Dear Candidate

Thank you for your interest in joining our Board of Trustees.

SolarAid is an international development charity working alongside communities in the most rural and hard to reach areas of sub-Saharan Africa to tackle poverty and the climate crisis through access to clean, safe solar lights.

Solar lights don’t just light up spaces; they light up hope and possibility in communities. By brightening health clinics and schools, they foster resilience and opportunity. When businesses have access to light, it paves the way for economic growth. Right now, our charity is focused on the Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) agenda. Collaborating closely with strategic partners, we are pioneering bold and innovative projects designed to extend the reach of sustainable solutions to last mile communities.

What we are looking for

We seek an individual with prior experience of chair roles, preferably with a background in international development focusing on poverty alleviation, although direct experience in the energy sector is not mandatory. An understanding of African operational contexts, along with expertise in program leadership and delivery, would be advantageous.

In this time of organisational change, the new Chair will play a pivotal role by fostering a positive and collaborative relationship with the CEO, supporting them in setting ambitious goals and navigating strategic transitions effectively.

Moreover, the Chair will be instrumental in guiding the Board in risk management and seizing opportunities, ensuring the charity’s financial stability. Leveraging extensive experience, the Chair will adeptly evolve strategies to support this transitional phase, maintaining stability while promoting agile program-led approaches.

About you

An accomplished and influential senior leader, you will be capable of getting the best out of our dedicated non-executive team.

You will have a strong grasp of the context in which we work and the challenges we face. You will be a confident communicator with experience of organisational management in the charity sector and of supporting organisations through growth and change.

You will have sound judgement and be able to seek and challenge information to reach decisions. You will be able to operate with tact and diplomacy. You will be used to working with small streamlined boards.

Crucially, you will be willing to devote the necessary time and effort to the role; approximately two-three days on average each month.

About us

SolarAid aims to do charity differently, through enabling locally led development. It has a social enterprise model, supporting people to create thriving solar businesses that tackle poverty and climate change.

At SolarAid, people are at the heart of everything we do. We believe clean and sustainable energy can bring about significant change in all aspects of life, from education to healthcare and entrepreneurship to community life. Every solar light distributed helps create a brighter, more sustainable future where parents can earn, children can learn and the planet can breathe a bit easier.

We believe that renewable energy is vital to limiting warming to 1.5°C. A simple solar light makes an instant impact in the fight against climate change. Solar lights cut down harmful emissions by replacing kerosene lamps, clearing our air from pollutants, and reducing our carbon footprint while building resilience in climate vulnerable communities.

My fellow Trustees and I are here to help SolarAid to make a real difference – from creating a clear strategy to, to ensuring we have a stable and growing funding base supported by great M&E and communications, with excellent finance and people practices underpinning the whole organisation.

As we look to broaden our breadth and agility as a Board, we are seeking an experienced and effective Chair. We very much hope that, if you believe you have the experience, knowledge, skills and qualities outlined below, and a passion for alleviating poverty through providing access to energy, you will consider applying for this role.

Come join us as we light up the path to a brighter future for everyone.

Mirjana Škrba
Chair, SolarAid
Nearly 600 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are denied access to clean energy. For communities in economically or geographically hard-to-reach places, the working day ends when the sun sets, leaving people with no option but to use battery powered torches, kerosene lamps or paraffin candles to see – alternatives that are expensive, dangerous and can emit toxic fumes into homes and the atmosphere.

SolarAid is an international charity founded in 2006 to combat poverty and climate change. Our pioneering ‘trade not aid’ approach uses sustainable enterprise to catalyse markets for safe, clean energy access. To date, we have distributed over 2.3 million solar lights across rural sub-Saharan Africa reaching places too challenging for the mainstream market. We know that every time someone switches on a solar powered light, it’s an instant win for people and the planet.

That’s why it’s our mission to light up every home, school and clinic in Africa by 2030, making real sustainable change with clean, safe solar power.

We gained our extensive knowledge from working on the ground, building a sustainable market for solar lights in sub-Saharan Africa. Through our social enterprise, SunnyMoney, we learned that building local, sustainable businesses and involving communities is the best way to ensure universal access to energy and make lasting change happen faster.

Our business-based approach helps bridge the gap between emerging enterprises and people living in poverty. This means we can invest in bold ideas that carry risk and model the market, creating pilots that are scalable for both businesses and governments.

However, we see an urgent need for fast-tracking universal energy access, delivering pilots with the potential to be replicated or scaled. Therefore, our focus is moving from building our own sales operation to product and process innovation.

Now the challenge is to reach the toughest market segments, overcoming barriers of poverty and deprivation to deliver clean, affordable, sustainable energy into communities considered low margin, high risk and beyond reach.

Every SolarAid programme is open-sourced to encourage replication and scale through collaborative partnerships to achieve our aim.
OUR VISION AND MISSION

Our vision is for a world where everyone has access to clean, renewable, energy.

By 2030, we aim to illuminate every home, school and clinic in Africa with safe, clean solar power.

We are working towards a world where the poorest and most remote communities aren’t left behind. Where entrepreneurs have access to the resources they need to expand their businesses, create sustainable income and light up their communities at the same time.
Our Current Strategy

SolarAid’s strategic approach to increasing access to sustainable solar energy in rural communities is multifaceted.

Since 2006, SolarAid has distributed solar lights through its social enterprise SunnyMoney. It supports a microfinancing cooperative called Financing Energy Business Cooperative (FEBCO), providing low-interest working capital to solar distributors and agents, enabling businesses to expand their reach and product portfolio. In Malawi, it supports women entrepreneurs with the Mayi Walas initiative, which recruits, trains and supports women to run solar light businesses across rural areas.

Direct community engagement remains a strategic priority. Working primarily in Malawi and Zambia, the key intervention targets are essential facilities such as health clinics and schools, improving access to services and fostering community development.

Innovation drives SolarAid’s approach, exemplified by projects like the Light-a-Village initiative in Malawi. This initiative tests the “energy-as-a-service” (EaaS) model to democratised access to clean energy, with plans to expand testing to Senegal and Sierra Leone. Additionally, SolarAid advocates for long-term sustainability through repair projects, reducing waste and creating economic opportunities.

Another key strategic priority for SolarAid is becoming a thought leader in the “Leave No One Behind” (LNOB) space. By engaging stakeholders and advocating for the prioritisation of marginalised communities, SolarAid aims to drive inclusive development. Through research, publications, and partnerships, the organisation raises awareness and highlights effective strategies to address their unique energy needs.

Collaboration is integral to SolarAid’s strategy, demonstrated by its leading role in initiatives like Solar United Madagascar and partnerships with organisations like GOGLA and 60 Decibels. These collaborations extend SolarAid’s reach and influence, particularly in communities and countries where it lacks direct operations, ensuring that no one is left behind in the transition to sustainable energy.
Our strategic priorities
Achieving universal access will transform socio-economic outcomes for those citizens and communities left behind by existing solutions and fast track progress towards attainment of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals.

The following four strategic pillars guide our work:

INCLUDE
Through close engagement with communities, we will ensure the voices and energy needs of those left behind, as well as the socio-economic impact of gaining energy-access, are recognised and included in all relevant forums. We will support and foster partnerships and cross-sector collaboration that ensures policy & practice includes plans to leave no one behind.

INFORM
We will become more data driven, analysing, gathering and sharing evidence and ensuring our operations are informed by best practice. We will identify barriers for energy access. Our goal is to develop the data and information necessary to build government, donor and investor confidence in solutions that leave no one behind.

IMPROVE
We will redouble efforts to improve existing models where we and others currently work; in particular, looking at subsidy and finance models.

INSPIRE
We will demonstrate inspiring models which achieve universal access for households and communities - from proof of concept trials to scale up roadmaps. The goal is to inspire solar enterprises, donors, investors, NGOs and governments to adopt models which accelerate progress towards universal energy access, ensuring no one is left behind.

More details about our work can be found on our website and in our annual report.
SolarAid is led by a Board of Trustees that draws on a wide range of expertise. This includes lawyers, finance, and management professionals, and people with extensive experience in both public and private sectors.

Our Trustees are actively engaged in the charity’s activities and often provide support such as sharing expertise for specific projects and strategies and with financial planning and management.

The staff team are a friendly, committed, and supportive group of professionals. The CEO is based in Zambia, supported by an SMT working from London. The charity operates a hybrid working model where we can broadly choose to work more or less at home or in the office.

The board makes time to meet in person regularly and have a shared expectation that board meetings are attended in-person (however hybrid attendance can be considered).
SolarAid is an incorporated Charity with a UK trading subsidiary, and two active overseas subsidiaries; one in Malawi and the other in Zambia. As per the last published accounts (Year to March 2023) SolarAid generated income of £2.8 million from a combination of fundraising, programmes and trading activity. It held reported reserves of £2.1 million.

The organisation has diverse income streams. UK generated income budgeted for the year ending 31 March 2025 totals £2.8 million, and includes the following streams: HNWI (£0.6M), Corporate (£0.4M), Individual donations (£0.7M), Trusts & Foundations (£0.6M) and institutional income (£0.6M). 70% of this income is either secured or considered likely.

Over the past three years the charity benefited from generous support from its key corporate partner - Statkraft (previously SolarCentury) - receiving £2 million in support over three years. This support has come to an end and the charity is evolving into a programme-led funding model, carefully managing its overhead costs.

The organisation’s priority will be to maintain financial stability to allow agile programme-led working. One of the corresponding operational goals is to focus on strengthening programmatic capacity in terms of setting out project plans, monitoring progress and reporting.

In future the goal is to further develop institutional funding opportunities, as well as building on existing donors.
Responsibilities

Board Leadership
• Provide effective strategic leadership to the Board and organisation.
• Ensure that SolarAid has a clear vision, mission and strategic plan.
• Chair board meetings and work with the CEO to develop the agenda for meetings
• Facilitate inclusive, effective and efficient meetings of the Board of Trustees.
• Promote high quality, well-informed and timely decision-making processes.
• Ensure full engagement of all Trustees, prioritising decisions in SolarAid’s best long-term interests
• Foster, maintain and promote constructive relationships with and between the Trustees and, where appropriate, address and resolve any conflicts within the Board.
• Ensure that the Board has the right balance and blend of skills to operate, and that new members are fully briefed on their term of appointment, duties, rights and responsibilities;
• Ensure the Board’s decisions take proper account of the requirements and charitable objects of SolarAid and are compliant with reporting and other obligations as set out in the Governing Documents and charity/company law;
• Help the Board to evaluate its own performance, and facilitate the contribution of board members, encouraging active engagement and fostering productive relations between board and executive team.
• Work with the CEO to represent the views of SolarAid to key stakeholders and the general public, and otherwise act as ambassador as required.

Line management of the CEO
• Establish and build a strong, effective and constructive working relationship with the CEO, ensuring they are supported in achieving strategic objectives during this period of change for SolarAid.
• Ensure regular contact with the CEO, including monthly 1:1 meetings.
• Conduct an annual appraisal and remuneration review for the CEO in consultation with other Trustees and the Senior Leadership Team.
PERSON SPECIFICATION

A commitment to SolarAid, its strategic objectives, cause and values.

Your knowledge and experience

- Experienced Chair - preferably in the non-profit space
- Experience of organisational leadership, having led or supported organisations through growth and change.
- Broad knowledge and understanding of the international development sector and current issues affecting it.
- Tact, diplomacy, and political awareness, with the ability to listen to and engage effectively with a range of stakeholders.
- Sound, independent, and robust judgement and the ability to seek and challenge information to reach decisions.
- Current knowledge of charity governance processes, with an understanding of the legal duties, responsibilities, and liabilities of charity trusteeship.
- Knowledge of energy and power sector nice to have
- Experience in an International Non-Governmental Organisation / Charity is desirable.

Remuneration

This appointment is offered on a voluntary basis with all reasonable expenses incurred as part of the role reimbursed in full.

Time commitment

Around 24-30 days per annum. The board meets four times each year. The Chair is required to work informally with individual board members, and with the CEO, as required. There will be some ad hoc work relevant to SolarAid business, within or outside the charity from time to time.

We are looking for a Chair who can offer the personal flexibility and availability to commit to the role during a time of change and development.

Location

Our headquarters are in the UK at 7 Blackhorse Lane, London, E17 6DS. Board meetings are normally held in person in central London at 22 Bishopsgate, EC2N 4BQ.

The Chair will need to remain personally flexible, to perform any additional duties that are reasonable and commensurate with the profile and responsibility of the role.
How to Apply

To apply, please send your CV and a cover letter answering the question below to tiku@charitypeople.co.uk by the closing date, [xxx].

• What do you bring both to the role and our mission, and what excites you most about becoming our next Chair? (800 words).

If you have a disability and identify any barriers in the job description or person specification, please tell us.

Timeline
Shortlisting by SolarAid: w/c [xxx]
1st Interviews: w/c [xxx]
2nd Interviews: w/c [xxx]

Charity People Ltd. is acting as a recruitment agency adviser to SolarAid on this appointment.