

Compact

between Newcastle's voluntary
and community sector and
the City Council > > > > > > > >

Volunteering Code of Practice

VOLUNTEERING CODE OF PRACTICE

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1. AIM AND CONTEXT

- 1.1** This Code of Good Practice sets out an agenda of undertakings for both the Local Authority and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Newcastle on good practice for volunteering. The aim is to enable more people to become involved in the varied forms of voluntary activity that are a vital part of active citizenship and offer them the necessary support.
- 1.2** In the spirit of the Compact, this code sets out a shared vision of how the Local Authority and the VCS can support and promote voluntary action, while respecting volunteers' independence and free choice.
- 1.3** This Code of Good Practice is one of three codes supplementing the Compact. The others cover funding and consultation.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTEERING

- 2.1** Volunteering has been described as 'an important expression of citizenship and essential to democracy. It is the commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society and the community, and can take many forms. It is undertaken freely and by choice, without concern for financial gain.'
- 2.2** For the purpose of this code another operational definition is 'an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives'.
- 2.3** Because volunteers are active in all areas of life, all decision-makers need to be volunteer-friendly and also volunteering-literate; that is, aware of ways that their actions and decisions may affect community and voluntary activity. The Local Authority can play a vital strategic role here by helping volunteering and community activity to contribute to wider social policy objectives.
- 2.4** The Local Authority and VCS agree that there should be greater publicity for the achievements of volunteers, and agree to work together to expand the public perception of volunteering by improving the profile, status and range of volunteer activity.

2.5 There are four principles fundamental to volunteering. These are:

Σ • **Choice:**

Volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. Any encouragement to become involved in volunteering should not result in any form of coercion or compulsion. Freedom to volunteer implies freedom not to become involved.

Σ • **Diversity:**

Volunteering should be open to all, no matter what their background, age, race, sexual orientation, faith, etc. Inclusiveness can build bridges, helping a diversity of people to feel usefully involved. Social exclusion barriers can be overcome by skills, experience, confidence and contacts gained while helping others. Policy-makers and practitioners in all sectors can learn much from working with volunteers from different ethnic communities, age groups and other demographic sectors, who may bring considerable relevant experience from their cultural and other backgrounds. Equal opportunities principles are basic to supporting diversity. However it is accepted that for some projects at some times there may be issues about suitability of particular groups of people.

Σ • **Reciprocity:**

Volunteers offer their contribution unwaged but should benefit in other ways in return for their contribution to wider social objectives. Giving voluntary time and skills must be recognised as establishing a reciprocal relationship in which the volunteer also receives. Benefits that volunteers expect to gain include a sense of worthwhile achievement, useful skills, experience and contacts, sociability and fun, and inclusion in the life of the organisation.

Σ • **Recognition:**

Explicit recognition of the value of what volunteers contribute to the organisation, to the community, to the social economy and to wider social objectives, is fundamental to a fair relationship between volunteers, organisations and government policy and practice.

2.6 Volunteers contribute to every facet of human life; if an activity is felt to be worthwhile, people will get involved in it as volunteers. This means that many aspects of government policy not intended to affect volunteering may well impact on some form of volunteering and vice versa.

2.7 The scope of voluntary and community involvement includes:

- a helping provide a service as an unpaid volunteer within a voluntary or community organisation, international development organisation, the public sector or a private sector body;
- b taking part in running a voluntary or community organisation as a trustee, board or committee member;
- c serving as a non-executive member of a public body or participating in civic governance;
- d leading a voluntary initiative, usually as part of a voluntary organisation or community group, to improve the quality of life for people in a neighbourhood or community of interest;
- e gaining skills and experience through volunteering, which will be useful when applying for paid employment;
- f a group activity, within a neighbourhood or community of interest, providing a community service, or campaigning for a public cause;
- g employer-supported community involvement;
- h helping develop public policy through involvement in consultation processes and campaigning;
- i volunteering overseas; and
- j volunteering through involvement in a faith congregation or community.

2.8 The Local Authority and the VCS agree that the need to recognise the value of the work done by volunteers and the need to resource the hidden costs of volunteer activity are particularly important. Essential to these two priorities is good practice in volunteer management.

- 2.9 The National Survey of Volunteering is currently the most comprehensive source of data on voluntary activity in Great Britain. The following statistics provide a snapshot of participation in the various types of voluntary activity:
- a around half of the UK's adult population is involved in formal volunteering, giving on average 1.9 hours a week;
 - b 29% of the adult population, the equivalent of approximately 12 million people, volunteer at least once a month; and
 - c three-quarters of the population (74%) are involved in neighbourly helping out (informal volunteering).
- 2.10 Most volunteering is done in the voluntary and community sector, but volunteering is not confined to the third sector. The National Survey found that:
- a 84% of volunteers were involved with voluntary and community organisations;
 - b 24% were involved with public sector organisations e.g. hospital friends, meals on wheels and day centre helpers, prison visitors, special constables, school and youth activity helpers; and
 - c 13% were involved with private sector organisations e.g. employee volunteering schemes.
- 2.11 Other sources of information on volunteering tell us that more than three-quarters of voluntary organisations are entirely volunteer-run, and many more consist mainly of volunteers, with just one or two paid staff. Charity trusteeship is estimated by NCVO to involve between half a million and a million people, many of whom serve as trustees for more than one organisation.
- 2.12 CSV's Hidden Volunteers research found around 700,000 people carrying out various forms of public duty, including 345,000 as school governors, 218,000 trade union representatives, and 30,000 lay magistrates.
- 2.13 No comprehensive national data is currently available on faith volunteering, overseas volunteering or community activity.

3. AN EFFECTIVE FRAMEWORK FOR VOLUNTEERING

Local Authority Undertakings

- 3.1 In supporting this code, the Local Authority undertakes to:
- 3.2 Recognise that volunteering is an exercise of the basic human right of freedom to assemble and associate, and fundamental to democracy.
- 3.3 Check that all relevant regulation, guidance and practice are checked for impact on volunteer and community activity and funding before being adopted.
- 3.4 Work to limit any barriers to volunteering and community action presented by existing policies and practices.
- 3.5 Assess how volunteering and community activity contribute to achieving departmental policy and programme objectives, and broader Local Authority policy objectives. An initial assessment should look at:
 - a what kind of volunteer and community activities support departmental policy objectives;
 - b numbers of volunteers involved, amount of activity, and details of the diversity of people involved;
 - c forms and extent of support for volunteering and community activity provided by the department; and
 - d any barriers preventing involvement by specific groups of people especially socially excluded groups.
- 3.6 Aim to increase staff awareness of volunteer contributions to departmental objectives.
- 3.7 Acknowledge that there is a need for an infrastructure body dealing with volunteering issues, and that such a body needs long term sustainable funding.
- 3.8 Recognise that volunteering infrastructure bodies need to be or be part of independent voluntary organisations, with voluntary management boards. Seek to work with structures that are already in place rather than set up new structures.

- 3.9 Similarly recognise the infrastructural support provided by many national umbrella bodies for volunteers and community activists in their local affiliates or member groups.
- 3.10 Use the media and communications resources of the Local Authority to recognise the value of volunteer contributions to raising the quality of life, and support activity motivating more people to become involved.
- 3.11 Support initiatives to provide and promote accessible information about volunteering opportunities at local, sub-regional and regional level. This includes Internet technology while not excluding those without access to this technology.
- 3.12 Take action to promote volunteering amongst schools and adult education facilities.
- 3.13 Promote the value of volunteering amongst their staff, and if appropriate consider initiatives such as staff volunteering schemes.
- 3.14 Where the Local Authority directly manages volunteers, it will act on relevant undertakings for the voluntary and community sector.

Voluntary and Community Sector undertakings

- 3.15 Voluntary organisations differ widely in their size and function, and include many entirely made up of volunteers. The undertakings must therefore be interpreted in relation to the very different resources available to different organisations.
- 3.16 In supporting this code, the sector undertakes to:
- 3.17 Within the limits of organisational resources, recognise the importance of high standards and the effective management of volunteers, and that fulfilling this responsibility requires allocation of organisational resources.
- 3.18 If there are staff who recruit, induct and manage volunteers this work should be recognised as part of their job descriptions and work plan, and receive appropriate training and support.

3.19 Recognise that as part of the reciprocal relationship volunteers should be given thanks and recognition for their contribution. They should get fair treatment, support, advice and guidance, and training according to the resources of the organisation with which they are involved.

3.20 Recognise that volunteers should be paid expenses, and that budgets for volunteer expenses should where appropriate be included in funding bids.

3.21 Encourage and enable (but do not compel) opportunities for personal development, including accreditation of skills acquired through volunteering for recognised qualifications, in partnership with relevant accreditation bodies, according to the resources available.

4. INVESTING IN VOLUNTEERING AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

4.1 Both sectors recognise that, although volunteers and community activists give their time free, they need resources with which to work. They also recognise that the key to enabling people from lower-income and disadvantaged groups to become involved is to ensure that their volunteering activities do not leave them out-of-pocket. This section should be read in conjunction with the Code of Good Practice on Funding.

4.2 Guidance notes, application forms and other information materials produced by funders and service purchasers should make clear that:

- a any volunteer contribution and involvement should be identified;
- b resources to support and manage volunteer involvement should be budgeted for; and
- c the funder/purchaser should recognise good practice in volunteer management as an essential aspect of community involvement and partnership.

- 4.3 Where match funding is required, auditable records of volunteer time donated should be accepted as equal in status to money. For poorer areas or communities, people's time may be the only form of community investment that can be afforded.
- 4.4 Recognise that short-term funding creates problems for attracting, motivating and supporting individual volunteers. Poor experiences of volunteering do not just affect the individual volunteer and organisation, but may detract from the wider public perception of volunteering.

5. BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING

- 5.1 The Local Authority and the voluntary sector are committed to making it easier for people to get involved and to work towards inclusive volunteering policies and practices. Both sectors agree to work together to identify and dismantle barriers to volunteering and community involvement.
- 5.2 Some real and perceived barriers to volunteering have been identified, and are listed below:
 - a the effect of the national minimum wage law on benefits in kind for volunteers;
 - b the benefits rules and how they are applied in practice;
 - c volunteers, especially those on low income, are left out of pocket because of their volunteering;
 - d tax allowances in relation to volunteering not including petrol mileage allowances for volunteer car drivers;
 - e possible treatment of reimbursed volunteer expenses and community exchange credits (e.g. LETS, Timebanks) as taxable income;
 - f employer policies on hours of work which are not friendly to flexible working and time off for volunteering and community activity;
 - g inconsistent criteria on what public duties can be asked of volunteers and what should be paid;

- h conflicts and confusion between volunteering and training for employment schemes, e.g. New Deal;
- i unavailability of disability aid subsidies for volunteers as well as for employees;
- j social isolation which can make it difficult to obtain information about volunteering; and
- k a lack of clarity and consensus about what constitutes volunteering activity;
- l lack of resources leading to inadequate support for volunteers;
- m child and other caring responsibilities.

6. VOLUNTEERING INFRASTRUCTURE


- 6.1 Both the Local Authority and the voluntary and community sector agree that public funding should be invested in creating and maintaining a modern, dynamic volunteering infrastructure.
- 6.2 At local level, there should be at least one identified local development agency undertaking a range of functions:
 - a promoting volunteering and community involvement, as well as specific volunteering opportunities;
 - b matching up people interested in volunteering with opportunities and/or volunteer-involving organisations;
 - c help promote employee volunteering with employers;
 - d developing innovative volunteering opportunities and promoting diversity;
 - e promoting volunteering with the local media.
 - f investigating ways to use ICT in the promotion of volunteering;
 - g piloting, promoting and disseminating good practice in volunteering;
 - h developing support and information networks for those working with volunteers.

7. APPLYING THIS CODE

- 7.1 The Local Authority and the sector will encourage other public bodies, for example the Primary Care Trust and the Learning and Skills Council, to adopt the Compact and its associated Codes of Practice.
- 7.2 This Code will become part of the arrangements for monitoring and developing the Compact, which lies with the Compact Annual Review Group, jointly serviced by the Local Authority and NCVS; and will be bound by the same Procedure for Resolving Disagreements.

APPENDIX 1: MANAGEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS

- A1.1 The following is a good practice checklist. You should note that these are basic summary points, with further practical guidance available from other sources. They apply to organisations where paid members of staff manage volunteers, not to community groups:
 - a prior to recruitment, be clear about why you want/need a volunteer;
 - b provide the volunteer with a clear role/task description, identifying anticipated requirement/s of the organisation;
 - c provide the volunteer with an initial induction and training programme;
 - d provide the volunteer with clear and appropriate supervision and support;
 - e encourage volunteers to contribute to decision making in the part of the organisation in which they are active;
 - f monitor and acknowledge the contribution that volunteers make to the organisation, to the wider public, to funders and to other volunteers;
 - g ask the volunteer what they seek from their placement and share with the volunteer what you want. Remember that any placement should be by mutual consent;

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- h** always offer to reimburse out-of-pocket expenses;
 - i** ensure that Health and Safety standards are in place and applied equally to all employees and volunteers. Insurance policies should be extended to cover volunteers;
 - j** provide opportunities for volunteers to acquire or develop new or existing skills and assist volunteers who want to gain accreditation towards recognised qualifications;
 - k** recognise that volunteers should not be recruited to fill the place of paid staff. This could be perceived as exploitation of the volunteer and deprivation of someone's livelihood. (However this is often very difficult to define in practice);
 - l** ensure that the work and contribution of the volunteer adds quality and value to the organisation's aims and objectives;
 - m** ensure that Equal Opportunities and/or diversity policies are in place and applied equally to volunteers. Examine the organisation's ways of working for anything that may pose a barrier for some members.

