

## Outlining who will be involved

### Introduction

There will be a range of people who will be involved in your social enterprise, your board, staff, volunteers, the wider community, and stakeholders. Rural social enterprises often rely on and benefit from the support and involvement of local people, who may volunteer their skills and expertise in order to support the work. In addition, there may be specific staff roles which are required in order to deliver the social enterprise activity.

It is important to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of people involved in your social enterprise, so that everyone knows what is expected of them within the wider team.

Many rural social enterprises have a limited capacity, and operate with a small number of volunteers and/or staff. For this reason, it is important to ensure that everyone's time is being used effectively, and that tasks are assigned to people who are best-suited to undertake them.

Having a clear understanding of what people are doing in the organisation (whether they are staff or volunteers) also helps to ensure that people are receiving the right support and training for their roles.

### The Board or Committee

A Board is a legal body who are responsible for overseeing the governance and strategic management of the social enterprise. Board members can be called trustees, directors, board members, governors, or committee members.

It is the duty of the board to provide strategic direction, set organisational aims, and ensure that the organisation is meeting its stated aims and purpose. The board is also responsible for ensuring that you comply with laws and regulations, and for accountability to the wider community.

It is important to consider the range of experience from across the wider community and aim to attract people from a range of backgrounds and perspectives that can bring skills and expertise. In particular, you should look for people who are:

- Interested and supportive of what you are doing
- Willing to help with their skills, expertise, and networks
- Be objective and constructive
- Be willing to learn and bring new perspectives

You should select people to be members of your board because they are not only interested in your project, but have relevant skills or expertise that can assist the enterprise. The issue of population decline in rural areas can make this a challenge. You may find that you have to look further than your local community to bring specific skills, expertise, and perspectives. See '[Good Governance](#)', section 'Who is on the governing body?' for more information.

- Read more about social enterprise boards [here](#).

### Roles on the board

While each board member has equal responsibility for the social enterprise, some members make take on specific roles on the board, such as Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. These different roles are outlined below:

#### Chairperson

- Supporting and supervising the head of staff, and acting as a channel for communication between the board and staff
- Preparing agendas for the meeting in consultation with staff and other board members, and then ensuring meetings are run effectively
- Holding the casting vote in the event of a split decision
- Ensuring AGMs and EGMs are carried out according to the governing document

#### Treasurer

- Overseeing and reporting on the organisation's finances
- Presenting financial reports, and answering questions at meetings and the AGM
- Being a signatory to any major banking transactions
- Liaising with auditors and financial examiners for the annual review of accounts
- Where there is not a staff role responsible for finance, this could also include book keeping, issuing receipts for cash received, and keeping records of cash paid out

#### Secretary

- Convening meetings and booking rooms
- Dealing with correspondence and being a cheque signatory
- Preparing agendas for meetings (in consultation with Chair)
- Taking minutes of meetings and ensuring back-up information is available when needed

You can read more about these roles in more detail at this webpage from the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations website: <https://scvo.org.uk/support/running-your-organisation/governance/roles-responsibilities>

## Diversity on your board

It is important that you include a wide range of perspectives on your board, and keep diversity at the forefront of your mind. If possible, you should try to achieve a good gender balance, as well as considering the wider demographic in terms of younger people, people of colour, different abilities, etc - as well as the skills and experience that these different perspectives bring.

In the rural context involving young people can have a positive impact in terms of attracting and retaining young people. You can read more about the benefits of youth representation in this case study from the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust, in Scotland:

<https://www.ruralsehub.net/brandon-clements-young-board-director-isle-of-gigha-heritage-trust/>

## Review and skills audit for your board

It is important to identify the skills, knowledge, and experience within your board, and conduct an honest appraisal to identify gaps. This can assist you to identify and recruit additional board members to build capacity and address any gaps.

- See ‘Collective Leadership’, section ‘Identifying Skills and Talents’ provides an activity to assist with this.

To identify what skills your group already has, you should undertake an activity to identify your existing skills and talents. From this, you will be able to make an honest appraisal of what skills and expertise you have, and identify the gaps in your collective skills.

The ‘Trustee skills audit template and board exercise’, from the UK National Council for Voluntary Organisations is also a helpful tool. <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/tools-resources/board-basics/tools-and-guidance/ncvboardbasicstrusteeskillsaudit.docx>

It is unrealistic to assume that board members will carry on volunteering their time indefinitely, and if possible, you should avoid relying on the same cohort of individuals for long periods of time. Succession planning is vital to ensure that the social enterprise can continue to operate without the presence of key people, and it is the same for your board.

- See ‘[Succession Planning](#)’ for more information.

## Paid for Expertise

You may also have to bring in and pay for additional support for business planning, legal advice, accountancy, or other technical aspects. For example, for a project relating to construction - there will be a whole range of skills and expertise you may need to buy in for the development and project management.

## Staff

The initial group of people involved in establishing a rural social enterprise will often be unpaid volunteers from the local community. However, as plans develop there may be requirement to bring in staff to oversee and run the social enterprise. The available financial resources will also determine the ability to support staffing positions.

Generally speaking, where staff are employed there is normally a senior post, such as a Manager, who makes operational decisions, and directs other staff members. It is also the responsibility of the senior staff member to be the direct link with the board, providing relevant information.

In rural communities, people often have a number of different responsibilities and it is sometimes useful to advertise positions as flexible, or part-time. Breaking up one large role into two smaller roles, may encourage people with relevant skills to step forward if they feel that a smaller role and its responsibilities are more manageable.

## Challenges attracting and retaining skilled staff

The declining population of rural areas, remoteness from the main centres of population, and the impact of out-migration of young and working-age people (sometimes referred to as the 'brain drain' - which sees young people leave to pursue opportunities in towns and cities), can impact on the ability to attract suitable candidates for staffing positions.

A shortage of available housing or accommodation in your area may pose a further challenge when trying to attract staff from outwith the area. [This report](#) highlights the particular challenges of attracting and retaining staff for rural social enterprises in Scotland, with lack of affordable housing being outlined specifically for more remote and rural areas as a barrier.

It may be worthwhile to identify a potential candidate locally who could develop into a role with additional training and development. It may be also be possible to secure funding to provide the relevant training (through an educational institution), and this person can benefit from a work-based opportunity to develop skills.

## Volunteers

Rural social enterprises are influenced by their local environment and are often initiated and developed by groups of people or whole communities. The community and social impact focus can assist in attracting and involving volunteers, who may want to get involved and offer their skills and expertise to support the social enterprises aims and objectives.

Rural social enterprises tend to be smaller in size than urban counterparts, and there are generally smaller numbers of staff, making volunteers an important asset.

Volunteers time and skills can be very valuable to the sustainability of rural social enterprises. A study in Scotland noted that the high numbers of retired people in rural communities meant that there was “an inexhaustible supply of people” who have the time and skills to support community action.

However, it is important to take steps to avoid ‘volunteer fatigue’, which occurs when responsibility is not shared equally, and people become overwhelmed by having too many projects or tasks to complete. This can ultimately lead to stress or burnout, and volunteers may lose interest in the project.

Regular conversations and check-ins with volunteers will allow them to share issues or concerns, reduce their workload, and enable them to continue.

## Attracting and Supporting Volunteers

When outlining volunteering positions, it is important to specify what the role requires, what responsibilities there are, and how long it will last for. Poorly-defined roles are one of the main reasons that people are reluctant to sign up to volunteering positions, as there is not enough information about the skills or time required.

This resource from Volunteer Scotland provides a helpful overview of how to create volunteer role descriptions:

<https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/242005/Creating%20Volunteer%20Role%20Descriptions.pdf>

It is important to provide support and training to volunteers, as you would staff members. Volunteers are providing you with their time, energy, and skills for free - so it is important that they feel respected, supported, and that their time is being put to best use.

Some of the ways you can provide direct support to volunteers include having feedback meetings, informal catch-ups, or group sessions.

You should regularly schedule opportunities to hear feedback, and discuss the volunteer’s work and how they feel they are doing. These give the volunteer the chance to raise any concerns or issues they might have.

Some of the different ways you can support volunteers include:

- Direct support: Feedback meetings, informal catch-ups, group sessions
- Other forms of support: Peer support, volunteer meetings, ongoing training and development, volunteer newsletters, social media
- Volunteer recognition and appreciation (awards, certificates, celebrations)
- Cultivating a volunteer-friendly internal culture

See this guide from Volunteer Scotland for more information:

<https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/242069/Supporting%20Your%20Volunteers.pdf>