Association of Chairs

Supporting charity and non-profit chairs

Working one-to-one

Working with trustees series

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Beacon programme

Beacon
For Chairs leading smaller charities

This guide has been written to apply to charities of all sizes, but context does matter.

Where we think the size or staffing of the charity may make a difference to the approach to take, we have made this clear.

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Why working one to one with your trustees matters

Each of us has different motivations for getting involved as trustees. We bring different life experiences, perspectives and skills. And we have different ideas about what we are willing to contribute and what being a good trustee looks like

As Chair a key role is to get to know the unique individuals on your board and to create the conditions for them to thrive and contribute.

This first guide in our ***Working with trustees*** series focuses on what you as Chair can do to build your one to one relationships with your board members. The second title ***Working as a team*** looks at how to create a good team. The third title ***Working through difficult board relationships*** explores what you can do when there are difficulties among one or more trustees.

Individual trustees deserve attention. They are volunteering their time and effort and it is right for the charity, led by the Chair, to show appreciation and help individuals to give of their best.

It will also pay off. There are too many stories of charity trustees who:

- don't understand what is expected of them
- don't feel noticed or appreciated by the Chair or board
- feel they are disadvantaged or a 'token' representative
- don't feel they are achieving anything much by attending
- don't feel their contribution is developing or going anywhere.

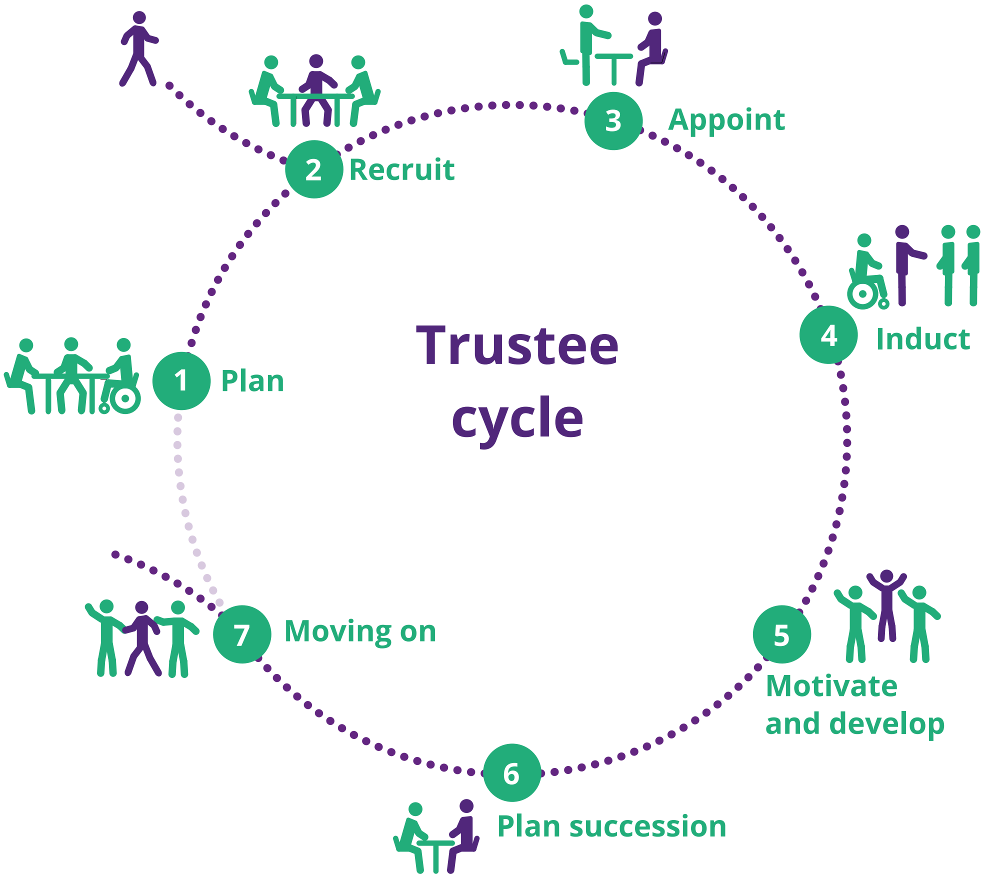
The relatively simple measures suggested in this guide, all of them based on real life experience, make it much more likely that the charity will get more commitment and effective contributions from its trustees, and will need to spend less time and energy dealing with the consequences of trustees' frustration, disillusionment or under-performance.

"One of the initiatives I am proud to have introduced is a periodic one-to-one with individual trustees. It's proved an invaluable opportunity to get to know individual trustees better than is possible in the hectic environment of a board meeting itself. My only regret is not introducing the idea sooner!"

Andy Chaplin, *Chair, Manor Gardens Welfare Trust*

Trustee cycle

It can be helpful to think about your relationship with each of your trustees as a cycle, starting with planning and going from the time your trustee is recruited to the time of leaving. What they need from you and your organisation will change as they progress through this cycle. A lot of the time you will be working with trustees who are already in post, in this case the emphasis will be on motivating and developing them, and when the time is right, managing their departure.



Plan your approach

Assembling and motivating a team of individuals does not happen by accident. It takes time, effort and intention. It helps to think through your approach, and how you will work with and support each trustee.

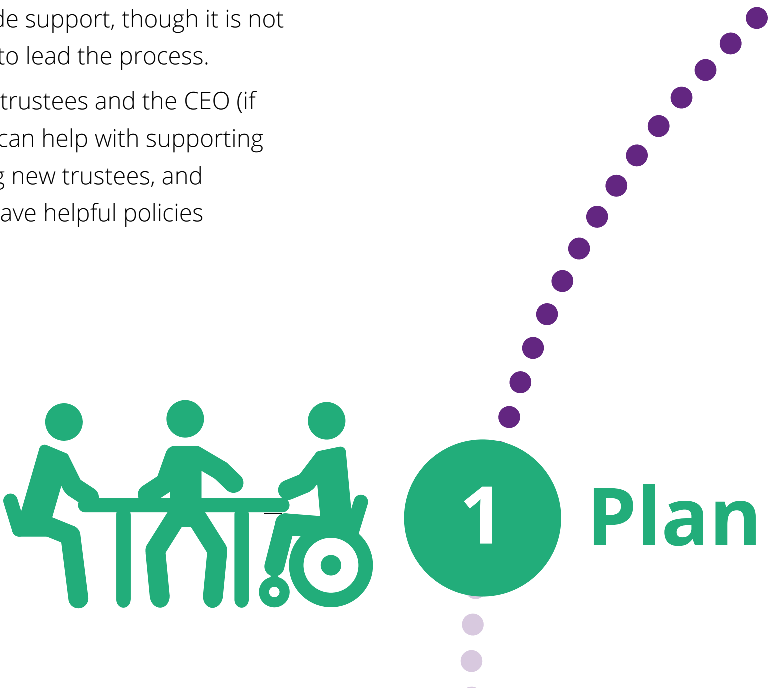
Be clear about the things that only you as Chair can do and where you can enlist the help of others. For example, for recruitment you might consider a working group or sub-committee who can lead on identifying the extra skills and qualities needed on the board, and the approach you want to take to finding new trustees. Trustee selection is a board responsibility. And your CEO, if you have one, can provide support, though it is not the CEO's role to lead the process.

Similarly other trustees and the CEO (if you have one) can help with supporting and developing new trustees, and ensuring you have helpful policies in place.

Trustee policies and procedures

Good policies and procedures help you work well with trustees.

See our **list of key trustee policies** that help, such as a conflict of interests policy, a code of conduct and powers to remove a trustee.



Recruit

It's vital to get the right people on your board, so take the time to get this process right. How you describe and advertise the role, any notes you provide about your charity and what you are looking for shape your trustee's expectations. An interview should normally be part of any recruitment process, conducted by a small panel rather than one individual. Other trustees can join or even take the lead in interview panels. It is also a chance for the candidate to get to know you and your charity. As Chair you may want also to suggest a conversation with a chosen candidate before formal appointment. You may also want to invite a prospective new trustee to attend one or more board meetings as an observer before a commitment is made.

Trustee recruitment resources

There are resources and organisations to help with trustee recruitment. Our resource list signposts to information and help with:

- Planning recruitment
- Conducting a skills audit
- Finding trustees
- Creating an inclusive board.

Remember to check what your governing document says.

What every prospective board member needs to know BEFORE joining

Here is a checklist of what should be clear to any applicant before committing to join the board. It can save so much trouble later if these things are clear from the beginning:

- What, *honestly*, are the likely demands on time? It can be a fatal mistake to underplay these: actual meetings, preparation time, email activity and other demands in between meetings, helping run the charity (sometimes applicable in smaller charities), possible extras like sitting on recruitment panels, attending external meetings, joining a committee or (if you are unlucky) getting involved in disciplinary hearings.
- What are the expectations on attendance? What flexibility is there on the timing and place of meetings? If the trustee cannot attend in person every meeting, can alternatives such as Skype be used?
- If the trustee can't come to a board meeting, is it expected that their views are given by email or telephone instead?
- Are there any particular tasks assigned to, and skills required for, this vacancy, or is there flexibility on that?
- Are there any potential conflicts of interest? It is essential to disclose and discuss these before committing rather than find out about them afterwards!
- Will expenses be reimbursed? What's included?
- What is the commitment as to the expected term of office? Might that term be renewed, if so, for how long?
- What expectations are there about behaviours or conduct?
- What briefing, training or other support will be available?

If you are aware of acute problems facing the charity, it is only fair to disclose these to the candidate before formal appointment. Otherwise, resentment may later undermine the trustee's sense of commitment.

Many boards keep drawing from the same pool of networks and miss out on the opportunity to have more diverse talents. Do consider what you are doing to go beyond the usual suspects and to make your board more welcoming to others e.g. the timing of your meetings or offering child care costs. This is not just about the nine protected characteristics protected by law. The charity governance code recommends looking also at different backgrounds, life experiences, career paths and diversity of thought. If you are trying to diversify your board it helps if the interview panel includes someone from the group you are trying to attract onto the board e.g. someone of the same age, gender or race. It can also help to recruit more than one trustee at a time to reduce the danger of laying unrealistic expectations on a single person, or leaving a lone recruit feeling isolated.

It is good practice, as part of the interview for a board vacancy, to allow time (usually towards the end), for a candidate to raise any questions about the role or charity. Many charities find it helpful to go further and offer the chance to shortlisted candidates to have opportunities to meet the Chair and/or a small group of trustees, and/or senior staff, in advance, so that they understand more about the charity before the formal interview. These are all ways of increasing understanding of what the charity and the role are about.

It is risky to rely entirely on an interview, or personal contacts alone, in choosing a new trustee. It is widespread and good practice to request from applicants as a first step a CV, together with a brief covering letter explaining why they are interested in the role and what they hope to bring to it. That enables you and other chosen members of the board to share in the responsibility of judging and selecting, on a more objective, transparent basis. It is also good practice to request from shortlisted or chosen candidates a couple of referees, to enrich your understanding of the qualities of the candidates and act as a prudent cross check on what they are claiming in the interview and CV. No Chair should feel inhibited about making these normal requests.

"Initial impressions and conversations set the tone for the whole relationship so it's important to get these right."

Helen Baker, *Chair, Shelter*

Appoint

Someone (e.g. you, another trustee, your company secretary or legal adviser) will need to attend to the formalities required by the Charity Commission or Companies House on appointment of a new trustee and, in the case of charitable companies, director. Details on this and other important requirements relating to safeguarding and other aspects are available in section 3.1 of the Charity Commission's **The Essential Trustee**. In addition, the Chair sets the tone in making a new member feel welcome. Many Chairs find it helpful to write a brief, formal letter of welcome to the new trustee, including the formal date of appointment, the term of office and possibilities of renewal. This can also cross refer to any role description or background note already seen by the candidate as part of the recruitment process and summarise arrangements for induction. A one to one chat with the Chair soon after appointment goes down well, encouraging an open relationship and showing that the new recruit is valued. This chat can help identify any particular needs for induction.

It is also important to make a point of welcoming a new trustee formally at the start of his or her first board meeting. Many charities couple this with an opportunity to meet informally and celebrate before or after the formal meeting, so that the new recruit feels noticed, welcomed and appreciated.

Induct

If induction is too hit-and-miss, experience suggests that it takes much longer for a new trustee to contribute effectively. The Chair needs to make sure this is thought about in advance. Many Chairs ask a relevant board committee, or a sub group or individual board member, to review induction arrangements from time to time.

"A first crucial step to getting an engaged and motivated board is a well planned and thought through induction. The time and effort you put in at the start of their trustee journey will inevitably support their contributions later on."

Nick Handley, *Chair, Ensemble Reza*

There are elements common to the induction of all trustees. They should receive at the outset:

- The governing document or constitution.
- Any agreed code of conduct.
- The current strategy document (if you have one).
- The annual report and accounts.

The **Essential Trustee**, freely available from the Charity Commission, should be part of the pack. But the Chair also needs to protect the recruit from a sudden tidal wave of information. It can be very off-putting to receive an enormous bundle of bumph; selective is better at the start. In due course, it will be important for trustees to understand the core policies of the charity and it is recommended that they should read **The Charity Governance Code** (prepared by umbrella bodies representing all shapes and sizes of charity and supported by the Charity Commission), but not all at once. The Chair can help them focus on priorities in the early stages.

To complement the information pack, the Chair will want to ensure that the new trustee has an early opportunity to meet individually at least some of the board, for instance, chairs of any board committees; key staff and or volunteers. There is nothing like a personal conversation to get a feel for the nature and significance of the work that is going on, the achievements of, and challenges for, the charity. Similarly, if at all possible new trustees should be encouraged to see the work of the charity on the front line at first hand. It can be mutually helpful for the new trustee to do this together with the Chair or another board member.

There may be individual induction requirements. An early chat with the Chair can identify these. For instance, the new recruit may lack confidence in understanding a balance sheet or management accounts and need some help with that. Or they may have lots to offer the charity but as yet know little about charity governance, so they may benefit from being taken through **The Essential Trustee** or **Charity Governance Code** by a more experienced trustee or even attend a relevant training course.

Many Chairs also encourage a system of mentors or buddies for new trustees: if the recruit indicates interest, another trustee is asked to work alongside the new recruit and meet from time to time to explain things and answer questions or give advice. Of course, if the new member has been recruited for a particular purpose, such as to take over as Treasurer or as the lead trustee on safeguarding, the predecessor in that role is the likely person to take the lead in briefing and mentoring.

"A buddy or mentor can be invaluable to a new trustee; someone to go to, to ask what you might perceive as a daft question."

Jane Hustwit, *Chair, York CVS*

Motivate and develop

There is great variety in the ways in which Chairs can try to relate helpfully to individual trustees without inordinate demands on precious time. But however it is done, it will be more successful if it is deliberate and thought through, so it is not just those with the sharpest elbows that get attention. Here are some key building blocks.

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Motivate and develop

Building blocks of a good relationship between Chair and individual trustee

A **Conversation as part of induction** includes early thoughts on particular interests and role of this individual, arrangements for induction and any mentoring. You may also want to agree some goals, or particular early tasks where the new trustee can help.

B **Keep conversation ongoing.** Have another one to one (in person or by phone/Skype) after a couple of board meetings to check how it's going, give feedback to encourage confidence, pick up any further requests for training or help, discuss thoughts about future development of this person's contribution. If not already done, assign an initial role on a committee or task force if appropriate.

C **Invite new trustee's feedback to the board**. Fairly early on, invite new trustees to give the board their impressions while their eyes are still fresh. It gives you valuable information and helps establish their value and status.

"Asking for a new trustee's fresh-eyed feedback to the board early in their tenure can help to establish the new trustee's value and experience quickly for the rest of the board".

Karen Brown, *Chair, Mines Advisory Group*

D **Make a point of thanking individual trustees**, personally and at board meetings, when they make a particular contribution or go the extra mile for the charity. Recognition and appreciation go a long way.

E **Annual review conversation** to discuss trustee's views and Chair's feedback on what is going well, or not so well, concerning the trustee's role on the board; how it might develop or change; any need for training or more information. Since this focuses on the individual, it is separate from a collective board self-review. Some better resourced charities add a 360' dimension, soliciting views from other trustees or senior staff, others confine review discussions to a more informal and briefer conversation, but it needs to feel focused and deliberate. However you do it, it can enable individual trustees to share things that they might be inhibited about saying in meetings, and give you an idea of what you or others might be doing differently. The task of conducting these conversations can sometimes be shared with the Vice Chair or other senior trustee on the Chair's behalf. If you'd like more information on how you might approach this kind of conversation see our **One to one trustee review** tool.

"An individual review conversation gives an opportunity for each trustee to raise any worries or concerns which they may not feel able (or appropriate) to raise in a normal, relatively formal meeting ...

Also, to invite some personal feedback on what the Chair might be doing more, or less of!"

Steve Hickey, *former Chair of Community Transport Association and St George's Hospital Charity*

F **Informal contact** In addition to (not instead of) structured conversations, it also helps to make opportunities to have informal chats over the telephone, a drink or occasional meal, as this can assist your rapport and make more official requests and collaboration easier.

Succession

Some charities conduct a slightly more elaborate review when a trustee’s term is coming up for possible renewal. It’s a chance to discuss carefully the pros and cons of a further term, and whether this is an opportunity for change. Having clearly agreed terms of office makes this far easier. It’s a good idea to put discussion of a further term in the context of the charity’s current strategy and the skills that are now needed most. As Chair it’s important to create a culture and expectation that renewing the board is important, you are not letting the organisation down by stepping down, and trustees expect to move off the board when their term is up. Sometimes you need to encourage people to leave, that’s a topic we address in the third title in our series ***Working through difficult board relationships***.

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Plan succession

Moving on

When a member's time on the board is near its end, ask the trustee's views on a replacement and on the future of the board and charity in some sort of exit interview. Take the time to specify some of what that person has contributed and thank them properly. Encourage the trustee to continue to serve elsewhere where appropriate.

Encourage the board to collectively thank and celebrate their colleague's time with the charity. If people leave on a high, it is good for the reputation of the charity, too.

In conclusion

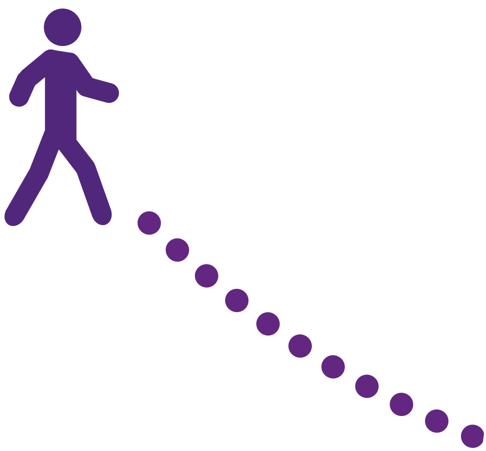
Following the trustee cycle will help create the conditions for each of your trustees to feel engaged, valued and able to contribute effectively, this in turn helps you build a high performing board.

It's also important to get your individual trustees to work well together as a team, a topic we will explore in the next title in this series ***Working as a team***. Despite your best efforts, difficulties can still arise and our final title in the series ***Working through difficult board relationships*** will look at this.

Working well with your trustees requires you to invest time and effort, our experience is that you, your board and organisation will benefit and ultimately the people and causes you serve.

Please let us know if you find this guide useful, and if there are ways we can make it better for people like you. This is work in progress for all of us.

You can contact us at
info@associationofchairs.org.uk



Additional AoC resources

The following resources mentioned in this guide are available from the AoC website:

www.associationofchairs.org.uk

- **Trustee policies and procedures**
- **Trustee recruitment resource list**
- **One to one trustee review tool**

Additional resources

- **The Essential Trustee**
- **The Charity Governance Code**

The Association of Chairs champions good chairing in the voluntary sector.

We support Chairs and Vice Chairs of charities and non-profit organisations to lead their boards effectively and so ensure delivery of the organisation's mission.

Our resources are designed specifically for Chairs and Vice Chairs to support them in their skilled and demanding roles.

To find out more, and to join, visit **www.associationofchairs.org.uk**

Working with trustees

Having good trustees and getting the best from them is critical to good governance. Our ***Working with trustees*** *series focuses on what you as Chair can do to nurture these important relationships.*

There are three separate practical guides:

- **Working one-to-one** *looks at how you work with your trustees individually.*
- ***Working as a team*** *looks at how you can help your trustees work together.*
- ***Working through difficult board relationships*** *looks at what you can do when relationships with one or more trustees is proving troublesome.*

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