

why?

Fact sheet 6

Why governance?

What is governance?

The Governance Hub UK describes governance as the “systems and processes concerned with ensuring the overall direction, effectiveness, supervision and accountability of an organisation.”

What does that mean?

“It’s about ensuring that the organisation delivers what it says it will, for those it says it is for and that it continues to do so.”
(CEO of a small charity)

Who ‘does’ governance?

Ultimately it is the trustees in the governing body who have responsibility for the overall direction and policy of the organisation. Trustees form the board of a charitable organisation, whether it is called a board of trustees, board of governors or a management committee.

What do trustees do?

Trustees are there to:

- Ensure that everything the organisation does is consistent with its values and mission;
- Set and steer the strategy and structure of the organisation;
- Make sure the organisation operates in an effective, responsible and accountable way; and
- Ensure that the trustee board works well and staff and volunteers are supported.

Crucially, trustees work as a team (the board). While individual trustees will bring particular skills, no single trustee will have all the skills necessary to govern the organisation. Governance is very much a shared task and this should lighten the load on everyone.

Why do you need trustees?

Although not all voluntary organisations are required by law to have a trustee board - registered charities and companies must have a board in place - most commissioners and funding bodies will want assurance that good systems of accountability are in place. Beyond that, though, good governance is another way of ensuring that children and young people get the best possible services that are safe and sustainable.

What are trustees signing up to?

Trustees are responsible for the decisions their organisation takes. In some cases this can mean being legally liable for debt incurred or a breach of charity law by the organisation. How an organisation is constituted - for example, if it is a registered charity or not - will impact on how liable trustees are. It is important to seek advice on liability before taking responsibility as a trustee; NCVO has extensive guidance on trustee liability available on their website.

Does safeguarding come into it?

The board of a children’s organisation, along with staff and volunteers, will need to pay special attention to ensure that children and young people are safe within the organisation. They will need clear policies and procedures in place, including around safe recruitment of staff and volunteers and ensuring that all activities minimise risk to children and young people.

Another aspect to be aware of is the new vetting and barring scheme, which will start rolling out in October 2009. Trustees of children’s organisations will need to be registered with the scheme and show that there is no known reason why they cannot work with children and young people (or vulnerable adults). For more information and regular updates, see www.isa-gov.org.uk. For background information, see fact sheet 4 in this series, *Why the new vetting and barring scheme?*

Why Governance?

Trustees have 12 important roles and responsibilities.

1. Ensuring compliance with the governing document: *Knowing what it says and what it means - and sticking to it*
2. Setting and maintaining vision, mission and values: *Knowing what you want to do and why you think it is important*
3. Developing strategy: *Planning how to get there*
4. Establishing and monitoring policies: *Being clear about how you will work and reviewing it regularly*
5. Setting up employment procedures: *Stating how staff will be recruited and treated and complying with regulations such as criminal records checks*
6. Respecting the role of staff and volunteers: *Having clear job descriptions then allowing people enough room to do their jobs*
7. Selecting, managing and supporting the most senior member of staff (the chief officer): *Offering supervision, appraisal and support regularly*
8. Ensuring accountability: *Answering to others*
9. Ensure compliance with the law: *Knowing which laws affect you and working within them*
10. Watching over the money and how it is used: *Ensuring there is enough money and it is spent well*
11. Performing well as a trustee board: *Getting on together and working effectively*
12. Promoting the organisation: *Spreading the word*

How can we involve children and young people?

Involving young people (aged 18-25) as board members can have significant and positive effects on an organisation. *Trust Youth* is a guide to support young trustees to understand what being a trustee means; it can be downloaded from NCVO at www.ncvo-vol.org.uk. If you are having trouble finding young trustees, Do-It.org.uk, a national database of volunteering opportunities, will post vacancies for young trustees.

Currently, charity law does not allow people under the age of 18 to be formal members of boards. However, boards may want to think of other ways to involve children and young people in supporting the organisation's decision-making. One way of doing this can be to have children and young people attend board meetings and offer views from a user perspective. This is probably more suitable for older children, though they may still need support to make a contribution that is meaningful. Another option can be to set up a children and young people's forum to discuss issues and input into decisions about a service. Such a group would likely need considerable support from staff and/or board members, but it can really help to ensure services are on the right track.

Resources

The Charity Commission has essential information for boards especially, *CC3 - The Essential Trustee: What you need to know* www.charity-commission.gov.uk

The Governance Hub provides a variety of useful resources, including *Good Governance: A Code for the Voluntary and Community Sector* www.governancehub.org.uk

NCVCCO has produced *Governing for Children: A beginner's guide to governance in the children, young people and families' voluntary sector*. www.ncvcco.org

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The logo for NCVCCO, featuring the letters 'NCVCCO' in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The letters are contained within a white rounded rectangle with a thick pink border.

helping charities help children

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