

Tip sheet



Safeguarding roles and responsibilities for the Board of Directors / Trustees of Nigerian civil society organisations

This tip sheet can be used on its own and as part of the RSH Nigeria Board of Directors training package. It outlines why Boards should prioritise safeguarding and what their roles and responsibilities are in ensuring quality safeguarding systems.

Why is strong leadership important for safeguarding?

- 'Leadership', for the purposes of this tip sheet, directly refers to the Board of Trustees (Board).
- The relevance of good governance and leadership in the successful implementation of safeguarding in organisations cannot be over emphasised. Safeguarding becomes more sustainable when it is integral to an organisation's culture.
- The Board plays a crucial leadership role in setting the culture, behaviour and priorities of the organisation. The Board must be fully aware of their roles and responsibilities for ensuring that adequate safeguards are in place, carry out the required actions with complete ownership, and monitor their implementation. This can contribute to a safer organisation.

Why is safeguarding important for your organisation?

Organisations enjoy many benefits from implementing safeguarding, including:

- Staff and people who interact with the organisation are better protected from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment (SEAH) and other harms and abuses.
- The organisation's credibility and reputation are strengthened: There may be improved trust and confidence between an organisation and communities (service users), donors, and the general public.
- Opening up more funding opportunities: Increasingly, donors want to work with a transparent organisation that can be held accountable in respect of its management of safeguarding.
- Staff, volunteers and other representatives are guided by the organisation: Everyone works and behaves in line with policies and procedures which aim to limit and efficiently manage safeguarding incidents within the organisation.
- Stronger accountability: When incidents and suspicions are handled appropriately, in line with case handling procedures, staff and communities are reassured that complaints will

be properly investigated. The safety and dignity of victims / survivors must also be prioritised.

- Incidences of SEAH are reduced and further prevented: When the right systems are in place, opportunities for potential perpetrators are reduced. When harm does occur, perpetrators are held to account through appropriately established disciplinary measures.
- Improves reporting: Establishing effective reporting mechanisms can increase reporting on safeguarding. This strengthens an organisation's accountability.

How Boards can ensure good governance for safeguarding

- Safeguarding means ensuring that the organisation you govern does not cause SEAH or other harms and abuses to anyone in the process of delivering the work. This includes staff, representatives and anyone who interacts with the organisation.
- Trustees are expected to provide oversight and to ensure that the right procedures are in place and adhered to, in line with best practices.
- In some cases (where necessary) actions can be delegated to the Executive Director or a top Manager in the organisation, but the responsibilities remain with the Board and they must provide adequate oversight.

Five core areas of work for Boards

1. Policies and procedures

- Ensure that your organisation has an appropriate safeguarding policy and a code of conduct in place. This should cover staff, representatives (including volunteers) and anyone who interacts with the organisation (including children and adults at risk). You should also have a policy or section of a policy which outlines your approach and response to whistle-blowing.
- Ensure that your policy(ies) and procedures represent a wide commitment to safeguarding. They should contain relevant details on prevention, reporting and response action as well as data protection and confidentiality.
- All members of the Board should understand the safeguarding policies and procedures.

2. Identify and manage risks

- Ensure that a robust risk assessment is conducted to identify the types of harm and abuse that are most likely to affect staff and anyone who engages with your organisation. You can access **RSH Nigeria risk assessment and guidance tool**.
- Ensure that all safeguarding risks are recorded in your organisation's risk register.
- Ensure that appropriate mitigation measures are designed to manage the identified risks.
- Regularly review the risk register and the effectiveness of mitigating activities.

3. Make safeguarding a priority to improve culture

- Appoint a safeguarding lead on the Board of trustees. Do not leave the Board safeguarding lead to handle safeguarding alone; every trustee needs to understand enough to support the promotion of safeguarding culture within the organisation and area of work that they are supporting, e.g. Human Resources or Programmes.
- Model the behaviours that are outlined in the code of conduct, such as transparency, clear communication and collaboration, and confidence to challenge inappropriate behaviours.
- Make safeguarding a standing item on the Board agenda and in annual reviews.

4. Handling and reporting safeguarding concerns

- Ensure that there are procedures and plans in place to support all staff and to understand how to recognise and report a safeguarding concern.
- Ensure that clear reporting channels and escalation routes are in place for receiving concerns.
- Ensure that community feedback mechanisms (CFM) are established, promoted and monitored with the active participation of the service users / community members.
- Without breaking confidentiality, review trends in and outcomes of cases to learn what needs to be strengthened in the organisation.
- Ensure that case handling procedures (or flow chart) detail how the organisation will handle incidents, including risk assessment, responsibilities and considerations for victims/survivors. Refer to the **RSH case handling flow chart** for more information.
- Provide adequate oversight to ensure that support to victims/survivors is given and that legal and contractual safeguarding reporting requirements are upheld, e.g. reporting to external bodies like the donors, local authorities, etc.
- Ensure that reporting is not avoided on the basis that it may harm the organisation's reputation. Maintain transparency on process, accountability, confidentiality on details and integrity when you receive a report and throughout case handling.
- Ensure that your organisation's annual report includes an appropriate summary of safeguarding incidents in the organisation.

5. Encourage speaking up

- Ensure that all staff and representatives, including volunteers, understand safeguarding and their responsibilities and roles.
- Check whether everyone knows how to speak up and feels comfortable raising a concern. An anonymous staff survey is a good way of doing this.

Relevant sources

- BOND (2019), **Good governance for safeguarding: A guide for UK NGO boards**
- BOND and Bates Wells (2018), **Safeguarding: a summary for trustees**
- NCVO (2021), **Safeguarding for Trustees**
- UK Charity Commission (2019), **Safeguarding and protecting people for charities and trustees**
- UK Charity Commission, **10 actions trustee boards need to take to ensure good safeguarding governance**