

Board member national group

Terms of reference

National Groups: purpose

The National Housing Federation's national groups are a crucial element in meeting our core values – to put members at the heart of everything we do. National groups support us by shaping our work, developing and testing either our policies or our approach to member engagement and helping us to gather vital member intelligence.

Groups should support us in delivering our business plan, and should be flexible in response to the external environment and salience of key issues. They should also provide added value for members through the opportunity to shape debates at a national level, in a dynamic setting and with high quality support from Federation staff.

We are committed to several key principles in relation to national groups; and our approach to member engagement more broadly:

- **Fairness** - all members are clear about who is on the group, the rationale and mechanisms for involvement
- **Inclusivity** – all members are clear about the group's purpose and how to contribute
- **Transparency** – the group operates in a way which is clear and visible to other members

Terms of reference

1. Purpose

The Board Members National Group exists to lead, inform and champion the Federation's ambition to be a trade body for board members amongst its membership. This can be divided into supporting the delivery of [Our Offer for Board Members](#) – our plan to deliver for board members in the first year of this work – and shaping the organisation to deliver the longer term vision to be a trade body for boards. In both cases, the focus of the group will remain strategic, as this is where it best adds value to the sector.

Specifically, this group will:

- Support us in the delivery of [Our Offer for Board Members](#) by:
 - Helping us to understand the role of a board member and what housing association board members need from their trade association
 - Provide feedback on [Our Offer for Board Members](#), suggesting how we can best deliver it
 - Advise on how the Federation can improve our engagement and communications with board members
 - Provide insight into our commercial offer to boards, including our partnerships
- Lead our longer term work to be a trade body for the sector's board members
- Championing the Federation's ambition among other board members, helping us improve our reach within the sector
- Introducing us to networks and contacts, where appropriate, to support our political influencing work

2. Membership

The Board member national group will comprise of around 10 members. All members must be board members or chairs of organisations affiliated to the National Housing Federation. Members will be selected in a fair and transparent way, and the Federation's Member and Business Support Manager will ensure consistency in the process.

The group does not seek to be wholly representative (there is no vote or mandate), but will encourage genuine diversity of members. To ensure valuable feedback on the group's work area, the following factors will be taken into consideration when assessing applications:

- The need to ensure representation from board members who have rarely or never engaged with the Federation
- The need to ensure representation from board members who are new to the sector or new to the board member role
- The need to ensure representation from very experienced board members, who perhaps hold a number of roles
- The need to ensure continuation of involvement by board members who have shaped [Our Offer to Board Members](#) with us so far

In addition, we will also seek to have a range of representation from across our membership, in terms of housing association size and location.

3. Length of term

As the nature of the group's task is defined, an initial term will be two years, with the group's continuation to be considered after 18 months.

4. Meetings and commitment

- 3 x core meetings per year
- This may include one extended 'wider engagement meeting' per year
- This also includes some activity in between meetings, such as acting as a virtual sounding board in between meetings, or promoting group or Federation activity within members' own networks, etc.

We expect the approximate time commitment will be 9 – 12 hours a year excluding travel time. This will rise to up to 15 hours for the chair.

Members will be expected to attend at least two meetings a year and participate in activity in between meetings. Membership will be individual and so meeting invitations may not be extended to substitutes.

5. Chairing

The group will be expected to elect a chair and vice-chair from within their number. The chair will be expected to:

- Be an active chair at meetings
- Act as an effective ambassador for the Federation externally
- Work with the Federation lead and the wider group to shape agendas and group activity.

The vice-chair will be expected to:

- Chair meetings on behalf of the chair where appropriate
- Act as an effective ambassador for the Federation externally
- Work with the chair and Federation lead to shape agendas and group activity.

6. Expectations of group members

Group members will be expected to:

- Provide creative, critical and constructive feedback in order to strengthen the Federation's work to engage board members
- Attend as many of the meetings as possible, and at least two across the year
- Act as an effective ambassador for the Federation and the group with both member and external audiences
- Contribute blogs, articles or introductions to your networks from time to time, in order to support us in reaching out to the wider membership
- Take actions forward outside of meetings as appropriate (e.g. provide views on email, canvas opinion from other members)
- Have their names published on our website as part of the group information section, and in alignment with Federation commitments around transparency and openness.

7. What group members can expect from the Federation

Overall we promise to ensure our approach is FIT for purpose:

- Fair – in our processes and decision-making
- Inclusive – in that we will always seek to reflect the diversity of our membership
- Transparent – in how we make decisions, and how we work with you

Specifically in relation to each national group members can expect:

- A clear framework to support group activity
- Opportunities to input ideas, test proposals and influence the delivery of this critical area of our work
- Support and input from the Federation's policy lead at every meeting
- Support and input from a range of Federation staff where appropriate
- Clear and consistent feedback and evaluation on how the group is making a difference to our work
- Clear communication with Federation leadership – an opportunity for the group to engage directly with our Chief Executive or another member of the Senior Team at least once a year
- Flexibility and responsiveness – we will review the format regularly and in partnership with you, to ensure it is fit for purpose
- Efficiency and value for money – we have no desire to create meaningless bureaucracy within our groups; the focus will be on creative thinking and practical action that will help to deliver our business plan.

In practice, this means:

- Providing dedicated resource to administer the group, which will include holding the mailing list, noting actions at meetings and circulating agendas
- Regularly demonstrating the added value of the group's activity to business plan delivery, through evaluation and feedback
- Ensuring the work of the group is communicated and accessible to the wider membership
- Paying travel expenses for those outside London, within reason

9. Review

We want to make sure the engagement mechanisms we have are strong and successful, and support us in delivering our business plan. We will review the group after the first six months and on an annual basis thereafter. We will always involve our members in discussions around changes.

Victoria Moffett
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