

Refine Your Search

Search



Filter by year

ALL
2022
2021
2020
2019
2018
2017
2016
2015
2014
2013
2012
2011
2010
2009
2008
2007
2006
2005

Speech by President Halimah Yacob Council for Board Diversity Patron at Future of Charity Boards

23 November 2022

Mr Loh Boon Chye and Ms Mildred Tan, Co-Chairpersons of the Council for Board Diversity

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning. I am pleased to join you at this Future of Charity Boards breakfast event.

This is the first time the Council for Board Diversity – or CBD for short – has organised an in-person gathering of charity board chairs. The energy in the room is palpable and I am sure you are looking forward to the discussions today.

With your decades of entrepreneurship and leadership experience, there will be many good ideas that will emerge this morning. It is my hope that the energy created in this room will carry over into your individual charities and result in positive outcomes for your organisations and beneficiaries.

We are just gradually emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic. It was an unprecedented crisis with no established playbook. I am heartened that charities rose to the occasion – you stepped up and overcame the challenges faced. There were many examples of the sector going the extra mile – be it providing support to migrant workers, or offering child-minding to low-income families with breadwinners in essential services.

You could even say that the charity sector has flourished, with more than 130 newly registered charities since 2020. There were also nearly 30 more organisations recognised as Institutions of Public Character – or IPCs.

All these demonstrated how valuable charities are in responding to the needs on the ground. It drew from the rich store of your compassion, resourcefulness and ability to innovate to fill the identified needs. But we should not stop there. We should and must institutionalise these qualities developed during the pandemic to keep them alive and leverage their benefits for a brighter future.

The business world is doing just that. Companies are racing ahead to make up for time lost to the pandemic. They are balancing the search for new technologies with evaluating the relevance of their operations and future-proofing their businesses. Charities must do the same.

Allow me to share three ideas you can consider implementing in your charities.

The first is to examine how effective your charity is in achieving your stated goals – in other words – impact assessment. This is about achieving both immediate targets and long-term goals in the most efficient manner. A useful tool that charities can use is the Sector Evaluation Framework by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS), which provides a repository of outcome metrics that can be used to measure the effectiveness of programmes, allocate resources appropriately and articulate impact to funders and potential donors. This is important as potential donors need to know the impact of the programmes and activities that you are proposing to run, and asking for funding. Having this evaluation framework is hence useful. To stay focused on achieving your organisation's mission, I also encourage you to regularly review your charity's direction and keep abreast with updates on the code of governance for charities and IPCs.

The second idea is to increase collaborations with fellow charities to leverage each other's strengths. In the last two years, I have seen more charities initiating partnerships to meet the needs of beneficiaries. For instance, during the circuit breaker in 2020, when the first COVID-19 cluster emerged at a nursing home, many of their nurses had to be quarantined. Many other charitable nursing homes stepped in to offer nurses to help care for the seniors. Another example of collaboration is the Maintenance Support Central (MSC) by Singapore Council of Women's Organisations which worked together with the Legal Aid Bureau to provide free video-conferencing services for those who require urgent support on legal matters relating to marriage and family.

The Government is also always ready to collaborate. For instance, the Ministry of Social and Family Development partners community groups and social service agencies to support rough sleepers and homeless persons, as part of the Partners Engaging and Empowering Rough Sleepers (PEERS) Network.

When different organisations work together – be it between a charity and government agencies, businesses or other charities – it brings to the table a diversity of strengths and skills that everyone can benefit from. With the pooling of resources, the result is larger than the sum of the parts.

The third idea is to have a well-constituted board with not just the right knowhow, but also breadth of expertise. With or without crises like a pandemic, charities must be able to transform and remain relevant to the changing needs of society. Having the breadth and diversity of skills, experiences, perception and approaches will help steer the charity towards its goals and deliver results.

Women on boards is one key aspect of diversity, as it is visible and measurable, and also a useful lead-in to an organisation's consideration of broader diversity on the boards. Today, women remain a minority in many IPCs, taking up only one-third of all the board seats. The CBD seeks to address this, and works to encourage IPCs to recognise the value and benefits of having women on boards. Having board diversity is also one of the action plans in the White Paper on Singapore Women's Development which reflects Singaporeans' shared vision towards a fairer and more inclusive society. Indeed, having women on boards provides diverse views, which would allow boards to better understand the perspectives of different stakeholders and strengthen decision-making processes. When women and men work in partnership across all levels of society, we can build on each other's strengths and achieve far more together.

To build a well-constituted board, individual charities must find your own mix of board members that will be most appropriate to your situation. By harnessing the collective strengths of your board members, you will be able to engage more communities and partners, attract more resources and ensure organisational effectiveness and governance. Similarly, we want to tap the energies of the larger community like yourselves in refreshing our nation's social compact under the Forward Singapore, an important visioning exercise. The charity sector is vibrant and growing which augers well for our society. They can complement the Government to help the underserved communities. Charities play an important ground up movement, as they are run by people who are committed and dedicated to helping people.

Singapore is renowned for being progressive and agile. Our charities must operate in the same spirit, embracing progress while leaving no one behind. As the pandemic has demonstrated, we are able to innovate and work together to overcome the crisis and emerge even stronger – we must continue to do this to be a greater force for good. I visited many charities during the pandemic and saw how committed they are to reach out to their beneficiaries despite the restrictions. This ensures that the vulnerable sectors are not left on their own in the most difficult of times.

As charities seize opportunities and run with them, I have a special word for Board Chairs: As board leaders, you have a significant role to play in encouraging and guiding your charities and Board members and ensure that they continue to run for many years to help those in need.

I am very happy that board leaders of charities have the opportunity to connect with each other this morning to discuss how to overcome challenges for a better tomorrow. I wish you all a lively and stimulating discussion with exciting ideas to take away, develop and turn into reality.

Thank you.

[◀ Back To Listing](#)