

Board Recruitment Toolkit

Guidance and resources to help you recruit and diversify your board

Introduction

Sport has a unique ability to bring people together to celebrate the diversity of our society, and diverse organisations are best placed to ensure diversity across sports. This starts with inclusive organisations that are representative of the communities they work with, and have diversity of thought, experience and background across their staff and governance.

Recruitment isn't easy. And it isn't meant to be.

You're looking for someone to fulfil a role of course, but you're also looking to improve your organisation, enhance your culture, live the values, and play their part in helping the organisation achieve its mission. Part of that is to ensure that your organisation is inclusive, fosters a sense of belonging, and represents the community so you will be looking for people to uphold that mission.

This toolkit provides you with guidance and resources, tips and tricks to ensure that you can attract, onboard and retain diverse talent for your Board.

“An inclusive organisation is one in which everyone is – and in which everyone feels – valued, respected and supported.”

Identify your needs

Introduction

Each role in an organisation exists to address a need and solve a problem. These change through different phases in growth and as a response to changing context.

Ask what the organisation needs at this time. What worked the last time may not be appropriate now. The recruitment process should be rooted in thinking about what kind of skills, personality, temperament and background the successful candidate needs to have, to help with current and future challenges.

Timeline

In advance of the process starting, this preparatory work may take place over the course of several weeks as you conduct the skills audit.

Inclusive recruitment

Diversity in recruitment is about ensuring that the process to fill any role is transparent and inclusive.

It is an intentional approach towards connecting with a broad range of candidates, with particular care around groups that are traditionally underrepresented in the workplace. The aim is to remove barriers to access, fair assessment, thoughtful onboarding, and a focus on candidate care through the whole process.

The Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance>

Disability Confident is creating a movement of change, encouraging employers to think differently about disability and take action to improve how they recruit, retain and develop disabled people
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/disability-confident-campaign>

Recruitment in action

Completing a Skills Audit

It is important to consider how the role you're recruiting for complements and intersects with other roles, and other people. What skills and backgrounds already exist on the Board and in the organisation already?

The audit could include:

- Reflecting on institutional culture and practices
- A critical reflection on your Board's diversity.
- A critical reflection of what diversity could bring to your board
- A review of what diversity means for your organisation given the area you work in and the region you cover
- Developing effective mentors to support new trustees through onboarding and induction

You should ask the Nominations Committee to define:

- What you are looking to achieve organisationally with this board appointment
- What skills, experience, or style do you need
- If you communicated clearly internally and externally about the importance of diversity as part the organisation's strategy
- Whether your Diversity Inclusion and Action Plan (DIAP) is up to date and accessible

In your DIAP, you should reflect on the following questions:

- What do you require? What are your non-negotiables and why?
- What do you mean by 'diversity'?
- Is what you are looking for achievable? If it's about increasing representation of a particular community or group, is this realistic? Is this based on local demographics? A post in London should aim to reach the levels of diversity of London but aiming for the same in rural areas may be unrealistic.
- How will you assess your candidates? Are you considering the benefits of diverse experiences rather than traditional career trajectories? It's important to look at not just the nine protected characteristics, but also factors such as lived experience, geographic, socio-economic background, educational levels, and neurodiversity.

- Who do you need to involve, and how will you do that?
- Have you planned for onboarding, training and induction? Do you have the resources and capacity to provide more tailored support for candidates who need it?

Quote

Diversity in athletics is something very close to my heart and this position has given me an opportunity to really drive the change I want to see. In any organisation, you can only improve diversity by ensuring that people see people who look like them at the top.

Tunji Akintokun, Appointed to England Athletics

Measuring success

A clear understanding of what skills your board requires is the first crucial step in going out to find the right person. This skills set should be developed in line with the gaps on the board, the organisation's strategic objectives and its Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan.

A robust board will have a range of skills represented covering different operational and thematic areas of expertise. Having a clear view not just of existing gaps but also anticipating emerging and future needs will help the board with both recruitment and succession planning.

A skills audit that plans for bringing on new skills such as safeguarding, HR or lived experience should also consider the terms of existing trustees and when people are due to step down so there is no gap, particularly around key areas.

Expert help

A search partner will work in partnership with you and will strive to gain a deeper understanding of your organisation, your culture, and the gaps you are looking to fill. This can involve discussions with key internal and external stakeholders to develop a holistic picture of what the organisational needs are. This is particularly helpful when you're thinking about the board as a whole and considering complementarity of skills.

Design the process

Introduction

An inclusive recruitment process should be designed with candidate care in mind. Clarity around timelines and responsibilities is critical in ensuring a smooth process, helps with communication internally and externally, and maintains momentum and engagement.

When designing a process consider all potential applicants and their needs in terms of accessibility and communications.

Recruiting and appointing trustees is a significant responsibility and requires commitment and time to reach a broader range of potential candidates, and run a robust process.

Timeline

Designing a process is not time intensive but will ensure that you have considered all factors in advance of recruitment. Outlining key dates to panel members and to candidates at the start of the process is key.

Typical stages in a recruitment process:

Planning – considering your needs, conducting a skills matrix, designing the process, developing your materials

Advertising and engagement – consider different platforms for inclusive recruitment; make sure your recruitment information such as application forms are designed accessibility and consider developing accessible formats ensure enough time for candidates to see your opportunity and apply

Longlisting applicants

Interviewing – consider diverse experience; relevant areas of motivation, values, skills

Shortlisting candidates that match the original agreed criteria

Offer and appointment

Induction and onboarding

An ideal timeline could be 12 weeks from steps 2-6.

Inclusive recruitment

Recruitment panel

Constitute a diverse and representative nominations committee (to whom decision-making powers are delegated). Panels should have a balance of experience and direct relevance to the recruitment. If necessary, organisations could consider inviting individuals to provide support. This could be someone who knows the organisation well, from the membership community, partner organisations, a senior volunteer or another stakeholder.

Maintaining momentum

Ensure there isn't too much of a lag between different phases in the process. A protracted or delayed process runs the risk of good candidates either losing interest, or taking up another role.

Recruitment in action

Work backwards from when you need the candidate to join and fix the dates for:

- Job Description being ready;
- panel selection;
- advertising;
- closing date;
- shortlisting;
- interview dates;
- and decisions.

Get panel dates in everyone's diaries early.

If the interviews are likely to be in person, book accessible rooms for interviews at the same time - make sure the venue is accessible including toilets and parking. Check that it is accessible via public transport.

Be sure to ask candidates if they have communication or accessibility requirements before and in enough time to arrange changes or support.

Check the calendar for conflicts, team members' annual leave, school holidays, religious holidays and bank holiday calendars.

Check with colleagues for communications and other significant events in the organisation. Depending on who is helping with the recruitment, what is their capacity like through the planned timeline?

Communicate the key dates from closing to decision with candidates in the recruitment pack.

Quote:

At SportsAid, we have long believed that diversity equals excellence. Only with a diverse range of people at every level can organisations truly reach their full potential.

The programme has allowed us to bring in exceptional leaders from the private sector who have helped us challenge our processes and create structures and systems that are inclusive to all.

Tim Lawler, CEO, SportAid

Measuring success

A well-designed process means engaged candidates. It's important to remember that success in the process is not just about the successful candidate, but also the relationships with other candidates in the process. Candidates who have a positive impression of the organisation through a well thought out and supportive process may go on to be ambassadors, supporters, staff or future Board members and it's critical that candidate care is embedded in the process.

Candidates respond to:

- Helpful and regular communication
- Notifications of successful and unsuccessful applications and stage progression.
- A timeline of the hiring process.
- Human contact after application.
- Candidates feel disappointed when:
 - Needlessly long application processes.
 - Lack of communication.
 - The hiring process is too long.
 - No confirmation emails.
 - No means to contact the recruiter.

Engagement with key individuals at the organisation can also be the difference between your preferred candidate accepting or rejecting the opportunity, so it's important to be flexible and accessible as required.

Expert help

A search firm can help in planning and project managing the process. This covers a range of elements including:

- developing collateral for advertising
- providing guidance on best practice around inclusive recruitment
- advising on advertising text and relevant platforms
- handling candidate care and communications
- logistics around managing diaries, applications, and interviews.

Executive search firms will also focus on candidate engagement and support through the process, which is important for individuals to have a good experience of the recruitment process, and form a positive impression of the organisation they're applying to.

We are seeing more people use blind recruitment as a part of the process, and a search firm, or blind recruitment platform can run this process on your behalf.

Promoting the role

Introduction

You will have a number of considerations including cost and reach when advertising your role. Don't restrict yourself to one way of advertising, choose a range of approaches to increase the chance of attracting the people you want to recruit. Online options which are free or low-cost will allow you to reach beyond your usual network. Use the results of your skills and diversity reviews to inform your decisions on advertising.

Making sure that you have a thorough job description that clearly defines what the job is and the skills it requires without any unconscious bias is a great first interaction with a potential candidate.

Timeline

Having the position open for applications for 28 days (4 weeks) is best practice to allow people enough time to see the opportunity and apply to ensure a wide reach.

Inclusive recruitment

When compiling and designing candidate documentation, you should consider:

Imagery: are images inclusive and representative of your work, and the community?

Language: are you using gendered language, jargon that might exclude people or phrases that could discriminate against some candidates?

Sample language: "We are committed to, and value the principles of diversity, equality and inclusion. We strive to provide an inclusive and supportive working environment where all employees feel respected and supported in fulfilling their potential. We encourage and welcome applications from all, regardless of background and are particularly interested to hear from those currently under-represented in the sports sector."

Accessibility: Are your documents available in accessible formats?

You can use the Microsoft Accessibility Checker as an easy guide to creating a document that will be accessible.

Are your documents clear and concise?

You can use the Activity Alliance Inclusive Communications factsheet linked in our Resources section.

Person Specification: Consider essential skills and experience very carefully to ensure you are not excluding strong, diverse candidates. Governance or Board experience is often included but is that necessary for your specific Board appointment?

Consider whether knowledge of your sport is also a requirement. Is that knowledge well represented on already, and if so, would you consider an individual without experience of working within the Sport sector?

Advertising – Choose a range of approaches to increase the chance of attracting the people you want to recruit.

Location: are you advertising locally, regionally or nationally? Are you recruiting on a number of platforms, including across social media channels, that increase your reach in under-represented groups?

Some interesting platforms for consideration include:

Do-It Trustee Finder

Activity Alliance

Bar in the Community (for trustees with legal skills)

BMEjobs.co.uk

Boardappointments.co.uk

Charity Job

CIPD (for trustees with HR skills, select “volunteering” in the salary list to get a free listing)

Diversity jobsite

MyDiversity.com

DiverseJobsMatter

DiversityLink

The Diversity Dashboard

Ethnic Jobsite

Evenbreak

Getting On Board

Honorary Treasurers Forum

ICAEW

LinkedIn

Local CVS or Volunteer Bureau

Media Trust (for trustees with media/communications skills)

NED on board

Pink Jobs

Proud vercida

Reach

Sporting Equals

The voice

Trustees unlimited

UK Sport job site

Women on Boards

Young Trustees Movement

Location Specific

Good Moves (Scotland)

The Fore/Bulldog Trust (primarily goes to London professionals)

Team London (for London charities)

Recruitment in action

- Candidate Pack - In order to promote your vacancy widely as and give potential candidates relevant information about the role, it is advisable to consider the development of a brochure for circulation to potential candidates. The brochure should contain helpful information pertaining to the appointment including:
- Background information on the organisation – this could include any helpful information relating to the organisational mission, values, history, strategy, size, scale/reach, relevant financial information, membership and any other relevant details.
- Diversity Statement
- Job Description
- Person Specification
- Time Commitment - expressed as days per month
- Dates of Board meetings for the upcoming year
- Location of Board meetings - are they likely to be virtual or a hybrid model of in-person and virtual meetings?
- Term Limit
- Remuneration (if any) and expenses
- Information on the application process
- Point of contact listed for informal inquiries
- Include an Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form

It is important to find out access needs of a potential Trustee as this is not only a legal requirement, but will inform the process as well as how these needs may shape Board meetings going forward. This could be done as a question in the application form and by including your organisation's commitment to equal opportunities and diversity in the application pack.

Quote:

The Diversity in Sport Leadership programme has given me the opportunity ... to transfer my professional experience into a governance role and begin to drive the change I want to see in sport.

Jennifer Thomas, Appointed to England Netball

Measuring success

A common barrier to a diverse field is having a narrow range of avenues for advertising the role. It is important to advertise your role openly and transparently to ensure that your opportunity is seen by a wide range of people, via a number of platforms and networks. This means having a clear strategy on sharing details through

- social media such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook
- relevant interest networks based on the skills you're looking for e.g HR, Finance, Safeguarding
- where to promote the role through advertising platforms (paid or free)
- newsletters
- staff and trustee LinkedIn pages and personal networks
- sector platforms

Having someone with a responsibility to share the job details and leveraging existing networks is important to increase your chances of a larger and more varied field of interested candidates.

One way of reducing the possibility of unconscious bias in selection is to apply elements of blind recruitment in the process. You could anonymise applications before the selection panel reviews them by removing names, dates of qualifications and even university or school names from applications. This reduces the chance of bias relating to age, gender, ethnicity and educational background.

Expert help

Expert search partners will identify and engage a broad and diverse range of individuals from different sectors who may be potential applicants. Many of these people may not be actively looking for a role, and not reviewing adverts regularly. The search team will approach candidates to present the role, advocate for the opportunity, seek referrals, answer questions, explain the process and encourage them to submit an application by the deadline.

Deciding on a shortlist

Introduction

Preparation is key when it comes to the shortlisting stage. It is important that the Nominations Committee come together as a group to complete the shortlisting process but it is also important that they receive all the applications in advance of the shortlisting meeting so they have the opportunity and time to review all applications.

Timeline

A shortlisting meeting should take no longer than a few hours, but you should allow Panel Members to review candidate applications in advance.

Inclusive recruitment

When the Nominations Committee meet as group and before beginning the shortlisting process, it is important to have a refresher on:

What are you looking to achieve organisationally with this Board appointment?

What skills, experience, independence and diversity is required on the Board

Your defined criteria as set out in your job description. This should focus on 2 or 3 areas of experience that no one else on the Board can provide.

As Chair of the Nominations Committee, you should encourage the Committee to focus on candidates' transferable skills and experiences.

They should also ensure the committee is considering bias as they assess and select candidates. This could be conscious, explicit biases or unconscious, implicit biases.

They should also support positive action when the Committee is split over the suitability of a candidate from a protected characteristic under-represented in the organisation

Recruitment in action

Review each candidate individually and allow each member of the Committee to comment on each candidate:

Quickly exclude unsuitable candidates

Focus your time in the meeting on those candidates with the skills you need

Agree how many candidates you wish to interview (consider a number between 4 and 6) to give diversity and choice within the candidate field

As well as contacting the successful candidates to let them know they are being invited to interview do also contact the unsuccessful candidates and provide feedback to them

Quote

In the past we have struggled to attract candidates with diverse backgrounds but working with you and Perrett Laver has extended our reach and I hope made us a more attractive proposition to a wider candidate pool

Karen Watkinson, Angling Trust

Measuring success

When you get to the shortlisting stage, it's important to have a clear and agreed view of what the selection committee is looking for and assessing. This means using agreed criteria for selection, and also being clear and consistent around the reason for not progressing candidates. This can form the basis of constructive and valuable feedback for unsuccessful candidates which is a key part of a good search process.

Alongside the key criteria around skill sets, inclusive recruitment best practice involves valuing lived expertise as much as professional expertise. Actively seeking to include a range of experiences gained in different ways is an important way of including diverse experiences and backgrounds.

Expert help

If using an executive search firm ask them to provide a diverse shortlist and make it clear that their success at delivering this is a key performance indicator. When working with a partner, it is also important to be clear about what your diversity needs are, but also to establish a shared view on a wide range of diversity characteristics, both inherent and acquired. Consultants will ensure that the panel is considering, and mitigating, unconscious bias when deliberating and provide an external objective view.

A search partner will be able to advise and consult on the comparative skills of candidates, and relate this back to organisational priorities based on the stakeholder consultation. They will also handle candidate care and provide feedback for candidates who are not taken through.

Assessment and appointment

Introduction

The interview process should be designed to be fair, inclusive, competitive and candidate friendly.

The stakeholders that form the Selection Committee should be diverse and representative.

Design your interview to test the key qualities you are looking for, and to ensure that all candidates have the opportunity to show their full potential. Explore the shortlisted candidates' own level of commitment to equality issues, and how this has been evidenced in their careers to date. Candidates will want to find out more about your organisation and Board too, so make opportunities for them to do this by considering:

informal conversations with key stakeholders

discussion and/or focus groups

Timeline

1 week.

Inclusive recruitment

Due Diligence -It is at this stage in the process you may also wish to start collecting references. Ask each candidate for two referees' contact details and where you can collect a verbal reference for each of the candidates.

Location - Take time to consider the location of the interview. Make sure it is an accessible location and plan a visit in advance and review the venue accessibility checklist.

Timing – Be flexible with timing so candidates with caring responsibilities and work are able to attend the interview.

Panel - Make sure a diverse panel is involved to mitigate risks of unconscious bias.

Information Gathering - Candidates will want to find out more about your organisation and Board too, so make opportunities for them to do this by considering informal conversations with key stakeholders and discussion and/or focus groups

Recruitment in action

Interviews

Develop your interview questions as a Nominations Committee and ensure there is input from all members. When assessing specific skills and experience ask for examples. Develop a set of questions that are linked to the success criteria as highlighted in the role profile. Ensure that these are the same for all candidates so that you are able to compare responses in a fair and consistent way. This does not mean that you cannot ask different questions based on candidates' specific experience, but it's important that you have set areas that you are covering with each candidate.

Panel

Make sure a diverse panel is involved to mitigate risks of unconscious bias. Having as diverse a panel of interviewers as possible will make candidates more comfortable as well as demonstrating that your organisation is inclusive and welcoming. Depending on the makeup of your existing Board, this might mean involving stakeholders, staff, athletes, service users or volunteers.

Selection

Culture is important to the identity of any organisation and it's worth considering how candidates will add to your culture rather than fit it.

Being aware of how unconscious bias can impact recruitment. One way of mitigating this is to assess CVs blind by removing the name, gender and age, and by ensuring that a diverse set of stakeholders participate in selecting candidates, are ways that can help fight against unconscious racism, ageism, and sexism and bias against disabled people.

Do not stand candidates down until you have had the offer accepted. Give yourself some time and manage expectations on when people should expect to hear about the outcome of their interview

Candidate care

Provide as much feedback as possible to unsuccessful candidates. Remember that each candidate in the process will have formed an impression of your organisation, through the people they've met, how they've been treated and communicated with, and how they've been supported through the process.

Quote

Everyone I've dealt with has looked at me as an individual, not just a candidate, and responded to my needs.

Andi Jarvis, Network Member

Measuring Success

Candidate Engagement

Providing honest and constructive feedback will help candidates in their own development, and it will help you maintain a relationship with a wider network of individuals who are already interested in your organisation. Assessing candidates against core requirements in your brief ensures a skills-focus and gives a framework justify your selection as a panel. Being clear from the outset about success criteria and the metrics you're using to select and appoint will be essential in providing fair and consistent feedback to unsuccessful candidates.

Expert help

A search firm can develop interview guides, and support on the assessment and interview stage. They can conduct interviews with shortlisted candidates and provide summary on each candidate. This includes detail on strengths of each candidate, areas for consideration and can also provide commentary on candidates who are not recommended.

The search partner will then manage the communication to both successful and unsuccessful candidates to provide feedback and coaching as appropriate.

Onboarding, induction & ongoing support

Introduction

Being a trustee requires skill, and support. It's vital that members joining your Board are provided with information and have a proper induction plan. This could include buddying them with another Board member, arranging conversations with key staff, service visits, and training on the role of being a trustee. This would also include ongoing review, coaching and appraisal from the Chair as necessary.

<https://trusteesweek.org/training/>

Onboarding

The process of bringing in a new trustee doesn't end with appointment. Good onboarding is essential and it needs to consider the particular needs of the individual. This might be in relation to particular skills training, or it might be in relation to making adjustments to the way the Board meetings are run to ensure that you are inclusive and considering candidate needs.

Timeline

Ongoing

Inclusive recruitment

The goal of an inclusive onboarding experience is to make Trustees feel welcomed and valued, whilst also addressing existing barriers to, accessibility and inclusion.

Having people from a range of backgrounds means that Boards need to consider different needs, and this can mean reviewing how the Board works. This could be in relation to where and when the Board meets and if this is convenient to people with different commitments and responsibilities, to how accessible are the materials and Board papers.

Recruitment in action

Ensure that you maintain engagement with your candidates between appointment and when they start.

Having a conversation with new trustees early about what their needs, preferences and constraints are will be an important way to demonstrate genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion. Questions could include

- What are your access needs?
- What is your availability to attend meetings? Are you in full-time work or education?
- Do you have any care commitments?
- What are your digital inclusion needs? Are you able to attend virtual meetings? Do you have a stable internet connection?
- Have induction activities planned for them, with introductory reading and any training set up for them.

Quote

It doesn't stop there - post placement the team have continued to keep in touch and become real allies for me

Andi Jarvis, Network Member

Measuring success

Successful onboarding is all about ensuring that trustees feel equipped in terms of understanding their role, how they can add value and crucially, feeling comfortable in contributing their opinions and perspective.

The role of the Chair is key in developing a Board culture and dynamic where candidates feel that they are able to challenge, and provide their perspective in a safe and inclusive environment. This is likely to result in higher levels of retention when candidates have been supported through training and mentoring, and feel valued for the skills and experience they bring to the Board.

Expert help

At this stage, the search partner will play a very light touch role. However, they can provide guidance on what will help in terms of onboarding, and will also continue to engage with and support the candidate after they have been placed. This can help to identify any issues or areas of concern that the candidate may raise, and provide the appropriate support.