



# Progress and change

## Two years of transformation

2024-2025



This report covers January 2024 to December 2025. In these two years, the Association of Chairs has been through a remarkable amount of change – including a new staff team, a new strategy, and an overhaul of our brand and website. Liz Lowther was confirmed as permanent CEO during this period, and we launched a range of new services and products for chairs and their boards. We're delighted that our income has grown year on year.

During this time of rapid change, our focus has remained unwaveringly on delivering excellent value for our members, and championing chairs, trustees, and the importance of good governance.



# Introduction – Liz Lowther, CEO

## **Governance can make or break a charity.**

Good governance creates a strong, resilient and effective organisation that is better placed to weather financial storms, tackle risks, and achieve its aims. The chair and trustees are the cornerstone of a charity's effectiveness. We are the only organisation solely focused on supporting these extraordinary volunteers in their crucial roles.

After our ten-year anniversary in 2023, we took stock, and considered how we could better support our existing members, and make sure that more chairs and their boards could benefit from that support.

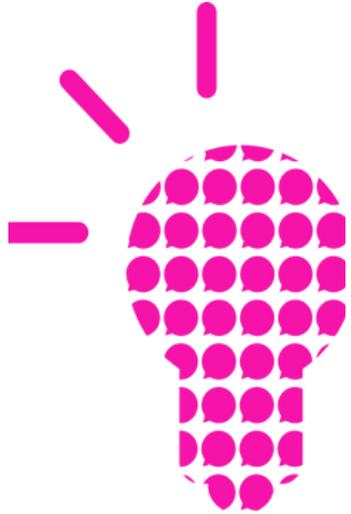
What followed were two years of rapid transformation, overhauling our services, website, and brand. Most importantly, we expanded and enhanced our membership offer to include trustees for the first time, as part of our Board Membership package.

We launched new chair and trustee training and resources, expanded our peer support offer, and launched a new service for chairs experiencing challenges (Chairs in Need). We worked with partner organisations in the sector and with the Charity Commission, championing chairs and trustees and their crucial roles to a wider audience.

This report showcases our work and our achievements during these two years of transformation. Moving forwards, we are continuing to seek new ways to support and champion chairs and trustees.

We're proud of what we have achieved in the past two years to help chairs and trustees be the most effective volunteer leaders that they can be. We're looking forward to further transformations and achievements to come.





## Our Vision

Our vision is of effective and valued chairs, with flourishing boards, leading resilient non-profits which make a positive impact in the world.



## Our Mission

Our mission is to champion charity and non-profit chairs and their boards in all their diversity, empowering them with confidence, collaboration, and community.



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Thank you to our supporters, partners, and funders



**We champion and lead**



# We champion and lead

We are an influential, respected voice on chairing and trusteeship, sharing insights and celebrating chairs and trustees for their roles as “extraordinary volunteers”.

## **Future Charity Chair research 2024**

We took part in this research with [Bayes Business School](#) to explore the future of the chairing role. Key questions focused on how can we secure the future pipeline of chairs? What skills does a future charity chair need and what challenges might they face? The resulting report gives a comprehensive overview of the future of chairing and potential pitfalls and changes to prepare for.

## **Festival of Trusteeship 2025**

AoC was an official partner for the Festival of Trusteeship during Trustees’ Week 2025. Our staff and trustees featured on various panels throughout the week – with over 2,000 people signed up to attend the sessions, we spoke about the future of trusteeship, board behaviours, and ideas for change.

## **Charity Governance Code 2025**

We were part of the steering group for refreshing the Charity Governance Code – a crucial framework for helping charities to ensure their effective governance. The new code launched in autumn 2025 and will help many charities to review and improve their governance, helping them to strive for best practice to ensure their organisations are led effectively.

## **Charity Commission – board behaviours 2025 and ongoing**

We are part of a Charity Commission working group looking at board behaviours, bringing our knowledge and perspective of chairing a board and tackling board disputes into the conversation. The work will impact the Charity Commission guidance on this theme, thus reaching many trustees and chairs and equipping them with resources to better manage board behaviours and dynamics.

## How can boards be better? Our 2025 consultation

In early 2025 we ran a consultation to ask chairs, trustees, and non-profit leaders what their priorities were for improving charity governance. **600+ respondents** from across charities large and small responded, picking their priorities and sharing their thoughts. Their responses have helped us to identify several priority areas for improving charity and non-profit boards, which will shape our work moving forwards, and the work we do with sector partners.



Photos from our better boards event, November 2025, CCLA, London

## Championing more inclusive and diverse boards

A crucial part of our strategy (2024–2027) is focused on equity, diversity and inclusion on non-profit boards. With resources, events, and partnerships, EDI is a continuous strand of our work with our membership and the wider sector.

### Resources and research



**EDI survey 2024:** We ran a survey in autumn 2024 on approaches and attitudes to EDI on boards, with over 300 respondents. The segmentation (by nfpResearch) revealed different attitudes to EDI, concerns and challenges, and what actions chairs and trustees had taken to improve their boards' diversity and inclusiveness.

**EDI guide: It starts from the top** – launched in autumn 2024, and drawing on themes from the EDI survey, this guide contains an array of practical tips and guest articles covering many aspects of diversity and inclusion, including neurodiversity, disability, and young trustees. It is free to download from our website.





### Lived experience on boards guide 2025:

We launched this new guide in autumn 2025, with insights from our members into how they recruit, retain, and support board members with lived experience. The guide contains profiles from chairs representing a range of charities and causes, from small to large, regional to national, and contains practical tips and questions for members to consider for their own boards.

### EDI blogs to share insights:

We regularly publish blogs focusing on various aspects of EDI – available to both members and non-members – these blogs amplify diverse voices, offer new perspectives, and give chairs and trustees practical tips for what they can do for their boards



September 8, 2025

EDI, Working with trustees

Helen Buckley

### Recruiting and retaining young board members



August 19, 2025

EDI, Leadership, Working with trustees

Guest author

### Engaging young trustees

August 13, 2025

EDI

Guest author

### Embedding disability inclusion on charity boards



September 22, 2025

EDI, Leadership, Working with trustees

Guest author

### Authenticity in action – embedding lived experience in charities



November 19, 2025

Chairing, EDI, Leadership, Strategy, Working with trustees

Helen Buckley

### How do we make charity and non-profit boards better?



**EDI events:** EDI is a prominent theme in events throughout the year, from training for trustees and chairs on building a diverse board, to discussion webinars, and peer sessions with guest speakers.

### **Building inclusive boards – insights from Black and Asian trustees, Nov 2024**

This free webinar was held for all members and non-members and took place in November 2024 in collaboration with Board Racial Diversity UK. Insights shared included:

- Cultivating a welcoming and inclusive board environment.
- Understanding what chairs seek in trustees and how to align.
- Mentorship, shadowing, and development opportunities for aspiring chairs.

The webinar was recorded so our members have been able to access it on demand.



### **Exploring skills gaps, diversity and intersectionality on charity boards, January and March 2025**

Stephen Bunbury, co-chair of Inclusion London, spoke at our London peer session in January 2025 on the topic of disability inclusion, race and intersectionality on charity boards. The session was repeated online in March 2025, and he also contributed a guest blog for the AoC website on the same subject. The peer event was, and the blog is, accessible to both members and non-members.

## Collaborations for EDI:

We're building strong collaborations with others in the sector to enhance our work and shared knowledge, and particularly with those who focus on EDI for boards.

### Example partnership: Board

Racial Diversity UK

We work closely with BRDUK to collaborate on discussion events, and lead sessions



on board diversity. We also support BAFCAs, the Black and Asian Future Chairs' Academy, run by BRDUK, by providing bursary memberships for their participants.



Our panel of speakers for the Better Boards event at CCLA in November 2025 (from left to right) – Joe Saxton (AoC), Liz Lowther (AoC), Malcolm John (Board Racial Diversity UK), Holly Riley (Charity Commission), Penny Wilson (Inclusive Governance Consultant).

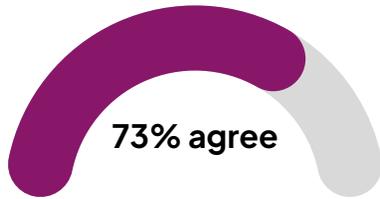


**We learn and develop**

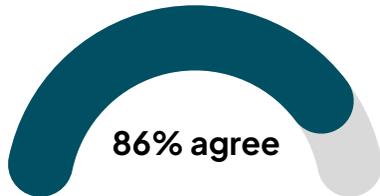


# We learn and develop

Good governance makes a major difference to whether or not a non-profit has the most positive impact for those it seeks to help. Through our training, webinars, and resources, chairs and trustees (both members and non-members) are equipped for their vital roles.



Because of my membership, I have new ideas about how to be more effective in my chairing role.



I have discovered new resources and sources of support for my chairing / trustee role.

-Member survey results 2025

## Resources

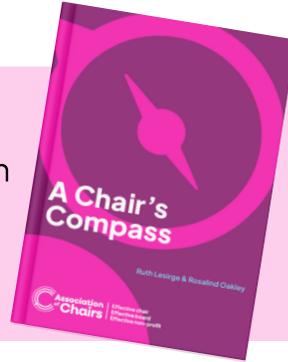
We have over **40 bespoke resources** for chairs and trustees to help them with various aspects of their roles, some freely available to non-members as well.

### Free resources

**Finance guide: Financial leadership in small charities** – launched in autumn 2024, this guide helps chairs and trustees to fully understand the questions they should be asking when it comes to financial leadership for their organisation.



**A Chair's Compass** – a comprehensive guide for chairs. We launched a new updated version of this guide in autumn 2024, which is still free for all.



**2365** ↓

FY 2024–2025  
downloads: A Chair's  
Compass

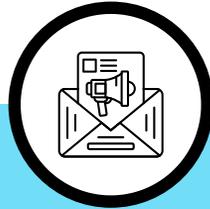
## Newsletters, blogs, and social media

We use various channels to share information and insights about chairing, trusteeship and governance, available freely to all.



### Blogs

In 2025, we published 17 blogs, including 5 focused on EDI topics.



### Newsletters

Current newsletter subscribers (non-members) – 10k



### Social media

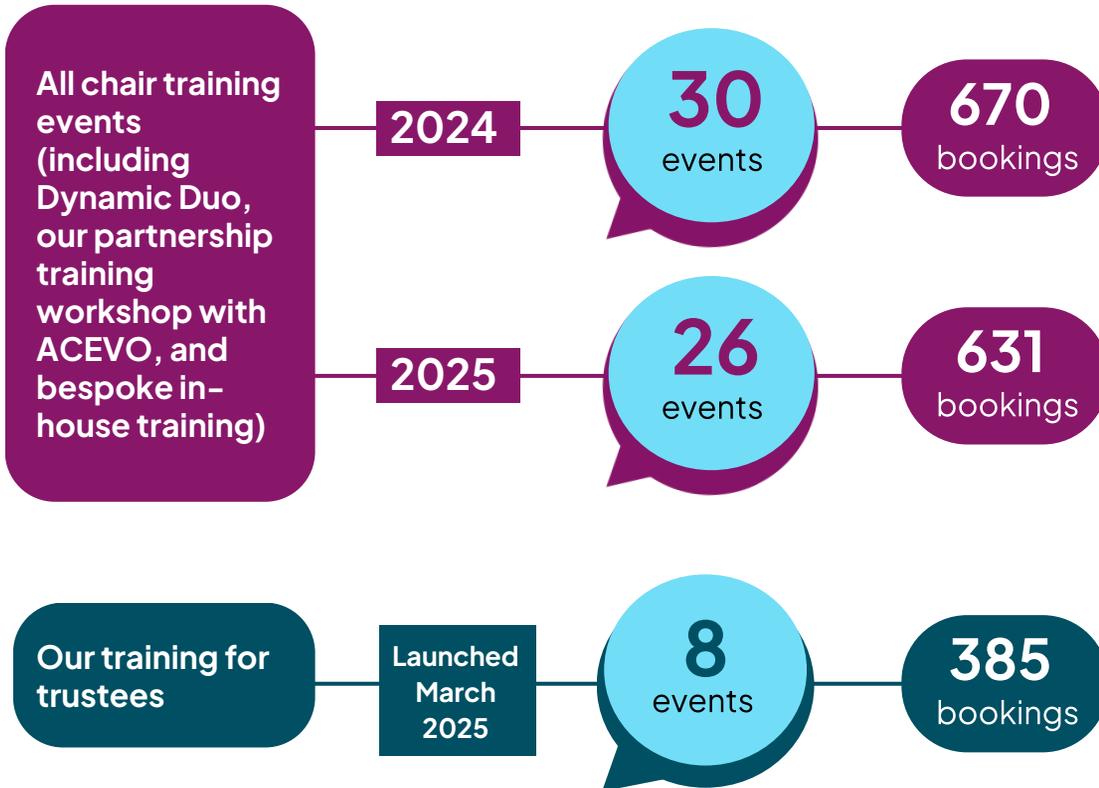
Our LinkedIn following has grown by over 90% from 2024, from 1.9k followers to 3.6k.



A behind-the-scenes photo of [our video series](#) on chairing, trusteeship, and governance, filmed in late 2025 with David (Chair, St. Leonard's Hospice) and Jane (AoC trustee).

## Training and events for chairs and trustees

Our training sessions help chairs and trustees understand their roles, grow in confidence, and develop their knowledge. Session topics include their legal responsibilities, finances, diversity and inclusion, building a positive and productive team, working with CEOs, and chairing with confidence.



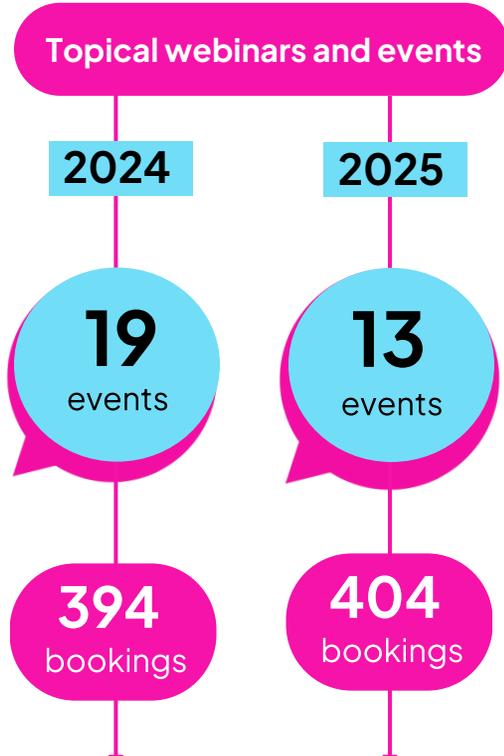
Group discussion highlights from our London peer session at the AoC office.



Participants engaged in the Q&A session at the Better Boards event held at CCLA in November 2025.

## Topical events for the whole board

We run regular webinars and one-off events on governance topics, often with guest speakers. Topics in 2024 and 2025 covered EDI, fundraising, recruiting trustees, board meetings, risk, AI, cyber security, and more.



“I found the event provided an excellent breakdown of the role. I knew quite a lot of this stuff, but it brought it all to life, the hints were incredibly useful, and the contextual patterning made it all make a lot more sense. I'm planning to put all the management committee members on one of my orgs through similar training now.”

– Attendee at our legal responsibilities training session

“Great content and insights from the knowledgeable presenter and great to see examples of practice in other charities.”

– Attendee at our Building the Board You Want session

## Member features – how the AoC helped me

### Individual membership

#### **Nick Amyes, Chair, Brymbo Heritage Trust**

I joined in 2024, when our project was moving into a crucial stage of development. I felt it was important to connect with other chairs, learn from their experiences, and draw on the resources available to strengthen my leadership skills. Leading a large heritage project requires balancing governance, fundraising, and people management – and I saw the Association as a way to support me in those areas.

I've found the guidance and resources invaluable – particularly the practical briefings on governance and the webinars that bring together perspectives from a wide range of sectors. It's also reassuring to know that other chairs face similar challenges, whether around trustee engagement, strategic planning, or balancing day-to-day demands with long-term vision. Having access to a supportive network has been a real benefit.

#### **Clare Walkenden, Chair, Abianda**

I joined about 6 months after I first moved into the chairship, as I was looking for ways to support my development as a chair and hear experiences from others of common challenges – of which there seem to be many!

It offers reassurance. I think now more than ever, having a community where you can feel safe to ask questions that others may have experience to support with or who are just able to listen is really important. Being a chair is a significant responsibility and so being able to access best practice resource to support thinking and sense check is really helpful to decision making.

## Member features – how the AoC helped me

### Board membership

#### Jules Hillier, CEO, Pause

We have found it so helpful to add AoC membership to the support offer for our trustees, particularly during their induction. We have a huge range of experience across our board and they have been able to pick and choose training and information that meets their specific needs. It's led to some really helpful and interesting discussions with me and the leadership team that I very much welcome.



Snapshot from the AoC networking event in November 2024

#### Vicki Nash, Chair, Pause

As a new chair, I've found the support AoC provided invaluable. From the webinars and training sessions to the peer mentoring project I took part in, to the fab WhatsApp group of chairs, it's really helped me grow in confidence in my role. And it's been fantastic to extend those resources so that all our trustees can benefit from AoC's expertise and insight. Would thoroughly recommend!



I've found all the workshops and lectures really informative and easy to understand - great as a new trustee!"

- Pause trustee



**We connect and support**



# We connect and support

Our members are part of a vibrant, supportive community of chairs and trustees, offering encouragement, understanding, and shared knowledge. Many of our events are open to non-members as well so they can meet and connect with their peers.

## Co-mentoring

**132** people have taken part in our co-mentoring programme, which matches chairs together. Funded by City Bridge Foundation, this is open to members and non-members as long as they are based in London or their charity serves Londoners.



“I’ve really valued having someone who understands the role of a chair and who has a lot more experience than me, as I have learned a lot from them and appreciate how much they know and how good they are at addressing very complex difficulties. It has made me reflect how I tend to err on the side of caution in terms of my career development, and how the problems I perceive as ‘problems’ are possibly more like opportunities, so it’s helped me to reframe this and be a better leader.”

– Vicky Beckwith, chair of the Centre for Action on Rape and Abuse (CARA), and co-mentoring participant

## Co-mentoring feedback (2024-2025)



report feeling supported by peers



report feeling less alone



“Our health and wellbeing is critical to our work as leaders in everything we do (both professionally and personally). I am very grateful to AoC for giving us the opportunity to have a 'safe space' but also having a co-mentor that held me accountable for my own health and wellbeing and steadily 'steered' me when faced with challenges. Time is our most valuable resource but it can also be our scarcest. The monthly one-hour meetings were invaluable in realigning ourselves with our priorities and reminding us that our health and wellbeing are a priority.”

– Natalie Mendez, chair of trustees at Alternatives to Violence Project Britain, and co-mentoring participant



A photo from our networking event organised at CCLA in 2024

## WhatsApp community

Offering an informal, safe space to ask questions, share thoughts, and offer encouragement, our chairs' invitation-only WhatsApp has **over 300 members**.



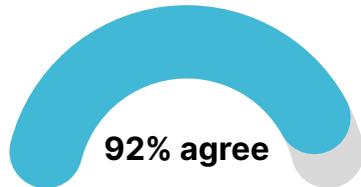
“I love the WhatsApp group. I've really benefitted from other chairs' knowledge. Members of the AoC are so warm and ready to offer support and advice. I've so appreciated this.”

– Emma Duke, Chair, Connection Support



“Can I just say what a fantastic source of information this group is. I've not been a member for long and I am generally fatigued by the enormous number of WhatsApp groups I am a member of, but this one definitely sits apart and I'm so glad I've joined! Wisdom, engagement and a willingness to share good practice and support fellow chairs.”

– Vicky Burford, Chair, PANS and PANDAS UK



As a result of my membership, I have had the opportunity to learn from other chairs and trustees

–Feedback survey 2025





Photos from our 2025 London peer sessions at the AoC office



## In-person peer sessions

Funded by City Bridge Foundation, these London-based sessions offer the chance to network and share insights around various topics related to chairing and charity governance. Often facilitated by guest speakers, these are also open to non-members.

We ran **20** London peer sessions in 2024 and 2025 with **368** bookings.



“There are all too few opportunities for charity chairs to share learning and experiences and so the London Project Peer Support event was both hugely valuable and enjoyable. Well led and unobtrusively directed, this was an evening for structured focused discussion and reflection on the key challenges that we as chairs face as well as for the informal networking that is such an important part of AoC membership (not least as it ensures we remain open to that wide range of views and opinions that makes the charity sector so vibrant).”

– Attendee at a London peer session

## Online peer sessions

We offer online peer sessions, facilitated by an experienced chair. This helps members to make connections in an accessible way, in a small group environment where they can safely discuss chairing challenges.

2024 – 11 sessions with 112 bookings

2025 – 11 sessions with 79 bookings



"The hosting was excellent. All the topics discussed were relevant and the wisdom shared was very helpful, and well-facilitated."

– Attendee at an online peer session

## London project 2024–2025: Impact of training and events



78%

have new ideas about how to be more effective



72%

feel more confident in their chairing role



66%

will do something differently in their role



92%

agree they have learned from other chairs/vice chairs or made new connections

– London project report for 2024–25

## Networking

We hold networking events for chairs and trustees to expand their peer networks and discuss relevant issues.

In 2025 this included a series of networking events around the country for member and non-member trustees and chairs, in partnership with Brewin Dolphin, as well as our annual showcase event kindly hosted by CCLA.

**Total bookings for networking events in 2025: 185**



Photo from our event for chairs and trustees at CCLA in November 2025

## AoC networking event locations in 2025



## Chairs in Need

We know how challenging the chairing role can be. Chairs can often experience tricky and unexpected situations which can cause significant stress to both them and their board members.

Our Chairs in Need service provides a valuable source of support and guidance to help chairs unpick the difficult situations they face, and find workable solutions for them, their board, and their organisations.



We offer a variety of types of support depending on what the individual chair needs. This can include:



Peer support from our community of chairs



One-to-one mentoring with an experienced chair



Connection with a consultant for professional advice e.g. legal/financial

Our service users report not just resolutions to their situations, or help figuring out the next steps, but also stress relief, encouragement, motivation, and the feeling of being unburdened.

“I can’t overstate the impact that being able to work with an Association of Chairs mentor has made to me but also to the charity I chair. Whether it’s needing to ask for advice or a sense-check on a specific issue, sharing problems and stresses or having someone talk me off the occasional ledge, it’s made such a difference to have someone on my side. It’s very easy to struggle on alone as chair, feeling that you have to be showing leadership and certainty, but anyone who has been in this role knows it can be lonely, overwhelming and sometimes even toxic. My mentor has helped me through those times and I’m now better able to protect and serve myself as well as the board and organisation I lead.”

– Anonymous service user, Chairs in Need, 2025



chairs helped since the service launched, April to December 2025



reported the support from mentors and consultants as very helpful



said the scheme helped them resolve their challenge (for others, it was ongoing)



rated the overall service experience as excellent or good

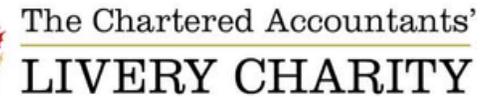


**Thank you to our  
supporters, partners,  
and funders**



# Thank you to our supporters, partners, and funders

We want to thank our funders who helped to support our work in 2024 and 2025.



Thank you to our partners, sponsors, and federated charities who funded memberships for their networks or supported events.

