

Getting    
on Board 

# How to recruit trustees for your charity

A practical guide



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# Foreword

**A diverse board with a wide range of skills**, experience and perspectives bolsters a charity's resilience and gives it the best chance of fulfilling its purposes into the future. Using this guide from *Getting on Board*, charities of all sizes can successfully and affordably recruit trustees outside their usual pool of contacts.

**Sarah Atkinson, Director for Policy, Planning and Communications,  
Charity Commission**



**Rathbones is delighted to have sponsored** this guide to help charities recruit the best trustees for their organisation. Importantly, the best practice contained within is based not just on theory but on what has been comprehensively proven to work on the ground.

The case for good governance in charities led by trustees that are well-qualified and have a proper understanding of their role has never been clearer. We are all aware of the reputation-shredding stories about charities over the past few years. In addition, disruptive change is happening across the political, economic, legal, social and technological spectrum. It is therefore imperative for every charity to have the best trustees on board.

Governance is a subject close to our hearts at Rathbones. We are a constituent company in the FTSE4Good Index that only includes companies demonstrating strong environmental, social and governance credentials. As a signatory to the United Nations-backed Principles for Responsible Investment, we ensure corporate governance factors are considered when deciding whether we invest in a company on behalf of our clients. Our commitment also extends to supporting charities to understand and manage their own governance responsibilities. As well as supporting great publications such as this, we have had around 3,000 charity trustees attend our trustee education programme over the past 10 years; our aim being to help them perform their roles more effectively.

I am sure that *How to recruit trustees for your charity: A practical guide* will be invaluable to those operating in the charity sector, and we are proud to be involved.

**Andrew Pitt, Head of Charities, London  
Rathbone Investment Management  
rathbones.com**





An incredibly valuable experience...

96%

of trustees in our research said that they learnt new skills by being a trustee

73%

said it boosted their confidence

84%

said it made them happier

So it's surprising that...

74%

of charities find it difficult to recruit trustees

90,000

is the estimated number of trustee vacancies

Until you realise that...

90%

of charities recruit most of their trustees through word-of-mouth and existing networks

only 10%

of trustee vacancies are ever advertised

only 54%

of charities advertise their trustee vacancies on their own websites

# Charity trustees are some of the most important people in a charity.

They have the potential to enable a charity to thrive or bring its operations grinding to a halt, and a charity's service users are dependent on its trustees to make good decisions and lead well.

Charities need a wide range of skills from their trustees, to understand and address the many challenges charities can face and navigate the changing context in which they operate. They need trustee boards that can challenge one another and the status quo, that bring different experiences, knowledge and ideas, but that are able to work constructively and enthusiastically as a team.

That is why board diversity is so important – because diversity brings together the rich mix of qualities that make a healthy and effective board.

## The result?

Only 14% of charities feel well-equipped to meet the compliance, strategic and development needs facing their organisation.

59% of charity boards are not representative of the communities they serve.

# Our programme: Trustee Recruitment Pathways

Following on from [its own research](#)<sup>1</sup> published in May 2017 and [Taken on Trust](#)<sup>2</sup> commissioned by the Charity Commission and published in November 2017, Getting on Board launched the Trustee Recruitment Pathways programme.

Over a period of nine months Trustee Recruitment Pathways worked with 30 charities to develop charity trustee recruitment practice, and to innovate and test free and low-cost trustee recruitment methods. All of our participating charities have an annual income under £2m. 80% had struggled to attract trustees previously and 20% were concerned that they didn't have the right mix of skills on their board to support the charity's future needs.

We wanted to prove: that open trustee recruitment does make a difference; that there is a direct correlation between good open trustee recruitment and success in finding the skills, knowledge and experience that a charity needs; and we wanted to give charities practical tools to recruit the trustees they need.

We also wanted to show that open trustee recruitment would be more likely to attract people who don't already know they want to become a trustee and/or groups of people that may be harder to reach.

80%

of the 30 charities had struggled to attract trustees

"The Trustee Recruitment Pathways programme really helped us understand the importance of finding brilliant trustees."

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## Outcomes of Trustee Recruitment Pathways

Our experience proved that high-quality trustee recruitment processes lead to success in finding the skills, knowledge and experience that a charity needs.

**74%** successfully recruited new trustees during the programme.

**55** is the number of trustees those charities recruited, receiving **111** applications between them. This included individuals who had not previously considered becoming a trustee. Some recruitment campaigns are also ongoing so this number will increase.

Most of those organisations that didn't recruit during the programme had to postpone their recruitment campaign because they were delayed by factors external to trustee recruitment, such as a loss of a major funding stream or departure of key personnel.

**43%** of participating charities felt partly or well-equipped to deal with the challenges their charity is facing. This increased to **85%** at the end of the programme.

**68%** of participating charities felt they were better equipped to deal with the challenges facing their charity than before.

**35%** of charities felt their board was more representative of service users now.

**65%** of charities felt their board was more diverse now.

You can read more findings from the Trustee Recruitment Pathways Programme on [Getting on Board's website](#)<sup>3</sup>.



This guidance sets out what we learnt about trustee recruitment and the key components to running a successful campaign.

It includes **real-life case studies, examples and quotes** from the 30 charities that took part in the programme, as well as lots of **practical tips and templates**.

## Contents

<a href="#">Why openly recruit trustees?</a>	10
<a href="#">8 stages in recruiting trustees</a>	12
<a href="#">Before you start</a>	14
1. <a href="#">Working out what you need on your board</a>	16
2. <a href="#">What to include in your advert</a>	20
3. <a href="#">Developing your recruitment pack</a>	28
4. <a href="#">Targeting your advertising</a>	32
5. <a href="#">Converting interest into applications</a>	42
6. <a href="#">Short-list and interviewing</a>	44
7. <a href="#">Actually getting people onto the board</a>	50
8. <a href="#">Induction: don't fall at the final hurdle</a>	52
<a href="#">Looking ahead</a>	58
<a href="#">Some statistics from the Trustees Recruitment Pathways programme</a>	60
<a href="#">Thank You!</a>	62