

INTRODUCTION TO BOARD VOLUNTEERING FAQs

1. HOW TO GO ABOUT BECOMING A VOLUNTEER ON A BOARD?

[Reach Volunteering](#) is where we recommend you start looking. It has a lot of trustee and specialist roles for professionals and those with specialist skills or expertise who are looking for a volunteering role.

Also think about a cause, issue, or charity you would like to get involved in and contact them direct. Very often trustee boards do not actively advertise trustee roles and many welcome a direct approach – so don't be afraid to proactively look for a role.

2. HOW LONG IS THE TENURE FOR A TRUSTEE/BOARD MEMBER?

Good practice is for charity trustees to rotate and have a time limited role. The length of time they can serve should be built into an organisation's constitution and is usually 3-4 years and two terms in office.

At the end of the first term, a review is recommended before standing again for a second term. The review mechanism gives the Trustee the opportunity to step back without feeling obligation to continue.

Restricting the number of terms a trustee/board member can serve ensures that the board thinks actively about [succession planning](#) and consider the [skills and experience](#) that the board requires going forward. It is worth noting that "older" organisations that have a constitution dating back many years may have provision for trustees/board members to serve indefinitely, but this is no longer recognised good practice.

3. HOW DO TRUSTEES ENSURE THAT THE CHARITY IS ACCOUNTABLE?

Accountability is about making sure whatever direction is set by the trustees is followed by the charity and that the rules are not broken. Are we doing the right thing? Are we doing the right thing in the right way?

The rules that need to be followed need to be clear, for example through good governance documents and compliance to laws and regulations relating to the charity and its operation. Does the financial planning make sense? Is the forecasting reliable?

The rules need to be communicated well throughout all areas of the charity and the trustees need to “keep their finger on the pulse” and questioning is a key skill that a trustee needs to bring to the charity to make sure that the charity is compliant. Challenge any inherited consensus – is this still the right way?

Trustees are individually and collectively responsible for the organisation including financial responsibilities – though the activities/mechanics of bookkeeping, accounts, forecasting, budgets etc don’t have to sit with a trustee – organisations with staff will have someone in this role. Where there are no staff a volunteer can be used. It is best practice where possible to contract Accountants and Auditors for end of year accounts and financial statements and information records required for the Charity Commission.

4. HOW DOES A TRUSTEE STAY ON TOP OF LEGISLATION?

- [Sign up for membership to Community Impact Bucks.](#)
- The [Charity Commission](#) provides updates, and you can register to receive those.
- Sign up for [National Council of Voluntary Organisations](#) (NCVO) newsletters for trustees and on governance.
- Chairs of voluntary organisations can sign up for newsletters or join the [Association of Chairs.](#)
- Also ask the question of your fellow trustees and board members.

5. HOW MUCH TIME COMMITMENT IS THERE OVER AND ABOVE TRUSTEE MEETINGS?

It varies depending on what you get involved with in the charity beyond trustee meetings and the work of the charity. But one of Community Impact Bucks’ trustees has estimated all their activity including board meetings, reading papers and interfacing with trustees and staff etc at about 10 hours a month on average with some peaks and troughs.

Do your research into any organisation you are interested in joining, find out what they do, how they are structured, read their financial returns and annual reports. That will give you a sense of what may be expected of you in a trustee/board member role. Ask the question of anticipated time requirements from the charity you are interested in becoming a trustee or board member of.

There will be a marked difference in time commitments where a charity has paid staff – as the governance role should be very clearly separated from the executive role. 75% of charities are volunteer led and volunteer run. In those charities the trustees or management committee may also be delivering the work of the charity. As trustees you need to think about in those circumstance whether there needs to be separation between trustee and delivery roles and whether to recruit a volunteer or a paid member of staff into the latter role.

6. HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT A VOLUNTEER IS RIGHT FOR THE ORGANISATION AND THE TRUSTEE/BOARD MEMBER ROLE?

Ensure that you have a [robust and agreed selection process](#). Each organisation board will develop one that is right for them so there is great flexibility. Draw on best practice from professional recruitment processes.

Ensure that more than one person is involved in meeting potential volunteers, so that there can be discussion and moderation. This can be other trustees, CEO, other volunteers, staff, and beneficiaries.

Trust your instincts.

One way to see if you are a good fit for each other is for the volunteer to do a piece of strategic work or take part in a time limited project with the organisation before exploring a trustee/board member role – this is a great way to test the waters on both sides or agree a trial period to test the waters on both sides.

7. HOW CAN WE ENSURE DIVERSE REPRESENTATION ON BOARDS?

Recognition and application of principles and good practice within Boards. In order to operate effectively, boards need to have both balance and [diversity](#) in the widest sense – reflecting the communities they serve, demographics, the population and lived experience to support good decision-making processes. This includes diversity of thought and skills.

As an example, for a board for a health-related charity a diverse board could be made up of professionals in that field, carers, those with lived in experience, representatives from the demographic and geography of beneficiaries, people with specific skills – financial, marketing, digital etc and those with the skills to support the organisation itself.

8. DOES BEING ON A BOARD FEEL LIKE BEING PART OF A CLOSE-KNIT TEAM?

Yes. What brings you all together is a common purpose, wanting collectively to do good. It is the spirit that you bring yourself. Go in with an open mind and energy. Do the things that you have committed to do. Do not be ill prepared for meetings, read any minutes and papers. Be helpful, offer your expertise, ask what you can get involved with.