



Charity Chairs Checklist

A brief guide to key actions

“Your next ten minutes read will help to deliver your next year’s plan”

Based on input from experienced chairs
Refined by day to day development
Used by all sizes of organisation

Neil Morricks has chaired voluntary organisations for more than thirty years, launched peer networks, advised charity boards on strategy, marketing, development and planning, provided seminars for Chair and CEO support and devised the **Charity Chairs Checklist** and the **Charity Action Plan**

1. Chair – Priorities

- Agree a **role description** with your board and chief executive and review annually
- Remember that you are the **chair of the charity** as well as the board and communicate the board’s role
- Develop a clear, shared **vision and strategy** and review annually
- Set the **tone and style** of all contact with management
- Draw out the **skills and talents** of fellow trustees
- Act as **sounding board** for colleagues
- Establish that there are sufficient and **suitable reserves, resources, policies and procedures**
- Behave as champion for the **business plan** by knowing your market and sector
- Understand and uphold your **constitution**
- Be alert to potential **HR and legal issues**
- Ensure that **decisions** are implemented by management
- Enable **progress** to be monitored and benchmarked

2. Chief Executive – Relationship

- Establish a clear division of **responsibilities** between your role description and the chief executive’s job specification
- Be prepared to act as **‘critical friend’** and support professional development
- Schedule regular one-to-one meetings and develop a mutual **action plan**
- Agree **board reporting** format and nature of attendance
- Mutually identify **major issues** and methods for resolving
- Learn how to handle **disagreements** and deal with them as they arise by accentuating positives
- Ensure that the **sharing of views** is a proper two-way process
- When carrying out **annual appraisals**, incorporate trustees’ views and aim for the ball – not the player

- Arrange to attend occasional **management meetings** by agreement
- Encourage presentations on **key topics** to the board

3. Board – Development

- Establish the appropriate **number** of trustees and potential future roles
- Carry out an inventory of **skills** and identify missing needs
- When **recruiting**, besides the national voluntary organisations, consider approaching local employers and outplacement companies
- Prepare an **induction** programme, supervise it personally and gain initial and ongoing feedback from new trustees
- Recognise **commitment** from colleagues and find ways to motivate ‘non-players’ by asking them to take on relevant projects, or organise their replacement
- Carry out an annual **review** of board performance (possibly in conjunction with the AGM)
- Build **understanding** between trustees and management by encouraging planned visits
- Plan **succession** for board roles especially the appointment of a vice-chair as your deputy and potential replacement with an agreed role description
- Consider setting up **sub-groups** to cover finance/funding, people/operations and communications/marketing – if there are not enough trustees, then find a ‘champion’ for each area
- Encourage **representative** trustees for relevant related organisations to add value and contacts through their connections
- In cases of large boards, use of an **executive group** can improve decision-making – but reporting back to all trustees should be observed

4. Meetings – Organisation

- **Types of meetings** – be clear. Are they general, trustees’ or special meetings?
- Know your **constitution**:
what is the quorum?
what percentage of voting is required?
do you have a casting vote?
is consent from third parties required?





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- Consider **how often** meetings are required
- Who sets the **agenda**? It should be led by you in conjunction with others primarily the chief executive
- Consider length, time of day and day of week of **meetings** – what suits the majority?
- Set **meeting dates** (where possible) at the start of each year to enable high levels of attendance
- Agenda and supporting materials should be **circulated** not less than one week in advance of meeting
- Consider **prioritising and timing agenda items** – pressing issues and decision items to be considered first and discussion or update items second
- **Minutes** are a critical record and drafts should be circulated within one week. Who is present, absent or in attendance? Summary of discussion and record of decision needed. Approved version should be signed by Chair at following meeting
- Include one **major topic** for review at each meeting and arrange an annual off site day

5. Legal – Knowledge

- Know and understand the **legal duties, responsibilities and liabilities** of charity trustees
- In addition, understand the **standards of skill and care** and their relevance to your board
- Trustees must understand that they share **collective responsibility** and are bound by decisions of the board, regardless of how they voted individually or whether they were present or not
- **Appointment of trustees** – ask all new trustees to complete and sign a declaration of willingness and eligibility to act
- Understand the **role of the Charity Commission** and its remit (and those of other regulators, where relevant)
- Remember, trustees can **delegate authority** but not responsibility
- Consider including **length of service** in trustee role description

6. Governance – Detail

- Know your **governing document** and is it still relevant?
- Key provisions: • objects • powers • meetings • decision-making • delegation
- Induction of new trustees and **ongoing training** of existing trustees in relationship to SORP (Statement of Recommended Practice – FRS 102)
- **Don't assume knowledge**. Focus on self, and group improvement

- Get your **policies and procedures** right, then use and follow them. They are your back up and ensure consistency in your dealings with others
- Delivery of paid services may carry an expectation or possibly an assessment of good governance – how confident are you of **demonstrating** that?
- Make **good governance the norm** throughout your charity with good practices being seen to be followed by all

7. Planning – Strategy

- Consider who should take the **lead** on planning – you, the board, the chief executive?
- How will you tackle it? **Information and guidance** from chief executive to be scrutinised and finalised by board?
- The trustees should feel free to be able to **challenge and robustly discuss** planning issues with the chief executive for an added layer of scrutiny rather than blind reliance
- Trustees set the **strategic direction** of your charity. Encourage and lead them to think strategically. Are the board considering the right things now? Are they looking to the future adequately?
- **Prioritise issues** according to importance and risk and add to agenda items accordingly
- **Evaluate and assess** your charity. How can it be improved?
- Constantly **look for opportunities**. Consider and evaluate them carefully
- When **setting budgets** ensure they are realistic and constantly monitored against actual results

8. Procedures – Mechanisms

- The starting point is your **constitution**. What additional layers of policies and procedures does your charity need?
- **Evaluate** existing procedures Do they work? Are they right? Are they robust enough?
- **Delegation** – consider carefully Strive for clear delegation, in writing, setting out remit, scope and any decision-making powers not forgetting reporting back requirements
- **Periodically review** all policies and procedures to ensure they are up to date – particularly relevant for legal and HR matters
- **Procedures** are there to be followed – otherwise they should be updated or removed, not ignored
- Maintain a **risk register** and keep up to date





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9. Change – Control

- Decide whether issues are **strategic or tactical** – the first is for the board and the second for management.
- Develop a **survival strategy** by producing a contingency plan based on 'what ifs '
- Produce a **marketing plan** and funders' perspective to underpin your business plan
- Ensure the board and management understand the **dynamics** of the sector in which you operate
- If using **SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats)** techniques, ensure conclusions are drawn and implemented
- Use **action planning**, constantly updated and avoid unnecessary agendas, minutes, memos and letters
- Check **service levels** even for free delivery and listen to users
- Gain **staff commitment** by clear and frequent communication and never underestimate resistance to change
- When making **major changes**, ensure that all benefits have been achieved
- Consider introducing **KPI's (key performance indicators)** for make or break activities and using a dashboard

10. Leadership – Motivation

- Believe in the **ethos** of your charity and make it the focus of your efforts
- Recognise the **tensions** between charitable objectives and commercial requirements – and balance the outcomes
- Develop a **communications policy** with trustees and management that reflects your charity's values
- Create a deliverable **succession plan** for all key participants
- In agreement with the chief executive, spend time with **team members and volunteers**
- Ensure that all **stakeholders** are heard and remember that the majority will be volunteers
- Think laterally in terms of **collaboration or joint ventures** with like-minded organisations
- You are the **ambassador** for your organisation – a succinct factual summary of the benefits to the community together with important milestones and delivered to the right audiences will always add value

Now to Action

Chairs can use the following table of practical steps to monitor their charity's progress.

This template can be adapted to suit each organisation's particular circumstances.

Strategy - What you want to achieve



Tactics - How you need to proceed



Delivery – Who you expect to fulfil

This guide is for those with an involvement in the third sector and is free to use.
Do share the Charity Chairs Checklist with any person who might find this helpful
The contents are comprehensive but are not claimed to be complete or conclusive
Please send any comments, questions or suggestions to [Neil Morricks](#) who will reply





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	Tactics	Delivery	Timing	Result
Strategy				
Structure				
Strategic Aims				
Governing Document				
Objects / Constitution				
Planning				
Action Plan				
Business Plan				
Operational Plan				
Controls				
Governance				
HR / Legal				
Professional Advisors				
Policies & Procedures				
Risk Register				
Contingency Plan				
Insurance Cover				
Finance				
Annual Budget				
Cash Flow Projection				
Rolling Forecast				
Monthly Accounts				
Annual Accounts				
Reserves & Restrictions				
Funding Objectives				
Board				
Role Descriptions				
Induction Process				
Meetings Schedule				
Sub Groups				
Skills Audit				
Succession Plan				
Personnel				
Job Specifications				
Recruitment				
Training				
Appraisal				
Pay Structure				
Succession Plan				
Organisation Chart				

	Tactics	Delivery	Timing	Result
Strategy				
Resources				
Property				
Equipment				
Inventory				
Audio				
Telephones				
Literature				
Maintenance				
Vehicles				
Systems				
Accounting				
CRM				
Database				
Fundraising				
Hardware				
Telecommunications				
Broadband				
Website Maintenance				
Development				
SWOT / STEEPLE				
Marketing Plan				
Communications				
Relationship Map				
Stakeholder Review				
Social Media				
Donors Initiative				
Volunteer Sourcing				
Service Users				
Partnerships				
Suppliers				
Competitors				
Reporting				
CEO Report				
Milestones				
SMART Targets				
Key Performance Indicators				
Chart Formats				
Impact Report				
Newsletters				
Webinars				
Annual Report				