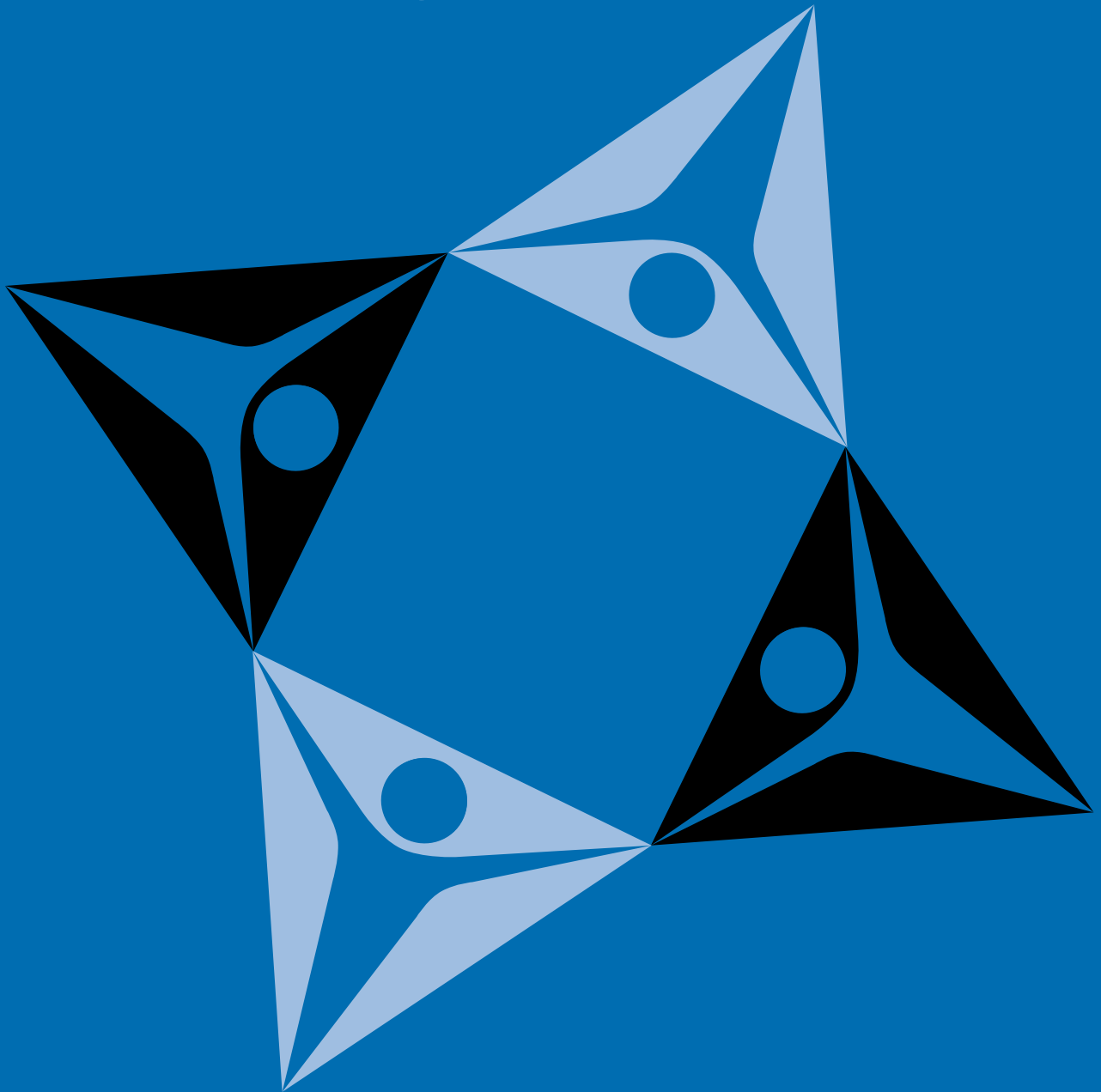# How to create diverse boards

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Culture Change Guide

5 HOW TO CREATE DIVERSE BOARDS

A diverse board is able to make decisions more effectively by reducing the risk of 'groupthink'. Board members are responsible for devising or agreeing strategies through critical appraisal and effective problem solving. A challenge in the decision-making process, within the boardroom, is 'groupthink' – the psychological behaviour of minimising conflicts and reaching a consensus decision. Including the contributions of people with different skills, backgrounds and experiences creates solutions to problems from a greater range of perspectives. This also provides a more comprehensive oversight to the operations of the organisation and enhancement of the company's sensitivity to a wider range of possible risks such as reputation and compliance risks.

The following section highlights what you can do to create a diverse board and take advantage of the benefits.

What can you do to create diverse boards?

- develop a selection criteria which looks beyond the traditional experiences of board directors to bring in a diverse perspective

- look more broadly – use a range of methods of recruitment, and refrain from only using word of mouth wherever possible, to try and reach into communities not currently represented on the board

- investigate using board/trustee brokerage services or specialist recruitment consultancies and make use of specialist job boards targeted at local communities or minority populations

- if using search agencies, insist search firms find diverse candidates

- consider sponsoring an individual for their first board appointment

- have term limits for board members and stagger open seats to create frequent opportunities to diversify your board

- organise board meetings in accessible locations, at different times or at a time that is convenient to all, so that all members have an opportunity to attend meetings

- pay expenses such as travel and childcare and consider paying trustees for their services or hold meetings at times where members do not risk losing income

Current situation

- there is a lack of understanding and leadership around diversity from boards

- trustees are often recruited on the basis of existing influence, contacts or wealth which predicates against a more diverse range of trustees

- many potential trustees, particularly those in younger age groups, feel they are excluded from joining a board as they would be missing out on paid employment

5.1 CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME

- lack of diverse role models in board members
- lack of churn in membership to create opportunities to diversify
- broadening the search to attract more diverse applicants
- 'group-thinking' within boards which may exclude new board members
- barriers to being an effective board member – access to board meetings – eg timing, information and location

5.2 GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDIES

These case studies provide an insight into what have others done to create diverse boards.

Independent Theatre Council

The Independent Theatre Council (ITC) has been supporting organisations and individuals in the cultural sector with their governance through the GAIN development programme. The first ITC GAIN was designed as a positive action programme to address the under-representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic people on arts boards. The ITC also ran a pilot programme for disabled participants.

What ITC and its partners learnt from running the GAIN programme is that the structure of governance is less important than the people appointed. The more diverse and well facilitated the group of people is the more they can achieve. These programmes also enhanced the future offer, which broadened participation even further, recognising that a wide range of talented people have either encountered barriers or not yet identified the opportunity. People new to arts boards were offered training, mentoring, peer-learning and the opportunity to join the board of a participating organisation. Organisations received board development training, enabling them to make the best use of new recruits on their boards.
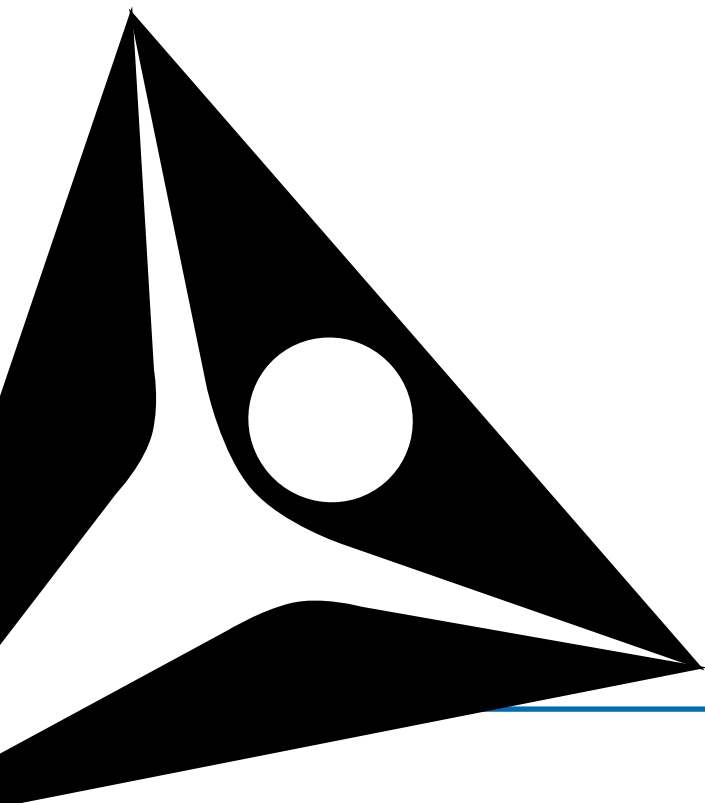
Film: The benefits of a diverse board

How did you diversify your board?

What were the challenges in diversifying your board and/or in having a diverse board?

What difference has it made?

4.3 DOWNLOADABLE RESOURCES

Downloadable resource:

How to work as an Inclusive Board

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

How to work as an Inclusive Board
Boards are a catalyst for change in your organisation – achieving diversity is reliant upon appointing members with inclusive mindsets and behaviours.

✓ **Create an environment where members are open to hearing different ideas and valuing different experiences**

Seek feedback from diverse stakeholders with different mindsets to inform your decisions. Use strategies to discourage groupthink e.g. ask people to prepare their thoughts in advance of meetings. Conduct meetings by breaking into smaller groups to consider key issues before group discussions.

✓ **Hold meetings which encouragecollaboration**

Provide members with sufficient time to prepare for meetings. Create opportunities for board members to be reflective and to have deeper conversations. Use consensus for making decisions. Provide timely reasonable adjustments to support effective communication.

✓ **Recognise that every board member will have biases**

Provide board members with opportunities to understand unconscious bias and how to manage these. Call out bias – challenge bias perceptions/stereotypes in meetings.

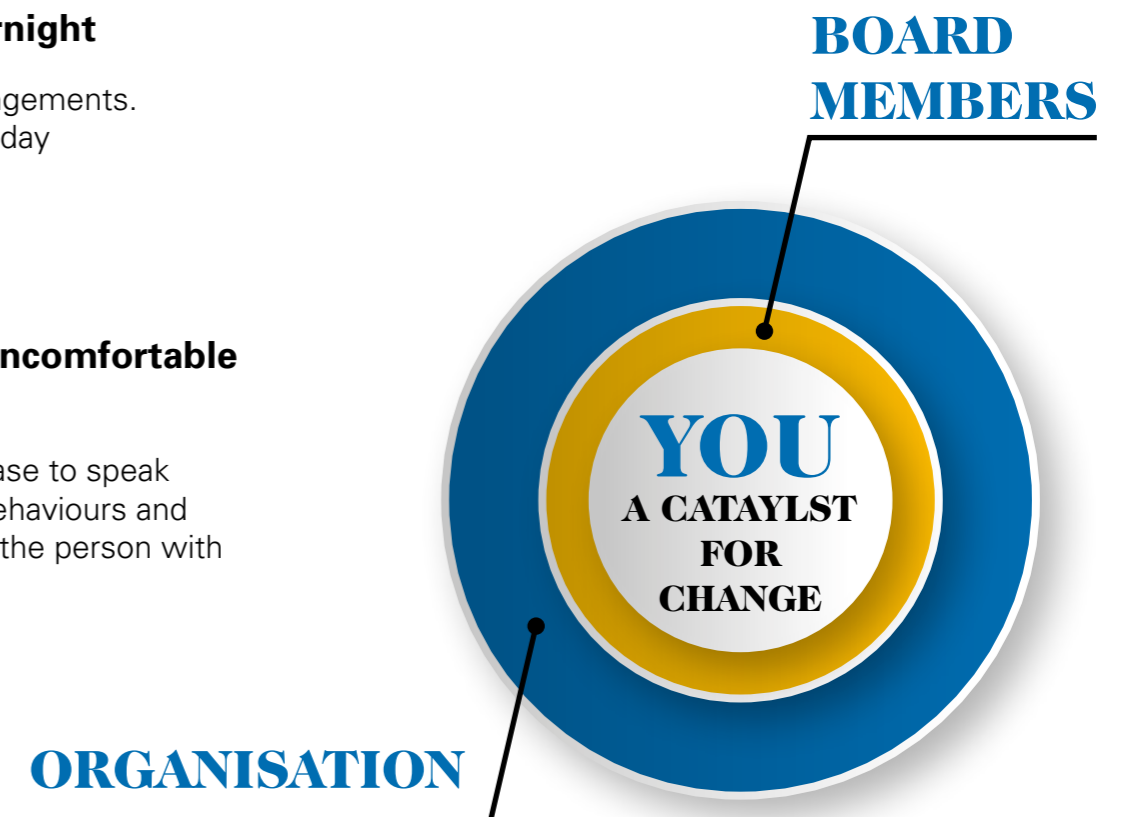✓ **Increase cultural awareness – understand how different people see the world**

Take time out to speak to people in you organisation to show a genuine interest in their world. Be curious – ask questions e.g. "how do people want to be treated?"

✓ **Communicate the benefits of remaining committed – achieving diversity and inclusive work places does not happen overnight**

Place diversity objectives within governance arrangements. Weave conversations about diversity within everyday communication.

✓ **Be open and receptive to having uncomfortable conversations**

Create an environment where members feel at ease to speak openly, without risk of feeling rejected. Call out behaviours and decisions that exclude people. Be prepared to be the person with the 'different' view point.

BOARD MEMBERS

YOU
A CATAYLST FOR CHANGE

ORGANISATION

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

In conjunction with ewgroup