



A practical guide to embedding young trustees in your Governance



Introduction

“There is no such thing as a young trustee. There is a trustee or there is not a trustee. ‘Young trustee’ is a useful tag but no more than that”

Joe Stockley,
Young Trustees Movement Ambassador

Lots of organisations are keen to bring about diversity of their Board, particularly through the lens of younger people. Boards whose trustees have different backgrounds and experience are more likely to encourage debate and make better decisions¹. Yet there are still just 0.5% of Charity trustees between the ages of 18-24 sitting on Boards today - so it is fantastic that you want to take your organisation to the next step in diversifying your Board!

This advice pack is full of real-life examples and clear templates, to help you take those first steps much more easily. It also shares stories of success from others already on this journey, from across the Our Bright Future² network to capture useful learning and offer some food for thought.

Here is the six-step checklist for getting young people onto your Board!

1. Identify skills & experience gaps and agree what you’re looking for
2. Create an inclusive role description and application form
3. Arrange an interview process that is accessible
4. Organise a welcoming induction process
5. Support the new trustees before, during and after Board meetings
6. Ensure a rewarding experience during tenancy and capture learning at end of term process

Ideally, all these steps should be the same for young trustees as for any other trustee. Still, if recruiting a young person for the first time, this may be a good opportunity to refresh documents and ways of working to ensure that these are even more accessible and inclusive.

¹ Kellogg Insight. Better Decisions Through Diversity. Based on the research of Katherine W. Phillips, Katie A. Liljenquist and Margaret A. Neale. 1 October 2010

² Our Bright Future is an ambitious and innovative partnership led by The Wildlife Trusts which brings together the youth and environmental sectors. This £33 million programme, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, is formed of 31 projects across the UK. Each project helps young people aged 11-24 gain vital skills and experience and improve their wellbeing. At the same time, they act as catalysts for delivering change for their local environment and community; whilst contributing to a greener economy.

1.

Identify skills and experience gaps and agree what you’re looking for

An effective Board has trustees with a mix of professional skills, personal experience and different ages, perspectives and backgrounds. It is powerful to have trustees with first-hand experience of your work on the ground. They can enrich Board discussions and play an important role in shaping strategy.

A skills audit can identify which skills and qualities your Board currently has, and where the gaps are. This will clarify what you need from new trustees and help you to find the right people. You can find a clear skills gaps template created by Reach Volunteering [here](#) that you can customise adding skills and lived experience relevant to your organisation.

You may then look to write a paper to discuss getting younger people onto your Board more specifically with fellow trustees – especially if it is something new for the Board to think about. Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust took this approach and have produced a [useful template you could use](#).



2.

Create an inclusive role description and application form

So, the Board is in agreement on what the needs are and the importance of getting younger people involved. Now to recruit. Legally, anyone can be a company director at 16 and a trustee at 18.

Did you know?

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In writing the **role description** add a clear summary of the role with clear responsibilities, expectations in terms of time and commitments, including when Board meetings take place. Explicitly state that young people are welcome to apply and why.

Ensure that your language doesn't put people off; for example make it clear that no prior experience on Boards is needed and that training will be provided. Plan and write for your target audiences:

- use layout to present information clearly, helping readers find what they need
- use signposts for accessibility (headings, bullet points, visuals, key words)
- create short sentences (12-20 words long) and paragraphs
- use everyday words, consider your tone of voice
- take care with jargon, technical terms and overformal language.

Ensure that travel expenses will be covered. You're also allowed to pay trustees to compensate for loss of income if it enables a more diverse Board.

Not sure where to start from? Here are two examples of brilliant role descriptions from [Friends of the Earth](#) and [Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust](#).

Keep your **application process** simple and straightforward for everyone. Consider allowing young people to apply using more creative means such as a video. This is particularly helpful for young people with disabilities who might find getting their words down on paper difficult. For example, see the following application process, from Uprising:

To apply, please write a short description or make a two-minute film about yourself, your interests, things you have experienced in life and learning that make you an ideal trustee and a proposal detailing:

- Why you want to be an UpRising trustee?
- How you fit the role requirements?
- What experience and personal skills you can bring to the governing Board?

The proposal can be a cover letter (one page maximum) or a video message (two minutes maximum).

Finally, if you are planning to use an application pack, here is an example of good practice from [Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust](#).

Did you know?

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And now that everything is ready, you can **spread the word widely!**

A good starting place is within the community your organisation serves and any youth groups that you have potentially already established (eg youth councils, youth campaign groups). There may also be existing young volunteers or interns who are in an ideal position to take on the role, meaning that some promotion can be focused internally. It is also worth reaching out, beyond your organisation, by advertising on job sites. For example, you can share the advert for free via the [Young Trustees Movement](#) to reach as many young people as possible, and ensure a more diverse reach too. The advert can be shared across social media platforms, utilising partnerships who can share or retweet to their own audience (eg your community



and voluntary service). You can also create a short video advertising for the role on social media, like [this video](#) from Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust. This significantly expands your promotion increasing the chances of reaching the intended age range and finding someone fantastic who really fits the role.

3.

Arrange an interview process that is accessible

The interview process can be nerve-racking no matter who you are – never mind for a first time Board trustee applicant, so there are steps that we can all take to make it as stress-free as possible, especially for young people. This way you'll get the best out of your candidates at interview.

Here are a few suggestions

You could arrange an informal **introductory chat** before the interviews with all candidates so that they can ask anything they are nervous about (30 minute zoom chat or in person if possible) before they are formally interviewed by the trustees. In arranging interviews, give people as many details as possible about what to expect and the format on the day (eg who will be there, the sorts of questions you'll be asking).

If you are looking for ideas around **interview questions** here is [a clear list of interview questions from #iwill](#).

If you ask candidates to do a presentation on the day, send details as far in advance so they have time to prepare and ensure you give all technical information – don't make assumptions about people's knowledge or access to 'tech'.

Could you consider appointing at least two young trustees?

This would help the new trustees to support each other, check-in before and after meetings, breakdown often complex papers and decisions. This would be especially important in the early days of their term, when Board meetings can appear intimidating.

Be flexible with when you can hold the interviews to fit in better with young people's schedules, offering online/dial in, wherever possible. Also make sure you ask if they require any adjustments or support for the interview.

When **conducting interviews**, score applicants on their potential. Consider the way they approach a problem and their curiosity, rather than how much experience they have. It's important to value soft skills such as creativity and emotional intelligence. At the end of the interview, allow time for the candidate to ask any questions and let them know when they should expect an update on whether they have been successful or not. If they aren't quite right for your Board at this time, give constructive feedback after the interview with some suggestions for the future. You can also share any potential suggestions to get them involved in your decision making (eg youth Boards, steering groups, consultations, volunteering).



4.

Organise a welcoming induction process

Now you have successfully recruited a new trustee to your Board, it's time to get up to speed. Share **background information** in a format that works for your trustee. This could include documents and previous meeting minutes to help

people get familiar with your style and approach.

Make sure trustees are aware of any existing policies starting with a focus on the areas of legal responsibility that all trustees need to know. Break the induction down into bite sized pieces that allows space to reflect and come back with questions so you don't inundate them with too much information. Ensure that it's a gradual process that includes elements that they'll need such as how to claim expenses.

Signpost your trustees to the [Young Trustees Movement digital hub](#) so they can access peer support.

To give them a **warm welcome**, you could also arrange time for the young person to meet with key members of the organisation for their role on the Board and existing trustees. This will help them to better understand your work, get to know the team and see where they fit in. You can also invite them to take part in some



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of your organisation's activities and give them an opportunity to meet volunteers and members of the community. Here is an example of the [agenda of an induction meeting](#) done via Zoom from the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Provide them with an induction pack, including key documents to read such as your organisation's strategy, business plan and departmental plans, so young trustees understand the scale of time involved and responsibilities.

Finally, consider if the young person could be matched with another more experienced trustee who could act as a **mentor or buddy**.

5.

Support the new trustees before, during and after Board meetings

In planning meetings choose venues and times, so that young trustees can attend. Ask them beforehand what restrictions they have (eg if it's difficult for them to take time off from their commitments or if they are limited by what type of transport they have access to).

Some young people may not have the experience of being in large meetings or projecting their voices to crowds. This barrier could be overcome via a **buddy system** on the Board, where a more experienced member is a mentor/buddy for a new young member. For example, for their young trustees Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust has agreed a six-month buddy system with the previous young trustee to offer insight and advice to new applicants. In this way, young people are successfully integrated into the Board with Board members sharing the responsibility of keeping them engaged and building their confidence.

A chat ahead of Board meetings that young trustees can have with other Board members, would ensure that they better understand what is coming up in the next meeting, ask any questions and get prepared, so it's easier for them to add their input on the day. Likewise, a chat after

each Board meeting will help the new trustee to ask questions/clarify points and express their comments on how the meeting went for them.

During each Board meeting, it is important to create an **inclusive atmosphere**, encouraging everyone to ask questions and avoid jargon and acronyms. Succinct Board papers that make clear points in plain English will ensure better engagement, especially if relevant graphs and imagery are added to improve readability.

If the meeting is face to face, having a seating plan where the young trustees can be seen by the Chair and are mixed between the experienced trustees would be ideal.

"When I joined, I had a Board buddy, to chat about papers. I had time with each Senior Leadership Team member, to talk me through their work and priorities. Speaking with other Board members they said: 'I wish I had that!'"

Jeana Malhi, the first youth Board member for Friends of the Earth

6.

Ensure a rewarding experience during tenancy and capture learning at end of term process

To ensure that the new trustees have a rewarding experience, it is important that more long-term trustees are trained on how they liaise and work with the younger ones and understand their importance and value on the Board.

[The Young Trustees Movement](#) hold regular training sessions to equip Board members to champion diversity on Boards. It would also be useful to watch [Young Trustees in the Environmental Sector](#), an informative online discussion for young people interested in becoming

trustees in the environmental sector. Five young trustees speak about their experiences, share good practice and dispel some of the myths around becoming a trustee.

During their time with you, actively look to **learn from their experience** and improve your processes for young people. Periodically ask questions like “Are you happy about

your experience?”, “Do you feel that you’re able to contribute to discussions and decision making? What can we do to help you contribute more?”. This will ensure that the young trustees have a meaningful and positive experience.

You can also offer **formal training** to new trustees or organise opportunities where they can spend time with specific team members so to make sure that they can fulfil their role more effectively. This applies to all trustees and is especially important to young people. Have a look at an example of a [learning & development plan from Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust](#).

At the end of their term, ensure they are thanked at their last meeting, offer an **exit interview** to capture learning before they move on (see suggested questions to consider [here](#)), and look into potential ways to keep them updated and involved with the organisation. Talk with them to see if they could become a mentor, helping you to support your future young trustees even better, while taking some of the pressure off the Chair to settle them in.

If it is the first time that you are getting younger trustees on your Board, you might also find useful a rough indication of the staff time needed to recruit and manage the new young trustees from Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust:

Task	Lead	Staff time
Development of role description and advert	Project Officer	Around two hours plus small input from comms team to share advert on website and social media
Shortlisting and initial chat with selected candidates	Project Officer / two volunteer officers	Half-day for shortlisting and then one hour chat per person
Interviewing and recruitment	Chair of Trustees / Trustees	One full day of each trustee's time (one hour per interview and then time to make decisions)
Induction to the organisation	Head/Project Officer	A few hours a month
Induction to the Board of Trustees	Chair of Trustees	Two hours
Mentoring centred around Board meetings which are every 8-10 weeks	Trustee	A few hours a month
Creation of a support and development plan for the young trustee	Head	Half-day plus an hour every three months for check-ins

Case study

Jeana Malhi

The first youth Board member for Friends of the Earth



Hi! My name is Jeana and I have been a youth Board member for Friends of the Earth Limited for the last three years. A lot of what I do outside of the Board member role is climate focused. In my day job,

I support people to engage their Councillors around climate change.

I didn't think of becoming a trustee before I saw the role advertised at FOE. FOE has been campaigning for more than 50 years in the climate space, so I felt so interested in the role as my values were so in line with their work. Coming from a grassroots background I was also very curious to know more about how the NGOs system works in influencing government from the inside, via lobbying activities.

I felt that I had something to offer too, which is my perspective on how the climate change is linked with colonialism and it's a system of injustice and oppression, as I am motivated by climate justice

and opposing the capitalistic and colonial structures responsible for climate change.

When I did the interview, I asked how much the organisation thought about hiring young Board members, because I didn't want to do if it was just a performative thing. Before this role, I had no leadership experience in professional settings. The jump was going to be huge and the learning curve steep! I was up for it only if the organisation had thought about the support someone without that experience might need.

And the response was amazing! When I joined, I had a Board buddy, to chat about papers. I had time with each Senior Leadership Team member, to talk me through their work and priorities. Speaking with other Board members they said: "I wish I had that!" I also had regular check in with my Chair and my access needs were met to meaningfully contribute. I also accessed Governance and Trustees training to get the basics covered. It's great to know that you can ask these things from an organisation!

"When I did the interview, I asked how much the organisation thought about hiring young Board members, because I didn't want to do if it was just a performative thing."

A barrier that I historically face in the environmental sector is that, being a racialised person, these spaces are not accessible. There is not a culture that welcomes that voice of difference. At FOE, they were very open to many things, and this allowed me to be part of the organisation's culture and not feeling outside of it. I definitely struggled with anxiety in putting my ideas forward before, thinking they are perceived as too bold. The way that I overcame this was by attending the Beyond Suffrage training programme, organised by Social Practise ENT which supports young women of colours to become Board trustees. It's important to have someone outside the organisation to talk about your challenges, too.

If the demographic of who sits on the Trustees Board are of a certain type and structurally these spaces aren't accessible, this brings a question for me: how do we do Board differently?

Virtual meetings can help. I am also a big advocate of Board papers that fulfil their purpose. You should be able to read the documents and get all the info that you need from them. Also, what kind of time we are expecting people to offer and what support we are giving people in return?

It's important to ask ourselves how we can make these spaces more welcoming. Being involved in such an influential organisation at such a strategic level has been a great experience. I learnt a lot and I was able to contribute to the conversations. I wished more young people had the same brilliant experience!

Case study

Elliott Lancaster BCAe

The first youth Board member for Staffordshire Wildlife Trust



Being a trustee for Staffordshire Wildlife Trust has been a fantastic experience, which I would recommend to other young people. My journey began after I was approached based on the impact of

my environmental activism and youth engagement work. The support from the Trust as part of the interview, induction and ongoing process was exemplary. I believe all environmental organisations must reach out to young people to make them aware of trustee positions, how to apply and how they can effectively contribute to these.

If I wasn't approached, I wouldn't have thought the role was something I was eligible for.

There have been many fantastic opportunities that have come out of this, which included chairing the Youth Environment Summit Staffordshire to encourage other young people to partake in environmental debates, as well as chairing the Sustainability Project Group to improve our carbon, water

and waste efficiency. The impact of my voluntary work led to becoming Support Staffordshire's Trustee of the Year (2021), as well as receiving the Diana Award. My message to all young people is to reach out to your local Trust and see what opportunities are available. I have learnt a lot for my self-development while supporting the strategic advancement of the organisation. I am not sure that I would have had a similar experience otherwise - I am extremely grateful to Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.

Useful organisations

- **Young Trustees Movement** aims to increase the number of trustees aged 30 and under on charity Boards. The organisation shares useful resources and runs regular free training sessions.
- **Getting on Board** is a charity which supports people from all sectors of society to become charity Board trustees, and charities to recruit and retain a diverse range of trustees.
- **Reach Volunteering** inspires, supports and connects civil society organisations and volunteers to work together. It is the UK's single biggest source of trustees for the voluntary sector.
- **Social Practise Academy** aims to facilitate the creation of leadership development and social entrepreneurship opportunities for young women aged between 18 and 30 from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

Resources

- **#iwill - Getting Young People onto Your Trustee Board**
- **Charities Aid Foundation - Young Trustees guide**
- **Getting On Board - How to recruit trustees for your charity guide**
- **Our Bright Future - Good Practice Guide: Involving Young People in Organisational Governance**
- **Roundhouse - Guided by Young Voices guide**
- **Social Practise Academy - Transforming Board Cultures Beyond Suffrage Guide**

Many thanks to all the organisations that contributed to the present advice pack, providing real-life examples, clear templates and invaluable comment:

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| • Friends of the Earth | • Uprising |
| • Fields Studies Council | • Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust |
| • #iwill | • Ulster Wildlife |
| • Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust | • Reach Volunteering |
| • Scottish Wildlife Trust | |

