

**Thinking of becoming  
a Trustee?**

# **Frequently Asked Questions**



## What do trustees do?

Trustees are the people responsible for ensuring that a charity or community group has a clear strategy, that it remains true to its original vision, and that it complies with all necessary rules and legal obligations. Collectively, trustees are commonly known as the board, but sometimes they will be known as the management committee or the executive committee. They have several formal roles and responsibilities, which include appointing key people and keeping a check on the organisation's finances and activities.

## What questions should I ask myself when thinking about becoming a trustee?

- What skills and experience do I have to offer?
- What makes me passionate?
- It makes sense to do the things you love doing, for the causes that touch you most.
- Are there any kinds of organisation I especially want to work for?
- It's important that the role feels right and inspires you.
- Can I commit the time and the energy?
- Be aware of the responsibilities and find out how much time you will need to give – this varies from organisation to organisation.

## How much time would I need to commit to being a trustee?

This depends entirely on the charity's size and activities. It is vital that trustees can devote the time to their essential duties, so it is worth checking with the organisation what would be expected of you.

## What sort of questions should I ask the organisation I'm considering becoming a trustee of?

- What are the aims of the organisation?
- Can I see the organisation's annual report and accounts, annual review, plans and governing documents?
- What work would I be doing, and is there a role description?
- How much time would I need to commit?
- What sort of induction would I receive?
- Would I be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses?
- Who would supervise me and how?
- What policies does the organisation have in place to deal with any risk?
- Would the organisation require references or run police checks on me?



## Would I need to do any preparation before taking up a trustee post?

You need to find out as much as you can about the charity and what would be required of you as a trustee. You should read their annual reports and governing documents and review the accounts. These may be dry and legal, but they are the charity's main constitutional documents that govern key aspects of their work. It is also a good idea to meet the chair, existing trustees, senior staff and perhaps some of the people the charity helps. Some charities might invite you to sit in on a trustees' meeting before you officially join.

## Is there support available to new trustees?

Yes, there is plenty of support and advice available for both new and existing trustees. Charity Commission are a rich source of information and can be reached on 0300 066 9197. There's also lots of guidance you can download including the new trustee welcome pack: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/charity-trustee-welcome-pack>

CWVA works right at the heart of West Cheshire's voluntary sector. We have experienced and friendly staff to help organisations thrive; providing advice and training to guide them through the sector. <https://chesterva.org.uk/>

## Would I have any personal liability for my decisions?

A conscientious and committed trustee need have few worries about personal liability, but it is important for all trustees to understand their position. If trustees act prudently, lawfully and in accordance with the governing document, then any liabilities (i.e. debts or financial obligations) that they incur as trustees can normally be met out of the charity's resources. However, if trustees incur liabilities or debts that amount to more than the value of the charity's assets, they may not be able to cover themselves in full out of the charity's property, even if the liabilities have been properly incurred. The Charity Commission therefore strongly recommends that trustees are particularly careful when entering substantial contracts or borrowings to ensure that the charity has the means to meet its obligations. If trustees act imprudently or in breach of the governing document, the position is different. Further information on this, and other issues, is available in the Charity Commission's free publication, The Essential Trustee: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-cc3>

## Are trustees paid?

Generally, no. Most trustees are unpaid and must not benefit in any way from their connection with the charity. There are limited exceptions to this rule. Further information on this, and other issues, is available in the Charity Commission's *The Essential Trustee*.

## Can anyone become a charity trustee?

Most people over the age of 18 can become charity trustees, but a few are not eligible.

Those who have been disqualified as company directors and those who have been convicted of an offence involving dishonesty or deception are some of the people who usually cannot become trustees.

