

How to Write a Strong and Compelling Cover Letter for a Trustee Application

When applying for a trustee role, your cover letter / supporting statement is often the most important part of your application. It's your opportunity to bring your CV to life, demonstrate your motivation, and show the organisation how you can make a meaningful contribution to their board.

At Public Leaders Appointments, we read hundreds of trustee applications each year. The strongest statements are the ones that are thoughtful, specific, and aligned to the mission of the organisation. Here's how to make yours stand out.

Start with Why: Your Motivation Matters

Before listing your skills, explain why this particular cause or organisation matters to you. Trusteeship is a voluntary commitment, so boards look for people who are genuinely invested in their mission.

- What draws you to this charity or social enterprise?
- How does its purpose connect to your personal or professional values?
- Why is now the right time for you to step into a governance role?
- A short, sincere opening paragraph can set a positive tone for the rest of your application.

Show You Understand the Organisation

Trustee boards need people who are curious, engaged and informed. Demonstrating that you've done your research shows that you respect the organisation and are serious about the role.

- **Read** their website, annual report, and strategy documents
- **Understand** their purpose, priorities, and the communities they serve
- **Reflect** this understanding in your statement - avoid generic language that could apply to any organisation

When your statement speaks directly to their mission, it's much more compelling.

Highlight Relevant Skills and Experience

More often than not, specific skills and experiences are being sought after in new Trustees, so ensure you include how your background, expertise and fresh perspectives will strengthen the knowledge on the Board.

Trustee roles are not about operational delivery, they should focus on the organisation's governance, oversight and strategic contribution. Ensure that you include your ability to focus on strategic decision making, governance etc. rather than delving into the operational detail.

Use clear, specific examples rather than lists of buzzwords. Show how your skills have made a difference in practice.

If you have 'lived experience' - either your own, or a family member for example - which gives you unique insight into what the charity does and why, make that connection.

Demonstrate How You'll Add Value as a Trustee

Boards are looking for trustees who will bring constructive challenge, strategic thinking and a commitment to collective decision-making.

- Highlight how your experience will support the charity's strategic goals
- Show that you can listen as well as lead
- Illustrate your ability to work collaboratively with others
- Demonstrate how you will bring 'diversity of thought' to the board – no board should be operating in an echo chamber, so fresh perspectives and experiences will be valued
- If you're newer to governance, emphasise your willingness to learn and contribute

This is your chance to show that you won't just 'join a board' - you will help it thrive.

Keep It Focused and Authentic

Trustee selection panels are often volunteers themselves and will be reading multiple applications. A strong statement is:

- **Concise:** usually no more than two pages

- **Well structured:** motivation first, skills and experience next, and closing with what you'll bring
- **Clear and authentic:** free of jargon and buzzwords (but do reference how your values align with those of the charity)

Avoid simply repeating your CV. Use this space to tell your story; why you care, what you bring, and how you'll help the organisation deliver its mission.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- Writing a generic statement that could apply to any charity
- Repeating your CV without adding insight or personality
- Overloading your statement with technical language or acronyms
- Talking only about what you'll gain, rather than what you'll give

End with Confidence

Your closing paragraph should reinforce your enthusiasm and your readiness to contribute. You might:

- Summarise your connection to the cause
- Reiterate the skills you'd bring to the board
- Express your interest in supporting the organisation to achieve its ambitions

Trustee roles are about shared purpose. A confident, genuine close can leave a lasting impression.

Final Thoughts

A well-crafted supporting statement can be the difference between being one of many applicants, and being shortlisted for interview. When your application reflects your personal motivation, your relevant skills, and your understanding of the organisation, you show that you're ready to make a meaningful contribution as a trustee.

Always ensure that you can offer the time needed to fulfil the duties of a Trustee, which can vary drastically depending on the organisation and circumstances.



About

Public Leaders Appointments is an executive search firm delivering executive recruitment, interim management and consultancy solutions across the public and third sectors, and at the public/private interface.

We partner with organisations at moments that matter; leadership transition, growth, transformation or change. Our role is simple but critical - helping clients identify, attract and secure the talent they need to lead effectively today and shape what comes next.

Our expertise spans board and senior leadership appointments, with a particular strength in Chairs, Non-Executive Directors and senior leaders across all functional disciplines. We understand the nuance of governance, stakeholder accountability and purpose-driven leadership, and we bring deep sector insight alongside a highly personal, hands-on approach.

With an exceptional track record and a trusted national network, we connect ambitious organisations with the leaders who will make a lasting difference.

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