

Why Trustees matter to Icon

Strategy

Trustees set the strategic direction of Icon. They raise their eyes above the operational and management aspects and look into the future. Where do we want Icon to be in five, ten, twenty years? Where do we want the sector to be? Trustees bring different perspectives to the table.

Trustees who are members of the conservation profession bring their knowledge and experience not only of the different roles and disciplines of the profession but also of the contexts in which conservation and heritage science is practised: in micro businesses, not-for-profit and large public organisations and universities. This is vital if Icon is to take account of the interests of all conservators. Some Trustees have had long careers in one discipline, others have management positions in large, complex organisations. The Board is strengthened by the bringing together of many different viewpoints.

Trustees who come from the Icon membership are well positioned to ensure that member benefits are of central strategic interest to the Board and that members' concerns are brought to the Board and followed up. Some Trustees have had other roles in Icon, for example, as an officer of a special interest group. Their perspective is useful and they can act as a 'critical friend'.

In recent years, we have seen a number of younger professionals join the Board. This has been a huge boon to Icon as younger Trustees bring an awareness of social change and challenge Icon to consider the role we want to have in a changing society. We are reminded to ask ourselves, how can we be relevant to emerging professionals?

Over the last few years, Icon has had the privilege of recruiting Trustees from a range of professional contexts. These individuals are hugely accomplished respectively in business, media, communications, law and education. It is, to my mind, a measure of the success of Icon that leaders in these fields want to give their time to Icon. Their perspectives are particularly important to counterbalance what might become conservation "group think" at Board meetings.

Governance

The primary function of the Board of Trustees is to have oversight of the organisation's management to ensure that Icon is well governed. This is the principle. In practice this means asking the staff what might appear to be awkward or challenging questions. Why are you doing it this way? What are the other options? What effect will this action have on our bottom line? Sometimes staff are so close to the coalface that having someone who can view the situation from one step back is invaluable.

Trustees help Icon to make good decisions. Having a group of people whose role is to question assumptions means that we are able to look at a range of possible outcomes.

Trustees sometimes have more than one charity in their portfolio. This can benefit Icon by providing comparisons or through sharing information. It can be satisfying to know that we are not the only ones struggling with a particular challenge.

Leadership

The Chair of the Board has a particular role in leading the organisation. It is a hugely demanding role, not only in terms of workload but also in the heavy responsibility of reaching the right decisions. Decisions may be hard to make and/or the outcome may be hard to take. It is the Chair's role to ensure that the difficult decisions are made, even though the outcome may not be popular. We continue to be enormously grateful to all of the Chairs of Icon, past and present for their hard work and dedicated leadership.

Conclusion

We are tremendously fortunate to have the high calibre of Trustees on our Board and it is great to know that the Trustees are appreciated by members. If the key to a strong and successful organisation is a good Board of Trustees, then we are all set to go from strength to strength.

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