

People power

Why trustees,
staff, volunteers
and donors matter



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In it together



We all know that people make an organisation. Their skills, energy and time are critical to the success of any charity, no matter what its size, shape or cause. Their actions are also intrinsically linked to a charity's reputation, donors and service users. Therefore the way charities behave has consequences and should be considered carefully.

The most important thing to remember is this: charities can have a huge advantage over many other types of organisations when it comes to their people. People with talent might join a retail organisation, but passion for the profession is something they learn over time. With a charity, passion is likely to be the reason your people are there. So learn to harness it.

“The actions of a charity's people are also intrinsically linked to a its reputation, donors and service users. Therefore, the way they behave has consequences”

Charities also need to understand the responsibilities and challenges that are unique to the role a person holds. Achieving clarity around these means issues and opportunities can be broadly shared, understood and respected.

This risk management guide poses the question: why do our people matter, and how can we get the most out of them? Dedicating time to understand and build relationships with a charity's staff, volunteers, trustees, beneficiaries and donors is critical if an organisation hopes to achieve its goals. That is why we have brought together experts to share their insight on everything from effective boards, to managing challenges in donor recruitment. Our contributors demonstrate how getting “the people piece” right can empower organisations, help to mitigate risks, maximise productivity and boost donations.

This is the seventh in a series of informative, practical guides that we have published. Visit our online partner zone to take advantage of these fantastic free resources: [theguardian.com/zurich-guides](https://www.theguardian.com/zurich-guides)

It would be great to hear how you are handling some of the challenges highlighted in this guide. Please share your feedback with me by email via amy.brettell@uk.zurich.com – I'd love to hear your experiences.

Amy Brettell, head of charities and social organisations, Zurich Insurance



Managing your most valuable asset

Making the most of the passion within your workforce can have a big impact on how you achieve your mission, says Amanda Murray

There is a tendency to think about those who make a charity run as distinct groups: donors, staff, volunteers or trustees, for example. But before thinking about what makes them different, let's think about what they have in common. Whether they are paid or unpaid, a long-timer or someone brand new, they are probably involved because they share a passion for the cause and identify with what the charity does. Everyone contributes, and everyone wants to feel their contribution matters. But how can charities enable this to happen?

Volunteers and staff

In the Cabinet Office's 2013/14 *Community Life Survey*, 29% of adults in England said they volunteered at least once a month, and 41% said they did so once a year. Indeed, volunteers often outnumber paid staff.

In any business it is natural that tension can arise among team members, but charities must be aware of any particular tensions that may exist between paid staff and volunteers. It's something we hear about often: for instance, if a volunteer is assigned similar responsibilities as a paid member of staff.

GETTY

That's why it is important to understand the motivations of a volunteer coming to work with you, because if you can't pay them then the experience must offer something else for their efforts. Is it about the professional development opportunity? Is it about a personal passion for the cause, or a desire to meet new people? Whatever the motivation, consider the ways that the organisation can help meet these needs and reward people for their unpaid work.

Skills and performance

Some skills will always be valuable to a charity: leadership, persuasiveness, enthusiasm or empathy. But new requirements are also surfacing: strategic digital skills, public relations, or the ability to work with new types of partners, for instance. In particular, a lot of charities have been speaking to us about moving from a funded model to an income-generating model – this requires organisations to have very different skills. Meanwhile, a recent survey by the Foundation for Social Improvement found that almost 20% of small charities needed to upskill their staff in “engaging and working with businesses/companies”, while nearly half felt “lobbying” skills were lacking at their organisation (49%).

Skills gaps should always be considered as part of the long-term strategy. This is ultimately about sustainability and the role people play in enabling a charity to adapt to change.

“Trustees bear an enormous amount of responsibility as they are ultimately liable for a charity's actions. This means the role can be a daunting one”

Managing performance is as important as bringing in new skills. This holds true from top to bottom – volunteers and the board alike should be appraised. If they are underperforming then take appropriate action. Setting clear expectations from the outset as to what a person's role will entail and what the organisation expects of them will help to mitigate issues in this area. But be mindful – don't be overly distracted by those who aren't meeting expectations and forget to thank others who are doing a great job.

Leadership and governance

Trustees bear an enormous amount of responsibility as they are ultimately liable for a charity's actions. This means the role can be a daunting one, which in turn can make it difficult to recruit a diverse board.

As such, trustees typically tend to be older, retired, and professionally successful. All of this is great, because it means organisations can tap into wisdom and experience. But charities should be asking themselves, too, if their

board is representative of the communities they serve. A phrase that rings true here is “diversity trumps ability” and there is a wealth of research that suggests diverse groups will outperform non-diverse groups when it comes to resolving issues and making decisions.

Another governance challenge that can arise is the need to manage a chief executive-founder. This kind of chief executive is likely to bring boundless personal passion to their work, and is usually a tremendous asset to a charity, but in some cases their decision-making can become overly influenced by emotion.

In these circumstances it is important to have a strong board that can maintain objectivity. One of the greatest skills a leader can have is to recognise their own blind spots and put a team around them to fill those gaps.

Supporters

Investing in good relations with donors, advocates, spokespeople and supporters can lead to opportunities but, again, these need to be managed carefully.

Take celebrity supporters, for example. While it is easy to get swept up in the excitement of an endorsement or partnership, remember to weigh up the risks against the rewards. With public visibility comes the chance of negative PR, so make sure the values of spokespeople are well matched with those of the charity.

Organisations in every sector can find themselves heavily investing their time on strategy, marketing, products or services. However, your most important asset is your people, and time should be dedicated to them.

Amanda Murray is HR business partner at Zurich Insurance

AMANDA'S TOP TIPS

Volunteers: Remember to be upfront about expectations to ensure a mutually beneficial relationship

Skills: Remember to recruit for the talent you need tomorrow as well as the skills you need today

Governance: Having a diverse board of trustees is vital to organisational health, and be sure to balance passion with objective decision making

Performance management: Set clear expectations for everyone's roles, from volunteers to trustees, and appraise progress

Supporters: Public advocates can be a powerful publicity tool, but make sure to align values.



People power at the top

Good governance will see a charity through times of change; the key is getting the board to work as a team

There are an estimated 580,000 trustees serving in the UK. The role is no small task. As the Charity Commission explains: “Trustees have independent control over, and legal responsibility for, a charity’s management and administration. Trusteeship can be rewarding for many reasons. It’s also likely to be demanding of your time, skills, knowledge and abilities.”

Be it keeping on top of regulations, overseeing changes in a charity’s mission, or building relations with senior staff, a trustee’s role requires risk management and strategic vision, says Jonathan Plumtree, head of Zurich Corporate Savings. He is a former trustee of CLIC Sargent and a current trustee of Zurich Community Trust (ZCT), a charity which is funded by an annual donation from the Zurich UK businesses and by generous donations from Zurich’s UK employees.

Team spirit

Harnessing people power at the top of an organisation means recruiting strategically and building strong dynamics within the board itself.

“Expectations of the board can increase as organisations become more professional,” he says. “At CLIC Sargent, for example, we evolved a formal process for auditing skills on the board. We looked at our skills matrix and if we were missing expertise – be it in fundraising, finance, or marketing – then that’s what we targeted when recruiting new trustees.”

Nearly half of charities don't appraise the performance of their board, according to Trustees Unlimited, meaning they might not be getting the most out of their leadership. Equally, with trustees personally responsible for the organisation, it's important they understand regulation as well as the work of the charity. Plumtree says: "The performance review process should start from the initial induction and be repeated often. It's important to ask if we need to change how we do things."

Dealing with change

It is when seeing a charity through a period of change such as a merger or re-brand that a trustee's role can really "come to the fore", says Plumtree. CLIC Sargent was formed from a 2005 merger between CLIC (Cancer & Leukaemia in Childhood) and Sargent Cancer Care for Children.

"As trustees we were very careful to focus on what could go wrong. Although the two charities looked after similar groups of people, the services and support they provided were different," he explains. "In particular we wanted to ensure there would be no nasty financial surprises."

The HR issues were also complicated. "We had two strong, passionate individuals as chairs of the respective charities, neither of whom wanted to step aside. We resolved this by having them both remain in their posts for a year while we recruited a new chair. Overall, it made for a smoother transition," he says.

Finally, it can take time for trustees to learn to work together as a team, particularly given that they may only meet a few times a year. One way to support this, Plumtree suggests is to tie in service visits with board meetings: "Doing that together can be hugely powerful."



USEFUL RESOURCES

- **The Essential Trustee (CC3)**: this core guidance document from the Charity Commission includes everything the regulator expects of trustees. It was updated in July 2015 following a consultation with the sector. www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-cc3
- **Charities and Risk Management (CC26)**: also produced by the Charity Commission, this outlines the basic principles and strategies that trustees can apply to help charities manage their risks. www.gov.uk/government/publications/charities-and-risk-management-cc26
- **The Good Trustee Guide (NCVO)**: highly recommended by many in the sector, this NCVO publication covers information on a trustee's role and developing an effective board. www.ncvo.org.uk/component/redshop/themes/9-charity-law/P16-the-good-trustee-guide

Case study

Safeguarding beneficiaries

There are many ways in which preventable risk can be avoided, says Cate Meredith

Charities work with some of society's most vulnerable, including children and young people. However, if safeguarding measures are put in place, it is perfectly possible to ensure everyone stays safe and happy.



There are a number of child safety risks that concern group and project leaders, including those that reflect more recent challenges:

- What if we are worried that a child who comes to our group is being abused?
- What if there is an allegation of abuse against one of our volunteers?
- What if we take a group of children on a trip and one has an accident?
- What if our children are targeted by adults seeking to sexually exploit them?
- What if someone in our group is subjected to online bullying?

Safe Network's message is that, in working with children and young people, we have to engage with risk and should not seek to eliminate it. We know from experience that we can reduce and manage preventable risk in a way that enhances rather than detracts from the overall level of fun, adventure or innovation in what your group is offering.

HERE ARE SOME KEY TIPS:

1. Operate a robust recruitment policy. Don't simply be grateful for anyone who volunteers. Groups that only accept the best are the ones that the best people want to work for
2. Develop a safeguarding statement and some essential procedures on dealing with (a) concerns about children, (b) allegations about staff and volunteers, and (c) health and safety risk assessment
3. Write a code of safe practice for staff and volunteers
4. Appoint someone reliable and authoritative as your safeguarding lead
5. Invest time (and, if you have it, money) in induction and regular training on safeguarding for staff and volunteers
6. Talk to your beneficiaries and, more importantly, listen to them. If you build a relationship, you will have a better chance of knowing what is going on in their lives and how you can help keep them safe.



Putting people first

Organisations have a duty of care to their staff and volunteers, but it is also important to encourage personal responsibility, says Kerry Smith

We can only do our vital work through the activities of our paid staff, supporters and volunteers. Charities, like any other organisation, have a duty of care to this amazing workforce. As the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), describes: “Employers have a duty of care to their employees, which means they should take all steps which are reasonably possible to ensure their health, safety and wellbeing.”

These are wise words to follow. Whether those people working for your organisation are paid or volunteers, it is essential that they have processes, systems, policies and people in place to mitigate risks to themselves and their colleagues, as well as to the public.

Here at the British Heart Foundation (BHF), we work hard to make sure our organisation is a legally compliant and safe place to work. But what does this look like in practice? It starts by understanding both the role that the charity must play, and that of employees and volunteers too.

Training our people

Training and induction is a vital first step in any people strategy. On the first day, part of the induction for our staff and volunteers covers the organisation and the individual’s responsibilities in ensuring a safe working environment.

This includes:

- Health and safety
- Manual handling
- Organisational policies
- Equality and diversity
- Data protection

We have a large retail operation with more than 700 shops. All new people in the shop teams must complete a comprehensive series of work books covering the five areas listed above. Their knowledge is checked by their manager and each individual signs to confirm their understanding before work begins.

“Don’t forget that the people supporting a charity, in whatever capacity, have a role to play – for both themselves and others”

The extent to which these areas are covered needs to be proportionate to the job role. So someone regularly working 20 hours a week in a shop would need comprehensive coverage of the five topics, whereas a volunteer at a BHF event for four hours will receive a briefing and know who to direct queries towards. It is this designated “point of contact” who must be fully versed in company policies and know how to handle or escalate issues that arise.

Safeguarding our beneficiaries

We have a safeguarding policy in place and ensure our people know when it applies and can identify if there is a potential safeguarding issue relating to a young person or adult at risk.

Our duty of care also extends to the thousands of people who take part in our 45 support and fundraising events across the UK each year. We undertake a comprehensive risk assessment for each event and put in place processes to mitigate any risks identified.

For example, during our flagship bike ride, when around 25,000 riders cycle from London to Brighton each year, we will not allow riders to ride without helmets and all participants must display their unique rider number. Helmets are essential for safety, while the unique identification number enables us to quickly access an individual's personal data should an incident take place.

The role of the individual

While the charity has a duty of care to ensure its people are safe, it is important not to forget that those supporting a charity, in whatever capacity, have a role to play in duty of care – for both themselves and others.

At the BHF, we have clear, trusted and well-advertised channels for people to report a concern about any aspect of the organisation, and we encourage them to do so. Similarly, we have formal processes for managing complaints and associated risks raised from external stakeholders.

The BHF quite simply wouldn't exist without our incredible workforce. That is why it is so important that all our people understand their role in our collective responsibility for duty of care and risk management. Working in this way ensures we can maximise the power of its people to best effect.

Kerry Smith is director of people and organisational development at The British Heart Foundation



KERRY'S TOP FIVE TIPS

1. Ensure the training a person receives is proportionate to their job role – part-time staff will need more than event volunteers, for instance
2. Always have a point of contact for volunteers who is fully versed in company policies, and can handle queries and escalate issues if necessary
3. Have a robust safeguarding policy in place and ensure everyone knows when it applies
4. Assess and mitigate risks before any event, such as a fundraiser. Make sure your organisation's overall risk assessments are up-to-date, comprehensive and relevant
5. Have a clear, trusted and well-advertised channel for people to report concerns themselves, and encourage them to use it.



How to love your donors

Get the relationship with donors right, and charities will see long-term rewards. Get it wrong and they risk losing support or facing criticism, says Stephen Pidgeon

This year will prove a turning point in donor recruitment. Telephone fundraising has already lost many of its advocates. Heavily criticised face-to-face will be swept up in the maelstrom, and cold direct mail in the UK will bow to the new data protection laws of the EU. In short, recruiting new donors is only set to get harder.

“For too long we have solicited for donations without thought for donors’ long-term support.”

If you can't fill the leaky bucket easily with new recruits, patching the holes with your existing supporters becomes a sensible option, and it will be hugely appreciated by them. For too long we have solicited for donations without thought for donors' long-term support. So if our task as fundraisers is to nurture our donors, what might best practice in fundraising look like?

Saying 'thank you'

Let me describe an unlikely scenario. Imagine you've supported a charity for several years, and one morning you receive a letter from the chief executive. "Forgive me for writing out of the blue like this," it reads, "but I've noticed

it is five years this month since you gave us your first kind donation." It goes on to describe the achievements in the previous five years, made possible by the support of wonderful donors like you.

You'd be astonished, wouldn't you? And when you receive that charity's next appeal, of course you would respond. This is an example of a sweet device, simple to implement, and one that gives immense pleasure to the donor.



"If you telephone simply to thank the donor (with no ask), then their subsequent year's support is increased in value by 40%"

Here is another simple device, this one based on research in 2013 by Chuck Longfield, the chief scientist at the software developer Blackbaud. A kind donor sends you their first cash gift. Current wisdom would have us telephone them and ask for a regular monthly gift. How rude! Chuck showed that if you called simply to thank the donor (with no ask), then their subsequent year's support is increased in value by 40% – more than enough to pay for the call.

Get them involved

Amnesty and Greenpeace, recruit all their donors in a two-stage process: first getting them involved in a campaign (or two) and only then asking them by phone to make a donation or regular monthly gift. It's well established and works a treat. After all, a charity's job is to achieve change. Donors know this, which is why they give us donations – so get them to campaign on your behalf. Those who put their name to a struggle, particularly if you update them on progress, will have a higher lifetime value than those that don't.

Another tip: asking donors for their views in a survey also increases the lifetime value of those who complete it, even when you're not asking for donations.

Why it's worth it

The trouble is, these things cost money and raise little in immediate donations. This is the new paradigm and is here to stay. Long term, the donor's value will exceed that of one who is cajoled into giving by numerous appeals.

ALAMY

This year, with the kind permission of The Royal British Legion, I published figures showing donors who had given a great deal throughout their lifetime and had subsequently died leaving a legacy. This "bonus" income is staggering. Of the 2002 cohort of new donors, for instance, 174 of them had died 12 years later, leaving well over £3m. These kind gifts came in because they loved the Legion with a passion and the Legion had honoured their support. They had not been over-mailed or encouraged to donate more than they felt comfortable giving.

Sadly, few charities treat their donors well. Most mail far too often. In year one, a new donor should get the best possible, pre-tested communications delivered through a wide range of media. They should not get standard appeals. Towards year-end, fundraisers should tailor programmes to reflect donors' interests and the frequency of their support. They could be offered opportunities to choose how often they hear from your charity.

Think programmes tailored to the individual with topics clearly reflecting their interests sounds impossible? With major donors, that's normal. Minor-donor fundraisers should realise that a gift in a will can frequently eclipse all but the biggest major gifts. It's time we took a longer view of our wonderful minor donors. That way, fundraising will never be a risk to supporter relations.

Stephen Pidgeon is a fundraising teacher and consultant, and author of How To Love Your Donors To Death

STEPHEN'S TOP TIPS

- Investing in donor care now will pay off in the long term
- Out-of-the-blue thank-you notes for long-term support are simple and high-impact
- Involving supporters in a campaign will increase the amount they engage with and potentially donate to your organisation
- Asking your donors for their views in a questionnaire increases the lifetime value of those who complete it
- In the first year or more after a donor's first donation, send pre-tested and carefully planned communications, not just the next appeal
- Don't mail too often: instead, tailor correspondence to reflect donors' interests
- Nurture "minor donors" as you would "major donors"; they might then leave a legacy gift.

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on behalf of Zurich Insurance.

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