent new ED). However, in a perfect, less nerve-racking world, we would have planned more carefully for a seamless transition.

At the Trustee level, maintaining Board quality and depth has been achieved through a mixture of carefully considered and constructed recruitment cycles

(at approximately two-year intervals), with occasional infill by co-option when a sudden vacancy in a key skills area occurs. A strong, well-designed and widely distributed recruitment pack, is vital to generating a rich seam of applicants and has, in our case, been productive over the past four years. But as one cannot always plan for the occasional unplanned resignation, having a 'First Reserve' list of candidates on file, is a worthwhile contingency.

I am very conscious of the need to give early thought to my successor as Chair of Wiltshire Creative. My own appointment was somewhat unexpected – I was ambushed in a Board meeting and found myself being nominated by my colleagues before having time to think of a decent excuse! The role has proved hugely rewarding and I was glad for the push, but the organisation deserves the next Chair's appointment to have been given proper, long-term consideration and careful thought. One option could be a framework in which the Chair gives a year's notice of a change, creating an imperative to study both the potential of existing Trustees and external candidates who might be right for the role.

It just goes to show that, even if circumstances conspire to upset the best-laid intentions, succession planning should be a constant feature of a Chair's to-do list. It's part of the day job, not just a consideration when the pressure of a vacancy looms.



Creating a Framework and Seeking Expert Guidance – ANNA STARKEY, CO-CHAIR OF UNLIMITED

I'm co-Chair of Unlimited, along with Adel Al-Salloum. Unlimited's mission is to commission extraordinary work from disabled artists, until the whole of the cultural sector does. We have an interesting context for succession planning, as one day, we hope that our organisation will no longer be needed!

Succession planning for Unlimited is one part of our future proofing strategy, which we are just starting to develop. Our Director, Jo Verrent, has taken a fantastically transparent and galvanising approach to this – she's engaged consultants to provide advice and support at board and team away days; we're taking a long view to prepare our thinking, way before any recruitment action might be needed.

We're establishing a Future Proofing Working Group of trustees, who'll be exploring the big strategic questions that have been surfacing in our discussions. Additionally, whilst we already have artist representation on the board, we'll be gathering even broader input from our community of artists too. Our work is artist centered and so any future strategy is meaningless without their participation.

Unlimited is planning on using the **Three Horizons framework** to help us determine and work towards a plan for change, alongside the day to day challenges of delivery. We have three strategic phases as an organisation: as a relatively new CIO and NPO, we're currently in stabilise and solidify – and the transition into the

next stage is not a set point in time but will be informed by indicators of progress and change.

Each phase for Unlimited will demand different skills and approaches in leadership, and therefore different lenses to bring to succession planning.

Our recent shift to a co-chairing model, is also part of our thinking about succession planning for the board. In an unpaid voluntary position that often requires significantly more than a few hours a month, we need to think about all the ways in which we can make these roles more accessible. Sharing the workload, being able to pass the baton at times of illness, or other life pressures, and distributing governance power and perspectives between two co-chairs, feels important.

Succession planning is a key responsibility for a Chair or Co-Chairs and is where any influencing power needs to be particularly carefully held. The task requires attention to the culture of the organisation and the board, the needs of the beneficiaries of the organisation and the wider forces shaping the next five or so years, as far as anyone can predict those!



Ensuring Inclusivity in Succession Planning – HILARY KNIGHT, CHAIR OF COMPANY OF OTHERS

Company of Others (CO) is a dance theatre company based in Newcastle, in the North East of England, working with artists and communities who are othered by society. The company was founded by dancer and choreographer Nadia Iftkhar, who leads it as combined CEO and Artistic Director, and in 2023 the company became an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO).

One of CO's defining characteristics is the close attention that it pays to living its values for artistry, integrity and equity, and it is an organisation that centres on care for its staff, artists, collaborators, community and environment. Upholding these values is a constant process of learning, reflecting and adjusting, and part of my role as Chair is to support the CEO/AD to hold them in balance.

As a Chair of such a values-centred organisation, succession planning is always on my mind. The legal conditions for boards and trustees can have unseen consequences for organisations trying to maintain an equitable and accessible environment. Because we actively seek out people with diverse perspectives and lived experience, some of our trustees may need to participate in ways that don't conform to board norms for set trustee terms. For example, trustees living with disabilities or chronic health conditions may need to be able to take time out, whilst others with caring commitments may only be able to participate for defined periods, as their circumstances allow. However, their contributions are no less valuable for it.

As a board, we also need to consider succession planning for the company and this too, is challenging. Chronic underfunding of the arts, especially of dance in the North East, by successive governments, means that the sector in general has lost their pipeline of talent in arts management and leadership. It is especially challenging for CO, as it is essential that our staff are highly skilled and experienced in working with the communities that we engage. As such, making a wrong step here, risks creating harm to our communities, artists and company.

We are trying to build flexibility and resilience. In practice, this means creating capacity that allows for some ebb and flow within the board and to have an 'always-on' process of rolling trustee recruitment. Our aim is to develop a board that is larger than would be expected for a small arts charity, building additional capacity for trustees to lean in - or step away, as they need to, without risking the overall governance of the company.

Like any board, we look for specific skills in areas like finance and communications, but we prioritise lived experience, values and connections to our community above all. We achieve this, not through recruitment campaigns, but through intentionally seeking out and approaching individuals as we engage with them.

There are no easy solutions to succession planning in small arts organisations, but in keeping our values at the core of our approach, we are finding ways forward that are both equitable and inclusive, and which have care at their heart.

TRANSFORMING GOVERNANCE – What We've Learnt and What's Next for the Sector

An interview by

Annie Jarvis, Director of Strategy and Programmes,
Cause4 with Hollie Smith-Charles, Director of
Creative Health & Change at Arts Council England



Launched in October 2023 by Arts Council England, [Transforming Governance](#) aims to celebrate and strengthen governance in the creative and cultural sector by supporting boards and equivalent oversight groups.

Nearly two years on from the start of the programme, we spoke with Hollie Smith-Charles, Arts Council England's Director of Creative Health & Change, and Programme Lead for Transforming Governance, to understand the impact of Transforming Governance and to explore what's next for governance in the cultural sector.



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Why was Transforming Governance established?

Governance is a vital part of our cultural ecosystem and largely relies on volunteer Trustees who are passionate about arts, culture and the impact of the work that their organisations deliver. This role - requiring fiduciary responsibilities, strategic thinking, sector expertise and the ability to dream and plan long term - is complex.

It is also critical in enabling people of all ages, in every corner of our country, to experience extraordinary creativity and culture - in other words, in ensuring the goals of Arts Council England's 10-year strategy, *Let's Create*, are met. Good governance is a vital characteristic of a well-run organisation and therefore helps ensure that the Arts Council's investments achieve maximum impact and public benefit.

Transforming Governance was set up to celebrate and strengthen governance, and in response to feedback from our funded organisations, which told us they were seeking more advice and support in this area. In particular, our current National Portfolio, which launched in April 2023, includes nearly 1,000 organisations, one fifth of which were new joiners. Our Executive Board and National Council recognised that, whilst there is excellent support available through the Cultural Governance Alliance and others, there was a need for a programme specifically exploring good governance through the lens of the Arts Council's Investment Principles and reporting requirements.

The programme aims to help Chairs, Treasurers and Trustees (or equivalent) better understand their roles and responsibilities, and to feel more confident in managing organisational risk, diversifying their governance structures and supporting inclusive recruitment. It's also an opportunity to facilitate thought leadership and generate new ideas about the future of cultural governance.





What has been involved so far?

A range of activities have taken place – here are just a few examples.

We worked with Cause4 to deliver seven **online workshops**, covering topics that support both new and seasoned trustees, including understanding your role, succession planning, leading and overseeing strategy and becoming more inclusive. A range of guest speakers from across the sector shared personal, diverse experiences of trusteeship and written case studies, FAQs and other resources added to the bank of support.

A Chair Peer Network (facilitated by Cause4) and a Treasurer Peer Network (facilitated by Charity Finance Group), enabled trustees with specialist roles to meet one another, share the challenges they face and explore ideas for addressing them. Topics were wide-ranging including: managing the relationship with senior teams, tackling imposter syndrome, maximising tax reliefs and building financial resilience. These peer-to-peer forums aimed to facilitate lively, productive conversations, so that Chairs and Treasurers could lean on and learn from each other. For the Chair Peer Network, 84% of survey respondents felt that the sessions had had a positive impact on their confidence and/or ability as a Chair.



What are your biggest challenges that the cultural sector is facing?

I suspect that the biggest challenges we have unearthed through Transforming Governance will not come as a surprise. They reflect the findings of other research with leaders, such as Clore Leadership's **2024 World of Work** review and the feedback we hear through, for example, our annual survey of the National Portfolio.

Boards and their executive leadership teams are grappling with complex operating environments and the expectations of trustees are becoming greater and more varied. There is a need to respond to issues such as stretched public funds and increased competition for grants, new technology, polarised discourse and environmental responsibility. All of these areas raise ethical, as well as practical questions for boards.

The passion and commitment of trustees remains undiminished, and Transforming Governance aims to help navigate and unpack these challenges. As well as building communities of practice through peer support and group discussions at the workshops and conferences, we found high demand for very practical support, such as understanding the governance **policies and procedures** which are required for good practice.

Across Arts Council England more broadly, we have also been actively working on ways to reduce our monitoring requirements – something we know through Transforming Governance is an issue for boards and senior leaders. This is an area that we are refining, so that we can also continue to collect the data we need to make the strongest possible case for public funding for arts and culture.

We're testing new ways of working at the moment, and aiming to roll this out from April 2026, particularly so that organisations in receipt of lower levels of Arts Council England funding can reduce their administrative burden.



What is the impact of the programme so far?

Over the past two years, more than 40% of National Portfolio Organisations have engaged with Transforming Governance, including one third of NPOs which have – for a variety of reasons – a higher risk rating for ‘Governance and Management’.

We are delighted with the positive uptake of the programme. Both the workshops and peer networks were over-subscribed and the online [governance resources in our Investment Principles Hub](#) are some of the most downloaded on our website.

Many participants have told us that their confidence and understanding has increased as a result of taking part in the programme, particularly through examples of good practice, case studies from other NPOs and the resources now available through the Transforming Governance pages of our website. Participants have described being “energised”, feeling “safe” and “having plenty of room for conversation and deliberation.” They enjoyed the opportunities for “fresh thinking” and the reassurance of learning “that things aren’t easy elsewhere in the ACE-world.”

Attendees have come from all over England, both new joiners to the Portfolio and organisations with more experience of being an NPO. There has been engagement from a good mix of artforms, disciplines and governance structures, showing that the issues facing boards often cut across geographic or artform/discipline lines and tend to be more linked to, for example, an organisation’s turnover, whether it is building-based, its governance structure and the level of experience of trustees.

We have tried to reflect this in the way that sessions have been structured and the content delivered, and we’re looking at how we can refine that even further in future activities.



What’s next for Transforming Governance?

All of the resources from Transforming Governance so far continue to be available [via our website](#) and I’d urge trustees (or equivalent) to have a browse.

The programme continues throughout 2025/26 with another cohort of the Chair Peer Network and Treasurer Peer Network. Opportunities to take part in Transforming Governance will be advertised via our general e-newsletters and website, or you can sign up to our [mailing list](#) if you would like to connect with the team and find out more.




How would you like to see governance change in the arts sector?

Ever future-facing, the arts and culture sector is already exploring new ideas and models of governance, including youth advisory boards, citizens’ assemblies and co-chairing. We discussed some of these last year in Lincoln, at the [Art of Good Governance](#) conference.

Looking to the future, I think that there are interesting challenges and opportunities emerging for boards from the political shift towards devolution. Whilst this doesn’t necessarily affect individual organisations, or their cultural, charitable or social aims, it poses questions about who makes decisions, where power is (or should be) held in an organisation or community, and where key relationships for cultural organisations might be in the future. Given the dynamic work happening already around the future of governance, I think that our sector is well-placed to innovate in this context and there’s no doubt that these issues will be fully explored as part of Transforming Governance this coming year.

EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE LEADERSHIP MODELS – Case Studies from Across the Sector

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At a time when leading an arts organisation has become even more challenging, it can be hugely valuable to look outside of our own models of governance and leadership to see what others across the sector are doing differently.

In this piece, we've decided to explore several case studies that offer alternative models of leadership, from Citizens' Juries and Community Boards to Youth Leadership Panels and Co-Chairing relationships.

Case study 1

Birmingham Museums – Citizens’ Jury

“The voice of the museum is to some extent, the voice of the people, and we want everyone to hear us a mile coming.”



Citizens' Jury – photo by Birmingham Museums Trust

In the summer of 2024, [Birmingham Museums Trust](#) (BMT) made history by introducing the UK’s first Citizens’ Jury in a museum setting.

5,000 Birmingham residents received an invitation through the post, signed by museum Co-CEOs Sara Wajid and Zak Mensah, calling on citizens to come together to deliberate on the question: *What does Birmingham need and want from its museums, now and in the future; and what should Birmingham Museums Trust do to make these things happen?*

This led to a rigorous selection process, with representatives from local government, the commercial sector, the voluntary sector, education, the cultural and historical sector, deliberative democracy, and other community groups to form an independent Oversight Panel to guarantee a ‘strong, equitable, and impartial process’.

The result was the formation of a 28-person strong citizens' jury, with participants aged 18 to 79 and from a range of backgrounds. The Jury met for 30 hours across evenings online and for three full days in-person. They heard from 12 ‘experts’, visited three exhibitions, and shared their own views and lived experience.



Citizens' Jury – photo by Birmingham Museums Trust

As part of their role, the Jury **produced** 11 ‘Roles of the Museum’, and 20 recommendations, covering four key themes: funding and marketing; community engagement and collaboration; exploring diverse perspectives; new audiences, accessibility and inclusivity.

Crucially, the BMT will remain accountable to the Jury, providing regular updates on its progress against the recommendations, and will continue to share its learnings across the sector.

These Citizens' Juries, and other forms of participatory engagement, are increasingly seen as important tools to enable cultural and heritage sector institutions to re-engage with the public and increase the impact of their work.

Whilst BMT’s core governance structure remains in place (with a full board of seven Trustees), the charity has demonstrated that community leadership can prove hugely beneficial in shaping our cultural future.

“With so many pressures driving polarisation and eroding the institutions which bring people together, BMT is embracing deliberative democracy, not only as a way of making better decisions, but as part of our contribution to the renewing of democracy itself. This Jury is not a one-off: it’s the first step in modelling the kind of democratic society that we would like to live in.”

Sara Wajid, Co-CEO

Case study 2

Clean Break – Co-Chairing

“You get a stronger sense of co-production in the oversight and governance, because the reach is wider and deeper...for us, the deeper meaning of co-chairing was relational...It brought stronger empathy and sympathy into decision making, greater alchemy for advocacy and campaigning. Co-chairing meant a stronger governance for delivering the power of theatre to transform lives.”

Tanya Tracey, former Co-Chair of Clean Break

Clean Break (a London-based charity using theatre to create personal and political change) began with a firm belief in the power of theatre to transform lives.

Founded by two women in prison, the charity continues to raise difficult questions, inspire debate, and to help to effect change in the lives of women who are criminalised through its unique work - on stage, in prisons and in the community.

Since 1979, Clean Break has been the only women’s theatre company of its kind, and its model of Co-Chairing highlights the organisation’s approach to inclusion, advocacy and empowerment.

According to Tanya Tracey and Alison Frater, Clean Break’s former co-chairs, experience, diversity and compassion are the cornerstones of the good governance approach. Co-chairing, for them, was about making connections, ensuring that the governance process stimulated lived experience, and kept the company’s members in charge of the story.

In 2024, Clean Break announced two new Co-Chairs - award-winning actor and director Josette Bushell-Mingo OBE and writer, actor, and artist Sarah-Jane Dent.

The plan to recruit two further Co-Chairs was wholly intentional, with a **recruitment pack** shared widely across the sector and a statement articulating that

‘as a company we are passionate about shared leadership, and collaboration and our Co-Chair model embeds these principles.’

This model of co-leadership is not entirely new to the sector, and in fact has become ever more popular given the **increasing strain** placed on charity chairs, with research conducted by experts such as **Claire Antrobus** suggesting that ‘two heads are better than one’.

Clean Break Members Festival 2024 – photo by Tracey Anderson



Case study 3

Theatre Peckham – Youth Leadership

New ideas, new stories and new partnerships – all are made in [Theatre Peckham](#), a multi-award-winning theatre and performing arts academy located in southeast London. Its mission is to cultivate an inclusive and representative society where everyone can participate, lead and enjoy arts and culture, providing access to the arts for young people from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds.



Theatre Peckham, Cultural Leaders

Theatre Peckham's board has undergone significant transformation to reflect the diversity and values of the community that it serves. 69% of trustees identify as Black, Asian, or ethnically diverse, 62% are women, and 15% identify as neurodiverse.

Trustees work closely with the staff, sharing their expertise and providing support both in and outside of board meetings. Its wider programmes ensure that young people from the local community see themselves represented in leadership roles, allowing them to envision their own potential in the creative industries.

One of the most notable examples of the charity's commitment to representation is the [Young Ambassadors Programme](#), which creates a supported pathway towards trusteeship and leadership for young people from underrepresented

communities. Young ambassadors are given the opportunity to watch productions and give feedback, gain insight into development and marketing projects, share ideas with staff and trustees, curate their own events and panel discussions, and participate in and present at board meetings and AGMs.

The board places a strong emphasis on mentorship and professional development, with over 50% as first-time trustees, and one of the young ambassadors has transitioned into a trustee role, highlighting the clear pathway for emerging talent into governance.

The board's dedication to removing barriers for young people was a key factor that inspired judges to shortlist the charity in the 2025 Board Equity, Diversity and Inclusion category of the [Charity Governance Awards](#).

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“Our board of trustees are a collective of visionaries, advocates, and change-makers. Together, we aim to create a vibrant and inclusive environment.”

Suzann McLean, CEO

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