

# The emerging normal

## The impact of COVID-19 presents challenges and opportunities for charity governance.

Governance expert **Tesse Akpeki** suggests steps your board can take to embrace the new normal.



**Tesse Akpeki**  
Lead Governance  
Consultant, Onboard

T: 020 7551 7702  
t.akpeki@bateswells.co.uk

I am a founder of the Well-being and Resilience Leadership initiative and I serve as a mentor to members of ICSA: The Chartered Governance Institute. I am an accredited coach, specialising in governance development and leadership and I have worked extensively with third sector organisations nationally and internationally.

The current crisis represents an opportunity for the board to adopt a proactive approach and refocus on good governance practices. The board has a crucial role to play in achieving effectiveness, efficiency and impact. Taking practical steps now can achieve balance, bring reassurance and greater stability, and shape a new normal.

Here are nine steps your organisation can take.

1. Check in regularly with your Chief Executive. Ask him or her what is needed and make sure she/he is assured of your support. Times such as this call for quick responses, experience, wisdom and sight. Board members can play a vital role in assessing how the CEO and senior staff are holding up.
2. Manage scenario planning and financial implications. Re-evaluate organisational and strategic plans and priorities. Agree what meaningful results look like. It may be useful to have strategic discussion as a standing item at board meetings, to ensure that the strategic plan continues to be aligned to the needs and expectations of the current times. Some aspects of the plan will need to be updated to take on board the new reality, while others (such as programmes and services) may need to be dropped or put on the back burner.
3. Revisit how the board's capacity and competence can add value to the organisation. Is the board composed of trustees who are fully engaged and able to maximise their contribution? The skills and experience matrix should be up to date and match current trustees to what is required in the future.
4. Pay attention to greater clarity, structure and communication. Set out what specific roles the board will fulfil and what activities and tasks will be delegated to staff.
5. Put in place an ongoing board development programme that will keep the board members updated

about developments. What are the trends, emerging patterns, touch points or current issues confronting the organisation, its networks and related communities? These can be integrated into short slots at the board meeting or during feedback slots designed into the agenda.

6. Solicit feedback through a range of channels such as annual assessments, quarterly feedback sessions or as part of board conversations. Feedback is helpful in building trust, confidence and commitment, and encouraging growth. What are people learning at this time that can be taken on board to strengthen the organisation? What is not working? Where do you need to make adjustments?
7. Observe how the virtual environment and virtual ways of working are shaping the organisation and its culture. What are you doing to ensure that the right technology is being used and that meetings are well run, well chaired and support the organisation to achieve its goals? The Chartered Governance Institute (ICSA) has produced excellent **guidance** on this (and see also our article on virtual meetings on the following page).
8. Support all of these steps with a code of practice that has appropriate and accessible protocols. **The Charity Governance Code** helps in this journey.
9. Agree an action plan – frame it to highlight what needs to happen for the short, medium and long term. Given the fast-changing nature of the emerging normal, the plan needs to be updated regularly.

These steps will enable board members, staff and volunteers to use their skills to make the impact of their work even greater.