

Decision Briefing

Hire a trainee

Context

I am the operations manager of a nonprofit organisation and am considering hiring a trainee with a view to providing this person with exposure to all aspects of our business over the next twelve months, while also enabling the trainee to study for entry level certification. The aim being after twelve months the trainee would be in a position to decide which areas of employment that person would like to work in (subject to appropriate vacancy and funding). During that initial year the trainee would provide back up to our front desk reception during when our receptionist is absent. I feel this is solid pathway to employment for someone who might otherwise not qualify. We also need a back up for reception.

Key Considerations

Funding is only short term. No guarantee of ongoing funding or that a role will be available at end of twelve months. Dont want to train someone and then lose them.

Multi Perspective Analysis

Strategic

The traineeship is being asked to do two jobs at once: a 'social-impact pathway program' (genuine merit, fits nonprofit mission) and a 'reception backup solution' (an operational gap). Bundling them means the program's success gets judged by organisational metrics (was the receptionist covered?) rather than pathway metrics (did the trainee progress?).

Financial

The funding line tells you the position is paid for, not that it's a good use of the funding. Total cost isn't just the wage — it's supervisor time, certification course costs/study leave, training overhead, and the cost of a failed placement (re-recruitment, lost momentum on whatever the trainee was covering). This is the total cost.

Operational

Reception backup is a real, immediate need, and a trainee whose attention is split across 'learn the whole org' and 'be ready to staff the desk on short notice' is a worse solution to either problem than a dedicated fix would be. The two needs are competing for the same hours.

Risk

Your own concerns highlight the key risk accurately: train someone for 12 months, build their skills and expectations, then have no role and no funding to retain them. The risk isn't just financial — it's reputational and ethical. A nonprofit explicitly built around providing a 'pathway to employment' for someone who might otherwise not qualify carries a heightened duty of care if that pathway turns out to be a 12-month dead end. The downside impacts everyone, the org loses some training cost and potential damage to reputation; the trainee loses a year during which they could have spent in a role with a real future.

Marketing / Reputation

There are two potential stories. 'We built someone's career' or 'we used someone for a year of cheap, funded labour and let them go.'

For a nonprofit, the second version travels fast in your community and among funders. If the decision is made to proceed, the exit pathway (what happens at month 12, what active effort goes into placing them externally if no internal role exists) needs to be real and visible, not just hoped for — partly for the trainee's sake, partly because the story you tell about this hire will outlast the funding.

Human Resources

Best practice for a genuine traineeship is a documented development plan with milestones rather than a generic 'exposure to all aspects', clear and honest communication from day one that the role is funded for 12 months only, an active plan for what success looks like at month 12 (internal vacancy, external placement support, or formal transition assistance), and a named mentor/supervisor with allocated time.

Opportunity Perspective

The opportunity provides for both the organisation and the trainee to benefit from a structured development pathway provided -

Write and disclose 12-month funding limit to trainee in the offer itself.

Assign named mentor with protected hours, structurally separate from reception rostering.

Schedule month-9 checkpoint forcing concrete month-12 decision before funding deadline arrives.
Solve reception backup via cross-trained existing staff, freeing trainee role for pure development.
Pre-negotiate external placement support or internal vacancy commitment before recruitment opens.

Risk Perspective

The risk is that nothing is achieved after 12 months, or worse the trainee becomes disgruntled and leaves or leaves because there isn't a role available. Without appropriate planning and process this risk is high.

Trainee stands to lose more than the organisation, a lost year versus organisation's recoverable training cost.

Desk-coverage demands will quietly crowd out development time; nobody owns that trade-off.

No written month-12 plan means default outcome is release with no transition support.

Funding-availability framing (little reason not to proceed) substitutes for actual decision justification.

Public narrative risk: unfulfilled pathway to employment promise reads as exploitation, not opportunity.

Balanced View

There is risk that were the decision to proceed without appropriate structure and process then all involved will emerge dissatisfied.

The opportunity is real provided such a structure is in place. Equally the risks are real, however mitigation is in your hands.

The multi perspective analysis converges on one structural fix: separate the pathway program from reception coverage entirely. A month-12 transition plan needs to exist prior to the role commencing, not as a late-stage scramble.

The funding is available however identify the best use of that money, rather than the convenient use. With appropriate structure a successful outcome would represent money well spent.

Key Tensions

The key tension is around what is driving the decision. Strategic analysis treats 'funding-as-justification' whereas risk analysis suggests the available funding prevents reasoned examination of

the decision and potential impacts. This is worth through examination rather than being smoothed over.

Uncertainties

The analysis fails to address what happens to the existing receptionist's workload or job security if a trainee becomes a long-term backup fixture — only the trainee's risk was examined.

Also missing is any external benchmark for how similar nonprofit traineeships have actually resolved at month 12.

The stated rationale (funding exists, little reason not to) confirms affordability only. No mention of a development plan, mentor allocation, or exit pathway.

Human Synthesis

The real decision would appear to be 'what is the plan for month 13? Rather than should I hire a trainee.

While available funding enables such a position, it may not cover the full cost and should not be used to rationalise the decision at the expense of through examination of all aspects.

Covering the receptionist role is an operational decision that may be addressed in other ways, for example staff rotation, rostering, casual staff or role redesign.

It is worth asking, would you make this hire if the reception-backup need didn't exist? If yes, design the program around the trainee. If the honest answer is 'probably not,' it suggests the pathway framing is partly a justification for a staffing fix, and the trainee may end up doing more desk-covering than skill-building.

By separating the pathway program from reception-backup need — designing and funding each independently, you are more likely to achieve a successful outcome for both.

Reflection Questions

- What would need to be true for this to succeed?
- What would cause this decision to fail?

- What are you prioritising—and what are you willing to give up?
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This briefing supports decision-making. It does not make the decision.