

Changing more than a name

Challenges in Contemporary Governance: Looking through a shared lens

Alumni webinar – Tuesday 4th May 2021

Seminar Chat Exploration: What questions should boards and senior teams be asking now as we contemplate both short and long term challenges?

Big generative questions

- What will the organisation look like in 5 years' time?
- How have/will the needs of our beneficiaries change - and what/how do we need to pivot our strategy to react/respond to this?
- How can we continue to remain relevant while also remaining economically sustainable?
- What is the purpose of our organisation and what is the difference we are trying to achieve (i.e. why do we exist) and is this still relevant in a changing external environment?
- How do we improve our downward accountability to our 'beneficiaries' especially within an international context, where local solutions and context are more critical than ever?
- How do we respond to external challenges such as environmental considerations, use of AI and diversity?
- How can we help charities emerge into the new normal? Financial models have had to change, working practices and the level of need on a diminishing charity sector. As a funder, we need to be able to understand the extent of the change so we can fund more sustainably.
- How do we continue to make progress on EDI and anti-racism in the sector? How do we embed that commitment?
- The last year has highlighted so many inequities in our society. How should we approach this vast potential agenda with Boards that are struggling to be more representative?
- How do we take the opportunity to see growth differently?

Play the learning forwards questions

- How do we shift from defence mode to entrepreneurship so we can capitalise on the new innovations we have recently embraced??
- Of the things that have essentially been forced upon us by the pandemic, what should we keep, what should we drop and what should we expand on.
- What have we learnt from the last 12 months that will help us?
- What do we not want to lose that we have gained in lockdown?
- What do we need to keep from how we have worked during COVID?
- Short term question but could be long term: how do we readjust our working practices after over a year working remotely?
- How to manage opportunities and challenges from the full / partial 'return to the office'
- How best to capture key learning from the past year?
- What has worked really well over the last year that you will continue doing?

- As we come out (hopefully) of the pandemic what different skills should we be looking for in both the Chair and Chief Executive compared to the past 12 - 18 months?
- the virtual working practices have enabled people to contribute to boards much more conveniently- do we keep this, as it may help us to diversify our board, or do we return to in- person meetings? How do we get the balance right?
- We have made lots of new connections as we pivoted to making local grants rather than providing our own activities- how do we keep this network vital?
- Some CEO/Chair relationships have probably been very different to 'normal' and we've been in crisis mode for so long... how do we re-set those relationships to be comfortable with talking about taking risks and growth again?
- How do we build relationships on the board when some "new trustees" have been trustees for a whole year as well as newer trustees?
- Have our beneficiaries become more comfortable with digital communications over the pandemic, and if so can we use this to continue to deliver some of our services differently?

Sharp strategic questions

- A balance between a level of risk that reflects the appetite of the board and the sustainability of the organisation. Do we have the resources for the medium to short term to deliver our strategy?
- Are we still fit for purpose?
- What have been the unintended consequences of the changes we've had to make?
- What changes do we need to make to governance structures to encourage a range of different voices at a governance level?
- Is our organisation still needed?
- Short term question is how to measure the positive and negative changes accurately so that good decisions are made for the long term?
- Have we got the right people around the board table to ensure that we are seeing all angles?
- Are there other organisations that we should be working with to support our users? Should we be collaborating, merging or competing?

Conversation starters

- How do we recover better than we were before?
- How will our working model change as a result of WFH for 15 months?
- is everyone in the charity clear about our shared purpose and roles?
- How do we plan when there is still significant long-term uncertainty regarding Covid? Is scenario planning the best we can do?
- How do we continue to do the best for our beneficiaries without damaging the better relationship with local government, however they're restrictions and changing support is unpredictable?
- Do pre-existing delivery models still meet need/take us towards our overall objective?
- Do you believe it's the age old questions that transcend time - do we have the right people in both trustees and execs, do we have the right skills but importantly do we have the appropriate and relevant systems for today's demands of our donors, our staff and parties that who drive the purpose of our respective charities?
- As our need for 'specialists' and 'skills' on our board grows, how can we involve lay voices in our strategy development & plans?
- How can we ensure that those who are internet poor or live in poor housing conditions are not excluded from work place if home working is expected?

- Some organisations are using 'decompression' models for staff and colleagues as we leave the pandemic - should boards also consider decompressing. If so what might that look like?
- In addition to 'scenarios' can we play in new thinking about the use of technology in the sector.
- What about managing power relationships between large & small charities?
- How can we help charities emerge into the new normal? Financial models have had to change, working practices and the level of need on a diminishing charity sector. As a funder, we need to be able to understand the extent of the change so we can fund more sustainably.
- What is the role for non-environmental charities in playing our part in climate and nature emergency? How to get boards and execs to have conversations about how to play our part beyond thinking about travel and paper ordering - the climate crisis will impact all our work and beneficiaries