

# SUSTAINABLE GOVERNANCE

SKILLS – EFFECTIVENESS – DIVERSITY



## Board self-assessment – governance for a lasting difference

Effective boards regularly review their performance, skills and composition<sup>1</sup>. This customisable self-assessment is designed to help boards do this systematically but manageably. It draws on recognised good practice from a range of sources including:

- The Scottish Governance Code, The Code of Good Governance Health Check (NI) and the Charity Governance Code (England)<sup>2</sup>
- The SCVO Good Governance Check-up
- Lasting Leadership<sup>®</sup> guides to sustainable leadership
- The Lasting Difference Toolkit<sup>®</sup>

However, it can be edited to reflect any criteria that are particularly important for your organisation, for example subject-specific knowledge, lived experience or future strategic developments.

It can be used to inform board discussions, away days, governance reviews and trustee recruitment. It can be worked through as a team, or individual responses can be collated to inform subsequent discussion. It is designed to be used by trustees, but it is worth including others, such as chief officers and managers. Consider protecting anonymity by collecting responses via an online survey tool or independent facilitator.

The self-assessment contains four sections:

1. Board skills
2. Board composition
3. Board effectiveness
4. Individual effectiveness

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<sup>1</sup> The Scottish Governance Code for the Third Sector <https://governancecode.scot>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.charitygovernancecode.org/en>

## 1. Board skills

‘A well-run board understands its role, powers and duties, and works collectively and proactively to achieve its organisational purpose. (Boards) should be self-aware and work together as a team.’ Scottish Governance Code

	My skills and knowledge				Board skills and knowledge				Comments
	Needs improving	Adequate	Good	Expert	Needs improving	Adequate	Good	Expert	
<b>Income and finance</b>									
Accounts, inc. charity									
Business development									
Financial management									
Funding / Income									
Organisational development									
<b>Influence and engagement</b>									
Campaigning / influencing									
Comms / marketing									
Corporate engagement									
Media / PR									
Policy and legislation									
<b>People and communities</b>									
Community development									
Equality, diversity, inclusion									
HR management									
Human rights									
Volunteering									

	My skills and knowledge				Board skills and knowledge				Comments
	Needs improving	Adequate	Good	Expert	Needs improving	Adequate	Good	Expert	
<b>Governance and oversight</b>									
Governance									
Legal									
Strategic planning									
Public sector									
Third Sector									
<b>Operational and technical</b>									
IT / digital / GDPR									
Research and evaluation									
Property									
Operations									
Quality Assurance									

**Reflection:**

- Do the board’s knowledge and skills reflect those that are needed to deliver its current strategy?
- What knowledge and skills will be needed to develop and deliver the next strategy?

Our guides to [knowledge management and succession planning](#) can help you to develop ideas and actions.

## 2. Board composition

'All third sector organisations should follow practices that fully recognise diversity in all its forms (e.g. diversity of background, thought and experience, as well as protected characteristics)...Diversity, in its widest sense, is essential for boards to be effective, informed and to make better decisions.' Scottish Governance Code

Boards often underestimate the importance of diversity and inclusion. Action to improve equality can be dismissed as tokenistic, despite being the foundation of many organisations' missions. Inequalities therefore persist in sector leadership and governance (for instance, two-thirds of the non-profit workforce are women<sup>3</sup> while almost two thirds of Trustees are men<sup>4</sup>). Seeing leadership through the lens of feminism, equalities and intersectionality is essential to increasing the diversity and sustainability of non-profit leadership.

Suggested scoring: 2 = We have good, consistent evidence; 1 = evidence is mixed or patchy; 0 = not evidenced.

	Score	Comments
Our board composition reflects the communities and issues the charity serves.		
We have diversity of background, thought and experience.		
The board is inclusive, giving equal opportunities and access for current directors.		
Our trustee recruitment practices will ensure future equal opportunity and access (e.g. reaching a wide audience, removing criteria and obstacles that limit diversity).		

### Reflection:

- Do you have any particular experiences, background or interests that would help the organisation better understand and respond to the people or issues it serves?
- Are you able to fulfil your role to your own satisfaction? Are there identifiable barriers that make it hard for you to make your contribution?

<sup>3</sup> UK Civil Society Almanac 2019, NCVO

<sup>4</sup> Taken on Trust, The Charity Commission, Cass Business School and Worshipful Company of Management Consultants, 2017.

### 3. Board effectiveness

Suggested scoring: 2 = We have good, consistent evidence; 1 = evidence is mixed or patchy; 0 = not evidenced.

	Score	Comments
<b>Working together</b>		
The board works as an effective team, making joint decisions and sharing workload.		
The board works well with the executive (e.g. chief officer), recognising that despite our different roles we are on the same team, with the same goals.		
All viewpoints are listened to, considered and valued, making best use of all the knowledge and skills around the table.		
We usually strike the right balance between scrutiny (looking down, in and back) and strategy (looking up, out and ahead).		
<b>Performance management and decision making</b>		
The board has the information it needs to make decisions.		
The board sets or approves policies, plans and budgets for the organisation to achieve its objects.		
The board monitors performance against plans, policies and budgets effectively.		
The board identifies and manages risk effectively.		
<b>Board development</b>		
There is a rigorous and transparent process for recruiting new board members.		
All directors have had an effective induction to the organisation and board.		
Directors have accessed suitable development opportunities.		
The board seeks independent advice or support where appropriate.		

#### Reflection:

- What has the board done well in the last year? What has it done less well?
- How could the Board perform better as a team? What actions would be needed for those improvements to come about?

## 4. Individual effectiveness

Suggested scoring: 2 = I am confident of this; 1 = I am not sure about this; 0 = not evidenced.

	Score	Comments
<b>Working with others</b>		
My opinions are heard and taken into account.		
I can attend board meetings, sub-groups and other board activities regularly.		
I manage my fair share of the board workload.		
<b>Performance management and decision making</b>		
I understand the work of the organisation and individual team members.		
I have an up-to-date knowledge of policies, strategy and budget.		
I participate in discussions and decision making.		
<b>Personal Development</b>		
I have the skills and understanding to provide effective scrutiny and monitoring.		
I have had opportunities, through the board, to support my own development.		
I am self-directed in my own personal development relating to my directorship.		

### Reflection

- Does what you get out of being a Board member balance with what you put in?
- Over the next 12 months, where and how do you intend to improve your contribution?
- Do you need help from anyone to effect this improvement?