

Charity Board Health Check and Trustee Self-Assessment

Good governance involves making sure that your board is as effective as possible in providing oversight for the organisation. It is worth taking time out periodically to review/assess how you are doing and identify improvements. This can be done in different ways.

In its simplest form, it should involve a run-through of any governance codes you have signed up to, such as the Charities Governance Code. This is a mandatory code for registered charities and requires boards to renew their compliance on an annual basis. Principle 5 (Working Effectively) of the Charities Governance Code includes the following minimum standard: “review how your board operates and make any necessary improvements”.

Additional standards for more complex charities include the following:

- assessing board effectiveness
- adherence to the board’s Code of Conduct
- assessment of how sub-committees are managed
- board skills audit
- board training and development
- recruitment of new board members to fill skills or competency gaps

It is up to the board to decide how it goes about its own self-assessment. See below two possible templates. The first is a board health check, which can be a basis for collective discussion. The second is for each board member to assess their own performance. This can help individual board members to stand back, assess their own effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

Charity Board Health Check

1. Advancing Charitable Purpose

What is your charity's purpose?

When was the last time it was reviewed?

Do you have an annual plan and is it monitored?

Does your charity have the resources it needs or a plan for getting resources?

2. Integrity

What are the basic values of your charity?

How do you deal with conflicts of interests and loyalties?

Do you have a board Code of Conduct? Is it signed by all trustees?

3. Leading People

Is everyone (board/staff/volunteers) clear on their roles in your charity?

If you have paid staff, are arrangements in place to comply with employment legislation?

Do you have appropriate operational policies in place? What are they?

4. Exercising Control

Is your governing document fit for purpose?

Do you comply with relevant legal requirements? What are they?

If your charity raises funds from the public, do you adhere to the Charities Regulator's guidelines on fundraising?

Do you monitor income and expenditure? How?

Do you have a risk plan? What does it cover?

Do you have appropriate insurance?

5. Working Effectively

Do trustees have the skills necessary to undertake their roles?

Do you have regular board/management committee meetings? How often?

Do you prepare and circulate agendas in advance of board meetings?

Do agendas include reporting on activities, review of finances and conflicts of interests/loyalties?

Do you have agreed minutes in accordance with standard practice?

Are there term limits for trustees? What are they?

How do you recruit new trustees? Do they have an induction?

Do trustees understand their governance responsibilities, including their responsibility to work as an effective team?

6. Being Accountable and Transparent

Is your charity name and Registered Charity Number (RCN) displayed appropriately in your communications?

Who are your charity's stakeholders? How do you communicate with them?

How do you involve stakeholders in planning, decision-making and reviews?

How do you deal with queries, comments or complaints?

Do you follow the reporting requirements of funders and donors?

Individual Trustee Self-Assessment

1. Advancing Charitable Purpose

I understand our charity's purpose and am willing to commit my time and energy to it.

I am familiar with what our charity is planning to achieve.

I understand what resources are in place/needed to support our charity's plans.

2. Integrity

I understand and adhere to the basic values of our charity.

I am clear on what is meant by conflicts of interests and loyalties and I am satisfied that I do not have actual or potential conflicts of interests and loyalties in relation to my role as a trustee of our charity.

I have read and understood the standards required of me in our board Code of Conduct and I have signed it.

3. Leading People

I understand my role as a trustee of our charity and my duty of care towards its people.

I understand my legal duties as a trustee, including my duty to:

- Comply with our charity's governing document
- Manage our charity's resources responsibly
- Ensure our charity carries out its charitable purposes for the public benefit
- Act in the best interests of our charity
- Act with reasonable skill and care
- Be accountable and comply with the law

I am aware of the operational policies that are in place and am satisfied that they are appropriate to the work of our charity.

4. Exercising Control

I am familiar with our governing document and am satisfied that it is fit for purpose.

I am aware of the legislation that applies to the work of our charity and I am satisfied that we operate within the law.

If our charity raises funds from the public I am satisfied that we adhere to the Charities Regulator's guidelines on fundraising.

I am aware of the income and expenditure of our charity and understand my role in overseeing prudent financial management.

I understand the key risks that face our charity and how they are being managed.

I am satisfied that our charity has appropriate insurance.

5. Working Effectively

I have the skills necessary to undertake my role as a trustee.

I regularly attend and participate fully at board meetings. I give advance notice if I am unable to attend a board meeting.

I make sure to prepare for board meetings by familiarising myself with the meeting agendas and board papers.

I read board meeting minutes to ensure they are an accurate reflection of agreed decisions and actions.

I am aware of our charity's agreed term limits for trustees and I abide by them.

I contribute where possible to the recruitment and induction of new trustees.

I understand my governance responsibilities as a trustee of the charity and the collective responsibility of our trustees to work as an effective team.

6. Being Accountable and Transparent

I am satisfied that our charity name and Registered Charity Number (RCN) is displayed appropriately in our communications.

I can explain what our charity does, including its public benefit, to anyone who asks.

I understand who our stakeholders are and I am satisfied that there is adequate involvement of stakeholders in planning, decision-making and reviews.

I can stand over what our charity does and how it does it, and can justify this to anyone who queries what our charity has done or is doing.

I am satisfied that our charity follows the reporting requirements of funders and donors.

Carmichael Board Effectiveness Review Service

As an alternative to a self-assessment Carmichael can facilitate a Board Effectiveness Review for your organisation. We have conducted several reviews over the last couple of years with great results for client organisations. Such a review can include an assessment of:

- the effectiveness, knowledge and experience of the Board as a whole, office holders and individual charity trustees;
- adherence to the board code of conduct;
- the structure, size, membership and terms of reference of any subcommittees
- training and recruitment plans, and
- a skills audit of charity trustees.

Boards of non-profit organisations which are not registered charities can also avail of this service.

For more details and a quote contact andrew@carmichaelireland.ie.