

# chair focus

February 2010

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### trusteefinder

*Don't forget to post your board vacancies on [www.trusteefinder.org.uk](http://www.trusteefinder.org.uk), the free national trustee vacancy listing service run by CTN, in partnership with [do-it.org.uk](http://do-it.org.uk) and Volunteer Centres. [trusteefinder](#) was recently praised in the House of Commons by Tom Levitt MP at a debate on trusteeship.*

## What makes chairs of governing bodies effective?

That is the question posed by a recent piece of research that CTN contributed to.

Relatively little research has been carried out on the important leadership role of chairs of governing bodies. What research has been done across different sectors suggests that the impact of chairs is highly variable. It is important therefore to understand in more detail what distinguishes effective from less effective chairs.

This report by Chris Cornforth, Yvonne Harrison and Vic Murray of the Open University helps to fill that gap. It presents the results of an online survey of board chairs and the people they work with, including chief executives, board members and staff. The survey collected data on perceptions of the chair leadership role, including the quality of the chair's relationships (with management, the board, and stakeholders), chair impact, and the influences on chair leadership.

### Key Findings

Chairs that were seen as fair, open to ideas, focused on building high quality relationships with others and encouraging team work were seen as having a considerable impact on the effectiveness of the board, chief executive, and organisation. The least effective chairs were those that were not seen as team players and were unable to manage inadequate performance by the key actors with whom they interact.

Various dimensions of a chair's emotional and spiritual intelligence were associated with his or her level of impact. In particular chairs with high impact were perceived as being socially aware, able to manage relationships and helping and service motivated.

The chairs' contribution was seen primarily in terms of process (e.g. managing board meetings) and content (e.g. providing information) rather than as a source of inspiration to boost board morale and board member engagement.

Chairs tended to rate their own performance and impact higher than other people they work with did. There is a potential danger that if this gap becomes too wide these relationships could become dysfunctional.

To read the full report please go to:-

<http://www.trusteenet.org.uk/news/what-makes-chairs-governing-bodies-effective>

## Not board meetings

*"Meetings are indispensable when you don't want to do anything." John Kenneth Galbraith (1908 – 2006)*

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## Governance stories – a chance to share your experience

The team at Governance Pages (run by ARVAC, the Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector) are running a project called Governance Stories. Their aim is to collect a range of real life chair and trustee stories and experiences that can be shared online. Trustees will be interviewed on camera and then highlights captured in short video clips that can be viewed by others from the Governance Pages website.

This is a really valuable project, generously supported by the Community Development Foundation, and we hope that some of you will overcome your fears of being in front of a camera and get involved. The first round of filming will take place in the latter half of February in London and Guildford. If you would be interested in taking part in the project, or would like to find out more, please email [info@governancepages.org.uk](mailto:info@governancepages.org.uk).

## The Code of Good Governance

CTN continues to be involved on the steering group of the sector's Code of Good Governance. The consultation on the Code's key principles closed at the end of 2009 and the steering group now hopes to launch the revised Code in the first half of 2010. It has been agreed that the Code of Good Governance should remain voluntary, but that the revised Code will have more meaning and become an effective standard in the sector.

## Making your board meetings more “green”

Does your organisation have a sustainable development policy and how “green” are your board meetings? Increasingly organisations are being judged on their green credentials. And quite rightly so. Not only are the public more likely to offer support and investment to charities that take sustainable development seriously (“Going Green: Charities and environmental responsibility”), but those charities that can adapt and find new ways of sustainable development will stand a better chance of sustaining their organisation into the future.

Below are some practical suggestions to support sustainable development when planning your next board meeting:-

- Try and make your meeting venue easily accessible by public transport, encourage its use and set your meetings so that your attendees can make full use of it. If that's not possible promote car sharing wherever possible
- Talk to your board members who have a distance to travel to meetings to ask if they could be brought into some meetings through a video or telephone conference call
- Consider sending papers via email to reduce the bulk of board papers – individuals could then choose which ones to print off
- Make sure any papers are printed doubled sided on “draft” and if the budget allows use recycled paper
- If the venue doesn't have recycling facilities make sure you provide your own and take it away with you
- We all know refreshments are very welcome at any meeting but try not to over order food. In case there are left overs have paper bags and aluminium foil at hand so people can take them home
- Buy refreshments locally, if possible from a local source and/or Fair

Trade produce

- Use tap water instead of bottled water
- Use glasses and crockery rather than paper or plastic – you won't be providing a banquet so there won't be that much washing up! Alternatively, choose biodegradable wares, and recycle.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. For many more ideas please go to the Every Action Counts website [www.everyactioncounts.org.uk](http://www.everyactioncounts.org.uk) and download a copy of "Every Action Counts for our event". See also the Charity Commission's "Going Green: Charities and Environmental Responsibility" at <http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/rs17.asp>

If your meetings are already sustainable, please share your tips by sending them to [info@trusteenet.org.uk](mailto:info@trusteenet.org.uk) so we may pass them on.

## Are you a chair of a local infrastructure organisation?

If the answer is yes, then have you tapped into NAVCA's Chairs' Network - the email network for chairs and trustees of local infrastructure organisations (LIOs). It provides a forum for trustees to share experiences of LIO matters, and seek advice from other chairs and trustees about problems that they may be facing.

To join the network or for further information please contact the network administrator at [admin.chairs@navca.org.uk](mailto:admin.chairs@navca.org.uk). Please include your name, your role and the organisation you chair.

Alternatively, you can contact Rebecca Balhachet on 0114 278 6636 Ex 131 or [rebecca.balhachet@navca.org.uk](mailto:rebecca.balhachet@navca.org.uk).

## Eastbourne chairs' lunches

EAVS is the CVS for Eastbourne and the surrounding parishes and runs a regular Chairs' Lunch event for chairs of local voluntary and community groups.

The object of these informal lunches is to encourage involvement between groups and, perhaps more importantly, between chairs. This, it is hoped, will create a network whereby chairs can talk to other chairs about issues that arise, which they may not be able to discuss with their board colleagues or staff.

The lunches, which are held every four months, always include some time to 'catch up' with each other, meet new members and a presentation on a useful topic. This forms an opportunity for chairs to keep up to date with events, when they may otherwise not have access to training.

The next Chairs' Lunch will be on 24 March 2010.

For more information about the Chairs' Lunches please contact Maureen Anstey, Community Support Officer Eastbourne, on 01323 419788 or [maureen@eavs.org.uk](mailto:maureen@eavs.org.uk).

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