

Sustain’s Trustee role-shares for diversity in leadership:

What are they for and how does it work?

All of Sustain’s work is guided by values and principles of achieving a healthy, fair, humane and sustainable food system. Our alliance also has shared concerns that are highly relevant to the food system, but go beyond just food, farming and fishing, such as tackling climate change, restoring nature, upholding human rights, and promoting economic prosperity and sustainable development that benefit everyone, not just a privileged few – at home and around the world.

Sustain staff, colleagues, alliance members and many others in the food system have a profound commitment to promoting equity, meaning that we want to promote diversity and inclusion across a wide range of characteristics. We recognise that there are entrenched and structural causes of inequity and want to play a part in tackling these, and to be helpful allies to those leading the way. In particular, we recognise the extent and depth of racial inequality and racial injustice in the food system and want to do what we can to help address this. Read more about our commitments and actions [here](#).

You may also like to watch this [short documentary film](#), sharing personal insights from trustees Shefalee Loth, from Which?; Dr Kawther Hashem from Action on Salt, Sugar and Health; Jyoti Fernandes, from Landworkers Alliance and Raksha Mistry from the Soil Association. They speak about challenges and opportunities in their roles and sectors, from access to land to perceptions of being a woman of colour, and touch on cross-cutting issues in food justice and public health.

Contents

Contact details	2
1. Leadership for diversity and racial justice	2
2. How does the trustee role-share scheme work?	3
3. Feedback from participants in Sustain trustee role-shares.....	4
4. Key ways role-share Trustees can participate.....	5
5. Overcoming barriers to participation.....	5
6. Questions to inform a personal development plan	7

Note: This document runs alongside the ‘Induction for new members of Sustain’s Council of Trustees’ document and process. This document on trustee role-shares for diversity may be shared with other organisations to support learning, continuous development and replication.

Contact details

If you have any questions about either of these documents, or ideas for how we could develop our approach to leadership for diversity and racial justice, we would be very pleased to hear from you. Please contact Sustain's Chief Executive Kath Dalmeny (kath@sustainweb.org) and/or Diversity Outreach Coordinator Sareta Puri (sareta@sustainweb.org).

1. Leadership for diversity and racial justice

Diversity and inclusion improve the quality of decision-making and ensure that we are addressing a more representative balance of concerns, as well as hearing and integrating diverse perspectives and solutions. Diversity also signals to other people wanting to get involved that they are warmly welcome. Disappointingly, the environmental charity sector is not yet representative of the British or global population and their diverse concerns among the sector's senior leadership teams and trustee boards. The 2022/23 data on trustees collected for [The RACE Report](#), shows that around 9% of Charity Trustees in the environmental sector are Black people and people of colour (BPOC).

Sustain has a Council of Trustees that are elected from the Sustain alliance membership and a senior management team appointed to run the organisation and coordinate the alliance.

Sustain is a majority female-led organisation, and has been since its founding in 1999. Across the past 25 years, there has always been a healthy balance of gender representation, and we have always welcomed people from diverse backgrounds and identities to take part, without prejudice, including people from a range of sectors, professional, cultural and ethnic backgrounds and people with a range of personal characteristics and identities.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge that across the first 20 years of Sustain, the leadership was predominantly White and probably not very diverse in terms of other personal characteristics. Since 2020, Sustain now takes proactive steps to welcome greater diversity into our staff team and onto the Council of Trustees, with a priority commitment to [recruitment for diversity](#).

This document focuses on Sustain's Council of Trustees. As part of our governance process, we hold annual Trustee elections where at least 5 positions (sometimes more) are opened up for alliance members to vote for who should provide leadership for the alliance. We actively encourage people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds to stand for election, cultivate connections and opportunities, and are committed to a warm welcome and helping overcome barriers to participation.

We also offer supported role-share Trustee positions for younger people – specifically those from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds under-represented in our sector – to gain contacts and experience in charity leadership and governance, and to contribute their unique perspectives. Some participate for around a year, to observe, learn and contribute in particular areas; others become more involved over a longer period, perhaps for one full Trustee term of office (three years), or perhaps for a longer period if they choose to stand again for re-election, either continuing in the role-share, or standing as a Sustain Trustee in their own right. We were delighted when two people in these role-shares became Trustees

in their own right in 2022, and we welcome their expertise, perspectives and ongoing contributions.

As a result of these initiatives, (using data for elections that took place in December 2023), membership of Sustain's Council of Trustees is 80 per cent female; just under half of Trustees are Black people and people of colour (BPOC); and just under half of Trustees have self-declared personal attributes that are among 'protected characteristics' in terms of religious affiliation, disability and sexual orientation or identity, with some intersectionality.

2. How does the Sustain Trustee role-share scheme work?

Sustain introduced the Sustain Trustee role-share position at Trustee elections in December 2020. Annually, we invite existing or candidate Trustees to consider coming forward for election in partnership with a younger person who is Black or a person of colour (BPOC). In line with Sustain's governing document, both people must be from an organisation that is a member of the Sustain alliance. Participants in the role-share positions have so far both been from the same organisation, which works well. However, this may limit the reach of – and opportunities offered by – this scheme. It is therefore possible for a BPOC role-share candidate to be supported in a role-share position by a Trustee from another Sustain alliance member. Please get in touch if you'd like to explore this.

We describe the relationship as a 'role-share'. We consciously avoid terms such as 'mentor', 'trainee', 'apprentice' or 'shadow', as these may convey a hierarchical relationship, which is not the intention. As far as possible and desired, we want to welcome both people in the partnership as individuals with equally valuable experience and contributions to make. When we communicate the membership of our Council of Trustees publicly (e.g. on the [Sustain website](#)), we do not differentiate between the 'registered Trustees' and people supported in role-share positions, as this might convey a 'senior' or 'junior' relationship, which is not the intention. We do differentiate internally to enable appropriate governance (e.g. to manage necessary charity governance responsibilities; clarifications on voting rights; and conflicts of interest) and helpful support (e.g. learning opportunities; invoicing for expenses or *per diem* payments – see below).

For practical, governance and legal purposes, one person in the partnership is the Trustee who will be officially registered in this role with regulators such as the Charity Commission and Companies House. A 'registered Trustee' is a defined role with legal responsibilities. Whilst Sustain rarely asks Trustees to vote on decisions, where votes are taken on financial, legal or technical governance matters, this vote should be cast by the 'registered Trustee' who will take legal responsibility for that decision. In most other matters, we hope the relationship will be collaborative, with agreement between the 'registered Trustee' and the 'role-share Trustee' on their position. For these and other reasons (e.g. flexibility for the role-share Trustee to serve a shorter or longer period by choice, subject to review), we expect that the 'registered Trustee' in a role-share relationship must be the person with the longer-term commitment of at least a full three-year term of office, and the person willing to commit to the legal responsibilities of becoming a registered Charity Trustee. This is most likely (but not necessarily automatically) not the person in the role-share position.

3. Feedback from participants in Sustain Trustee role-shares

During 2023/24, we had conversations with people who had participated in trustee role-share positions. All felt that the scheme is valuable. There were different perspectives on how people engage from, contribute to and benefit from the scheme, probably best characterised by the following two quotes. These illustrate that people want to participate in their own way, suited to their own circumstances, level of confidence or experience, and personal ambitions or career stage.

“Every Sustain Council meeting I attend is like a masterclass in governance. This is building my understanding, my capacity as a potential future charity leader. I don’t think I would have got into board-level matters for quite a while if it hadn’t been for the role-share opportunity.”

Sustain Trustee elected to a role-share for cultivating new talent and charity leadership, now a full Trustee in their own right

“I like to see people of colour raising their views and voices in meetings. I’m not as used to seeing that and it’s great. Whilst I don’t yet feel very confident to contribute a lot to the governance discussions and decision-making, and am happy to observe, I get a lot out of attending and being part of the process.”

Sustain Trustee elected to a role-share, who joined for two years

Participants also commented on, and Sustain has learned from, the following:

- The importance of knowing that participating in Trustee discussions is valued and not dependent on age or perceived seniority or level of experience. Sustain is clear: all Trustee views are welcome.
- The benefit of flexibility – having some core expectations in the role-share position, but the ability to engage at varying levels at different times.
- The central importance of attending the four quarterly Sustain Council of Trustees meetings that happen each year, where most of the governance business of Sustain is discussed. And the value of participating in the annual Sustain Strategy Day to meet the team and understand the ‘bigger picture’.
- The need for greater clarity on key things that people in role-share positions can participate in, contribute to and learn from (see more details below).
- The need for greater clarity on legal responsibilities and voting rights of ‘registered Trustees’ and trustees taking up a role-share position.
- Some people would like the option of connecting with other people of colour on the Council and/or on the staff team. People of colour who are in role-share Trustee positions might like to be in touch with the colleagues of colour group, and join them for conversations where this is relevant and helpful.
- The idea that some people in role-shares might like to participate for just a year; others might like to participate for longer; and that knowing there is a set review period would be helpful.
- For some, especially those less experienced or confident to speak up, they felt that a more ‘mentor-style’ or ‘career coach’ approach might be beneficial.

- For everyone participating in a role-share position, it might be helpful to have a way to think through and communicate what the person would like to get out of the role, and for there to be clear routes to gaining that experience and beneficial contacts.

4. Key ways role-share Trustees can participate

“Sustain should emphasise that the role share Trustee should use the opportunity to get what THEY need from it – and that will look different for everyone and will be a personal decision. The ‘main’ [registered] Trustee should support in identifying this. This could be anything from having freedom to ‘shadow’ and observe just to learn the ropes in the first instance, or go through to the other end of the spectrum to being an active participant and getting involved in several working groups.”

Feedback from Sustain role-share Trustee reflecting on their experience

We want you to get what you need from your participation in Sustain’s work. This will vary according to the individual, and might also vary at different times. As a role-share Trustee, some key ways that participants have indicated are useful ways to be involved and gain contacts and experience:

- Participation in the four quarterly meetings of Sustain’s Council of Trustees that take place in January, April, July and October each year (with some minor variations year by year).
- Participation in one or more Sustain staff recruitment or interview panel. We are especially keen to recruit for diversity, and participation by people of colour in shortlisting and interview panels is one way to enable better decision-making, to convey to other people of colour that they are welcome, and to help them have a better chance of success. If you are willing to participate in this way, and to improve our recruitment process for inclusion, we would be very grateful. We hope that this will also be a helpful experience for you.
- Supporting policy and promotion in relation to Sustain’s development of paid internships, prioritising opportunities for younger people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
- Participation in one or more Trustees working group to help develop research, thinking, policies and guidance, bringing your own personal experience and expertise.
- Attendance at Sustain’s annual Strategy Day and Annual Conference, both of which usually take place in the autumn, but this may vary year by year.

This list is indicative. Other opportunities may come up that you would like to be involved with.

5. Overcoming barriers to participation

We recognise that participation as a Sustain Trustee is a significant commitment. There may be personal, physical or financial barriers to participation. Sustain is committed to overcome these in a solutions-focused and inclusive way, and would welcome a conversation with

anyone who wants to explore how we might enable comfortable, welcoming and inclusive participation.

For younger people from diverse backgrounds, and people involved in community work or smaller organisations, lack of money may be a barrier to participation. We can pay reasonable expenses for all Trustee participation, for example travel expenses if a meeting is attended in person.

For legal reasons, 'registered Trustees' cannot be paid by Sustain for their work as a Trustee – i.e. attending meetings and participating in governance and decision-making (see the link to the Charity Commission rules below). This is to avoid the possibility of misuse of charitable funds, over which 'registered Trustees' have decision-making control and hence the possibility of misuse. Charities are duty-bound to guard against such risks. Generally, Sustain Trustees are employed by their own alliance member organisations, so their time is paid for by those organisations, or they can afford to volunteer, to help with pursuit of common goals.

However, a 'role-share trustee' is in a different position where they are not to the 'registered Trustee'. We understand that some participants may come from organisations where their time spent supporting Sustain is not covered by their normal employment. We don't want this to be a barrier to participation, and we do want to recognise and value the support that is given. This means that whilst Sustain cannot pay people in a role-share Trustee position for their attendance at quarterly Trustee meetings and Sustain Strategy Days (formal Trustee activities that should not be paid for, according to [Charity Commission rules](#)), we can offer a payment for any work outside of these core Sustain Trustee activities. This arrangement also enables role-share Trustees to participate in decision-making on policy matters, rather than having to 'sit out' of the conversation and decision-making, which could create hierarchies, and this is not the intention.

Sustain is able to pay a *per diem* for people in role-share positions – currently in relation to defined activities and calculated on the [London Living Wage](#) (2024 rates; updated annually) – namely:

- £92.05 per day (7 hours), or £52.60 per half day (4 hours) for participation in a recruitment panel, as part of Sustain's commitment to positive steps to enable [recruitment for diversity](#).
- £92.05 per day (7 hours), or £52.60 per half day (4 hours) for participation in a Trustee working group on an organisational theme, for example to help research or draft a paper or participate in a discussion about organisational matters.

These payments will be checked by Sustain's auditor and piloted in the year November 2024 to October 2025, to be reviewed by Trustees at their quarterly meeting in autumn 2025.

All paid work must be agreed in advance and invoiced promptly using Sustain's invoicing system, so that we can track and budget for expenditure appropriately. Payments may be declared in our Annual Report. In addition, anyone paid for work at Sustain, or if their organisation receives money for this arrangement, must declare this if they are involved in any decision-making that might present a conflict of interest.

We will offer such payments routinely to anyone in a role-share position, and enable easy invoicing and expenses claims to make this possible. Claiming such payments will be the personal choice of participants, and will have the option of being paid either to the individual as a *per diem*, or in vouchers, or to their employer (if this is a member of the Sustain alliance, or another suitable charitable organisation) as a charitable donation. We will introduce and advertise these payments as part of the Autumn 2024 Sustain Trustee election process, and review this after one year of implementation.

6. Questions to inform a personal development plan

As part of Sustain Trustee and role-share induction following the annual Trustee elections, we will ask questions to both people participating in the role-share relationship.

We will use the answers to these questions to plan proactive support; also to inform a review and plans for the future after one year. Your answers to the first set of questions will be read by Sustain's Chief Executive Kath Dalmeny (who supports Sustain's Council of Trustees); Head of HR and Operations Danila Ardé; Diversity Outreach Coordinator Sareta Puri (or the person cover her role during maternity leave). This is for the purpose of thinking through how we can best support you. We will also share this the Sustain Trustee who you share the role with, and ask them to respond with how they plan to support you in this role.

Questions to the person participating in a trustee role-share position:

1. Have you any thoughts about how participating in this role-share scheme might help you?
2. At this stage, do you feel like this will definitely be a shorter-term commitment (e.g. one year) from which you want to gain specific contacts and experience: or are you open to it being longer than this?
3. In Year 1, what do you most want to get from your participation as a role-share trustee? Do you have any initial thoughts, or personal objectives?
4. In Year 1, which Sustain Trustee activities do you think you will be likely to participate in:
 - The four quarterly meetings of Sustain's Council of Trustees.
 - One or more Sustain staff recruitment process or interview panel, where your participation and views will be especially welcome to support recruitment for diversity.
 - Contributing to policy development relating to paid internships and promotion of these roles.
 - A Trustee working group to help develop Sustain's policies and guidance.
 - Sustain's annual Strategy Day, involving trustees and the staff team.
 - Sustain's Annual Conference.
 - Anything else? Please describe.
5. Are you aware of the payments available to help you participate? And are you clear on how you can claim these, either as payments to you as an individual, or as a donation to your employer (if they are a charitable organisation)? Let us know your preference.
6. Are you clear that if you claim any payments in this role (other than reasonable expenses, such as travel), then you cannot be part of decision-making on financial matters at Sustain Council meetings?

7. There is a colleagues of colour group developed by the staff team. Would you like to meet them, to find out if you would like to be involved in some way? What email and/or phone number for you can we pass on to this group?
8. If Sustain is able to arrange for a mentor or career coach to help you as an individual, is this something you would be interested in during Year 1? What support do you think would be most helpful to you? Do you have any ideas on who you would like to receive this from (e.g. an organisation or individual)?

Additional confidential question

Note: Your answer to this will be read only by Sustain's Chief Executive Kath Dalmeny and Head of HR Danila Ardé, for the purpose of supporting you, and will not be used in any other way.

9. Is there any way we can help you to overcome barriers to your participation? For example, any ways we can adjust Sustain's expectations, physical arrangements or the way we communicate? We will treat this personal information as fully confidential and agree with you how the information will be used, and how best to help you feel comfortable and welcome.

To the 'registered Trustee':

Note: Your answers to these questions will be read by Sustain's Chief Executive Kath Dalmeny and Head of HR and Operations Danila Ardé, for the purpose of supporting you, and will not be used in any other way, unless with your explicit permission.

You are supporting a role-share Trustee – a young person of colour from a Sustain alliance organisation – to enable them to gain contacts and experience in charity leadership.

1. Have you read this person's responses to our questions about the contacts and experience they'd like to get from this role-share and how you and Sustain can support them?
2. How will you support this person to help achieve their personal objectives in Year 1?
3. Is there anything Sustain can do to help you - and the person you will share this role with – to make this a supportive and productive opportunity?
4. Can we book a check-in with you in 6 months' time (please suggest a date – preferably allowing for two Sustain Council of Trustee meetings to have taken place), to find out how things are going and see if there's anything more we can do to improve the contacts and experience of the role-share Trustee?

Sustain will respond to the answers to these questions, and help to create a personal development plan, also suggesting ways that the 'registered Trustee', role-share Trustee and Sustain can work together to help the role-share Trustee have the best possible experience from their participation.

The Year 1 review will track progress against objectives, whether various modes of participation and support have been useful, take on board feedback from the participant, including any ideas for improvement of the scheme, and develop a plan for Year 2.

ENDS, KD August 2024