

# Charities urged to consider reputational risks of not campaigning

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*From left to right: Craig Bennett (chief executive of the Wildlife Trusts), Jan Lasik (general counsel and secretary of National Trust), Sonya Sceats (chief executive of Freedom from Torture), Stella Kanu (chief executive of Shakespeare's Globe), Suhan Rajkumar (senior associate of Bates Wells).*

Charities have been encouraged to consider the potential risks to their reputation of not campaigning to advance their cause.

Craig Bennett, chief executive of the Wildlife Trusts, said in a panel discussion at Bates Wells' annual charity conference yesterday that there are always risks when charities campaign to achieve change.

But charities need to be bold and firm when campaigning, Bennett said, and stick to their fundamental charitable objectives.

"The question I always say is 'what's the reputational risk of us not doing something?'" he said.

"[The] reputational risk of us not doing something is that we fail to achieve what we set up to achieve."

Shakespeare's Globe CEO Stella Kanu, meanwhile, said charities should be less reactive in their campaigning.

She said: “We should [...] create the right culture and conditions to move from reputational risk and fear factor to risk acceptance.”

## **Protecting staff and trustees**

Kanu said that when charities are proactive, they can take “the sting out of the tail” and think about their organisation’s system, structure and processes and how to prepare when risks occur.

Shakespeare’s Globe is working with its trustees to establish its triggers for reputational risks and the positions it could take to address them.

“It’s about the conversation you have at governance level that filters through to the organisation,” Kanu said.

“And for me as CEO, I’m also conscious that that also means I’m trying to protect my trustees at the same time as I’m trying to think about staff who are on the front line.

“I’m really focused on how do we create the right conditions in order for all of us to be responsible.”

Sonya Sceats, CEO of Freedom from Torture, said her charity had to close its centre this past summer to protect its staff due to the race riots.

The refugee charity also upgraded its cybersecurity measures due to the sensitive information it holds that governments around the world could try to access, Sceats said.

She added that her charity also has a wellbeing framework for its staff, some of whom have experienced torture, with a focus on trauma-informed principles.

“We aren’t only a charity working with traumatised peoples, we’re working on the trauma and that means that trauma circulates inside our organisation in ways that we need to be tending to over time,” she said.

## Strength in numbers

Jan Lasik, general counsel and secretary of the National Trust, said charities' campaigning should be focused and evidence-based.

“If you're not crystal clear and focus on your charitable objectives, and if you don't have your policies backed by very clear evidence, you risk not only harming your charitable objectives but also face accusations,” Lasik said.

When it comes to navigating risk-based decisions and protecting staff from threats or campaigning, Lasik said charities should collaborate and seek help from the wider sector.

He said: “There's strength in numbers and there's confidence in numbers.

“There's real strength to be drawn from working with others in the sector and partnering with them.”

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