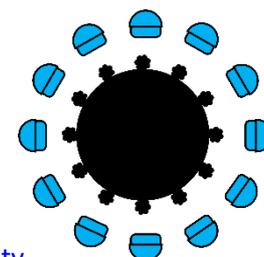


Charity governance in the time of covid-19 lock-down

inTRUSTed provides this guide as a stimulus to continued good governance in your charity, although not as a guide to what you, your volunteers or employees should be doing or how you can support your beneficiaries to keep safe at this time.



The Charity Commission published and regularly updates their advice for charities <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-the-charity-sector>

Some of this **inTRUSTed** guide is taken from that CC advice, with many additions about implementation.

Another good source of advice is the NCVO. Here's something specifically for trustees:

<https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2020/03/17/coronavirus-and-governance-what-charity-trustees-need-to-think-about/>

And if your trustees, staff or volunteers just want to informally discuss or rant about the pressures on your service, the isolation of working from home, or share concerns about funding, you can join an informal forum: [Voluntary Voice](#)

Digital technology support for charities

[Using technology to support Remote Trustee Meetings](#) – specifically created for **inTRUSTed** (by [Energise Technology](#), thanks!), this explains how to set up a remote video meeting and includes information for how trustees without access to computers can access and contribute.

[General free digital technology support](#)

[Working from home online resources easy guide](#)

Keeping your charity well-governed

Yes, your priorities are rightly on personal health and safety for your beneficiaries, volunteers, trustees and employees, but that doesn't mean that strategic governance of your organisation can stop; indeed good leadership and decision-making is even more important as your organisation faces these unprecedented challenges. *Rising to and overcoming these is what a good Board does.* And although it may seem more efficient for only your Chair and your most-senior employee (i.e. CEO) to discuss and make those decisions, your whole Board should be involved, especially in the longer-term implications of your charity's actions.

Board meetings can be held remotely

"But we can't go out" I hear trustees say. If your Governing Document (Constitution, Memorandum & Articles, etc.) allows it, you can hold 'remote' Board meetings. But *even if* your Governing Document doesn't allow such remote meetings, the Charity Commission have given dispensation to *all* charities to do so, although you must note your trustees' decision to do that in your Minutes. Some [legal background](#) from Bates Wells solicitors, including Board meetings, decisions and Minutes, or [register for their free webinar](#).

Although notice of Board and other meetings is usually given much in advance, in the current situation you can give short notice, but try to get all your trustees involved and even if using non-FTF formats, your remote meeting must be quorate. If you do give short notice, Minute the reason why when you meet.

If you need to cancel or delay your AGM, your Board should Minute this at a quorate remote meeting, but if that will delay production and acceptance of your Trustees' Annual Report and Accounts and submission to the Charity Commission, you must inform the Commission, who should grant a one-off extension.

Video meetings via home computers, laptops, tablets or smartphones; if you're using a desktop computer, you will need a camera, microphone & speakers/headphones. The suggestion for Apps/programs below is not comprehensive, are not recommendations and not all are free.

[Options for Video-conferencing Software for Charities](#) inTRUSTed's technical knowledge is limited, so if you know more or better, please send those ideas to intrusted@involve.community

[Small Charities Coalition: remote working guides](#) several easy-to-understand guides to WfH.

Etiquette: try to minimise disturbances from other people at home (and pets) if possible, and PLEASE when you join a conversation, ensure your microphone is muted until you need to speak.

[More guidance](#) [And more etiquette guidance](#)

Zoom. With international lock-down, [Zoom Meeting](#) is the current favourite of people WfH; you'll probably have heard of it by now.

You will need to register for the unlimited Free service, download the Desktop or mobile App, after which you can invite 100 participants to join via desktop, tablet or smartphone. Participants don't need to download Zoom, as you send participants a web address prior to the Meeting start. The Free version is limited to 40-minute Meetings (*maybe not a bad idea for Board meetings?*) but you can run another Meeting straight away if really needed.

Participants who have the Zoom App gain more functionality, including Chat to other participants. Currently (26/03/2020), demand for the Free version is so high that they've stopped dial-in-only participants, so everyone will need to access via the web or their Zoom App.

inTRUSTed is aware of some privacy and data-sharing concerns about Zoom that are circulating on the internet, but we cannot comment on nor legitimise these. Strong passwords and good data security may alleviate some of those concerns, but if you are concerned about your generic data being shared commercially, you may want to look at other solutions. [The Guardian about Zoom security](#)
[Discounted \(paid-for version\) Zoom for charities via CDX.](#) [Zoom's guide to Zoom](#)

[Co-production Wales: guide to video calls with Zoom](#)

FreeConference. Free [online conferencing](#) for up to 5 web-based & 1,000 phone-in participants. No set-up costs; all web participants will need to set-up their own free account. [Start a conference](#) and invite others.

Zoho Meeting. Part of the paid-for [Zoho Suite](#), you can *trial it* free for 14 days before costs of \$120 p.a. for minimal version, which allows 100 participants. Zoho is all browser-based [unlike Zoom](#).

Skype. You'll need [Skype installed](#) on your device. Start a video conversation, then invite others on your contact list or by [sending them a link](#) (via email, text, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, etc.). Others don't need a Skype account as they can participate via Skype for Web.

Microsoft Teams. You'll need to have, or sign-up for, a Microsoft account to start a Teams meeting. Office 365 includes Teams and other Microsoft products and the basic version is free for non-profits via [Charity Digital Exchange](#), but this limits your use of Teams to those who you have given Microsoft-email addresses (e.g.your.name@yourcharity.onmicrosoft.com). The paid-for versions (including those for charities through CDX for £2.30/user/month) allow many more participants; once you are running this O365 and Teams version, you can [invite other people](#) as Guests, who don't need a Microsoft account.

Google Hangouts. You will need a free [Google for Nonprofits](#) account (not just a personal Google account), which gives you unlimited free access to G-Suite Basic, including Hangouts to participate in a video Event. Once you start an Event, you can [invite Guests via their email](#), which doesn't have to be a Goggle account. It is possible to use Hangouts via personal Google accounts, as long as all participants have their own.

ClickMeeting. Free for seven days after [sign-up](#), with online meetings for up to 5, or webinars for up to 25. Probably best for that latter use (i.e. training), rather than trustees' meetings.

Facetime. Apple only, for up to 32 participants, so unless all participants/trustees use Apple devices, probably not suitable. Of course, Apple devices can use all the other systems and access all of those.

For one-to-one, or one-to-few video meetings including interviews if all participants have the same Apps, you can use **WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Signal, even Instagram or Snapchat.** **inTRUSTed** suggests that these may not be suitable for complete & quorate Board meetings, but you may find them of use; let us know if you can make them work for your Board, or you know of other methods. And there are many others!

Phone only Many trustees will not necessarily have or be comfortable using video-conferencing, or have the capacity to set that up. As with video-conferencing, teleconferencing has an etiquette and good chairing is paramount. Here are some phone-only suggestions; again, please let **inTRUSTed** know of others.

WhyPay. Free to [set up and use](#) for 50 participants with one organiser, but will need initial access via computer/tablet/smartphone to set-up. Participants then dial into the phone number you're given. The company are offering their Plus tier (normally £4.00/pcm) free for the next three months, but for trustee boards, the Free tier is probably sufficient, although the Plus tier allows downloading of recorded meetings, useful to transcribe Minutes, etc.

British Telecom Conference Call Express or BT MeetMe. If your phone provider is BT, you can purchase conference calling, which gives participants access via 0800 or local rate numbers and you don't need computer access to set this up. Call BT on 0800 028 2075 or 0800 77 88 77 with your account number if you're a BT customer.

Microsoft Teams also allows a phone dial-in alongside video participation, if the meeting has been set up that way. The invite sent (usually via email, but can be shared by any medium) should contain a local number to call for the specific meeting, plus a security code to input from the phones' keypad or dial.

Add phone call to **Zoom** (26/03/2020 prior to the current lock-down and increased demand, Zoom allowed phone dial-in additions to Zoom conferences; this has been suspended pro tem for the free service, but is [worth checking](#) whether it's been reinstated).

Email only Email 'meetings' aren't necessarily the most-efficient, but it's legitimate and it works if your Chair (or other trustee) calls a meeting using all trustees' email addresses and everyone uses "Reply All" throughout the 'meeting'. It can take place asynchronously, but your Chair must ensure there is participation (even "nothing to add") from all trustees, even if they're not present at the time of the email exchange starting or continuing. It's vital for the Chair to summarise decisions and actions intended at the end, gain agreement from all participants and produce more-formal Minutes as a permanent record.

You could substitute text or WhatsApp/Messenger/etc. in groups instead of email, but that's really not recommended as many people will find it hard to continually navigate; it's also harder to summarise/Minute.

Why should trustee Boards continue to meet during this pandemic?

Exactly as in more-normal times, operational decisions can be proposed and influenced by your charity's employees and management but far-reaching (i.e. strategic) decisions about how your charity will cope in the longer-term, what funds to use, laying off or reducing hours of employees, closing services, etc., and discussions about priorities must be taken by trustees: hence the need for Board meetings.

If you have video Board meetings, some software allows recording of that video discussion, but it's important that formal Minutes (and Action Notes) are produced as a permanent record, ideally in a text

format. It's possible that you may have to produce evidence of trustees' decisions at a later date, to funders, to beneficiaries, even to the Commission.

Your charity's Business Continuity Management plan, if you have a formal document, or your trustees' and employees' understanding of what needs to be done and in what priority, needs to be put into place.

[Guidance for a formal BCM plan.](#)

Finances

This ongoing situation will have impact on your charity's finances, including fundraising, closing facilities and much more, which is why discussions by trustees on your charity's financial resilience are vital. And as vital is recording (Minuting) the decisions you have to take.

Even in this situation, trustees cannot authorise spending of Restricted Funds for Unrestricted purposes, but they can 'release' Designated or spend Unrestricted Funds for any legitimate purpose of the charity.

Your next set of Accounts, if externally Examined, Audited or even below those thresholds, will need to reflect the financial decisions your trustees are now taking. The Charities Statement of Recommended Practice sets out how charities should prepare their annual accounts and report on their finances and there is [revised guidance from the overseeing organisation](#). Although most-applicable for those preparing the Accounts, all trustees should consider that (fairly easy to read) guidance or [this Civil Society article](#).

Fundraising

Your FTF fundraising will have stopped but there are new funds springing into being from a wide variety of sources; these may not replace what you are losing but some may temporarily carry over your organisation. Contact Jackie Leslie jackie.leslie@involve.community or see [involve.community/funding/](#) for more info.

Serious incidents and reporting

There is much discussion about what the Charity Commission exactly needs to know about 'serious incidents' but for the foreseeable future, it is recommended that incidents that cause or will cause your charity to completely cease operating, or anything that puts people at risk are serious incidents to be reported. But if your employees and volunteers are working remotely, even when service to beneficiaries is curtailed or ceases temporarily, that's not reportable. In the end, it's trustees' responsibility to decide how serious an incident is and to [report incidents to the Commission](#).

Gaining new trustees and pertinent skills for your Board

It might seem counter-intuitive, but with people working from home or on shorter hours, many will want to focus on other things; some of those other things can be *trusteeship*. And this is likely a time when your Board needs some additional skills to add to those your trustees are already using, if only to share the load. **inTRUSTed** continues to be in contact with people with strategic planning, even business-continuity skills, who are interested in becoming trustees.

The **inTRUSTed** [recruitment service](#) was already mostly-online and continues to be busy. We can source trustees for your charity and you can interview them now via video, as above. You can even offer them a shadow-appointment to join the Board during lock-down.

[Guide to interviewing remotely](#)

Contact intrusted@involve.community for a no-obligation discussion.