

Charity Trustee Information Pack

1. Do you know your charity?

Make sure you know your charity well.

1.1 Understand the charity's purposes

You should know all about what makes it a charity and why it exists:

- its purposes
- how it is trying to achieve them
- who it helps – the beneficiaries

Clarity on these is essential to making a successful contribution to the charity as a trustee. They're also at the heart of how the charity promotes itself and accounts to the public.

1.2 Have you read your charity's governing document and understood the rules?

You should have a copy of your charity's governing document, and within the document will be information regarding the charity's purposes, rules, powers, and minimum requirements expected of all trustees. Make sure you know and understand yours, as it's one of the most important bits of information you will need.

1.3 What do you know about your fellow trustees?

Do you know your fellow trustees well? If not, get to know them, because you are all collectively responsible and accountable for the overall management of the charity, including areas where you may not be directly involved. The collaborative relationship of the board is key to your charity's success; even in times of challenge, encourage and respect each other and the time and effort you are all prepared to give.

1.4 Do you know how your charity operates?

Pay particular attention to the charity's finances:

- how much money do you have?

- where is it held?
- where does it come from and what plans are in place for spending it?
- Are there any restrictions on how you spend your money? You should all know details about your charity finances and whether it is restricted or unrestricted

It is also important that you get to:

- know what savings, property or investments your charity holds
- know what commitments, contracts or debts you may have
- regularly visit your premises and talk to beneficiaries, volunteers and staff
- be involved with and 'sign off' on the development of key strategies, plans and policies

Make sure you are well informed about any key policies on areas such as risk, safeguarding, equality and diversity and fundraising (see [Trustees and Fundraising](#) booklet). Safeguarding and Equality and Diversity are priorities for all charities. All trustees should take the time to read your [safeguarding duties](#) and [equality and diversity duties](#)

2. All trustees will have a responsibility to do the following

2.1 Attend trustee meetings

Meetings will be a necessary and consistent call on your time as a trustee. It's important to prepare for them and use them to contribute your views and ideas. Use these occasions to make sure that your charity is on track and expect to be able to monitor its performance against plans and any key risks.

Be prepared to ask questions, particularly on things you are unclear about to increase your knowledge.

Find out more about [trustee meetings](#).

2.2 Make decisions

This is such an important part of your role. Some decisions will be straightforward, others more complex. Use the Charity Commission guidance to help you make sure

your decisions are properly made, particularly when you are taking those more difficult strategic decisions, such as those affecting the charity's beneficiaries, assets or future direction.

You should ensure that you have the information you need and that decisions are considered as a collective. While some trustees may have specialist knowledge that you will want to rely on, be careful not to let any one individual dominate the actual decision-making process.

Find out more about [decision making](#).

2.3 Put your charity's interests first

At meetings and when making decisions – and in everything else you do for the charity – you must always put the charity's interests first. Be alert to those matters affecting the charity in which you personally may also have an interest – this could be a direct financial interest but also be more broadly a loyalty or commitment to another organisation or person.

Where such conflicts of interest exist, they can be relatively straightforward to manage. Good awareness and having a system in place to handle them are crucial.

You will need to:

- identify conflicts of interest when they arise
- prevent them from affecting any decision
- record how they are handled

Find out more about [conflicts of interests](#)

Getting this right is not just a matter of meeting legal requirements, it also shows integrity, honesty and openness about what your charity does and how it does it. These values influence the public's willingness to support charities, and their trust and confidence that charities are run for public benefit, not private interests.

3. Get to know your 6 main trustee duties

It's important that you know these. In almost any trustee activity or decision at least one of the 6 main duties will be relevant. These are all summarised in the Charity Commission's [infographic](#) and in their short guide [CC3a charity trustee: what's involved](#)

Here's practical action you can take, for each of the 6 duties, in your day to day role as a trustee.

Always:

1. be clear that what your charity does supports its purposes and benefits the public
2. check that decisions you make are within the rules for your charity
3. ask yourself what's best for the charity and who it helps
4. satisfy yourself that the charity's funds, people and reputation are used sensibly and are protected from undue risk
5. be prepared. Have the information you need, in the format you need, and set aside time to read it prior to meetings
6. get your charity's accounts and reports to the Charity Commission on time. Make sure they are to the standard required, and clear about the charity's achievements

The Charity Commission expect all trustees to read their detailed guide on [trustee duties](#) and if, at any stage, you are unsure of how to act this is the guidance that you should come back to.

Understanding the 6 duties is essential to your role, they set out the main responsibilities that you have. The [Charity Governance Code](#) can help you put these into practice - it will help you understand what you can do to meet your main duties on a daily basis and what good governance looks like.

4. What you need to send the Charity Commission

All registered charities must by law keep their register entry up-to-date. Many charities also have to send financial information each year. The trustees are all responsible for getting this right, so you'll need to know what your charity has to send us, when and how it needs to be sent, and that its records are accurate.

To start, check your charity's income level and type (is it a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO), company, trust or other structure?). The charity details on the Charity Commission [register entry](#) will help with this, and you along with your fellow trustees should all know this information.

These are the 3 filing requirements that you have with the Charity Commission:

- charity register details must be up-to-date at all times. These include details of trustees, the charity name and the contact. If there are inaccuracies your charity contact must let the Charity Commission know. This information is public and can be a valuable tool for presenting information about the charity. Use the [charity details service](#) to update your information
- [annual return](#) - all CIOs must send the Charity Commission an annual return. All other charities must do so if their income is over £10,000; below this figure charities should use the annual return to update their income and expenditure details on the register
- accounts - does your charity need to file its [accounts every year?](#) There are different requirements for different types of charities. All CIOs must send the Charity Commission their accounts and trustees' annual report. Any other charity must do so if its yearly income is over £25,000 and all other registered charities must have their accounts available to send to the Charity Commission or anyone else on request.

You will also need to know [how to send information to the Charity Commission](#). You can send information, update details and access their online forms here. To do this your charity will need an online password. This password is important; it is sent to the registered contact for your charity. Check who has the password; if your charity

doesn't have one, the charity contact can [request a new or replacement one](#). You don't need to know the password unless you are responsible for submitting information to the Charity Commission, but you should know whether the charity has one and who has it.

5. How can the Charity Commission help you?

The Charity Commission will help you understand your role and duties as a trustee; how to avoid mistakes and get it right. Use their website to:

- [look through guidance](#) - you'll find here an extensive library of advice and guidance to match the many queries that can arise, including shorter 'how to' guides covering topics such as fundraising, managing your charity, and staff and volunteers
- help you if you need to [change your charity's name or rules](#) - you should use their online services to make these changes or to get their permission for other actions
- [keep yourself informed](#) - they will send you a quarterly newsletter (CC News) with information for trustees on key matters for your role. So, please keep your email details up to date

You can also keep up-to-date by following them on [Twitter](#) and by reading their [Blogs](#).

6. If things go wrong

As a trustee you are not expected to be perfect; the Charity Commission know things can go wrong. While it is rare for trustees to be held personally liable, understanding your potential liabilities will help you protect yourself. This is explained in more detail in their guidance [the essential trustee \(CC3\)](#). If something goes wrong make sure that you and the other trustees:

- act quickly to prevent further loss or damage
- communicate and plan what you want to say

- review the situation and learn how to stop it happening again
- let the right people know, for example contact the police if there's been a crime

You will need to let the Charity Commission know when there has been a serious incident. Find out more about [reporting serious incidents](#).

So, over to you....

Here the basics have been outlined for you, so that you can check your understanding of the role and the responsibilities that you have. Getting to know your duties as a trustee will help you run an effective charity that will have a positive impact for the good of others.

Keep this guide handy, there is more information and help available from the Charity Commission website if you need it. There are also many other advisory and support organisations that can help and listed below are some of these.

Use this opportunity to play an active part in helping your charity, using your life skills and experience. Your commitment and the time and effort you are prepared to give are part of what makes charities so valued by the public.

7. Useful Contacts

There are a number of organisations that can provide information or assistance to trustees. These include:

[Charity Commission for England and Wales](#) the regulator of charities in England and Wales

[Association of Chairs \(AoC\)](#) – offers resources and support to chairs and vice-chairs of charities and non-profit organisations

[Charity Finance Group \(CFG\)](#) – champions best practice in finance management in the voluntary sector

[Directory of Social Change \(DSC\)](#) – provides trustee training courses, publications and several free resources



[Ethical Property Foundation \(EPA\)](#) UK charity which offers voluntary organisations free property guidance, advice and workshops and a wide range of expert advice on legal issues and premises management

[The Foundation for Social Improvement \(FSI\)](#) – provides strategic support for small charities

[Fundraising Regulator](#) the independent regulator of charitable fundraising

[ICSA: the Governance Institute](#) – trains, informs and represents the interests of governance professionals across all sectors and offers free to access guidance notes specific to the charity sector

[Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\)](#) UK's independent body set up to uphold information rights

[National Association for Voluntary and Community Action \(NAVCA\)](#) – England's largest network of local charities and community groups

[National Council of Voluntary Organisations \(NCVO\)](#) – champions the voluntary sector and volunteering. Connects, represents and supports voluntary organisations, from the smallest community groups to the largest charities

[Reach Volunteering](#) – provides a trustee recruitment service and useful resources for charities and people interested in joining trustee boards

[Small Charities Coalition \(SCC\)](#) – helps trustees, staff and volunteers of small charities (those with an income of less than £1 million) access the skills, tools and information they may need

[Museums Association](#) – providing a range of information supporting Museums across the UK

[Association of Independent Museums \(AIM\)](#) – providing a range of support, advice, workshops, events, resources and grants supporting Independent Museums across the UK

[Museums Development Network](#) – A network which provides regional representation for the Museums Sector across the UK