

Not For Profit A SPECIAL 2-PAGE REPORT

Non-profit funding must increase to solve recruitment crisis in the sector

Some 70 per cent of services are delivered by independent community voluntary organisations – many of them paid for by the state, says Ivan Cooper of The Wheel

BY LORRAINE COURTNEY

Funding for non-profits needs to increase to address the recruitment and retention crisis in the sector, says Ivan Cooper, chief executive of The Wheel.

Seventy per cent of services in Ireland are delivered by independent community voluntary organisations, and many of them are in large part funded by the state. Cooper said the most pressing issues for The Wheel's members are the lack of funding and the pay and retention crisis.

"Charities are experiencing a recruitment and retention crisis. We have instances now where some members have 30 per cent staff turnover rates. It is hard to hold on to good staff in current economic environment. The sector needs a national workforce development strategy funded through the national training fund."

A retention crisis in a challenging environment can be very disheartening for employers, given the effect on almost every aspect of a charity's work. Any employee leaving a charity will take valuable knowledge and experience with them, which can be hard to replace during a recruitment crisis.

"Wage cuts imposed after the economic crash over a decade ago – and reversed elsewhere – remain in place for hundreds of section 39, 56 and 10 charities, putting services at risk. Finding ways to reduce staff turnover is a key focus for many," he said.

The Wheel is Ireland's national association of charities. Its membership includes over 2,200 charities, community groups and social enterprises. The Wheel is a representa-

tive voice and a supportive resource that offers advice, training, influence and advocacy for the non-profit sector.

Charities working in areas like health, disability and home care may be unable to deliver many services in the coming months due to a staffing crisis directly linked to funding shortfalls from the government, added Cooper.

"Enforced pay disparities of 10 per cent and more below that paid to equivalent staff in state agencies like the HSE mean charities simply can no longer recruit and retain qualified staff."

"We have, at last, an agreement that this matter be addressed by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). But unless the WRC produces a speedy and meaningful outcome, essential public services to the most vulnerable in our society will be in immediate jeopardy."

"The state has for many decades relied on charities to deliver almost one-third of all public services in key areas [looking after] health, children, older people, disability, addiction and homelessness. It knows we can, and do, deliver. Addressing the issue of adequate and fair resources would remove a major blockage to ensuring the sustainability of our sector."

Providing certainty

This would also include the introduction of multi-annual funding to provide certainty to service delivery as well as measures to assist fundraising charities, such as enhanced measures on philanthropy and realistic allocations to the Charity Vat Compensation Scheme.

"It would allow us to build on our sector's partnership with the government during



Ivan Cooper, chief executive of The Wheel, Joe O'Brien, Minister of State with responsibility for Community Development and Charities, and Vincent Keenan, chairman of The Wheel
Maxwell Photography

the Covid-19 pandemic, our response to the war in Ukraine and the more general overall contribution to maintaining the fabric of Irish society," he added.

"Most importantly, it would deliver on the spirit and ambition contained in the government's Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership Working with Community and Voluntary Sector last year and on the more recent recommendations arising from the Dialogue Forum for Voluntary Organisations."

Working towards these goals, in partnership with the government, will be the prime focus of The Wheel in the immediate years ahead, said Cooper.

"The charity and community sector in its many

iterations and through tens of thousands of volunteers, staff and volunteer board members, can contribute even more to our society in future."

"We must all try to learn from the innovative and flexible methods of working between government, state agencies, charities and community organisations during the Covid crisis. Our society currently continues to face many serious difficulties and challenges including climate change, migration needs, digital transformation and the green transition."

"All these issues require continued, similar innovation and flexibility."

"Summit 2023 was a unique opportunity to come together, share ideas and best practices,

and explore how we can collectively and collaboratively tackle these challenges and release the energy, commit-



The state has for decades relied on charities to deliver almost one-third of all public services

ment and innovation in our organisations."

Cooper said that The Wheel's recent summit heard from a diverse range of experts, thought leaders and activists, who provided insights and perspectives on the key issues facing civil society, our organisations and the people they serve. Topics explored included sustainable public services, the need for charities to tell the story of their impact, and opportunities for greater collaboration.

"One of the highlights of the programme was the presentation of the Dr Mary Redmond Honorary Award. This accolade is awarded by The Wheel's board of directors to a person (or persons) who has made an extraordinary contribution to civil

society in Ireland. The award is named after Dr Mary Redmond, the late academic, lawyer and founder of The Wheel and the Irish Hospice Foundation."

Social Justice Ireland co-founders Dr Seán Healy and Sr Brigid Reynolds were this year's winners for their outstanding commitment to promoting social justice for nearly half a century.

Dr Healy and Sr Brigid have been director and company secretary of the independent social justice think-tank since its foundation in 2009. They will both retire later this year.

"We see an opportunity. We are very responsive organisations, well connected in local communities. Our services can be flexible and

complement a person-centred approach to providing support," Cooper added.

"However, the not for profit sector needs pay parity with public sector staff. Funding must be provided on a multi-annual basis so that charities can plan their services into the future."

"We've seen a welcome increase in the regulation of charities, but this means increased compliance for the sector. The sector must be allocated funding to assist with this extra workload."

"Finally, we would like to see the National Training Fund used to upskill our sector's employees so that every charity has comprehensive training options available to their staff, board members and volunteers."

Forge bonds and broaden your horizons with charity work

BY LORRAINE COURTNEY

In a time defined by virtual interactions and digital connections, people crave genuine human contact. Engaging in volunteer work enables individuals to forge bonds with like-minded individuals who share their passion for a particular cause.

"At Boardmatch Ireland, we are seeing a growing interest from the public in volunteering and a continued increase

in demand for our services," said Boardmatch Ireland communications manager, Hannah Coleman.

Boardmatch Ireland is a registered charity. It has been around for 18 years and connects charities with prospective volunteers for their boards.

"We have seen a trend in the last number of years where more and more people are working remotely and have a little bit more time to give. They also want to have an im-

pact outside of their day job and to be able to give back to society in a structured way," said Coleman.

"Charities need volunteers, and it is great that the interest is there. Boardmatch Ireland has had 600 candidates register with us since January alone. We placed over 400 candidates on to charity and not-for-profit boards in 2022."

Volunteering on a charity board is not just about the feelgood factor. Through their



Hannah Coleman, Boardmatch Ireland communications manager

service, volunteers encounter diverse perspectives, realities and challenges that broaden their horizons and deepen their understanding of the world. They develop empathy, and invaluable skills in problem-solving and teamwork, which are not only beneficial in their altruistic pursuits but also in their personal and professional lives.

"People can also benefit from getting involved with a charity by learning new skills," said Coleman. "We

get candidates from a very diverse range of sectors, including corporate, commercial and non-profit."

Coleman said a candidate doesn't necessarily need to have prior board experience. "Our ideal candidate is someone who is enthusiastic and has their eyes open about the responsibilities of the role. It is important that you are aware of the expectations that are on you as a board member and that you are realistic about your time commitments."

There is a growing awareness of the need to diversify charity boards. "This was one of the key results of a research study Boardmatch Ireland carried out with Goodbody late last year," she said.

"That research gave us key insights from existing charity trustees and aspiring trustees, and we are working on implementing services and supports in response to these results, including board diversity, board training needs and improving onboarding for trustees."

"In response to this research, we have collaborated with the Leadership Academy (part of The Wheel), to introduce a pilot board placement programme: Future Board Leaders Programme."

"This programme will promote the engagement of under-represented voices on charity boards and aims to improve charity trustee diversity. This is an opportunity to introduce new voices to charity boards. It is an assisted board placement programme for people who don't have any prior experience but who can be supported in finding their charity board role. It also helps charities to recruit beyond their existing networks."

"Providing board-ready trustees is a key objective of Boardmatch and we are continuously improving and growing our training services to support existing and prospective charity trustees."

Boardmatch Ireland is run-

ning its annual in-person matching event in Dublin on October 4. "Our Charity Trustee Speed-Dating is a unique event in the sector that provides an opportunity for prospective trustees to meet charities which have board vacancies. Over the years



Volunteering on a charity board is not just about the feelgood factor

candidates have praised charities for their openness and transparency at this event, providing a refreshing way to meet new board members," said Coleman.

"It is a job fair – but for volunteer board roles. Candidates can visit and see how they might be a good fit with an organisation. We have continued to grow our speed-dating event over the past four years, and we are pleased with how the sector has embraced it."

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Fiona Callan, life coach and owner of Coaching to Be

To truly lead, you must first learn how to lead yourself

BY LORRAINE COURTNEY

In an ever-evolving landscape of social enterprise and not-for-profits, leaders face a constant mix of challenges, ranging from answering to multiple demands and holding onto a clear vision to sustaining a harmonious working environment where a high value is placed on personal well-being,” said Fiona Callan of Coaching to Be.

Callan is an accredited coach and mentor who empowers leaders through self-leadership. “When people are able to lead themselves effectively, they are in a much better position to then lead others”, she said.

“Self-leadership is about really getting to know yourself, the way you think, feel and behave, your inner beliefs and ways you might be holding yourself back.

“Developing your ability to self-lead means you learn to lead with greater clarity of what you want, a stronger sense of purpose, confidence and know-how for your journey ahead. Not just the big stuff, but in everyday life as well.”

For over 25 years Callan worked within the local (social and economic) development sector. Her work has always been based on the principles of empowering others, assisting individuals, groups, communities and organisations to become more purposeful in planning what they want to achieve and deciding how they are going to get there.

“I learnt along the way the importance of working with ‘the person’ as well as ‘the problems’. This led me in more recent years to focus my work on empowering others to lead themselves, which has such an impact in business, in the community or in life in general. I operate my business on a social enterprise model, for social enterprise.

“I really believe in people. People are great, with great ideas and strong motivation for social change.

“Sometimes they forget about (or don’t know yet) their own strengths and capabilities, because they get lost within life’s experiences in one way or another. Through coaching and mentoring, I provide the space for people to uncover their own greatness and become their own inspiration for success.

“My clients talk about how coaching has helped them become more grounded, confident and energised. They experience realisations about how they were getting in their own way and become excited about choices and possibilities and new ways of working to achieve what they want.

“They talk about their confidence and self-belief being

raised and how this positively impacts on their wider working relationships and their ability to connect with and lead others.

“Sometimes people forget to check in with themselves. Coaching provides an opportunity for them to do that.”

Callan’s education includes an MA in Sociology: Work, Labour Markets and Employment, Master’s in Leadership Coaching and Mentoring, Diploma in Coaching with Neuroscience, Certificate in Professional Coaching Practice and Ethics and a Certificate in Training and Development. She holds similar qualifications in Rural Development, Social Studies and Community Development.

Sometimes people forget to check in with themselves

“Leading an organisation can be a lonely and high-pressure journey, with leaders often struggling with complex decisions and significant responsibilities,” she said.

“I provide a confidential and non-judgmental space for leaders to express their concerns, fears, and doubts while at the same time gaining clarity, building resilience, and navigating challenges with confidence.”

If you would like a complimentary consultation or to learn more contact Fiona Callan on 087-9793782 or by at info@coachingtobe.ie

Helping charities deal with audits

BY LORRAINE COURTNEY

I think we can offer a unique perspective: not only do we head up the not-for-profit and charity audit department, Sylwia and I are both directors of not-for-profits ourselves,” said Thomas McDonagh, director, UHY Farrelly Dawe White Limited.

“This gives us a first-hand insight into the operations of a not-for-profit and we understand the pressures that voluntary directors are under.”

Supporting the charity sector is something the accountancy company takes pride in,



said UHY audit and accounts senior manager and charity specialist, Sylwia Willis.

“We are members of The Wheel. We attend their events so we can understand the sector better. Some of the team attended the recent Charity Summit organised by The Wheel with me last week. We are also proud to have been recently appointed to the technical assessment panel for the Carmichael Good Governance Awards.”

It can be a challenge for people in the not-for-profit sector to keep up to date with legislative and compliance requirements, said Willis. “We await the enactment of the Charities Amendment Bill 2022 and we welcome some of the proposed provisions, particularly the clarification of the requirement to produce financial statements that comply to the Charities SORP [Statement of Recommended Practice].”

Willis went on to explain that while SORP is intended to provide clarity and transparency in financial reporting for charities, there are some nuances in applying the SORP.

“Unless you have prior experience in financial reporting, this is not something that every charity and not-for-profit organisation can do on their own. They need the

Thomas McDonagh, director, UHY Farrelly Dawe White Limited



Sylwia Willis (right), audit and accounts manager at UHY Farrelly Dawe White Limited, and charity specialist, with audit trainee, Conor Conroy at the Wheel Summit

support of experienced professionals.”

McDonagh explained the importance of the audit to not-for-profit stakeholders.

“In the case of a lot of Irish SMEs, the directors and shareholders can be one and the same, [so] the audit is sometimes viewed as a compliance exercise or a necessary evil,” he said.

“In the not-for-profit sector the audit is seen differently. There are many disparate stakeholders including funders, service users, directors and the team employed by the charity. Each stakeholder is seeking their own

assurances from the audit. Funders want assurances that funding terms have been adhered to. Service users and the public welcome the transparency that an audit brings. The directors want to know that the control environment is sound and the policies they have implemented are being followed.”

Willis said UHY Farrelly Dawe White provides a range of services from statutory audit to accounting and compliance services for non-audit clients. “Our specialists are committed to providing comprehensive charity audit and accounting services which

help you maintain a financially sound organisation,” she said.

“We are seeing an increasing move toward requests to provide internal audit services to clients where we do not act as statutory auditors. Directors/trustees are seeking a greater level of assurance over the internal operations of the organisation they are volunteering with. It is worth noting that a director of a charity has the same statutory obligations and responsibilities as the director of any other company.”

The firm has experience of working with a wide range of not-for-profit organisations.

“We understand that they need to operate within tightly controlled finances, subject to public scrutiny. With increased competition for grant funding and charitable giving and a greater burden of compliance, we help ensure organisations are prepared to deal with the challenges,” said McDonagh.

He also referred to Willis’s mention of the Charities Amendment Bill and commented on the proposed increase in the audit exemption threshold for charities. “I think this is important for very small charities – organisations with low levels of income cannot sustain the cost of a compliant audit, particularly with the increased compliance burden in our own industry as we deal with the recent International Standard on Quality Management (ISQM1) and multiple revisions to auditing standards (ISAs).”

“It is so good to see the other side, to see how much work goes into running a charity,” Willis said.

Thomas McDonagh is a fellow of the Institute of Certified Public Accountants in Ireland and chairs its financial reporting sub-committee. He is a director and treasurer of Dundalk Chamber of Commerce and promoter for the Dundalk Chamber Skillnet.

Sylwia Willis, a chartered accountant, is an audit and accounts senior manager and charity specialist. She is treasurer of a credit union in Co Down and director of Louth Volunteer Centre.

Secure shortcut frees boards to do their vital work

BY LORRAINE COURTNEY

In the complex landscape of social change, NGOs face multifaceted challenges that require robust leadership, strategic guidance, and sustainable resources. “Boards of directors play an indispensable role in driving NGOs towards success and impact,” said David Malone of chief executive of BoardX.

A non-profit board plays a crucial role in the success of a charitable organisation. Yet most board members are volunteers and may not fully appreciate the fact that they are fully accountable for the governance of the organisation.

“A non-profit board should adhere to these seven core responsibilities,” said Malone. “These include advancing the mission, fundraising for the organisation, attending board meetings, evaluating the CEO, recruiting new members (skills required and succession planning), enhancing board communication, and serving on at least one committee.

“All too often agendas, board packs and other confidential information is sent via email and remains with past board members after their resignation.

“Apart from the obvious GDPR issues in emailing confidential personal information



David Malone, chief executive of BoardX

to outside organisations, best practice demands a robust board portal solution. That is why we created BoardX.”

BoardX is an Irish technology company, focused primarily on non-profits. “We understand the governance, risk and compliance needs in the sector. Our clients leverage our expertise to ensure they are up to date with the latest regulatory and funder requirements.”

In a nutshell, BoardX streamlines board meetings, governance, risk and compliance for non-profits. “Invariably we find that when it comes to setting up meetings today, secretaries tend to email agendas and attachments which makes it difficult to find information, wastes board members’ time and is a potential GDPR breach,” said Malone.

“The typical board meets from four to 12 times a year and significant time would be spent discussing governance issues. BoardX automatically brings governance items into agendas and enables the automatic completion of the Compliance Record Form required by the Charities Regulator.

“Our system provides a simple, readymade portal. Board and sub-committee members have access to a meeting archive enabling them to easily find board packs and minutes from past meetings. They can go in and search for decisions or directors’ interests.

“It also automates the compliance piece and manages succession plans. It is a solution that has been specifically designed for the non-profit sector to make boards more effective and help ease the burden of regulatory overload.

“BoardX helps streamline non-profits’ compliance and risk management programs with a strong focus on collaboration and automation. This simplifies how you prepare for meetings, [allowing you to do it] without digging through multiple applications, email threads or file storage locations. It reduces manual work and the need for spreadsheets. You can build, circulate and manage all your policies from a centralised interface and bring structure to meetings and information.

“Board agendas and associated attachments can contain very sensitive personal information about staff, volunteers, donors and patients. It’s imperative that this data is not available to persons outside your organisation, including past board members. BoardX eliminates the need to email attachments and keeps everything secure.”

Since launching eight months ago, BoardX has a number of small, medium and large non-profits using the system. Current clients

demonstrating leadership in compliance include the Charities Institute, Oxfam, the Salvation Army and Bru Youth Services Crumlin.

Board compliance stands as an essential pillar for upholding integrity, maintaining transparency, and fostering trust. Malone said the company will be adding three additional components over the next couple of months.

“We are adding a policy management component, a risk framework for automating risk registers and an over-

all compliance management architecture. These will mean that we are inserting more enterprise grade capabilities into the product, yet maintaining ease of use. If you can use email, you can use BoardX.”

Best practice governance is an ever-evolving concept that requires continuous action, said Malone. It is not a once-a-year declaration of compliance. “BoardX addresses this issue and saves significant time. Your funders, donors, board members and employees deserve nothing less.”

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