

# Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance for the charity sector

This page is a reformatted version of the Charity Commission's coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance, which was first published in March 2020.

Understandably, charities are concerned about what to do during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, so we have set out our response to the most commonly asked questions.

We want to assure charities that our approach to regulation during this uncertain period will be as flexible and pragmatic as possible in the public interest, whilst helping trustees to be aware of and think about the wider or longer impact of their decisions on their charity.

We are working hard to keep our contact centre open.

During the current crisis we will be prioritising registrations, permissions, reporting and other interactions related to coronavirus.

We will update this page with responses to further questions.

## Charity objects: understand if you can help with coronavirus efforts

Naturally, lots of charities are considering whether they can help the effort to tackle COVID-19 and its severe impact on people right across the country. You should first consider the terms of your charity's existing charitable objects. These are set out in your governing document.

Objects that might already allow you to offer support include:

- the relief of poverty
- the relief of need hardship or distress
- the relief of the elderly
- the advancement of education or advancement in life of young people
- the advancement of health

Trustees of charities with other objects may also be able to adapt and respond to COVID-19 either directly or indirectly. For example, a charity with an object to advance religion may be able to offer support as part of its pastoral work. An arts charity might help relieve isolation through its online work. Your charity may also have a general object that allows you to act for any charitable purposes, or an object that allows you to support the general benefit of a local area.

In considering what you can do under your existing objects you will need to check whether your objects have restrictions, for example, to benefit a particular local area or class of beneficiaries.

If your existing objects do not allow you to help, you may be able to amend your governing document to change them. But consider carefully:

- whether there are other charities that may be better placed to respond than yours. You can find [contact details for relevant local charities on our register](#)

- the wider and longer-term impacts of changing your charity's objects including on your existing beneficiaries

If you want to change your charitable objects, you should check to see whether your trustees have the powers to amend them, for example using an express power in your governing document. If not, you may need permission from us. For example if your organisation is a company or a CIO, a change to the objects is a 'regulated amendment' which would require our consent.

Any changes proposed should be reasonable, consistent with what your charity does, and not undermine your existing objects. We will prioritise requests required urgently because of COVID-19.

See further, more detailed, guidance on [alterations to governing documents for unincorporated charities and charitable companies](#) and [governing document guidance for CIOs](#).

## Government financial support for charities

The Chancellor has announced a £750 million package of support for frontline charities.

[HM Treasury announcement of coronavirus funding for frontline charities](#)

The government has also said that charities can access many of the measures the Chancellor previously announced for businesses.

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) support for businesses](#)

## Using reserves and restricted funds

We understand that many charities are currently very concerned about their financial position. In the first instance, trustees should consider what are their short, medium and longer term priorities, and see if they need to amend their financial planning given their current situation. Trustees are encouraged in particular to think about whether or not certain projects, spends or activities can be stopped or delayed in order to focus on essential spending if they are facing financial challenges at this time.

Reserves can be spent to help cope with unexpected events like those unfolding at present.

You should identify which of your funds or assets have limits on their use. If these are internal only - for example your charity has decided to earmark certain funds for a particular purpose - you may be able to re-prioritise these. If they are restricted funds, meaning they cannot be spent at your (trustees) discretion, then they may only be used for a particular and defined purpose. For example, a fundraising appeal may restrict funds to a specific purpose, or if you have a permanent endowment, it may have restrictions on selling it to release funds.

If there are restrictions, in some instances there may be ways to amend these restrictions, but accessing or releasing restricted funds should only be considered if other options such as reserves are not possible. The Commission encourages you to also carefully consider the wider and longer term impacts of making such a decision on your financial resilience and donor relationships. You should seek professional advice on this if you can. The Commission will be as helpful as possible, and offer what guidance we can.

All decisions on such financial matters should normally be taken collectively, and significant decisions and action points noted in writing. We have further more detailed guidance on [financial resilience](#); on [charity reserves](#); and a [general tool to help trustees work out what to focus on](#).

## **AGMs and other meetings: postponing or cancelling meetings**

Coronavirus is having a major impact on charity events and the government's health advice may lead to some charities having no choice but to decide to cancel or postpone their AGMs and other critical meetings.

If as trustees, you decide it is necessary to do so, you should record this decision to demonstrate good governance of your charity. This is particularly important if it is not possible to hold your AGM which may make it difficult for you to finalise your annual reports and accounts.

Wherever possible, we would ask you to try to get your annual reports to us on time. However, where the situation impacts on the completion of annual returns and accounts, charities with an imminent filing date can email us.

Please include your charity name and charity registration number when you email us: [filingextension@charitycommission.gov.uk](mailto:filingextension@charitycommission.gov.uk)

## **Holding meetings online or by telephone**

In the current situation, it is becoming increasingly difficult to hold face-to-face meetings. Some charities have clauses in their governing documents that allow them to meet virtually or to use telephone facilities, so we advise trustees to check their governing document and see if they can make amendments themselves to facilitate changes as to how or when meetings are held.

Where there is no such clause in your governing document and you decide to hold meetings over the phone or using digital solutions, we will understand but you should record this decision and that you have done this to demonstrate good governance of your charity.

## **Reporting serious incidents to the Charity Commission**

We appreciate that during the coronavirus pandemic the charity sector will face extremely demanding and ever-changing challenges. Charities' primary interest, and ours, must be looking after the public and the communities that we serve.

It is ultimately the responsibility of the charity trustees to continue to report serious incidents using our current guidelines, and we will continue to ask trustees to use their judgement in deciding whether an incident is significant in the context of their charity and should be reported to us.

We will continue to prioritise those incidents that place individuals at risk, or incidents that have had a significant impact on a charity's operations and therefore serious harm to the charity's work.

## **Keeping people safe**

This pandemic is already giving rise to that spirit of charity and community that brings people together, and we appreciate and value that people will want to help others during the challenges we are all facing. But now more than ever it is critical to ensure that charities protect and safeguard their beneficiaries, volunteers and staff.

This is all the more relevant for those directly helping communities or vulnerable members of society who are self-isolating. Our [safeguarding guidance](#) is a source of support on how to keep people safe, and what steps you should take if you identify concerns.

## Working with a company or business to help with coronavirus

Charities can work with non-charitable companies or businesses in a number of ways.

For example, you could:

- provide a service or run a project together
- have staff seconded or volunteering for your organisation
- enter into a commercial partnership to raise funds (for example, a company donates a percentage of sales and uses your charity's name on their promotional material)

You should:

- make sure that linking with a business for this purpose is in your charity's best interests and that your trustees support it
- ensure that any activities you carry out fit with your charity's purposes
- identify, address, and review risks as well as benefits
- consider any conflicts of interest or risks to your charity's reputation

Any charity can enter into a commercial partnership to raise money but they must follow specific rules.

[Guidance on working with companies and professional fundraisers](#)

[Fundraising Regulator guidance: Professional fundraisers, commercial participators and partners](#)

## Charity SORP guidance

The Charity SORP has issued [updated guidance about what and how to report](#).

## Information from other organisations

Other organisations also have resources that may help charities during the COVID-19 crisis.

- [Association of Chairs](#)
- [National Council for Voluntary Organisations \(NCVO\)](#)
- [Small Charities Coalition](#)
- [Welsh Council for Voluntary Action \(WCVA\)](#)