

Good Governance for Safeguarding

Adapted from- *Good governance for safeguarding: A guide for UK NGO boards*, Bond, May 2019 Published by Bond, Society Building, 8 All Saints Street, London N1 9RL, UK. Available at: <https://safeguardingsupporthub.org/documents/good-governance-safeguarding-guide-ngos>

Organisations can become safer if they have good governance structures in place. This short summary of the full guide seeks to provide an overview of six ways that boards should take the lead on safeguarding: these activities are summarised in the diagram below.



A first action for the Boards of Trustees of any organisation may be to work with the senior management to review organisational policies, procedures and practice against the full guide and create a plan to fill any remaining gaps and implement any required actions. A summary of the six areas is provided below:

1. Set the right tone

Organisations may have excellent safeguarding policies, procedures and systems in place to ensure that safeguarding is properly managed. However, the culture of the organisation must also create an environment which is safe and where staff, communities and others feel comfortable raising concerns or complaints when things go wrong and are confident that such concerns will be dealt with appropriately.

Organisational culture can be defined as “a system of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs that show people what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour” (Jennifer Chatman, Professor of Management, Haas School of Business, UC Berkley).

2. Reduce risk

Organisations need to consider their own activities and how individuals may be vulnerable. Where the regulatory authorities for charitable or Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have introduced safeguarding requirements, these include the role of the board in actively managing risks, of which safeguarding is a key one. One example is the UK Charity Commission Guidance (CC26, Charities and Risk Management and the Charity Code of Governance). This can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/589944/CC26.pdf

The Commission updated the guidance in October 2018 to state that it is: “essential that charity trustees manage the risks associated with safeguarding, in the same way that it has a responsibility to actively manage all risks faced by the charity. Only once risks are identified can an organisation think about managing them.”

3. Encourage speaking up

NGOs should take all reasonable steps to create an environment in which there is zero tolerance of harm to others; that those who engage in misconduct or have been complicit are held to account for their actions; and those who raise complaints or concerns are appropriately protected and respected.

These principles should be woven through all policies, procedures, statements of purpose, values, missions, and codes of conduct. A code of conduct should expressly set out the NGO’s culture and its expectations of behaviour from all those who work for or with it or on its behalf.

All NGOs should have mechanisms in place that make it easy for victims, survivors or witnesses to speak up in relation to actual, suspected or potential harm to those who come into contact with the NGO and/or misconduct by those who work for or with it or on its behalf.

4. Investigate complaints

Complaints provide a window into the practice of the organisation. The senior management team and the Board of Trustees cannot be in all places at all times to ensure that the systems and protections that have been put in place to safeguard and protect all who come into contact with the organisation are being appropriately followed.

It is therefore often through the investigation of incidents, complaints and concerns that potential and actual harm and/or misconduct comes to light and can be appropriately addressed and managed.

Issues will come to light in different ways depending on the type of concern and who is affected.

5. Support survivors

Boards of Trustees should ensure that the organisation adopts a survivor-centred approach. This is one where the wellbeing and the wishes of the survivor of a safeguarding incident are put at the heart of any actions taken.

6. Encourage transparency and accountability

Transparency and accountability should be a key principle of an organisation's governance. The UK Charity Governance Code describes this as: "The board leads the organisation in being transparent and accountable. The charity is open in its work, unless there is good reason for it not to be."

The rationale behind this principle is as follows: "[The] public's trust that a charity is delivering public benefit is fundamental to its reputation and success, and by extension, the success of the wider sector. Making accountability real, through genuine and open two-way communication that celebrates successes and demonstrates willingness to learn from mistakes, helps to build this trust and confidence and earn legitimacy."

It is therefore important that the Board of Trustees consider how the organisation can achieve appropriate transparency and accountability in relation to safeguarding, while taking account of the sensitivities of the subject matter and the rights and welfare of those affected.

References

Good governance for safeguarding: A guide for UK NGO boards, Bond, May 2019, Bond, UK. Available at: <https://safeguardingsupporthub.org/documents/good-governance-safeguarding-guide-ngos>

CC26, Charities and Risk Management and the Charity Code of Governance, Charity Commission 2017, Charity Commission. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/589944/CC26.pdf

This document is an output from a project funded by UK aid from the UK government. However, the views expressed and information contained in it are not necessarily those of or endorsed by the UK government who can accept no responsibility for such views or information or for any reliance placed on them.

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About RSH Resource & Support Hub reports: The RSH Resource & Support Hub is funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). RSH Resource & Support Hub services are provided by a consortium led by Options, with Social Development Direct (SDDirect) as technical and delivery lead and including GCPS Consulting (GCPS), Terre des Hommes (TdH) and Sightsavers.

Experts consulted, organisation: Angie Bamgbose, GCPS Consulting.

Suggested citation: Bamgbose A (2021). Bullying and Harassment Factsheet. RSH, London, UK: RSH Resource & Support Hub.