



GirlDreamer



**Trustees
Unlimited**

**'STEP ON BOARD'
BECOMING A TRUSTEE**



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INTRODUCTION & USING THIS RESOURCE

Our friends over at Trustees Unlimited kindly put together this resource to signpost you to all the information you need to understand the role of trustees, to apply and secure a position on a charity board.

In this guide, there is content to help you think about trusteeship and prepare for the briefing session. There is content on adapting or redeveloping your CV and making the transition to a charity board.

Finally, we also cover making an application and undertaking due diligence before joining a charity board.

**BRIEFING
SESSION**

**FINDING THE
RIGHT ROLE**

**APPLYING FOR
VACANCIES &
SECURING A
ROLE**



PREPARING FOR THE BRIEFING SESSION

2.1 Questions to ask before becoming a trustee

1. What is a trustee?

Trustees are the people who serve on the governing body of a charity. They may be known as trustees, directors, board members, governors, committee members or something else. They have ultimate legal responsibility for the charity's management and administration.

Trustees come from all walks of life, from professionals to people with personal skills and lived experience. There are around 800,000 trustee positions in the UK. 48% of trustees are female. 66% of trustees are over 50 years of age but young people can make great trustees and should be encouraged to join boards.

2. Why should I become a trustee?

There are a number of good reasons for being a trustee. For example, you:

- Will have a lot of skills and experiences to bring to a charity's board.
- Will develop transferable skills, improve your CV, and broaden your experience
- Will meet a wideV range of new people which could open doors to all sorts of other networks and opportunities
- Have the chance to shape, support and contribute your ideas and knowledge to a meaningful cause and organisation.

Trustees play a vital role in a sector that contributes significantly to the character and wellbeing of the country.

3. How can I contribute to a charity board?

Around 50% of all charities are looking for new trustees at any one time.

Each charity is in need of a range of professional skills, such as law, finance, fundraising, IT, HR, PR, marketing as well as lived experience and 'soft' skills. However, you do not need to be a specialist to be valuable. If you apply fresh perspective, commitment, and a bit of common sense, you'll be doing a good job.



4. What do trustees do?

Being a trustee is like a non-executive director of a company. A trustee's role is to provide checks and balances and oversight of the organisation's performance, ethics, finances, and risks. Trustees ensure that the charity complies with all relevant law and that it is well-run, in good financial shape and importantly, delivering its charitable objects to the best of its ability.

Trustees support and challenge the management team (where there is one) on strategy and major decision-making so they can deliver the charity's activities effectively.

A trustee board should not interfere inappropriately in the day-to-day operations but, from time to time, particularly in small charities, trustees may well be more involved.

5. What do I need to know about charity?

To be a responsible trustee, you need to have an understanding of the role of charity in society. For many trustee positions, you will not be expected to have board level experience already or be an expert in either the specific cause or in charity law.

What is vital is that you feel passionate about the mission of the charity you join and that you understand your duties and responsibilities as a trustee.

The Charity Commission has produced guidance for trustees on the role of a trustee and a trustee's legal duties which can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-essential-trustee-cc3-new-version

6. How can I prepare to become a trustee?

A lot of charities will provide new trustees with an induction and training. With or without this, it's important for you to feel comfortable with the charity's procedures, systems, and processes and confident in your understanding of the charity's mission, its activities, and achievements.

It is sensible to request and review a copy of the charity's annual report, finances, and governing documents prior to joining a board. It might also be worthwhile asking if you can sign a non-disclosure agreement and observe a trustee meeting before you officially join and talk to some of the other trustees.



It is also important, and rewarding, to meet the people involved in the charity and where appropriate, see the charity's work first-hand and meet some of the beneficiaries.

7. Is being a trustee a voluntary role?

Unlike non-executive directors of a company, trustees shouldn't expect to be paid other than legitimate, agreed, out of pocket expenses. It is not forbidden to pay trustees, but it requires approval from the Charity Commission and in practice it is the exception rather than the norm.

8. How often do trustees generally meet?

Depending on the size and complexity of a charity, trustees will usually meet as a board on average between four and eight times per year. A well-chaired meeting, in normal circumstances, should not last longer than two hours.

9. What is expected of trustees between board meetings?

You will be expected to read papers carefully in advance of meetings and make notes of issues that you do not understand or where you have comments.

There are likely to be sub-committees where you can apply your specialist expertise or interests (e.g. finance committee). Sub-committee meetings take place in addition to board meetings, usually on a quarterly basis.

You'll be able to contribute much more and get more

out of your role if you attend the occasional event, offer introductions and connections to the charity, or support the senior management with a particular project.

Trusteeship can be demanding in terms of time, skills, knowledge, and abilities. It is therefore a good idea to clarify with a charity during the interview and appointment process what will be expected of you.

10. How long will I be a trustee for?

Most trustee boards have a fixed term of membership (e.g. three years) with a limit on how many terms you can serve as a trustee. The trustee terms of office will usually be set out in the charity's governing document.

11. Could I incur personal liability as a trustee?

It is extremely rare, but not impossible, for trustees to be held personally liable either to the charity for a financial loss caused by them acting improperly or to a third party. However, there are a number of steps which a charity and trustees can take to reduce (but not eliminate) the risk of personal liability.

The Charity Commission expects trustees to take their role seriously while also recognising that most trustees are volunteers who sometimes make honest mistakes. Charity law generally protects trustees who have acted honestly and reasonably. Some charities also provide trustee indemnity insurance.



If the charity is incorporated as a company, trustees may also incur personal liability in their capacity as company directors.

12. What is good governance of a charity?

First and foremost, trustees need to make sure that a charity is always focused on its mission and meeting its charitable objects to the best of its ability.

Trustees have the responsibility to ensure that the charity complies with its legal, financial, and ethical obligations. On a practical level, trustees need to make sure that the charity is accountable to the Charity Commission and Companies House (if it is incorporated) and files its report and accounts on time.

Good governance means having sensible internal controls and policies to govern the charity's operations (from personnel, fiscal, risk to legal matters). A useful framework of good governance developed to help guide trustees is [The Charity Governance code](#).

13. What questions might be useful to ask at board meetings?

What are the charity's headline results since the last meeting?

Are we making best use of resources to fulfil our mission?

What is the evidence that demonstrates that we are achieving our objectives?

Are we focusing on the right things or have we drifted into activities that are inconsistent with our core charitable aims?

What is the state of our finances, including expenditure and adequacy of resources?

How are we progressing with fundraising targets?

Do we need to review any contracts or major commitments?

Are there any areas we might require some specialist advice? (e.g. pension schemes, redundancies, property, investment management, charity law)

Are there issues or risks relating to the conduct of the charity generally?

What are the current obstacles and what is not going so well?

2.2 Reading suggestions

Below we list some reading which you might find useful as a follow up to the briefing session and in preparation for your role.

The Good Trustee Guide Summary: This document provides comprehensive information about a trustee's role, and guidance on developing an effective trustee board. The updated edition covers current legal and regulatory frameworks and includes an extensive range of best practice guidance from voluntary sector support agencies and regulators.

The Essential Trustee: is the Charity Commission's guidance document outlining the requirements of trustees.

2.3 CV Template for Trustee roles

This section details some key things to think about and a template CV to help you prepare.

First, choose a clean, professional font, such as Arial, Trebuchet or Verdana. Your CV then needs to cover the following sections:

Your Name

In bold, right at the top! There's no need to write 'CV'.

Profile

- Your profile should briefly describe you as a professional, in 3 - 4 sentences, and what you can offer a board.
- The average recruiter in the UK spends 12 seconds looking at a CV before discounting or considering it so it is important to get this right.
- Use words like 'I' and be positive. For example, "I am an effective team-player" sounds more positive and confident than, "I like working as a member of a team".
- Describe what you are interested in, for example, "I am keen to use my finance skills on the board of a charity that works in the mental health area."

Skills

- Some people list a range of their key skills.
- If you do, make them relevant to a board position, so focus on things such as strategic thinking, risk management, mergers & acquisitions.



Employment

- Should start with your most recent experience.
- Include the job title, organisation, and dates of employment.
- Always include some information about the organisation to give a sense of scale.

Describe responsibilities of the role but focus more on specific achievements.

- Keep the sentences short or better still, use bullet points.

Voluntary experience

- Most people looking to transfer from the commercial sector will be able to demonstrate their commitment through the voluntary work they do, which might include things such as fundraising. So, include anything such as the London to Brighton Bike Ride or coaching of a rugby team.
- Include any prior trustee experience here.

Professional qualifications, professional memberships, training

- Start with your degree or post-graduate degrees and add any other professional qualifications.
- Professional memberships are important but leave out low level items such as 'trained on Excel'.

Personal interests

- Not often used in the commercial sector but done well this helps add a layer of texture to your CV.

Contact details

- It is not necessary to put your personal contact details at the beginning of your CV.
- Provide your address, email, landline, mobile and links to a professional networking profile such as LinkedIn.
- If you include daytime contact numbers or email addresses, you should expect to be contacted at these times.

References

Available on request. However, you might choose to include a specific individual for a particular role.



2.4 Example personal statement

When applying for roles, you will be asked to provide a covering letter or personal statement setting out how your skills and experiences meet the trustee specification.

It is important to cover both your professional background and your personal interest in the organisation and/or the cause it addresses, in order to demonstrate your motivation for joining as a trustee.

I have been looking for a suitable charity trustee role for some time now, that would allow me to combine my professional expertise in financial decision making and investment management, with the strong interest in music I have always had outside of my professional career. I was therefore excited to see the trustee roles available at XXX, an organisation I have already had considerable engagement with, and which focuses on new music, which is what I am most passionate about.

I have been following the work of for some time and have been in touch with for about a year now after some initial contact through the XXX twitter feed. Although my professional career has been split between academia and finance, I have been heavily involved in high level amateur music throughout my life, singing with a number of top choirs, including the World Youth Choir for many years, BBC Symphony Chorus, London Philharmonic Choir, and currently the ZZZ Singers.

My real passion has always been contemporary and new music and in November 2011 I co- created an experimental 'reality' opera, which combines my professional/academic specialism in behavioural finance with vocal performance to create the world's first 'reality opera'. The work creates an artificial, but functioning, open outcry trading floor, where the traders are required to trade by singing specific phrases in pursuit of financial objectives. As well as creating the conceptual cohesion and market structure of the work itself, I co- ordinated all the funding, production, and vocal training of the musicians. I also organised speakers and an art exhibition for the premiere, which I hosted in London's Mansion House in 2011.

Subsequent to this I've been working to set up a performance arts movement to develop works grounded in concepts from finance, social sciences, and decision sciences. I recently contributed a description of both and the broader movement to my own Sampler blog.

From this I hope it is evident that my passion for new music extends way beyond passive consumption: I develop creative ideas, bring people and skills together, promote and sell concepts to get them off the ground, and have a proven track record of taking conceptual ideas to practical fruition.

My interest in this trustee role is not just because of the music, but because I want to have the opportunity to apply my specialist professional expertise in decision making, investment, financial management, and strategic planning (and execution) to something outside of my day job that I'm passionate about. The finance trustee role with XXX is a perfect match with both my interests and capabilities.



FINDING THE RIGHT ROLE

3.1 Preparation for an interview

So, you've sent in your application and you've been invited to meet a Chair, CEO, or board members of an organisation you are thinking of joining.

What should you consider when preparing?

Initial thinking and reflecting

Background and motivation

- Motivation for role – what is it that attracts you to the role/organisation?
- What are the key synergies from your experience that you will bring?
- How does this fit with your long-term plans, if any?

Understanding of the organisation

Do your due diligence, including:

- Review their website and Annual Report and Accounts (<http://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk/showcharity/registerofcharities/RegisterHomePage.aspx>) for the past few years;
- Look at their trustee profiles to see what other skills they have on the board already.
- Ask to see their Memorandum & Articles (the charity's governing document).
- Sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement and ask for Management Accounts and last Board Minutes (normally after you have had a first meeting)

Once you have done your due diligence, reflect on what you see as some of the key challenges for the organisation. How could you contribute to tackling those challenges? What questions do you have?



Questions you may be asked at an interview

Charities take different approaches to recruitment of trustees. You may go through a very formal process, meeting with a panel of trustees along with the CEO. Or you may have a series of individual conversations with key trustees and senior staff.

Whatever the format, you should expect to be asked most of the questions below:

Motivation and knowledge of organisation

- Why are you looking for a Chair / Trustee / Treasurer role at this time?
- What attracted you to this role/our organisation?
- From what you know about the role, what do you feel are the key challenges facing the organisation – and you as potentially our new Chair / Trustee / Treasurer?
- What prior experience, knowledge, awareness or understanding would you bring to the role and our mission and work?

Board and/or Trustee experience

- What experience have you previously brought to the role of operating within a board in a charitable, public sector or commercial organisation?
 - 1 - How would you evaluate the contribution that you made?
 - 2 -Where were the tensions?
 - 3 -What would you have done differently?
- If you haven't been on a board before, tell me about your understanding of the role and where might be the area(s) of greatest stretch?
- Given your lack of board experience, why should we choose you over someone with direct prior experience?
- What experience do you have of developing, building, and growing the influence of an organisation?

How have you built credibility with staff, trustees, and volunteers in a previous role? CV and/or broader experience
- What do you consider to be the greatest achievement in your career to date?
- What do you consider to be your strengths?
- How would colleagues or peers describe you?



Questions you should ask at interview

The trustees will be assessing you, but it's also important that you fully understand the commitment you are making, and that you feel confident this is an organisation and group of people you want to join and can make a positive contribution to.

Having done your due diligence, you will probably have detailed questions about the organisation itself, but the following are a guide to additional areas to cover.

- What is the recent history of the organisation? Past issues, problems, successes etc.?
- Current state of the organisation – strengths, weaknesses, problems?
- Future challenges facing the organisation – key factors?
- Members'/Board's/CEO's vision and ambition for the organisation?
- What makes this organisation different to other organisations of its kind?
- Is there a similar organisation you aspire to emulate?
- Internal and External perceptions of the organisation – and your aspirations?
- What is the tone and style of board meetings?
- What are members/the board like to work with?
- What is the Chair like to work with?
- What is the CEO like to work with?
- Confidence in the senior team?
- Key issues/challenges for the board?
- Immediate priorities?
- Medium/longer term priorities?
- Time commitment?
- Conflicts of interest?



3.2 Due diligence for prospective trustees

This list of questions has been designed to support prospective trustees in making informed decisions about becoming a charity trustee. These questions should be considered alongside the Fifteen Questions to Ask Before Becoming a Trustees and the Bridging the Gap guidance provided after the initial briefing.

We would encourage prospective trustees to research these areas and probe charities on the answers before accepting positions as trustees. The value of the questionnaire is that new trustees can join a board with their eyes open and with awareness of the way in which a board and organisations governance operates.

It's important to highlight that just because a charity may appear 'deficient' in an area that is not necessarily a reason to avoid becoming a trustee, particularly if the board and senior staff have a rationale for arrangements or are willing to make changes.

Similarly, just because an organisation appears to satisfy each of these questions it does not guarantee there won't be other governance issues which require attention. To further understand the nature of board decision making, trustees may wish to observe a board meeting to get a sense of how trustees interact or take a look at the criteria set out in the sectors [code of governance](#) and consider how this relates to an organisation.

Has the charity filed its annual accounts on time with the charity commission?

Is the organisation operating at a surplus and is this sustainable for the foreseeable future?

What are the sources of the charities funding and is this money restricted for particular projects?

How does the organisation manage long-term commitments e.g. pensions and leases as well as any trading activities or admin costs etc?

What controls and oversight are in place over cash flow management?

Does the charity have an agreed reserves policy and is this being followed?

Does that charity have a risk register which incorporates a range of areas and which is reviewed by the board?

How does the charity manage any reputational risk? Is the charity incorporated? If not, why has it chosen not to incorporate?

Do governance practices reflect the processes and powers set out in the governing document.

Do the charitable purposes set out in the charities governing document reflect the actual work of the organisation?

Does the charity demonstrate continuous improvement and pro-active learning from achievements, impacts and outcomes?

Does the board meet on a regular basis and are accurate records of decisions from these meetings made?

Are their organisational policies in place which relate where appropriate to: finance, fundraising, ethics, personnel and volunteers, equal opportunities, complaints, health and safety, data protection, safeguarding - and if not then why not?

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Management accounts from organisation

Statement of Recommended Practice guidance for charities

Internal controls guidance charity commission

Charity commission website for annual report and accounts

Minutes of trustee meetings

The risk register

Governing document

Companies House website (if company)

Governing document asking about governing structures

Strategy and operational plans CEO report and KPI reports

Organisations policy book

Employee handbook

Trustee handbook

Terms and conditions

Does the charity have access to independent expert advice?



FURTHER INFORMATION

Please get in touch with us if you have questions or would like more information:

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WE HOPE THIS SIMPLE RESOURCE SUPPORTS YOU ON
YOUR JOURNEY AND YOU CONTINUE TO FEEL
UPLIFTED & EMPOWERED.

THANK YOU



**Trustees
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**EDUCATE.
ELEVATE.
EMPOWER.**

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