

12 Essential Trustee Board Roles

This is a list of the 12 key trustee board roles and responsibilities.

1. Set and maintain vision, mission and values

The trustee board is responsible for establishing the essential purpose of the organisation. They are also responsible for guarding the ethos and values of the organisation.

2. Develop strategy

Together, the trustee board and chief executive officer develop long-term strategy. Meeting agendas reflect the key points of the strategy to keep the organisation on track.

3. Establish and monitor policies

The trustee board creates policies to govern organisational activity. These cover:

- Guidance for staff
- Systems for reporting and monitoring
- An ethical framework for everyone connected with the organisation
- Conduct of trustees and board business
- Depending on the nature of the policy, the policy, the chief executive or even other staff may develop and implement policy without consulting or notifying the board.

Policies established by the chief executive or staff must support the organisational-wide policies established by the board.

Ultimate policy-making responsibility belongs to the board. For this reason, the board has the responsibility of keeping apprised of the organisation's policies. Some policies may give rise to a recommendation for the board to discuss, and debate. Examples of these may include Health and Safety policies, and occupational health policies. Others may be so specific that the board need not consider them in detail. Only in all-volunteer organisations should the board involve itself in defining and implementing all the operating procedures for the organisation.

4. Set up employment procedures

The trustee board creates comprehensive, fair and legal personnel policies. These protect the organisation and those who work for it. They cover:

- Recruitment
- Support
- Appraisal
- Remuneration
- Discipline

It also recruits and selects new trustee board members.

5. Ensure compliance with governing document

The governing document is the rulebook for the organisation. The trustees make sure it is followed. In particular, the organisation's activities must comply with the charitable objects.

6. Ensure accountability

The trustees should ensure that the organisation fulfils accountability as required by law to:

- The Charity Commission
- Inland Revenue
- Customs and Excise
- Registrar of Companies (if it is a company limited by guarantee)

The organisation should also be accountable to:

- Donors
- Beneficiaries
- Staff
- Volunteers
- The general public

This means publishing annual reports and accounts.

7. Ensure compliance with the law

Trustees are responsible for checking that all the organisation's activities are legal.

8. Maintain proper fiscal oversight

The trustees are responsible for effectively managing the organisation's resources so it can meet its charitable objects. The trustee board:

- Secures sufficient resources to fulfil the mission
- Monitors spending in the best interests of the organisation
- Approves the annual financial statement and budget
- Protects the organisation against liability by providing insurance
- Seeks to minimise risk for the organisation
- Participates in fundraising (in some organisations)
- Ensures legal compliance

9. Select and support the chief executive

If necessary, the trustee board creates policy covering the employment of a chief executive. They also select and support the chief executive and review their performance.

10. Respect the role of staff

The trustee board recognises and respects the domain of staff responsibility. At the same time, it creates policy to guide staff activities and safeguard the interests of the organisation.

11. Maintain effective board performance

The board keeps its own house in order. It engages in:

- Productive meetings
- Effective committees with adequate resources
- Development activities
- Regular performance reviews
- Partnership with consultants where necessary

12. Promote the organisation

Through their own behaviour, their governance oversight and their activities on behalf of the organisation, trustees enhance and protect the reputation of their organisation. They are good ambassadors for the organisation.