

Head of Programme and Engagement (Open & Trusting)

*For an informal discussion, please email
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*For other queries, please email
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Welcome

Thank you for your interest in working at the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR). We work with charities, foundations and public agencies to strengthen UK communities through action research.

So, what does this mean in practice? We champion the role and contribution of the voluntary sector. Through our research projects, we build an understanding of what it takes to deliver for communities and causes across the UK. We hear what helps charities – and what gets in their way – and we work with funders and public agencies to influence practice, build dialogue and put charity voice at the heart of change.

This is a pivotal moment for IVAR, and for Open and Trusting grant-making. Over the last five years, Open and Trusting has grown from a minority pursuit to a network of 170 funders - each of whom is shaping their practices according to what matters to charities. Our new strategy puts the development of this community as one of the central pillars of IVAR's work. At a time when many charities are stretched to their limits, when their work is more vital than ever, we are hugely ambitious for Open and Trusting, and believe it can set a new standard for grant-making in the UK.

This new post of Head of Programme and Engagement (Open and Trusting) will play an essential role in seizing this moment. It is a multi-faceted position that will help inspire change through influencing, facilitation and collaboration. It will require leadership alongside programme management, so you'll need both a strategic mind and a flair for the details.

This is a hands-on position in a small but mighty team. If you feel you fit the role, thrive on building relationships, enjoy working collaboratively, and are motivated by strengthening the voluntary sector, we'd love to hear from you.



Ben Cairns
Director, Institute for Voluntary Action Research

About IVAR

At IVAR, we're more than researchers – we're sense-makers and bridge-builders. We turn real-world challenges in the voluntary sector into clear, practical insights that inspire change and action.

For 25 years, we've worked shoulder-to-shoulder with charities, funders and community organisations: listening, learning and tackling tough problems together. Our work is curious, grounded, human and hopeful.

If you're excited by ideas, motivated by making change, and eager to bring clarity to complexity, you'll feel right at home here.

What we do

- **Deliver quality research:** We use action research methods and existing literature to support the voluntary sector to develop practical responses to real challenges and opportunities.
- **Act as a trusted sounding board:** We listen, encourage and challenge when necessary – helping partners navigate through complexity, drawing on insights from 25 years' work alongside communities.
- **Shape the system:** We work with funders and public agencies to inform and support changes in practice and behaviour that improve the day-to-day experience of voluntary organisations.

Our strategy

Our enduring focus is to strengthen the voluntary sector and transform the funding system, so that charities can do their best work.

In our 2025–2030 strategy we are committed to:

- **Strengthening charities:** Expanding our peer support and learning offer for charity leaders, generating useful, usable research and resources and building stronger networks of smaller charities connected to IVAR.
- **Transforming the funding system:** Driving forward **Open and Trusting** grant-making, influencing more equitable, flexible and confident funding and learning practices across trusts, foundations and public agencies.
- **Being a healthy, fit-for-purpose organisation:** Sustaining a strong and diverse research portfolio, embedding equity in all that we do, investing in our people, and maintaining the systems and culture needed to deliver our best work.

Open and Trusting

Open and Trusting was born from two forces: 25 years of deep listening to both charities and funders, and a crisis that couldn't be ignored.

When funders responded with agility and compassion to the pandemic's strain on charities and communities, we saw a glimpse of what better funding could look like. It was flexible, fast, and grounded in trust – a far cry from the risk-averse and process-heavy approaches many grantees had come to expect.

That experience, combined with insights from two decades of IVAR's research into funding, power and the voluntary sector, led us to create Open and Trusting Grant-making – a community built alongside funders who want to make change happen.

Since then, 170 funders have now signed up to the eight commitments – actively working to be clear, flexible, proportionate, and purposeful. They're reducing unnecessary burdens, embracing risk, developing more equitable practices, and building honest, responsive relationships with the charities they support – with direct guidance and oversight from charities themselves.

About the role and person

Open and Trusting has come a long way, but there's a lot more it can achieve – which is why we are looking for a dedicated leader for the programme. The success of the role will depend on an understanding and belief in the work of charities and funders, and the need to transform relationships between the two.

As Head of Programme and Engagement, you'll bring energy, structure and connective thinking to a network that spans over 170 funders. You will play a central role in strengthening the community, supporting funders to learn from each other, and ensuring the programme runs with momentum and purpose.

This is a collaborative, outward-facing role working closely with colleagues across research, communications, operations and leadership. It brings together project management, external engagement, community-building and fundraising – all in service of making O&T a vibrant, useful and well-supported movement for funding practice change.

The Head of Programme and Engagement will need first-rate listening, diplomacy, influencing and relationship-building skills. You will also need to be a proven manager, with a track record of developing the systems, data and processes that underpin the success of initiatives involving multiple strands and big ideas. You will need to bring an entrepreneurial spirit to your work – both in terms of developing the network and its offer, and securing funding.

If you are energised by transforming the funding sector, and have the key skills needed to take on this versatile role, we'd love to hear from you.

Our principles

- **Grounded:** We deal with practical problems, challenges and opportunities. We start by helping to pin down what really needs to be addressed.
- **Collaborative:** We know that those with direct experience of an issue are key to resolving challenges and opening up opportunities.
- **Curious:** We listen and learn with an open mind, and we always want to hear a wide variety of perspectives.
- **Flexible:** We notice when things aren't working and change our approach to meet the needs and circumstances of each partner. We listen and learn, evolving continuously in response to voluntary sector needs.

Our people

We are a small, dedicated team of 13 staff, nine trustees and a network of associates and advisors, who have worked in and around the voluntary sector as volunteers, staff, leaders, trustees and researchers.

Job description

Purpose

Open and Trusting (O&T) is a central pillar of IVAR's new strategy. The community has grown rapidly, and there is real potential to deepen its reach and influence. We've created this new role because the network needs dedicated leadership to guide its next stage – at a time when a resilient and well-resourced voluntary sector is more essential than ever.

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Position in Organisation

Reports to Katy Oglethorpe, Director of Communications. Works closely with the Director, and the whole communications and research teams, as well as with external associates.

Key Responsibilities

Strategic leadership and coordination

- Oversee all aspects of O&T initiatives to ensure alignment, clarity, and sustained progress.
- Directly manage selected work streams while providing guidance and support to colleagues and associates delivering others.
- Collaborate with senior colleagues to clarify O&T's value, improve our offering, and secure future support.
- Design and supervise the entire membership experience, from recruitment and onboarding through ongoing engagement.
- Integrate insights gained from research and charity-facing activities into O&T priorities and communications.

- Disseminate O&T learnings across the organisation to foster connections and collective understanding.
- Translate research findings and practical experiences with charities into actionable O&T strategies that benefit both funders and charitable organisations.
- Ensure the O&T offering remains clear, relevant, and valuable to funders.
- Cultivate and sustain strong relationships to promote member retention and enhance engagement.

Operational delivery

- Design, plan and manage community of practice events – shaping themes, supporting contributors, and creating useful peer-learning spaces for funders.
- Coordinate O&T fundraising processes, including annual contribution cycles.
- Oversee key operational processes – sign-ups, commitment reviews, CRM/data hygiene, newsletters, communities of practice and events.
- Maintain a current overview of progress, potential risks, and possible opportunities.
- Collaborate with communications and operations colleagues to ensure smooth and reliable delivery.
- Identify and implement practical improvements to systems and workflows.

External representation

- Act as an ambassador for O&T: presenting, facilitating sessions and helping funders understand its value and advance their practices.
- Build relationships across the funding sector – including trusts and foundations, public agencies and other infrastructure bodies – to strengthen the movement.

Person specification

Experience

- Demonstrable experience leading or coordinating complex, multi-strand programmes or initiatives, ensuring structure, clarity and momentum throughout delivery.
- Exceptional organisational ability, with a proven track record of managing processes, meeting deadlines and juggling multiple workstreams simultaneously.
- Outstanding relationship-building skills, able to engage and collaborate with individuals across and outside organisations, including senior stakeholders.
- Confident facilitator, skilled in leading group discussions, supporting peer learning, and nurturing inclusive, welcoming environments.
- Practical and solutions-focused, adept at identifying improvements to systems and workflows.
- Experience in developing or supporting communities, networks or membership groups to foster meaningful connections and shared learning.
- Effective communicator, both written and verbal, able to convey ideas clearly and tailor messages for diverse audiences.
- Comfortable representing initiatives externally, acting as an ambassador and championing their value.
- Ability to interpret insight, feedback and data to inform decisions, and connect learning across different parts of an organisation.
- Experience coordinating or supporting fundraising processes – for example, contribution cycles, stewardship or relationship management.

Interests

- A commitment to IVAR's values and approach
- Interest and experience in funder practice and how change happens through relationships, learning and shared action (gained either in a funder, or adjacent organisation).
- Passion for the voluntary sector, and a belief in the importance of resilient, well-resourced and responsive charities.
- A demonstrable interest in the relationship between charities, funders and public agencies.
- An understanding of how diversity, equity and inclusion impact the work of charities and funders.

If you feel that we are describing you in most of the above, and you're excited by our strategy and mission, then we'd love to hear from you.

Key Details

Responsible to:	Katy Oglethorpe, Director of Communications
Works closely with:	All staff
Location:	Hybrid – we currently work in the office at least one day a week (Thursdays) at The Foundry, 17 Oval Way, London SE11 5RR
Salary:	£46,000 – £56,000 per annum
Contract:	Permanent
Hours:	Full-time
Leave:	30 days
Pension:	Workplace Pension scheme operated by the Pensions Trust; employee contribution matched by employer up to 5%
Other benefits:	We operate a flexible working policy, with hybrid working and core hours designed to support staff wellbeing and collaboration. We are committed to supporting your personal and professional development. This includes providing both internal training and learning sessions and supporting you to attend external training and conferences.

Application process

Any questions

If you would like an informal conversation about the role, please email Allyson Davies at ad@allysondavies-consultant.com.

For any practical queries, please email applications+ivar@allysondavies-consultant.com.

How to apply

Please prepare:

- Your **CV**
- A completed **application form** [download via [this link](#)] which includes space for a short supporting statement (no more than two pages) explaining:
 - Why you are interested in the role
 - What you would bring to IVAR
 - How you meet the person specification

Send these two documents to applications+ivar@allysondavies-consultant.com by **10.00am on 23 January 2026**.

Screening interviews will take place **29 January to 3 February 2026**.

Panel interviews will take place in London on **12 February 2026**.

Start date: from April/May 2026.

If you cannot make the proposed interview dates, please let us know this when you apply.

We value, welcome and respect all the differences that make us who we are, including: age, cultural background, disability and mental health, ethnicity and race, gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, and social background.

Data Protection Note

Any personal data you provide (e.g. addresses, telephone numbers, employment history) will be used for recruitment purposes only, and only shared with individuals involved in the recruitment. Data will be stored securely in accordance with our [Privacy Policy](#). If you have any questions about the processing of your data, then please contact IVAR's Data Protection Lead diana@ivar.org.uk.