

THE ESG IMPERATIVE



11.02.26 | THE MINSTER BUILDING, LONDON

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THE ESG IMPERATIVE



LEAD THE CHANGE. SHAPE THE FUTURE.

Stronger, fairer, greener – building charities that stand firm in a time of division and change



Tristan Blythe
editor,
Charity Finance

As the landscape of charitable governance and accountability evolves, environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors are no longer optional – they're imperative. With recent changes to the Charity SORP (Statement of Recommended Practice) placing greater emphasis on sustainability reporting and responsible stewardship, charities must be ready to respond.

From navigating the complex world of responsible investment to setting meaningful net zero targets and tackling the growing intricacies of ESG reporting and governance, today's charity leaders face a myriad of practical and ethical decisions – all while operating in an increasingly polarised political and social climate. Balancing transparency, trust, and purpose has never been more challenging, or more vital.



Jenni O'Donovan
Events director,
Civil Society Media

Our broad range of expert speakers will explore how ESG principles can be embedded into your charity's strategy, not just as a compliance requirement, but as a framework for long-term impact, resilience, and integrity.

You'll leave better equipped to take meaningful action – helping to shape a more sustainable, transparent, and equitable future. We hope you will join us for what promises to be an inspiring, practical, and thought-leading conference.

Who should attend The ESG Imperative?



Charity
leaders



Finance and
Investment



Chairs and
Trustees



Operations
teams



Sustainability
leads

What do past attendees say?

"It was fantastic to attend the ESG conference! From start to finish, you as an attendee felt incredibly welcomed and cared for. From the delicious food to the massive smiles on arrival, to the brilliant speakers and schedule —every detail was a reflection of thoughtful organisation. What stood out most was the genuine joy and passion the event's team brought to every moment of the occasion. The discussions were inspiring, the conversations rich with insight, and it's clear that with the ESG conference you're building something together with other leaders and professionals that will lead to a better, fairer, and more just world."





– Dean Gillespie, International Justice Mission

"I had a fantastic day at the ESG Imperative conference. Some really inspiring talks, so much to learn, good food and great company! It was a great opportunity to meet up with people I know and make some brilliant new acquaintances."


– Hazel McCambridge, British Trust for Ornithology

ESG Imperative is a net positive event

As event organisers, we at Civil Society Media are on our own journey to a sustainable future. We have calculated the carbon footprint of this event and implemented several measures to reduce it, including:

-  **Offering a fully vegetarian menu throughout the day.**
-  **Selecting a venue with strong green credentials, including achieving landfill neutral certification, offsetting 100% of its carbon footprint through tree planting and using 100% green energy tariffs.**
-  **Going paperless—our event app will provide the programme, presentations, and delegate list, replacing traditional printed materials.**
-  **Using fully recyclable badges—please hand in your badge and lanyard at the end of the day so they can be recycled and reused.**

We are continually working to monitor and reduce our environmental impact. We have offset the remaining emissions of this event by investing in a carbon offset scheme. We have partnered with an ICROA-accredited organisation, ensuring that only certified carbon offsets from internationally recognised registries are used to meet the highest standards of environmental integrity. Civil Society Media staff chose to support the Safe Water Scheme in Rwanda for this event, which maintains water wells and essential infrastructure to provide clean water, reducing the need for inefficient fires to purify water.

08:30	Registration, refreshments, networking and time to visit exhibition	
09:15	Welcome from Tristan Blythe , editor, <i>Charity Finance</i>	
09:20	Opening keynote: Reclaiming climate justice for people and planet At a time when political backtracking threatens progress on climate action, Asad Rehman will argue that despair is not an option. Drawing on his journey from a working-class community to the frontlines of global climate justice, he will explore how the environmental movement must remain a radical force: confronting inequality, challenging the systems that fuel both poverty and planetary breakdown, and showing that climate justice is inseparable from economic and social justice. Far from retreating, now is the moment to double down – to build grassroots power, foster solidarity, and hold on to hope as a tool of resistance and transformation. This talk will make the case that fighting for climate justice is not just about saving the planet, but about creating a fairer, thriving world for all. Asad Rehman , chief executive, Friends of the Earth	
09:50	Regulatory update: SORP 2025 and sustainability reporting The regulatory landscape is shifting. Join us for a timely update from the Charity Commission on the new SORP and the growing emphasis on sustainability and impact reporting. Learn what’s changing, why it matters, and how your charity can prepare. Amie Woods , assistant director of accountancy, Charity Commission	
10:10	Transit time	
	Stream A – Responsible investment Chair: Diane Sim , freelance journalist, <i>Charity Finance</i>	Stream B – People and planet Chair: Tristan Blythe , editor, <i>Charity Finance</i>
10:15	1A. How can we push for progress against the backdrop of political challenges? Amid political turbulence and the prospect of continued pushback on ESG, especially under the Trump presidency, how can investors keep driving progress? This session will explore the real-world levers of change, showing how effective engagement with companies, done at the right frequency and with clear milestones, can deliver progress even when policy headwinds are strong. Politics may set the backdrop, but investors still have the power to shape the future. Tom Montagu-Pollock , co-head of charities and Emilie Shaw , portfolio director and sustainability lead, Cazenove Capital	1B. Getting started with measuring your carbon footprint With SORP 2026 set to make sustainability reporting mandatory for larger charities (and encouraged for smaller ones), this session offers a timely and practical introduction to measuring your emissions. Cancer Research UK will share their insights and experiences, from understanding where to start and gathering data to turning measurement into meaningful action. Whether you’re beginning your sustainability journey or preparing to report, this session will equip you with the confidence and tools to take your first steps towards net zero. Tim Mew , Climate Consultant, Carbon Trust and Antonia O’Neill , Cancer Research UK
10:55	Morning coffee and networking	
11:20	2A. How tech Innovation is powering the energy transition As the energy transition accelerates, technology is emerging as both a catalyst and a compass for sustainable transformation. This session will explore how innovations in AI, data, and digital infrastructure are transforming the way we produce and manage energy. From smarter maintenance that keeps renewables running reliably to carbon-free data centres and efforts to shrink AI’s energy use, we’ll look at how tech is tackling sustainability challenges head-on. Through real-world examples and fresh research, we reveal how digital tools are not just reacting to ESG pressures but helping shape a low-carbon, resilient future. Katrina Brown , head of responsible investment, Evelyn Partners	2B. Understanding your finance emissions and cutting carbon where it counts Your organisation’s biggest climate impact may come not from operations but from your finances. This session explores how banking, pensions and investments can drive hidden carbon emissions, drawing on Keep Britain Tidy’s experience of undergoing an eco-audit to uncover where carbon really sits. You’ll gain practical insight into why finance emissions matter, what an eco-audit can reveal, and the steps any organisation can take to reduce transition risks and align its financial choices with net zero goals. Ruth Jenkins , finance director, Keep Britain Tidy and Donnachadh McCarthy , founder, 3 Acorns
12:00	Transit time	
12:05	3A. AI: breakthrough or bubble? What it means for the future of ESG investing As artificial intelligence reshapes industries at a staggering pace, ESG investors face a critical question: is this rapid growth a durable opportunity or the next market bubble? This session examines how to navigate the hype without overlooking the fundamental risks that matter. We’ll explore practical ways to balance exposure to innovation with adequate diversification – ensuring investors capture meaningful ESG value while maintaining a clear-eyed view of emerging financial, concentration and potential regret risks. Andrzej Pioch , senior fund manager, L&G	3B. Hidden in plain sight: tackling modern slavery in charity supply chains Join Andrew Wallis, CEO of Unseen UK, for an eye-opening session on the hidden risks of modern slavery in the UK. Discover the scale of the issue, the legal responsibilities that large charities must comply with, and practical steps every charity – big or small – can take to spot red flags, strengthen transparency, and build ethical, resilient supply chains. This session will equip charity leaders with the tools and awareness to turn compliance into meaningful action against exploitation. Andrew Wallis , founding chief executive, Unseen UK
12:45	Lunch and time to visit exhibition	
13:45	4A. Designing ESG-aligned portfolios for long-term resilience Charities and endowments face the dual challenge of meeting current income needs while safeguarding capital for future generations. This session explores how long-term investment portfolios can be structured to deliver financial resilience and mission-aligned impact through meaningful ESG integration. We’ll examine how trustees can navigate economic uncertainty, embed sustainability into investment policy, and align portfolios with values and long-term goals. Designed for those overseeing investments or planning strategic investment reviews, this session offers a practical roadmap for building portfolios that serve both today’s operational needs and tomorrow’s legacy. Laura Hobbs , investment director, Greenbank (Rathbones)	4B. Strategic ESG: the power of materiality to prioritise your resources - lessons from Wellcome Organisations striving for meaningful sustainability impact often face a fundamental question: where should we focus our efforts? This session delves into how a materiality study can serve as a critical foundation for defining sustainability benefits and aligning ESG strategy with organisational purpose. Drawing on the Wellcome Trust’s approach, we’ll explore how identifying what truly matters to stakeholders and operations helps clarify priorities, focus resources where it matters, surface long-term risks and opportunities, and guide impactful decision-making. Whether you’re refining your ESG roadmap or just beginning the journey, this session offers a grounded, actionable perspective on moving from ambition to action. Charles Joly , associate director, sustainability, Wellcome Trust
14:25	Transit time	
14:30	5A. The time to act: how charities can lead through investing in high-quality sustainable and Impact assets This session explores why now is a rare moment to access high quality, mission aligned businesses at attractive valuations. We’ll demystify Paris-alignment and impact investing, unpack recent market shifts, and show how underperformance in quality assets has created opportunities rather than risk. Through case studies across our Impact and Paris Aligned strategies, we’ll highlight both return potential and real world outcomes – before summarising why the investments in M&G’s offering deserve a place in charity portfolios today. Randeep Somel , fund manager, M&G	5B. British Heart Foundation case study: becoming fit for the future This session will share BHF’s journey to embedding ESG across the organisation. From completing its first environmental roadmap in 2022 to committing to net zero by 2045, BHF is driving change through circular economy, responsible sourcing, supporting diverse workforces, tackling health inequalities and reducing the environmental impact of funded research. The session will share both challenges and lessons learned along the way, while also making the case for why investing in strategic ESG initiatives delivers impact not only for the environment and society, but also strengthens the organisation’s ability to achieve its core mission. Nick Greenwood , strategic initiatives delivery manager, British Heart Foundation
15:10	Afternoon coffee and networking	
15:30	6A. Investing in the energy transition This session explores how investors can positively contribute towards, and benefit from, the global transition to a net zero emissions economy. We’ll discuss the tailwinds supporting the energy transition, the investment opportunities this presents – which extend far beyond renewable power generation – and explain how investors can gain access to this megatrend within their strategic asset allocation while balancing mission, risk, and return. We aim to give charity investors an understanding of how energy transition investments can be utilised to generate strong risk-adjusted returns in a responsible, mission-aligned portfolio. James Baldwin-Brown , senior consultant, and William Platt , partner, Lane Clark & Peacock LLP	 6B. Roundtable discussions: Sharing what works Join an interactive idea exchange where peers will share practical stories, successes, and lessons learned from embedding sustainability into their organisations. In small group discussions, you’ll swap inspiration and approaches across key areas – from tackling financial emissions to rethinking food choices, procurement practices, property management, and organisational culture. Come ready to share your own experience and leave with fresh ideas you can take back and adapt to your context.
16:10	Compassion Under Siege: Charity leadership in an age of hostility Charities supporting refugees, migrants, and vulnerable communities are facing unprecedented hostility – from threats and misinformation to political indifference and hostile rhetoric. Women’s organisations, too, are being forced to defend their work against weaponisation by the far-right, misusing the language of protection to fuel division. At the same time, civil society must uphold values of fairness and compassion that government seems reluctant to champion. This panel will bring together leading voices to discuss how charities can safeguard staff, counter damaging narratives, build coalitions, and lobby government effectively. Join us for practical insights on advocacy and leadership in defending and strengthening the space for civil society. Chair – Peter Holbrook , chief executive, Social Enterprise UK Paul Parker , recording clerk, Quakers in Britain, Sonya Sceats , chief executive, Freedom from Torture, Andrea Simon , executive director, End Violence Against Women Coalition and Wanda Wyporska , chief executive, Black Cultural Archives	
16:55	Chair’s closing remarks	
17:00	Networking drinks reception	

REGISTRATION

PRICES

	Early bird (before 16 January)	Final release tickets (after 16 January)
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Charity delegate	£99	£169
Charity team ticket (up to four places) Limited quantity available	£249	£460

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