



Involving Young People In Organisational Governance

A Good Practice Guide

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Introduction

It is of vital importance that a board understands the people its organisation serves – their needs, their issues, challenges, and what is important to them. The best way to do this is through representation within governance; providing a diverse and relevant voice to help shape the decisions that affect them. 18-24 year olds make up less than 0.5% of all charity trustees¹, with the average age of a trustee in England and Wales at 59 years old². Whilst not surprising, and despite efforts being made, there is still some way to go. There is clearly appetite for the role,

with a survey of under 35 year olds reporting that 85% would consider becoming a trustee³. There are two things that potentially need addressing here. One is that there are clearly young people out there who are interested in the role, so there is either a lack of promotion of the opportunities or there are barriers preventing young people from applying. And two, it might be that the opportunities are not available, and they cannot apply to a role that does not exist.

So what can we do?

We need to **share** good practice, resources, solutions to challenges and **take action** to ensure young people are sat at the table of the **organisations that matter** to them.

¹CAF (Charities Aid Foundation), 'Mind the Gap', 2012

²<http://trusteesweek.org/>

³<https://www.pilotlight.org.uk/blog/whats-the-benefit-of-young-trustees>

Why is it important?

If an organisation runs activity, projects or programmes with or for young people, they should be represented in governance. A new young member will likely have much in common with the rest of the board. After all, they have applied to be a trustee of the organisation for a number of reasons, including an interest in the work that it does. However, being younger, they are probably less aware of previous practice, initiatives, successes or failures which can be a positive thing. Any objections to ideas can be countered with a fresh perspective, often bringing with it new ideas and energy.

Making the case

The case for boards to recruit young people as trustees can be simple: does your board properly reflect the communities and beneficiaries you are there to serve? If not, it's possible to do something about it.

Are you doing enough to ensure the long-term sustainability of your organisation and its work? The board is there to guide the vision of the organisation, ensuring its strategic objectives are met, and there is a vast amount of evidence that mixed groups of people make better decisions.

The Charity Commission gives this advice on trustee recruitment:

As well as skills, consider if your trustees' background and experiences can help:

- bring different points of view to a discussion
- give insight into your beneficiaries' needs and experience
- make contacts in the community
- think of new ways of doing things



@National Youth Agency

Perceived barriers can actually be reframed into opportunities. For example, the board might say:

“It is a very responsible role...”

Having young people join a board is a good chance for all trustees to reflect on their role. Explaining what you do and why, to someone else is a great way of learning. For instance, that nobody is there to “represent” any group or interest other than the best interests of the organisation. Or that all trustees share equal responsibility, and so must all understand the important decisions they are asked to make: financial, legal, employment and so on. If they do not fully understand, are they

asking the right questions? Sometimes, new young trustees ask the obvious questions that others don't like to.

Then use this as reason to find some. Which groups does your charity work with? Are there other groups that you could make contact with and ask for suggestions? This would then be a great opportunity to expand your networks and understand your beneficiaries better – go to where the young people are.

“We don't know any young people who would be interested”



Top Tip!

Use the addition of new young trustees to try different meeting formats – switching away from a round table discussion helps to reduce the power dynamic and can inspire different ways of thinking

This simply isn't true. There are plenty of young people with the skills and experience to join boards, both within existing volunteer pools and beyond. Does your existing trustee role description need to be reviewed or refreshed to reflect the needs of the board? Do you have development opportunities built in for existing volunteers? It can feel like a big leap for some volunteers; moving from volunteering to governance - does your organisation have the intermediate training and leadership opportunities they might need to get them there? See *Section 7: Other Sources of Information* for links to resources in this area.

“They don't have the skills or experience”

“We aren't prepared to support them”

This is an opportunity to implement additional preparation and training for the board. Being able to explore any concerns and mitigate the barriers will be beneficial to everyone. High quality training is available from external facilitators; providing an ideal platform for development as a board, perhaps as part of an away day.

“ I was interested in joining the board meetings to see how large conservation organisations work at the highest level, to see how this information filters down to the rest of the organisation and really get to grips with how decisions are made. I also felt that this would be good experience to take forward in terms of my employability and perhaps help me understand how other organisations might work

Jacob Lawson, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust

Recruitment

So, the board are in agreement. Now to recruit.

Ideally, there should be an agreed model of recruitment, with a certain number of seats on the board reserved for young people. This may mean updating your organisation's terms of reference and deciding on what age bracket 'young people' will fit into. Some suggest 24, some 30, whichever works best for your individual organisation. Legally, anyone can be a company director at 16 and a trustee at 18.

Secondly, the terms should set out the length of the role and at what point in the year the recruitment will take place – terms (from September to August) rather than calendar years may be sensible, allowing them to fit better around any education commitments young people may have. Will the role be one year, two or longer? And how many terms can your trustees serve consecutively?



© Down to Earth

Top Tip!

Ahead of trustee recruitment, ask your board to take part in a skills and knowledge audit to identify where the gaps are. This way, during recruitment, you can have a clear idea about what you would like the young person to bring to the board, in turn giving the applicant a clearer understanding about what is required from them.

Promotion

Just as with recruitment of any new staff, a good starting place is within the community your organisation serves. There may be existing young volunteers or interns who are in an ideal position to take on the role, meaning that some promotion can be focused internally. It is also worth reaching out, beyond the organisation, by advertising on job sites. The advert can be shared across social media platforms, utilising partnerships who can share or retweet to their own audience. This would extend the promotion into the wider community and increase the chances of it being advertised to the intended age range.

It is also worth assessing at this stage if the trustee recruitment material needs to be reviewed and updated to enable this wider audience to be reached. Is the language appropriate and accessible for a young person who may not be familiar with how a board operates? Would it be worth adding in a glossary of terms or an example timeline of a typical year of activity for board members?

Two or three years into having young people on your board, it will be possible for some peer to peer recruitment to take place; where your current or past young trustees can talk to their own age group about the opportunities available.



© Our Bright Future



© Here! Alliance for Positive Youth Participation

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Application

Ideally, the application form and process should be the same for a young prospective member as for any other applicant. They should have the same interview panel members and questions, ensuring they take the process seriously and understand the responsibility of the role. That said, as above, they may need that extra bit of information during the process to aid that understanding.

In terms of the application form and accompanying materials, if recruiting a young person for the first time, as mentioned above, this may be a good opportunity to refresh the documents you already use. Would a one or two-page application form draw out the best and ensure answers are succinct and to the point? Is there an option to submit a short video as an application?

© UpRising Leadership



© Dean Sherwin for Wilshire Wildlife Trust

Interview

During the interview process, exposure to senior staff in the organisation is beneficial and a good experience for any prospective member. Again, it highlights the level of responsibility within the role and allows a chance for the individual to gain a greater understanding of the overarching aims and governance structure of the organisation.



Result

If successful, follow the usual procedure when recruiting to the organisation. Include an induction schedule to meet the team and provide strategy documents or other materials for the young person to read in their own time ahead of their first board meeting (see section 4: supporting full participation, for more tips on supporting a new young member).

If unsuccessful, or if the young person changes their mind, provide feedback to promote self-development in the future. Suggest other ways they can continue to be involved in the organisation and support positive next steps to build on their interest areas (see: 'how to involve young people in other ways').



Supporting full participation

Young people may face different barriers which make full participation more difficult. It is important to explore what those barriers might be and work with the young person and other trustees to remove or overcome them.

Barrier	Solution
Education, training or work commitments which make it difficult to attend meetings	Ensure meetings and events schedules are shared with members with as much advanced notice as possible, preferably at the start of each term. This will help them to plan their commitments to avoid missing out on one or the other
The role requires a monetary commitment either through transport or social events	It's worth thinking about whether a young person can afford what other board members take for granted. For example, does the Christmas social have a cost involved that the young person feels embarrassed about turning down? If the organisation is able, offering travel expenses for board meetings would remove the barrier and ensure full inclusion
Pressure to represent all young people or feeling that they are a "token gesture"	Appoint more than one young trustee to prevent them from feeling isolated and to provide greater diversity. Once your first young trustees are appointed, and as the recruitment cycle rotates, feedback can be gained via exit interviews to develop and improve the strategy
Fear of looking stupid or not feeling valued within meetings	Allowing time for young trustees to prepare for input is important particularly at the beginning of the role when they are getting used to the processes. Ensure papers are shared well in advance and give them access to a mentor or 'buddy' they can talk to ahead of meetings in case they are unsure of any terms or aspects of the agenda. Good Chairing is crucial to meaningful engagement

Barrier	Solution
Concerns about legal and financial liability	This is a good opportunity for existing trustees to hold a session to discuss their individual and collective responsibilities, and therefore be able to explain these with clarity to new young trustees. Although there is risk of personal liability through the role, it is rare for charity trustees to be held personally liable and there are things trustees can do to assess and mitigate the risk (see: 'other sources of information' for more details)

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Having young people involved in an organisation's decision making processes can have a positive effect, as young people bring in new ideas, have different priorities and offer a different perspective. They can also challenge the way the organisation engages with young people, so it becomes easier for young people to become involved with the organisation.

Ellie Brown, Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust, Young Trustee

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Top Tip!

Give young trustees free access to your organisation's events or locations. This will help them to get a better overview of how things work and provide an opportunity to embed themselves in cross-organisation activity

Involve young people in other ways

Depending on your organisation, there could be additional ways to support the involvement of young people:

- allocate a number of days or weeks per year to support young people taking part in staff shadowing or work experience opportunities across your organisation. Work experience strategy and guidance documents can often be found online for free
- involve young people in staff recruitment and interviews, particularly where the role involves working directly with or for young people
- engage young people in the management and delivery of activities including responsibility for budget and resources
- run consultations with young people ahead of future funding bids, involving them in the application process and giving them a meaningful voice and space to be heard when activity is for them
- consider also setting up a Youth Forum, Youth Advisory Board or a Youth Committee to input on larger decisions and the strategic plan for youth involvement within the organisation, and who would then communicate through the young board members

If you are not a solely youth-focused organisation, why not use this opportunity to develop a Youth Involvement Strategy combining some or all of the above? This could create an organisation-wide culture shift ensuring young voices are heard and can be genuinely involved in shaping what you do.

Top Tip!

Try not to pigeon hole their skills - not every young person knows how to develop a website or create an Instagram story. Doing this will not draw out their best



Case study: Ellie Brown



Ellie Brown is a young board member at Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust (YDMT), who first became involved through its Our Bright Future project: Green Futures.

How did you first find out about the Green Futures project?

I had just finished a MSc degree in Biodiversity and Conservation, and a family friend who was working at YDMT at the time knew I was looking

for opportunities to get involved in local environmental projects. During the development phase of the Green Futures project, while they were putting together the application to 'Our Bright Future', they held a youth consultation evening. The family friend passed on the details, to see if I would be interested in going along. My entire career and involvement with Green Futures/YDMT has led on from that one meeting and getting to know the Green Futures project staff.

What support did you find useful when taking on the role?

It helped that I had already met the chair of trustees, and a couple of the other trustees, and so felt comfortable in talking to them. I had an informal meeting with the chair and YDMT's Chief Executive before agreeing to be a trustee, which was really useful for finding out more about what the role required, the time I would need to commit, and who all the other trustees were. YDMT also had a very comprehensive Trustee's Handbook which contained all the relevant information.

What kind of commitment do you have to make with your time?

There are roughly six trustees' meetings every year, each one taking up half a day. There are a series of papers to read before each meeting, which usually take me a couple of days to read. There are also a series of YDMT events that trustees are always invited to – although it's not compulsory for trustees to attend, I like to attend two or three of them every year, to show support to the staff and the great work they're doing. There is also the occasional extra trustees meeting each year – for example there was an extra meeting earlier this year to discuss YDMT's strategy, for which they only required a small subset of trustees to attend.

Do you have a highlight or best moment of being involved so far?

I really enjoyed being one of only three trustees who were involved in the initial planning stages of YDMT's future strategy. It was great to be able to contribute a 'young person's' view to what the priorities for the Trust should be and ensure that issues relating to young people and the environment were included in discussions and future plans.

What advice would you give to an existing Board who were thinking about appointing a young person?

I think having a young person on a Board of Trustees can be a very positive thing for an organisation. In my experience a young person can quite often have very different ideas about things compared to more senior trustees, they see different priorities, and perhaps have fresh ideas about how things should be done, thus shaking up the way things have always been done. This doesn't cause conflict, but instead promotes useful and interesting discussions. One YDMT trustee has stated that having a young person on the board has been 'a breath of fresh air.'

Case study: Sally Stephens



Sally Stephens is Leadership & Governance Support Manager at Leeds University Union (LUU), working directly with the Board of Trustees and its subcommittees.

How does the structure of the LUU Board of Trustees impact the union and the vision for governance?

As a students' union, it's only natural that our board includes students. They represent our membership and help to highlight which areas LUU needs to focus on to deliver the best for the people we support. It's a bit of a given. The thing which is sometimes surprising to other people is that the majority of our board are students – 10 places of 14. Six of those are elected, and four are appointed. Insight into the needs of students is an obvious benefit, but we find that our trustees bring a wealth of skills to the table. Many have volunteered before in other capacities, they all have their own expertise (in fact, many of them are studying it!) and the key thing which they bring is a huge amount of passion and enthusiasm. They drive us forward because they expect to see change quickly, while it will still impact them and their peers, and they expect that change to be highly effective. Because our six elected trustees have a two year maximum term, with most serving just one, and our four appointed students have a four year maximum, we have a high rate of board turnover. While some charities might see that as a risk, we see it as a constant opportunity to re-evaluate our priorities, welcome new experiences, and bring original perspectives to the table.

Are you able to share an example of a key area the board has worked on in recent years and how this has been progressed with the addition of young voices?

A key priority for LUU in the last few years has been a digital transformation of our organisation and services. More and more, our members are engaging with us using primarily digital platforms, and we knew we needed to get up to speed with their needs. We ran a couple of different working groups and task and finish groups to govern the project, but ultimately found that the best format was to have one of our student trustees chair a sub-group of our board. We reported to this a little like an ad hoc subcommittee, and our student chair was great at challenging us to create a more defined and targeted project to deliver results that students wanted to see from us.

What support do you think is important to ensure a positive experience for a new young trustee?

We put a lot of time into inducting our trustees, partly because we know they have quite short terms and want to get the most out of that time, but partly because we recognise that governance is often new to them. All trustees get to spend time with our Chief Executive, who acts as a mentor for them in their first year, and they meet with each of the lead staff members before each of our subcommittees which gives them the opportunity to ask questions they might not feel comfortable bringing up in the meeting itself. The main thing which improves their experience though, is that we don't act like they are "young trustees" – they are just trustees, an integral part of our decision-making and some of the most responsible people in the organisation. We empower them to take that on, be confident, and have their voices heard. Their youth is ultimately a really small part of what they bring to the table.

Other sources of information

Trustees Week

www.trusteeweek.org

National campaign information, training resources and events

Charity Commission

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission

Includes guidance and information on a range of topics related to trustee recruitment, induction and beyond

NCVO

www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/information/governance

Link to NCVO Knowhow Nonprofit site providing advice and publications (including a trustee liability guide) as well as information on trustee events

Hear By Right - National Youth Agency

www.nya.org.uk/hear-by-right

Hear by Right is an organisational development tool built on a framework of seven standards with 20 indicators that describe best practice, supporting organisations to plan, develop and evaluate their participation practices and provision

UK Youth Parliament

www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk

News, information and opportunities for 11-18 year olds to use their elected voice to bring about social change through meaningful representation and campaigning

Roundhouse

www.roundhouse.org.uk/about-us/our-work-with-young-people/youth-governance

Downloadable copy of their Youth Governance Guide – Guided By Young Voices - created in partnership with Arts Council England

The FSI (Foundation for Social Improvement)

www.thefsi.org/services/essential-trustee-series

Free 6-module online video series called the Essential Trustee series, to help promote good governance for all charity trustees

Social Change Agency

www.thesocialchangeagency.org

Working on the Young Trustees Movement, funded by the Blagrave Trust - set up to challenge the stereotypical image of trustees and to bring new and younger voices to the boardroom

Charity Governance Code

www.charitygovernancecode.org/en

Practical tool to help charities and their trustees develop high standards of governance

Young Trustees Movement

www.youngtrusteesmovement.org/

Includes guidance and information for organisations looking to recruit young trustees and for young people to become trustees.

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