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FUTURE BOARD LEADERS

NEW VOICES for IRISH CHARITY BOARDS

Candidate Handbook

BOARD TRAINING & PLACEMENT PROGRAMME

Future Board Leaders: Guiding Principles

This document sets out the guiding principles for candidates participating in the Future Board Leaders Programme. It is designed to support you to engage meaningfully with the programme, provide a positive and inclusive experience for you, and maximize the impact of board diversification for both the organisation and the individual trustee. It clearly outlines what you can expect from the programme as well as what the programme expects from you.

There is an accompanying document for Charities available [here](#).

These principles should be read as part of the candidate handbook and any guidance provided by Boardmatch Ireland and The Leadership Academy.



1. Commitment to Inclusive and Diverse Board Recruitment

We are committed to:

- Actively promoting the value of diversity of background, age, lived experience, perspective, and identity at board level.
- Promoting the recognition that effective governance benefits from a broad range of voices, not solely traditional professional or sector-specific experience.
- Being open to learning, reflecting and responding to issues raised by participants
- Providing any reasonable accommodations required and trusting that participants are the experts in what they need
- Value the lived experience that candidates bring to the programme and treat that information with dignity and respect

2. Openness to Non-Traditional Board Pathways

We are committed to:

- Proactively engaging with candidates who may be first-time trustees or who bring non-traditional career or life experiences in a curious and respectful manner.
- Focus on candidates' potential, values alignment, and willingness to learn, rather than expecting prior board experience.
- Viewing participation in the programme as a two-way learning opportunity for both the programme and the participants.

3. Clear Role Expectations

Future Board Leaders will:

- Provide clarity on the role, responsibilities, and expectations of participants, including time commitment and level of engagement.
- Communicate clearly and promptly throughout the matching, interview, and decision-making process.
- Recognize and respect the time and commitment candidates invest through training and programme participation.

4. Good Governance

Future Board Leaders will:

- Work with the charities to ensure that governance structures, policies, and practices are in line with good governance standards and the guidance of the Charities Regulator (if the organisation is a registered charity) before placing a participant.
- Work with charities to ensure maximum transparency during the recruitment and interview process about board culture, challenges, and strategic priorities.
- As part of training, ensure candidates are informed and empowered on identifying the right questions to ask when engaging with a potential board.
- Ensuring the participating charities affirm their commitment to inclusive governance, meaningful trustee development, and long-term board sustainability
- Ensuring participating Boards have a structured induction plan to onboard Future Board Leaders participant and provide additional support while the Trustee is onboarding
- Ensure participating Boards provide an assigned Board Buddy to the participant for their first year on the Board.

5. Participant Commitments

As a collaborative programme, we expect all Future Board Leader Participants to commit to:

- Recognizing the programme is an affirmative action project and always engaging with other participants in a respectful and dignified manner. Recognizing that all voices have value.
- Engaging in training events and webinars in a meaningful and collaborative way and becoming an active member of a community of learning practice.

- Being honest and transparent in all dealings with the programme, representing yourself in a truthful manner to the organisers.
- Be respectful of the programme organisers' time, attending agreed training or networking events and responding to any requests for information from the FBL team or possible boards in a timely manner.
- If an issue arises, that you raise it with the organisers in a timely and appropriate manner so they can make efforts to resolve it.
- Share your learning with FBL and your wider community so to contribute to the wider community.
- Share your feedback with the team to support the ongoing expansion and development of the programme.
- If offered a place that they engage with the training in full, including attending training and they recognise that not engaging in the programme means a place has been lost, as a candidate cannot be replaced after training.

Future Board Leaders: FAQ



What is Future Board Leaders (FBL)?

Future Board Leaders (FBL) is a programme co-designed by [The Leadership Academy](#) and [Boardmatch](#) which aims to bring new and diverse voices to Irish Charity Boards.

The programme grew out of the Leadership and Emerging Leaders networking event, which identified a disconnect between charities aiming to diversify their boards and diverse candidates who were interested but faced barriers including access, understanding the system and confidence. The Leadership Academy felt they could recruit the potential candidates, and Boardmatch were sure they could recruit interested boards.

They firstly developed an outline of a programme to bridge the gaps initially by providing training for the candidates. Providing training meant boards could be assured the candidates proposed by FBL had basic Governance knowledge. This training is based on Boardmatch's accredited [Trustee Training](#).

The second part of the programme involves directly supporting the candidates navigating a Board recruitment process. Training will be provided before the recruitment starts but the two elements of the programme overlap in some parts.

At the very core, FBL is a support programme. It provides direct one-to-one support to candidates who may need that extra bit of support to take the step onto a board, and support for a Board who might be on their first steps to diversifying and need help bridging the gap.

In 2023, we recruited a group of 22 people from all walks of Irish life who had limited or no Charity Board Experience but were very interested in doing so. Successful candidates were provided with certified Governance training to help them learn the basics and network with their new peers.

Simultaneously, we recruited charities who were interested in diversifying their membership. Boardmatch made sure the charity was properly prepared for FBL graduates and then arranged for them to meet with potential matches.

We have had three full rounds of the programme now with 65 individuals trained, 47 individuals successfully matched to a board and 5 people have joined a board after our programme.

Who is the programme for?

The programme is a proud affirmative action project. We actively seek and recruit individuals who are from traditionally under-represented, minoritised, marginalised or generally from unheard communities.

Everyone who works with the alumni, including our own teams, the trainers, the Boards who meet them, all comment on how impressive the alumni are. Even though it is not a prerequisite for joining FBL, many alumni have years of experience, are highly qualified, and have amazing accomplishments such as starting charities or social enterprises. But, despite all their achievements, there is some systemic barrier preventing them from applying for a board and that's where FBL steps in.

At its most basic the main barrier is a confidence gap, but we recognise that it is due to the systemic barriers our society place on certain people.

We try very hard not to label anyone because we know all experiences are valid, which makes it hard for us to create hard rules for enrolment. Therefore, if you feel excluded from applying for whatever reason, then we encourage you to apply and clearly explain why you would like to be in FBL and how you match our mission. We recognise there are other barriers individuals face outside of the traditionally identified groups of people. For an idea, here's some of the reasons the programme might suit you.

- Highly proficient people can struggle with some of the more interactive part of getting a role, such as, interviewing. Someone may find the process of small talk challenging due to neurodiversity. By liaising directly with the Board and the candidate in advance of meeting, we can manage expectations of both parties in advance.
- Mental health issues such as anxiety or Rejection Sensitivity disorder can prevent someone from applying to a Board. We can help mitigate this by managing expectations in advance and supporting the individual with additional questions they may have after a meeting.
- People with learning difficulties or disabilities, visible or invisible may be nervous about asking for reasonable accommodations. We can navigate this conversation in advance of matching, if required.
- Some people find themselves in the position of advocacy unintentionally. Perhaps they have experienced a life changing event, or they have someone they care for that requires their advocacy. This can be a huge turning point for someone, affecting their personal and professional identity and may require support into a new space.
- Certain extremely experienced people have no formal academic background or professional accolades; this can lead them to believe their experience is invalid. We help them recognise it is very valid.
- Some people who are new to Ireland don't have the privilege of established networks to help guide them onto boards and in some cases, they simply may not understand how the system works. We provide training about the system, share our networks, and aid in forming new networks.

Who shouldn't apply?

As we outlined above, it is very important to us to not rule anyone out, but these are the some reasons people have not been chosen in the past:

- *They want the programme for the training.*

FBL is not a training programme; it is a supported programme that has training.

Some people who apply are on a board but want the training, this is not what the programme is for. If you fit all the criteria but you are already self-nominated onto a board, please do not apply.

If you want to avail of training, Boardmatch provides standard Trustee training, [available here](#). If you feel you need this training as part of your onboarding to a new role, you should approach you Chair for funding. Alternatively, Carmichael also have a Governance e-learning module for new Board members you can [access here](#).

- *They had or were currently sitting on a board they applied to independently.*

To be clear, if you have been nominated onto a board as part of your role or community, we will still accept your application. For example, if you have been elected to a Students Union, a local Residential group, a youth group, etc. then you can still apply.

If you have self-nominated yourself by applying for and been elected to a board independently, the course is not for you. You have clearly demonstrated you have the resources to apply for a board.

- *They had been asked to join a board or are in the process of joining a board.*

This was mentioned by several candidates in previous years. This indicates to us that you have the network and access to resources to apply for a board role yourself, so the programme isn't necessary for you.

- *They have held senior management positions.*

While some people applied based on their diversity such as age or disability, if you have a history of senior management roles, we will expect that you have the resources to apply for a board role yourself and do not need the support of the programme. We are of course open to hearing more but you must outline clearly in your application what the barrier is.

- *They wanted a job.*

You do not have to be in employment to apply for the programme, however the programme is not a job placing programme. All roles are on a volunteer basis.

If you are in these situations, you are very welcome to apply directly for a Board using the FREE Boardmatch service, which you can [see here](#). There are always Boards looking for new candidates so please register an account and get involved.

If you tick one of the above boxes but there is additional information or nuance to your situation, please apply. We take every application seriously, but the information needs to be there for us to consider it.

We understand that there are instances that may sound like they could fit in the above categories of exclusion but there could be nuance to them. For example, you were a senior manager but have only worked for one small organisation and therefore never interviewed externally for the role. Or you have sat on a board before, and it had been a negative experience and now are concerned about joining a new board. Please use your own judgment and if you do have additional information, please state it clearly.

If you are unsure whether you are eligible our advice is always to apply and provide all relevant information to let us assess your application.

Don't disqualify yourself unnecessarily.

What's in it for me?

Excellent question!

By the time you have finished the FBL Programme, you will have:

- CPD accredited Governance Training
- Two in person training days in a gorgeous city-centre venue with lunch and snacks
- On-line icebreakers with your class
- Networking event with past alumni
- Have real experience of interviewing for a Board – with the potential to be appointed on to the board
- Joined our LinkedIn Alumni group for networking
- Have access to alumni training and networking events

If this sounds like a lot of people-ing, all of these events are designed to be supported. We are aware it can be daunting and we take additional measures to support you.

What information do you need from me?

To apply, everyone must fill out an application form. A lot of the information is basic demographic information, such as location and roles, but there are some sections that focus on you and your diverse voice. It is imperative that you use that space to explain to us who you are.

We will mark based only on your answers, we cannot consider any additional information such as where you work or who you know. We mark the applications using a weighted desk assessment. The details we are looking for are:

- Has the candidate clearly indicated which under-represented voice they represent
- Has the candidate indicated why they believe the programme will help them, what barrier it will help them overcome
- Has the candidate indicated intersectionality (i.e. - when someone identifies with more than one group. This could be a person with a disability and practice a minority religion. It could be someone new to Ireland and LGBTQ.).

There is no requirement to have more than one lived experience but the more clearly explained how you align with FBL's mission, the better your score will be.

- Has the candidate indicated if they will use their learning beyond their board position? Bring it into their community etc.

How do you support the people on the programme?

We are open, transparent and we actively invite feedback or correction at every stage of the process. Rather than fear saying the wrong thing and doing nothing, we accept that we are liable to make mistakes, and we ask our candidates to correct us when we do so we can try again. We are a community learning of practice, we are learning too.

We accept that candidates are the experts in what they need. We take time to figure out what these needs are, and we work with the candidate to meet them.

We make sure that the Boards they are matched with can meet any needs they may have. We will intervene if required we do not leave candidates dealing with any issues that may arise.

We make sure that candidates have completed their 2 days of CPD accredited Governance Training before they meet with any Boards for an interview. You will have the opportunity to ask all the questions you have about being on a Board, and to practice role-play interviews with the other candidates.

What is expected from me?

As part of your participation on the programme, we expect you to:

- Engage with us in a timely and professional manner, read the emails we send fully and respond in a timely manner, attend scheduled interviews and send apologies if you are unable to attend scheduled meetings.
- Attend both in-person days training (more details below)
- Attend the informational webinars for successful applicants (dates tbc)
- Engage with the programme as Alumni going forward
- Engaging in feedback requests or supporting testimonials to support the ongoing expansion and development of the programme

Time wise we estimate:

- Attendance at the two full days training
- Attending preparation webinars online before the in-person training for about an hour
- Attending two interviews and prep around 2 hours
- To engage with your board as a full member. Boards meet 6-12 times a year usually for 1-2 hours, but you should discuss this as part of your interview process.

What are you looking for in a candidate?

There are three main things we will be marking on

- A clear demonstration of who you are and how you feel your voice is missing. We want details of your own understanding of how your lived experience will bring a new voice to the Irish charity boards. We do not need any sensitive information such as medical information but please tell us as much as you can in your own words
- We want to know why you need the programme. There are easier ways to apply to sit on a board, what about this programme is the addressing your own reasons for not applying for a board, ie network, systemic issues, confidence etc.
- How will you pay it forward. The programme is a long-term community of practice. We particularly value when candidates are hoping to bring their learning back to their community. Whether it's promoting the programme to future candidates or using your learning to start your own social enterprise. Tell us what you hope to do.
- Why you want to sit on a charity board

We will use a desk assessment (see the Appendix) to mark candidates. Higher marked candidates will then be considered as a group. It is important that the group is diverse and one group isn't over-represented.

So, if I apply will everyone know my business?

No.

Candidates are chosen by a small team in the Leadership Academy and high-level details are communicated to the team at Boardmatch. That is the last time the details are discussed.

The other candidates never find out what makes their classmates diverse unless individuals choose to share or if it's visible. Ironically even if something is visible, it may not be the reason the person applied, as diversity is often invisible.

Requests from Boards for a particular demographic of person is only considered if they can demonstrate the request is in line with the organisation's function or values. For instance, a Travellers representative group or LGBT group may request someone from within their community, if possible. However, we do not share the details of the candidate without their approval. If the Board is not specific in what type of diversity they are seeking, we do not inform them of the candidate's background.

So, do I have to work with a charity that I am representative of? Do I have to sit on a disability board if I have a disability?

Absolutely not. Marginalised voices are labelled enough. We want your voice. Full stop. We don't expect you to be the voice of your lived experience, unless of course you want to be.

The boards that engage are in such a wide arena of spaces there's something for everyone! We are very happy for you to try something new.

Am I guaranteed a seat on a board?

Unfortunately, no.

Unfortunately, from time-to-time matches don't work, and like dating, you can't force it. People have not been matched for a wide variety of reasons, they met boards and realised it wasn't what they thought, their life circumstances changed or circumstances changed for the board.

However, we will guarantee you a minimum of one meeting so you can get the full experience of interviewing and feedback if you need it.

Our promise is to get you Board ready.

When you finish the FBL programme, you will be trained, have a new network of peers, interview experience and feedback if necessary. We keep in touch with the Alumni and many of them have secured Board positions after the programme. You don't have to be on a board to remain on the programme

What days are the training on?

Training dates are held on Saturdays. We completely get this doesn't suit everyone, but it suits the maximum amount of people, allowing for work and childcare arrangements. We also try to have additional events at other accessible hours like lunchtimes and in the evening.

There are two in-person Saturday trainings required.

What is the agenda for the training?

See the Appendix

I can't make the days can I apply anyway?

Unfortunately, no.

The in-person days are important. Firstly, to meet everyone and establish your new network and secondly to meet the requirements of the Governance certification. The class is small as we provide a lot of hands-on support. We need to be sure whoever applies can attend the in-person days.

We ask that you do not apply if you are not 100% available and committed to attending the in-person days. We do keep a shortlist of other applicants in case someone needs to drop out of the programme; however, the training days are on Saturday, and it therefore takes time for people to plan their attendance, so this is not an ideal situation.

Does it have to be in person?

Yes.

We get that it can be cosy in the zoom rooms, but a part of our responsibility is to get to know you so we can match you well, and a part of your responsibility is to network and engage with your new network of peers. While we do sometimes have reluctance from people in advance, afterwards everyone agrees that in person is better.

Any other events we have are online.

Finance is an issue for me can you help?

Yes, we appreciate travel can be very costly so we can support costs of public transport to the event on both days. We start late and finish early to allow for morning travel, so you won't need to stay overnight.

We provide food and snacks throughout the day to make sure there is no additional costs for you.

If there are any other reasonable costs that you might have, we are very happy to discuss. Raise it with the team as early as possible.

I have physical accessibility requirements

That's expected, we are very lucky to be supported by Chartered Accountants Ireland who have a fully accessible building, including access to the building, the boardroom, the eating area and toilets on every floor.

If you have a personal assistant with you, we are happy to support them for the day as well with travel and food.

If there is anything else, just let us know.

I have other accessibility requirements

To be honest most candidates have.

Whether it is diet, presentation of material, movement breaks, fidgets, advanced details, detailed details, chats in advance to lower anxiety, no impromptu questions... We are happy to discuss them all!

Where is the training on?

We have been lucky to partner with Chartered Accountants Ireland who are based on Pearse Street. Their full address is **47/46 Pearse Street**. We will send lots of details in advance of how to access.

How much does it cost?

Nothing! The programme is jointly and fully funded by The Leadership Academy (through The Wheel) and Boardmatch. The Wheel's funding for this project comes from the National Training Fund through the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

There is no cost to candidates or Boards to engage in the programme.

I still have some questions

We love hearing any additional questions you may have. Please email sharon@wheel.ie. If I am unavailable, please email ciarapower@wheel.ie and one of us will help!



Appendix 1: Draft Agenda

The Leadership Academy & Boardmatch Ireland: Future Board Leaders Programme 2026

Training Details:

Accredited Trustee Training course for prospective trustees facilitated by Grainne Madden

- Day 1: 21st March (Chartered Accountants Ireland)
- Day 2: 11th April (Chartered Accountants Ireland)

Timings

Day 1: 21st March 2026

- 10:00am: Registration
- 10.15am: Part 1
 - Introductions and icebreaking exercise
 - What are your concerns about becoming a charity trustee?
 - What is governance
 - Why do we need Trustees
 - Governance Frameworks
- 12.30pm: Part 2
 - Who are Trustees?
 - What are their obligations and Duties?
 - Conflicts of Interest & how to manage?
- 1.30pm - 2.30pm – Lunch
- 2.30pm: Part 3
 - Governance Code
 - Policy Framework & Policies (Including examples and scenarios)
 - Day 1 Summary
- 4:00pm: Training Close: (**Optional social opportunity post-training**)

Day 2 – 11th April 2026 [Registration at 10am]

- 10:00am: Registration
- 10.15am: Part 4
 - Intros & Recap Week 1
 - Measuring Impact & activity
 - Finance
 - Information Needs of Trustees (Both Ways)
- 12.20pm: Part 5
 - CEO/Chair relationship
 - Board Disputes
 - Board Meetings
- 1.20pm - 2.20pm – Lunch
- 2.20pm: Part 6
 - Board meeting - Case study
- 3.20pm: Wrap up and reflections
- 3:50pm: Training Close (**Optional social opportunity post-training**)

Desk assessment scoring metric

Scoring Method: Everyone scores using the below scoring method to ensure we are all scoring in a fair manner.

1. 0–2: Too vague, no clear answer/alignment
2. 3–5: Some relevance but limited
3. 6–8: Clear explanation
4. 9–10: Went above and beyond in answer – ideal candidate

Scoring:

- Q1- Q6: Does not affect scoring of application but provides additional context
- Q7: Eligible/Not Eligible for this program
- Q8: Does not affect scoring of application but provides additional context
- Q9: Have you ever independently applied for, been elected to or been appointed to a charity board in Ireland? If yes, independently applied for or recruited, then this may affect eligibility for this programme. We will take into account information in Q9.
- Q 11: Please tell us which under-represented, marginalised or unheard communities you identify with and how this has shaped your experience of access, opportunity or confidence...: This will be scored from 0-10
- Q 12: What aspect of the FBL programme do you feel would be most helpful in helping you be placed on a board? I.E: confidence building, safe space, etc.: This will be scored from 0-10
- Q 13: Is there anything you would like us to know about how we can best support you during the programme or board-matching process? Does not affect scoring of application but provides additional context
- Q 14: What draws you to the idea of serving on a charity board? This will be scored from 0-10
- Q 15: How will you bring the learning from this program into your community? This will be scored from 0-10
- Q 16 & 17: Does not affect scoring of application but provides additional context

MAX SCORE: 40