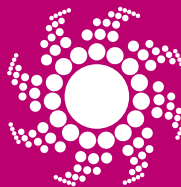




**ELECTORAL
REFORM
SERVICES**



**Membership
Engagement
Services**

The Membership Bulletin

**Tackling Tokenism: The Future of FT
Membership.**

**FTN Conference Workshops
(Birmingham): Summary of Findings**

In September 2009, Membership Engagement Services and Electoral Reform Services were once again proud to sponsor the FT Network Conference, held this year in Birmingham, focusing on ‘Governance in Challenging Times’.

As part of our commitment to the FT Network and its members, our ‘Tackling Tokenism: The Future of FT Membership’ workshop was designed to help Trusts not only think about their current membership challenges, but also exchange practical advice and ideas for meeting the demands of tomorrow.

We asked Trusts to imagine a future Monitor compliance framework document asking for evidence of how to:

- a) double the number of candidates standing in elections and increase electoral turnout by a third, and
- b) demonstrate that the Trust membership is engaged beyond the level of tokenism

Following the success of our previous workshops and Membership Bulletins, we are pleased to offer NHS Trusts our latest summary of shared views and experiences from the NHS community.

Increasing candidate numbers and election turnout

Advertising

It was generally agreed that Trusts now have to work harder to create interest in governor vacancies. Rather than relying on the Trust's website or a blanket mailing, some Trusts had used more targeted advertising to find their governors, by:

- Using Linked in, Facebook, student union or university websites, and classifieds ads
- Approaching volunteers, members of hospital forums, or unsuccessful NED applicants
- Ensuring that nominees from previous elections who weren't elected were encouraged to stand again

Managing expectations

Providing clear information about the roles of the Governor before elections was seen as an important way of reducing the number of vacancies arising mid-term as well as ensuring that candidates standing for election are aware of the demands of the role:

- Governor workshops are now held by the majority of Trusts prior to or during the nomination period
- Most Trusts sent out an information booklet detailing the responsibilities and limitations of the role, as well as providing an idea of the time commitment required

- Some Trusts also print interviews with current governors in the material accompanying the nomination form

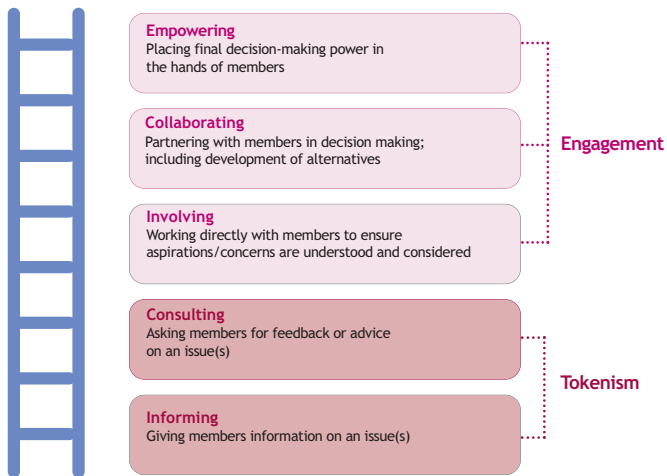
Longer-term involvement

Many Trusts had experienced problems with governors standing down or feeling disillusioned with the role. There was also some discussion about disillusionment in connection with election turnout and whether or not members felt that their vote had any tangible effect. The governors present at the workshop in particular, felt strongly that allowing governors more opportunity to interact with members could bring very positive results. Popular suggestions included:

- Meet the governors' events -for potential candidates to speak to the governors about the role. Governors that attended such workshops felt very positively about these
- Follow-up information – there was a suggestion that Trust membership mailings and newsletters could be more focused on the governors and their involvement with the Trust so that members felt they knew the governors a bit better and would show more interest in the elections
- One Trust's newsletter was written and managed wholly by the governors, allowing a regular point of connection to the members

‘Compliance Framework 2011’: demonstrating engagement

We set an imaginary future scene, where Monitor are asking for hard evidence of how a Trust is engaging with its membership. To illustrate the various levels of membership activity, we used this ladder of engagement:



The Trusts present were asked for any examples of methods of engagement shown on the ladder that they had used and found successful. A lot of Trusts used surveys as a way of interacting with their membership regularly, but there were fewer examples of involving, collaborating and empowering. Two areas emerged in both workshops as focal points for developing engagement:

- There were some concerns voiced about how engaged members should be and whether ‘empowerment’ was a relevant concept for Trust members
- In response to this matter Trusts talked about different ways of viewing ‘empowerment’. For example, one Trust’s

members felt empowered by painting their ward in the colour they chose

- One Trust had encouraged members to petition against the closing of a ward by sending out pre-written petition letters for their members to sign and send to their MP

As illustrated by some of the examples above, engaging members successfully does not involve giving absolute control of the Trust to members! Providing members with the chance to make decisions on smaller issues is a tangible example of their power to make a difference. This in turn can prove very productive in increasing overall engagement and combating disinterest.

Improving Engagement: approaches and challenges

A wide range of engagement methods were discussed at this year's workshop, and although there was some frustration with the challenge of keeping members engaged there were equally some very positive ideas raised by the Trusts and governors present.

Targeting low-engagement Groups

- There was some frustration with members' perceived lack of interest in the workings of their Trust, but it was suggested that this disinterest might originate from lack of understanding of the members' role in the Trust.
- Some Trusts had used analytical approaches such as membership or voter profiling to identify hard to reach groups of their membership.
- Most Trusts struggled to engage young members but some had made real progress in this area through visiting schools and making links with similar organisations such as Youth Parliaments
- Although members could often request material in large print/Braille/other languages, very few Trusts produced accessible materials as standard practice.
- There was a considerable amount of discussion over accessible materials and the idea that Trust publications needs to

be made available to different groups of members in the format best suited to them; whether that be online blogs for younger members or large print for visually impaired members accessible materials as standard, with the exception of Mental Health trusts which often produce materials in an easy-read format. However, there was also some concern as to how this could be achieved in terms of costs and resources.

The role of the governor

- Some of the Trusts present felt strongly that membership recruitment and engagement should be part of the role of the governor, but there was also a sense (particularly from the governors present) that they did not have the resources available to them to be able to do so effectively.
- Constituency workshops were again viewed positively as a good way to inform and involve members on issues important and relevant to them.

Look out for future events - you are welcome to join the debate



What did people think of our workshop?

Very informative ... forward looking

A very interesting and helpful discussion - thank you!

More of this type of session!

Thanks! Do more in future please

**For more details please contact the Foundation
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or Membership Engagement Services**



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**For Membership Participation
and Electoral Management**