



Charity Matters is a weekly column that will look at issues affecting what is sometimes referred to as Civil Society. Each week we will examine a relevant topic and explore its impact. We will look at emerging developments and assess how organisations can build much needed capacity.

The charitable sector encompassing community, voluntary, trusts, foundations and charitable organisations is much larger than people would realise involving over 15,000 organisations, some 100,000+ employees and in excess of a 560,000 volunteers. They all have one thing in common.....they are active in your community....they want to get your attention...and most importantly, your support.

The sector has experienced some difficulties in the last two years which were reported on extensively in local and national media. The sector is working hard to recover through enhanced governance and compliance via the Governance Code supported by legislation in the form of the Charities Act 2009 and the establishment of the Charities Regulatory Authority. That being said, it is incumbent on every organisation that is the beneficiary of “public” funds, whether through government sources or through direct fundraising, to manage its organisation to the highest possible standards.

Being a charitable organisation means being responsible and the responsibility starts with the board members (also often referred to as directors or trustees). The chairperson of the board sets the tone for the organisation and he / she together with fellow board members determine the policies and procedures that will shape the organisation ensuring at all times that there is transparency, compliance, good governance and accountability. Through this process, the board agrees its mission, creates a vision and sets the values within which the organisation operates. The CEO (or manager) is the person responsible for implementing the mission, vision and values in tandem with the established organisational goals and objectives.

Being compliant is a challenge and requires that robust systems are in place (usually referred to as Policies & Procedures). It is essential that these systems are reviewed annually with the most critical being reviewed and approved by the board. Such checks and balances are no different than having your car serviced annually to ensure it remains roadworthy. Sometimes, and often unintentionally, systems are forgotten until an issue arises and at that stage it is defence and not attack.

Many charitable organisations are challenged on a daily basis...not just by funding but also through available resources and time management. Charities must channel as much (human) resources as possible into the delivery of programmes, services and activities which is the very reason for which they exist but they cannot ignore their legal obligations and their responsibilities to society. In that respect, the board, together with the CEO, should look at ways of creating the space and time that is required which can often be achieved through a reallocation of internal responsibilities, a new staff member, a robust volunteer recruitment program or external professional support.

Our community, voluntary and charitable organisations perform an essential role in civil society providing as they do the programmes, services and supports that enrich our lives; provide hope and opportunity and that directly engage and empower local people in local issues and in local decision-making processes. Such engagement builds a better society and places community where it should be....in our hearts and in our minds.



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