



CP4H Governance & Accessibility Report

1. Introduction

Community Plan for Holloway (CP4H) is a grassroots independent organisation working to ensure the needs of the local community are at the heart of the 10 acre redevelopment of Holloway Women's Prison, the largest for the London borough of Islington in 30 years.

In 2016, after Holloway Prison was closed down by the Ministry of Justice and the land sold, different campaign groups, local residents and women with experience of imprisonment and of working in the criminal justice system called for truly affordable homes to be built on the site, and for a proper legacy for the women of Holloway in the form of a visionary women's building. More information about our mission and the redevelopment is available [here](#).

As part of our work sharing best practices in consultation and participation in decisions on local planning, CP4H has conducted an informal study to gather ways that different organisations in our network organise their governance. We were especially interested in learning how organisations are working towards making decision-making in governance more accessible and participatory.

This report is based on conversations with the following organisations:

- Elizabeth House Community Centre
- Advance
- Together Productions
- EC1 Voices
- Clean Break
- Outlandish Co-op
- Museum of Homelessness
- Southall Community Alliance
- IRMO (Indoamerican Refugee and Migrant Organisation)

The report also includes CP4H's experience and learning.

2. Board Meetings

Organisations have adopted different approaches to holding Board meetings, balancing accessibility with engagement. Online tools such as the chat and captions are very helpful, as well as thoughtful chairing of online meetings to ensure everyone gets a chance to contribute.

- **HEAR Equality and Human Rights Network:** This organisation holds all Board meetings online, with measures taken to ensure accessibility for members including captions. Meetings are scheduled at convenient times, and materials are shared in advance to allow for preparation and participation.
 - **Outlandish Co-op:** Outlandish, a workers' tech co-op, holds weekly 90-minute in-person meetings for all members of the co-op. Sociocracy is used to ensure everyone has a chance to speak. The in-person format encourages active participation and collaboration, with decisions made relatively quickly under the principle of "safe enough to try."
 - **Elizabeth House Community Centre:** Elizabeth House holds five in-person Board meetings per year, with an option to attend remotely if necessary, although this is discouraged. The dates are set well in advance, and board papers are shared a week prior to ensure trustees are well prepared.
 - **Together Productions:** Together Productions alternates between in-person and fully online meetings. Finding hybrid meetings challenging, they now focus on either in-person or fully online formats depending on the project and member needs. Minutes are shared by Whatsapp with the emphasis on what actions have been decided.
 - **Museum of Homelessness:** The Board meets once a term with an away-day each year. Meetings are held in person. They use a consensus-based process to make decisions.
 - **CP4H:** Until very recently the Board met once a month, with quarterly meetings in-person at a local venue, and other meetings online. In practice the in-person meetings are often hybrid as trustees with caring and work responsibilities struggle to get there. A good mic has been very useful. Recent additions of subcommittees have made more demands of trustees' time. Therefore meetings are now every two months. CP4H has been trialling the use of sociocracy following a training course. In practice its been challenging to use sociocracy online and so far works better as a tool for group decision-making at in-person meetings.
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3. Advisory Groups

Many organisations have advisory groups, steering groups, or committees to gather input from people with lived experience or to guide specific initiatives. Along with having a Board, advisory groups play an essential role in ensuring that the voices of those directly impacted by the work of the organisation are heard.

- **Advance:** A national organisation focused on trauma-informed support for women and girls affected by domestic abuse, including those in contact with the criminal justice system. In addition to its Board, Advance also has advisory groups made up of people with lived experience working on specific projects. Participants are compensated with

vouchers for their involvement and the charity is currently looking at different forms of compensation and payment. The organisation is careful not to over-rely on these individuals, recognizing the risks of using a small group for press quotes or views for consultations and focus groups. Advance has robust safeguarding procedures to select and support lived experience ambassadors and they receive one to one support and guidance from trauma informed professionals.

- **EC1 Voices:** This Islington-based campaign coalition group has a small steering group and created working groups that regularly meet to work on different aspects of their campaign.
- **IRMO:** is in the process of setting up a new community panel and youth steering group. They plan to hold one or two joint meetings per year between the panels and the Board. Additionally, a rotating representative from the community panel will attend each Board meeting (held every six weeks) and feed back to the rest of the panel to ensure ongoing communication and accountability. The panels will provide strategic input on services and play a key role in shaping future needs assessments.
- **Together Productions:** Participatory governance is central to Together Productions' operations. They have two projects, each with its own steering group or committee, led by anyone who volunteers to take the lead. Members of the committees are compensated for their time, including a data fee for sanctuary seekers who attend online meetings. Committee meetings happen six times per year, and actions and minutes are communicated via WhatsApp. One of the projects has hybrid meetings (both in-person and online), but it was found that hybrid meetings hinder the flow of conversation.
- **CP4H** has working groups, which are open to all and focus their discussion and action-planning on specific topics, including the Women's Building Working Group, the Monitoring Group and the Co-housing Working Group.

4. Best Practices for Effective Participation and Governance, Diversity and Inclusion

Experience and Training

No formal training is currently provided by some organisations, but peer support initiatives are really helpful for many. Certain basic expectations (e.g. numeracy, literacy) are required due to the legal responsibilities trustees hold. There is concern that young trustees might become a "tick-box" exercise without the proper support.

While there are free in-person and online (and often on demand) training sessions available to trustees, it is often likely that trustees, especially those who are time poor, will not take advantage of such training and support.

- **Clean Break** has implemented a buddy system for trustee roles, pairing individuals with lived experience with those with more professional expertise. This system is seen as an effective method for participatory governance and supports the development of strong working relationships. They have shared their learnings with other organisations through seminars. Additionally, Clean Break emphasizes the importance of reaching

underrepresented candidates for trustee roles and offers various programmes, including shadowing and fellowships, to help individuals transition into leadership roles.

- **IRMO** is planning for its new community panel and youth steering group to meet monthly during their first year, with a strong focus on skill development and capacity building. They offer training in skills for community organising as well as digital skills and more. Self-efficacy is built into all of their work (e.g. soft skill development, confidence etc). IRMO's different groups use a WhatsApp channel (which works well for participants of all ages) as well as Instagram to communicate with their users. They also have a youth Instagram channel.
- **CP4H** has developed a handbook for new trustees and is developing informal knowledge-sharing meet-ups for trustees to engage with trustees at other local organisations.

Diversity and Inclusion:

It is helpful to define the parameters we want to use to define diversity: are we talking about lived experience? Ethnic background? Gender? Religion? Age? Abilities? These parameters will likely be different depending on the area of focus of different organisations. It may be helpful to source external data to provide a baseline and also to define a timeline to implement changes. **CP4H** has worked through specialist organisations and Facebook groups to help recruit trustees with specific experiences.

Diversity is not only about recruitment, it is also about who gets to participate in decision making. This may depend on how meetings are facilitated and on building a culture of trust, as well as one of reflection and learning. It may be useful to provide travel expenses and / or data fees or internet access. Consider opportunities for informal and inclusive socialising and providing food for in-person meetings. Translation and interpreting may be useful. Chat GTP can be a key tool for organising for people with English as an additional language.

5. Challenges in Participation and Governance for Small Organisations

- **Limited Resources:** Many small organisations face challenges due to limited funding and staff capacity, which can hinder their ability to facilitate participatory governance effectively.
- **Balancing Involvement:** Ensuring that everyone, including volunteers, staff, and advisory group members, is meaningfully involved without overwhelming the organisation remains a challenge for many.
- **Advisory Group Challenges:** The time commitment and managing the expectations of advisory group members, particularly for small organisations with fewer resources, can be difficult to navigate.
- **Founders' Syndrome:** Many small organisations struggle to put a proper plan in place to continue to thrive beyond their original founders (who can be the CEO or the original trustees)

- **External Governance Review:** regular evaluation by external consultants with experience in governance is helpful but may be costly.
 - **Lack of clarity regarding roles:** where an organisation has staff, trustees need to focus on strategy and governance rather than operational or day-to-day aspects of the organisation
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6. Conclusion

Effective governance and meaningful participation are essential to running sustainable, transparent, and accountable organisations. The organisations reviewed in this report showcase a variety of governance structures and models for participatory decision-making. Key takeaways for small charities and organisations looking to enhance governance and participation include:

- **Utilise advisory groups** to guide decision-making, ensuring those directly impacted by the organisation's work have a voice.
 - **Explore different meeting formats** (online, hybrid, in-person) to find what works best for your stakeholders and participants.
 - **Provide ongoing support** for trustees, including training and peer support systems, to ensure they can effectively contribute to the organisation's governance.
 - **Ensure that trustees have experience or access to training** for specific roles such as Treasurer.
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Useful Resources

For organisations looking to strengthen their governance frameworks, the following resources are recommended:

- The **Charity Governance Code:** [A framework for good governance](#)
- **Charity Excellence Framework:** [Free tools and health checks to assess and improve governance](#)
- **NCVO's Governance Resources:** [Practical guidance for trustees](#)

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