



GETWIRED

Increasing the Digital Capacity
of Trustee Boards

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In summer 2014, the ALS ice bucket challenge went viral across social media. Over the course of a couple of months it raised over \$115 million for the American ALS Association and substantial sums for other similar organisations across the world. It was a triumph for viral marketing and a reminder of just how crucial the use of technology can be to a charity's success or failure.

And yet, even while charities yearn for their own "ice bucket moment," plenty of them still struggle to use YouTube effectively. Charity boards don't necessarily understand the difference between Facebook and Instagram, let alone platform-based marketing and software-as-a-service. Despite constant reminders of the importance of "going digital" – essential to innovation and systemic change – charities are still struggling to put this into practice.

A real understanding of Technology, Social Media, Campaigning and Co-Creation is the in-demand skill needed to help create and support the charities of tomorrow, today. But organisations are struggling to find and retain trustees who can bring those skills to effective governance. The failure to value or develop these skills in trustees will lead to underinvestment in the digital futures of today's charities. And in today's volatile social sector climate, a lack of digital future-proofing is something few can afford.

However, between Silicon Roundabout, Brixton Hub and the Square Mile, London is bursting with the technology and digital skills needed to equip and support the charities of the future. Not just in terms of supplying products and services but also in training up a new generation of advisors, trustees and leaders. And with technology hubs growing up around the UK, it's not just London either.

The problem therefore seems not to be one of supply or demand, but of the interaction between the sectors. Charities don't know how best to take advantage of the talent out there, while tech and digital leaders also seem at a loss with respect to how to help or get involved with voluntary organisations at a governance level.

Until recently, the only way for technology and digital workers to get involved in scaling a charity's work was through occasional hackdays or direct digital fundraising. As a result, there is incredible potential for initiatives which connect charity governance with the considerable skillsets that exist within the tech community.

Bridging the Gap: GetWired

Recognising this, the Social Change Agency and Peridot Partners teamed up during National Trustee Week to create GetWired, a conference and brainstorming opportunity devoted to bridging the gap between the charity governance and technology sectors.

Altogether the event had around 50 passionate attendees. The charities ranged from small volunteer-led grassroots organisations to large national



Katie Mantell
(@katiemantell)
04/11/2015 07:40 pm

A great meeting of digital/tech/charity minds @ #getwired event this evening - all about getting more digital/tech skills on charity boards

bodies with over £10m turnover, and were represented by a mixture of chairs, chief execs and heads of digital. London's rich tech scene was represented by a cross section of digital entrepreneurs, technologists, innovators, product designers and social media strategists, working across a range of sectors including education, travel and broadband provision.

Supported by technology investors GP BullHound and Balderton Capital, and digital development company Cyber Sushi the event was specifically designed to identify the obstacles to getting better digital skills on boards, to get people thinking about solutions and to create practical tips for both sectors going forward. We used open space methodology to explore the following question: "How can we increase digital capacity and leadership in trustee boards?"

Below is a summary of the conclusions which arose from the discussions at GetWired. First we list the top 10 barriers to getting digital skills on boards, and then we set out 15 practical recommendations for getting past those barriers. Not all of the recommendations are new, but they could all be practised more widely. With the right support and attitude, we believe that some of the recommendations could be put into practice easily, while a few will need sector-wide leadership to change the system.

Technology and the charity sector is not a new pairing. Much has been written about the digital divide and we see our work as continuing the discussions laid out in [The New Reality](#), by Julie Dodd. However it is abundantly clear that both sides need to take more responsibility and action if we are to successfully rewire the charity sector, allowing it to continue to increase in impact into the digital future.



Susan Munroe
(@MunroeLuthra)
04/11/2015 06:49 pm

#getwired event really useful to bring together potential techie trustees with charities looking for tech expertise. @FreefromTorture here.

The Top 10 Barriers to Increasing Digital and Tech Capacity on Charity Boards

Culture:

1. **Cultural fit and mindset** – Combining tech/digital workers with governance of any sort can be a bit like mixing oil and water.
2. **Receptiveness to change** – With the best will in the world, charities can be suspicious of radical change and reluctant to buy into new methods of working.
3. **Process and speed** – Tensions can arise from the contrast between the "normal" speeds of operations and strategy on the one hand and tech/digital innovation on the other.
4. **Rigid processes and bureaucracy** – On the whole, tech/digital workers are turned off by heavily structured processes and bureaucratic meetings.
5. **Assumptive behaviour** – There exists a mostly unfounded perception among tech/digital workers that charities are old, failing dinosaurs and that technology will save them.

Communication:

6. **Understanding of roles** – Charities tend to lump all tech/digital skills together, failing to appreciate the diversity of the skills involved. Conversely, tech/digital workers often lack awareness of the trustee role and confuse it with consultancy or operational roles.
7. **Awareness of potential** – There is still a general lack of awareness among charities of the importance and potential impact of recruiting trustees with modern skills and sought after experience.
8. **Resources for recruitment** – With charity funds so limited, there is often the temptation to underinvest in recruiting trustees from “new” sectors such as tech/digital.
9. **Access to opportunities** – It’s far from obvious how to search effectively for trustee opportunities or how to find tech/digital workers willing to be trustees.
10. **Setting expectations** – Charities often fail to set out what they look for in terms of effectiveness and impact, which means that prospective trustees generally don’t know what they are coming into or what is expected of them.



Jonathan May
(@jonathan_may)
04/11/2015 06:33 pm

Awesome #getwired
#trusteesweek - incredibly
valuable conversations connecting
technology and charity leadership.

Our 15 Recommendations for Increasing Technology/Digital Representation on Boards

Internal Development

1. **Assess needs** – Boards should do more to analyse the sort of technology or social media experience they are really looking for, making sure that this is aligned with organisational strategy and what the organisation really needs. The nature of this assessment will depend to a large extent on the size and complexity of the organisation. For example:
 - Small turnover: A digital toolkit to help the organisation determine whether it needs a consultant or a trustee.
 - Medium turnover: Pro-bono support to help the organisation undertake the assessment.
 - High turnover: Professional external advice to undertake the assessment and find the right person for the role.
2. **Accept the costs** – Funders should recognise that there is a cost involved in necessary digital transformation. There needs to be more investment in achieving systemic change through the strategic use of technology, including building organisational infrastructures. This extends all the way to developing digital skills in governance.
3. **Find the balance** – Charities should be realistic about the tension between often risk-averse boards and the value of entrepreneurial progress. It is better to work out where to strike the balance, so that intent can be aligned with action before starting to recruit a digital trustee. Where the board is particularly risk averse, a careful assessment process can help to allay fears (see recommendation 1).



Sarah Jordan
(@sarahbjordan)
04/11/2015 06:33 pm

Interesting insights from
@msjowolfe on how @BCCare is
increasing digital awareness on
Board & beyond. #getwired



Sarah Jordan
(@sarahbjordan)
04/11/2015 06:26 pm

Disrupting the #charity sector & trustee recruitment - big opps but challenges on agenda @ #getwired event

4. **Take general responsibility** – There is only one Treasurer, but everyone on the board is responsible for the finances. In the same way, there should be a minimum of one tech person on the board but the responsibility for tech/digital should lie with everyone. The “tech trustee” should not be treated as a consultant, expected to deal with every single technology-related issue. Instead, the role is to translate opportunities and risks for less specialised trustees and help them to engage with the issues in an informed way.
5. **Improve digital skills** – It’s increasingly important to work on improving the digital skills of all board members, in a similar manner to basic finance skills. There are a number of different ways to achieve this, for example:
 - Internal and external trustee induction programmes could include a digital component.
 - Boards could set up a tech/digital advisory group for the organisation. This serves a dual purpose of both addressing immediate need, and creating a pool of potential trustees for the future who know the organisation.
 - Boards could provide digital mentoring for board members and executives, which could come from the board suggested above.
6. **Use grassroots expertise** – Boards need to be confident in bringing in operational staff when discussing tech/digital issues. Much of the digital transformation work occurs across organisations, and not all senior management team members understand it or can represent it accurately.

Accessibility and Communication

7. **Make meetings accessible** – Long bureaucratic meetings don’t suit anyone, and the danger is that tech/digital workers will disengage. While governance needs to be done properly, effort should be put into making trustee meetings dynamic, strategic and timely. Similarly, organisations should consider more flexible meeting times, including at evenings and weekends (with the caveat that nothing is going to suit everyone).
8. **Consider new methods** – Organisations should be open to using technologies to support and streamline their governance, for example through the use of virtual meetings, digital chat rooms such as Slack, electronic board papers, Dropbox and Google Docs. In addition, charities should recognise that the tech/digital sectors have their own work methodologies, such as Agile, Scrum and Lean, and should not be afraid to use them where appropriate.
9. **Promote understanding** – Charities need to recognise that the tech sector has a lot to offer, but that language and behaviour can create barriers to understanding and cooperation. It is worth taking the time to double-check that people have a shared understanding regarding jargon and expectations in and out of meetings.
10. **Create networking opportunities** – There need to be more networking opportunities between the tech and charity sectors, allowing trustees to meet potential trustees and vice versa, and for concerns between the two sides to be explored and allayed.



Hannah Mitchell
(@h_e_mitchell)
04/11/2015 04:59 pm

How can tech entrepreneurs support charities? #getwired talks about the role of trustees & critical friends to support digital innovation



Paulina Sygulska
(@Payah)
04/11/2015 05:27 pm

#agile trustee board FTW! Let's
implement #getwired

11. **Explain expectations** – Charities should be explicit about what good trusteeship looks like, helping to explain what is involved in governance, manage expectations around the role and highlight key responsibilities. This could be done through the use of positive-impact case studies and online profiles of trustees.
12. **Support engagement** – Tech/digital firms need to do more to engage their staff with the idea of taking on trustee roles, potentially through their board or CSR teams and the provision of internal courses. This serves the dual roles of increasing employee skills and giving back to society.

Industry-wide Action

13. **Create trustee readiness programmes** – The technology and digital sector needs trustee readiness programmes to allow tech/digital workers to explore and build their trustee skills. This would work best with support from both the tech/digital sector and the charity sector as well as transformational funders.
14. **Set up buddying programs** – Working together, the technology and charity sectors could put in place cross-organisational trustee buddying programmes. These would serve to support tech people on boards and also invite external technological digital leaders to be present during meetings, demystifying the environment for tech/digital workers.
15. **Awareness and signposting** – Trustee week needs to be bigger and bolder and go beyond the usual suspects. There is a massive need for trustee awareness and recruitment campaigns which signpost people to good quality analysis and information around the roles. This could be funded by NCVO or ACEVO.

Next Steps

If you have any comments or queries, would like to be involved in future events or like to know more about how we can support you and your organisation on your digital journey please contact **Esther Foreman, CEO of The Social Change Agency** esther@thesocialchangeagency.org or **07956808355**.

If you were unable to attend GetWired but have relevant skills and experience that you think charities could benefit from then Peridot Partners would like to hear from you.

If you are a charity looking to get your board ready for the 21st century so that it is able to recruit, retain and get the best from the new breed of trustee then reading this was the first step forward. **Finding and onboarding fantastic trustees can be a complex process. If you are interested in hiring people with modern skills and mindsets and want to explore ways in which to onboard them then please contact Grant Taylor, Managing Director of Peridot Partners on grant@peridotpartners.co.uk or 07958 690 184.**

Who We Are



The Social Change Agency

The Social Change Agency specialises in systemic social change through consultancy, training and events, innovation and thought leadership. We help build big movements for change by connecting up sectors, people and tech. www.thesocialchangeagency.org [@SocialChangeAg](https://twitter.com/SocialChangeAg)

Peridot Partners

We spend most of our time recruiting people for leadership roles, both executive and non-executive in charities. We also help boards of trustees to become more effective by undertaking diagnostic reviews and then delivering modern solutions such as fresh induction and development programmes. www.peridotpartners.co.uk [@PeridotPartners](https://twitter.com/PeridotPartners)

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With thanks to

