

# COMPACT

getting it right together

## Volunteering: a Code of Good Practice



Compact on relations between Government and the  
Voluntary and Community sector in England

## Key points for a framework of partnership between Government and the voluntary and community sector.

- The Government and the voluntary and community sector, are committed to maintaining best practice in the promotion, development and celebration of volunteering.
- Volunteering is a substantial social investment that creates social capital and makes a major contribution to national production. The Government undertakes to examine how this is shown in national economic accounts, and ensure that employment and economic policy is 'active citizenship-friendly'.
- Government and the voluntary and community sector should ensure that volunteers are brought into policy-making processes, both internal decision-making and responses to government consultation.
- Government should encourage employment practices that allow time off for volunteering in partnership with employer bodies in all sectors.
- The voluntary sector should ensure sufficient resources are budgeted to support volunteers including management and/or peer support, office space and equipment.
- Funded voluntary organisations should make it a priority to reimburse actual out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers, including care costs.
- The voluntary sector and, where appropriate, Government Departments, should acknowledge the nature and extent of volunteering in their annual and project reports. This information may form part of a wider social audit.



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## 1. AIM AND CONTEXT

- 1.1** This Code of Good Practice sets out an agenda of undertakings for both the government and the voluntary and community sector in England 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. This Code of Good Practice supplements the Compact on Relations between the Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England published in November 1998.
- 1.2** In the spirit of the Compact, this code sets out a shared vision of how government can support and promote voluntary action, while respecting volunteers' independence and free choice. It is also informed by the Giving Time, Getting Involved report of the Working Group on the Active Community (Warner Report, 1999), which sets out a strategy for promoting volunteering, and the Report of the Policy Action Team on Community Self-Help (PAT9 Report, 1999) produced as part of the government's neighbourhood renewal strategy.
- 1.3** This Code of Good Practice is one of five codes supplementing the Compact. The others cover funding, consultation and policy appraisal, black and minority ethnic voluntary and community organisations and community groups. This code can be referred to in drawing up Local Compacts.
- 1.4** The Code applies to central Government departments, including Government Offices for the Regions, and 'Next Steps' Executive Agencies in England (Separate Compacts have been developed in other parts of the United Kingdom). The Code also applies to the range of organisations in the voluntary and community sector.

## 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. Government can play a vital strategic role here by helping volunteering and community activity to contribute to wider social policy objectives.

- 2.4** The Government and voluntary and community sector 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. The Warner Report<sup>1</sup> sets out a strategy for achieving these shared aims. Actions set out in other sections of this Code also aim to help improve the status and image of volunteering.
- 2.5** There are four principles fundamental to volunteering. These are:
- 2.6** 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.
- 2.7** 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.
- 2.8** 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.
- 2.9** 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.
- 2.10** 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.
- 2.11** 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;



<sup>1</sup> Giving Time, Getting Involved (Warner Report), published November 1999.

- 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.

**2.12** Government and the sector 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.

**2.13** The National Survey of Volunteering<sup>2</sup> is currently the most comprehensive source of data on voluntary activity in Great Britain. The following statistics<sup>3</sup> 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).

**2.14** 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



<sup>2</sup> The 1997 National Survey of Volunteering, Institute for Volunteering Research, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise credited, from the National Survey of Volunteering

- c 13% were involved with private sector organisations e.g. employee volunteering schemes.

**2.15** Other sources of information on volunteering tell us that more than three-quarters of voluntary organisations are entirely volunteer-run<sup>4</sup>, 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.

**2.16** CSV's Hidden Volunteers research<sup>5</sup> 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.

**2.17** No comprehensive national data is currently available on faith volunteering, overseas volunteering or community activity.

### **3. AN EFFECTIVE FRAMEWORK FOR VOLUNTEERING**

#### **Government undertakings**

- 3.1** In supporting this code, the Government 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.<sup>6</sup>
- 3.3** Seek to ensure that all relevant proposed legislation, regulations, guidance and practice are checked for impact on volunteer and community activity and funding, before being adopted, and that the regulatory impact assessment is published.<sup>7</sup>
- 3.4** Work to limit the 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 Government 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;

<sup>4</sup> NCVO Research Quarterly, June 1998

<sup>5</sup> Jan 2000

<sup>6</sup> Universal declaration on Volunteering, United Nations/IAVE, 1990

<sup>7</sup> This is normal existing practice

- 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.
- 3.8** Aim to increase staff awareness of volunteer contributions to departmental objectives. Additionally, how departmental objectives fit with Active Citizenship, Social Inclusion, Lifelong Learning, Work-Life Balance and other relevant social policy objectives.
- 3.9** Ensure transparency of the advertising and bidding process for Government tenders and contracts for volunteering schemes.
- 3.10** Aim to adopt policies which ensure that volunteering infrastructure bodies can rely on realistic sustainable long-term funding. Similarly, recognise the infrastructural support provided by many national umbrella bodies for volunteers and community activists in their local affiliates or member groups.
- 3.11** Recognise that volunteering infrastructure bodies should be independent voluntary sector organisations, with voluntary management boards. Seek to work with those already active and organised, rather than setting up new structures.
- 3.12** In partnership with the voluntary and community sectors, review the strengths and weaknesses of local volunteering information and infrastructure, and make recommendations based on best practice examples identified.
- 3.13** Support a cross-departmental media and communications strategy, recognising volunteer contributions to raising the quality of life, and support activity motivating more people to become involved.
- 3.14** Support initiatives to provide accessible information about volunteering opportunities at local, regional, national and international level. This includes Internet technology while not excluding those without access to this technology.
- 3.15** Seek ways in which Government can work with community and voluntary sectors to address how detailed demographic information on volunteering and community activity can be collected for comparison with other surveys and research.
- 3.16** Government, in consultation with the voluntary and community sector, to seek to improve the measure of voluntary and community activity (currently indicators L2 and L3) in the Government's Quality of Life Counts.
- 3.17** Take action to promote volunteering amongst those in schools, colleges and universities.
- 3.18** Where the Government directly manages volunteers, it will act on relevant undertakings for the voluntary and community sector.

## Voluntary and Community Sector undertakings

- 3.19** Voluntary and community organisations carry out a number of roles in relation to volunteering. Community organisations are those entirely or almost entirely made up of volunteers. Voluntary organisations may involve and manage volunteers, and may provide infrastructure support or funding to volunteers and volunteering groups. Both can develop, promote and celebrate volunteering and community activity.
- 3.20** In supporting this code, the sector undertakes to:
- 3.21** Recognise the importance of high standards and effective management of volunteers, and that fulfilling this responsibility requires allocation of organisational resources. Staff who recruit, induct and manage volunteers should have this work recognised as part of their job descriptions or work plans, and receive appropriate training and support.
- 3.22** Identify a senior manager to be responsible for volunteer involvement, and for monitoring and reporting on it. Also identify a board-level champion for volunteering.
- 3.23** Ensure proper records are kept of how funding supports volunteering, and the value this produces.
- 3.24** Recognise that as part of the reciprocal relationship volunteers should be given thanks and recognition for their contribution at the very least. They should get fair treatment, training and support according to the resources of the organisation with which they are involved.
- 3.25** Encourage and enable (but do not compel) accreditation of skills acquired through volunteering for recognised qualifications, in partnership with relevant accreditation bodies.
- 3.26** Assist potential volunteers to find volunteering opportunities that fit their needs, interests and abilities by working in partnership with other agencies. This will help people offering their time as volunteers to be deployed where most needed.
- 3.27** Develop systems for referring surplus volunteers, or those unsuited to their needs, to other organisations, to ensure no volunteers potential is wasted. Bodies that provide infrastructure support for voluntary groups should provide support for these systems.



## 4. PARTNERSHIPS AND PUBLIC BODIES MANAGING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

**4.1** Cross-sectoral partnership initiatives are an important part of modernising public services and regenerating disadvantaged communities. Community, user and lay representatives who may or may not be contributing their time unpaid, are essential players in these. Examples of such, often voluntary, community participation include:

- a consumer watchdog committees and representatives;
- b regeneration partnership boards; and
- c health and care partnerships.

**4.2** The Government and the voluntary sector recognise the importance of the role played by volunteers in cross-sectoral partnerships and agree to:

- a produce and publish policies for involving volunteers with measurable targets for extending the involvement and diversity of volunteers;
- b seek to identify the types of resource being put to supporting volunteering and community activity, and the level needed to achieve policy objectives;
- c examine the management of any volunteers directly involved in their work. Where appropriate volunteers should be included in internal communications and their interests should be taken into full account;
- d establish whether management boards and committees, especially for partnership initiatives, have, or should have, a member specifically representing volunteers who contribute to the initiative. Where a board or other decision-making body of any organisation has significant volunteer involvement, it should be established that there is at least one member responsible for volunteer involvement and interests; and
- e ensure that public bodies do not exploit volunteers. It should not be assumed that a person already volunteering with one or more other voluntary or community organisation should have their involvement with any other organisation or project unpaid. Good practice guidelines should be drawn up, through consultation, to ensure equal status, treatment and back-up resources for community or lay members of public bodies.

**4.3** Both sectors should work together towards a set of consistent principles on:

- a what level of commitment is fair to ask for on a voluntary basis and at what level the commitment required needs to be properly paid; and
- b the reimbursement of expenses where it is agreed that volunteers will be involved.



## 5. INVESTING IN VOLUNTEERING AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- 5.1** 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.
- 5.2** Where volunteer involvement is or has been considered an objective, appropriate priority for funding to projects that involve volunteers, or encourage and develop volunteering, should be provided.
- 5.3** 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.
- 5.4** 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.<sup>8</sup>
- 5.5** 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 detract from the wider public perception of volunteering.

## 6. BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING

- 6.1** Government 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.
- 6.2** Some of the barriers are attitudinal and the commitments on Promoting Volunteering in Section 8 of this Code will help tackle these.



<sup>8</sup> Several standard frameworks exist for assigning monetary equivalents to volunteer hours. They include the local 'going rate' for identifiable types of work; and national average hourly wage rate. Some funders e.g. European Social Fund, produce standard rates they accept for types of work.

**6.3** 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 enabling mechanisms to ensure that low-income volunteers are not left out of pocket because of their volunteering;
- d tax allowances in relation to volunteering 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, flexible working and time off for volunteering and community activity;
- g consistent 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 availability of disability aid subsidies for volunteers as well as for employees;
- j definitions of work and economic activity that currently exclude unpaid volunteers, community and household activity;
- k poor image of volunteering in the media and amongst young people in particular;
- l social isolation which can make it difficult to obtain information about volunteering; and
- m a lack of clarity and consensus about what constitutes volunteering activity.



## **7. VOLUNTEERING INFRASTRUCTURE**

**7.1** Both the Warner report and PAT 9 highlight the importance of strengthening the volunteering infrastructure at national and local level.

**7.2** Both the Government and the voluntary and community sector agree that public funding should be invested in creating and maintaining a modern, dynamic volunteering infrastructure.

- 7.3** At national level, a range of umbrella and resource organisations fulfil different aspects of the volunteer development function in England:
- a undertaking research into volunteering;
  - b raising awareness of the value of volunteering with policy makers across all sectors;
  - c scrutinising public policy and legislation for its impact on volunteering;
  - d piloting, promoting and disseminating good practice in volunteering;
  - e training, professional qualification and accreditation of volunteer managers;
  - f developing practitioner networks;
  - g running a comprehensive national volunteering database; and
  - h promoting volunteering through the media.
- 7.4** 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 acting as local partner for national promotional campaigns;
  - d building local partnerships which support volunteering;
  - e developing strong local networks across all three sectors;
  - f providing information, training and consultancy including a register of volunteers with professional expertise available for small community groups;
  - g developing innovative volunteering opportunities and promoting diversity; and
  - h working with the local media.
- 7.5** Both the Government and the voluntary and community sector undertake to work together with regional and local government to identify:
- a what level of resources are required to deliver these essential services; and
  - b a funding framework that allows for independence and accountability with minimum bureaucracy.

## 8. PROMOTING VOLUNTEERING

- 8.1** Government and the sector agree the need to promote the status and image of volunteering and community involvement. Ways in which this can be achieved include:
- a promotion of volunteering events, such as Volunteers Week and Make a Difference Day to secure greater media coverage, and a higher public profile for volunteering and community activity;
  - b developing and promoting innovative programmes for enabling the contribution of volunteers e.g. time banks;
  - c developing partnerships with organisations that promote volunteering or deploy volunteers, and with the media, in order to encourage greater media coverage in order to inspire, promote and encourage individual volunteers, community activists and special volunteering events;
  - d use of information and communication technology (ICT) to communicate volunteering information via the Internet, while ensuring organisations without access to ICT are not excluded; and
  - e developing the knowledge and experience of volunteering amongst children and young people.

## 9. APPLYING THIS CODE

- 9.1** The development of monitoring, impact assessments and annual reports called for in this code will be the responsibility of individual departments, agencies and bodies and the range of organisations in the voluntary and community sector. Where they do not follow this good practice, they must satisfy themselves that, if asked, they have good reasons for not doing so.
- 9.2** The Government and the sector's Compact Working Group will encourage other public bodies, for example, Non-Departmental Public Bodies and local government to adopt and adapt the Compact and its associated Codes of Good Practice. This is particularly important given that most voluntary and community activity takes place at the local level.
- 9.3** As part of the process of making the Compact work, there will be an annual meeting between the Government and representatives of the sector to review the operation and development of the Compact, including the Code of Good Practice on Volunteering. The report of that meeting will be published. It will also be placed in the Library of the Houses of Parliament.
- 9.4** Local initiatives drafting Local Compacts may wish to adopt this Code or incorporate reference to it.



## 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 appropriate line management;
- e add volunteers to organisation charts. Encourage volunteers to participate in the organisation's wider decision-making process;
- 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;
- h always offer to reimburse out-of-pocket expenses. These normally include travel and lunch. Where a placement is away from home, this might also include accommodation and a subsistence allowance;
- 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 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;
- 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;

- n encourage and promote a diverse range of employees at all levels. This will help volunteers of different ethnic groups, ages, disabilities, etc, feel welcome; and
- o in order to attract volunteers from groups that the organisation has previously failed to reach, it may be helpful to approach those groups/people directly to establish what would make volunteering with the organisation more appealing to them.



## APPENDIX 2: PROMOTING A DIVERSE VOLUNTEER BASE

- A2.1** At the Active Community Convention on 2 March 2000, the Prime Minister challenged the audience to ‘...commit themselves to achieving a really diverse involvement of people within their organisations...that reflects the nation we live in’.
- A2.2** People from different backgrounds can bring fresh ideas and skills to volunteering. Managing diversity requires action to ensure organisations have an open workplace culture based on trust and mutual respect. In such a culture people value each other and treat each other with dignity. Personal backgrounds and characteristics must not prejudice decisions about the suitability of individuals for volunteering.
- A2.3** Managing diversity requires an integrated approach to equality. Like equal opportunities, it requires that all decisions about volunteering and the training of people are objective, based on merit and relate to personal development criteria. It broadens the concept of equal opportunities beyond these issues covered by law. It welcomes difference and recognises that action might be needed to give everyone a chance to contribute on equal terms. It recognises that the organisation may need to become more flexible and adaptable in order to realise the full potential of the volunteers.
- A2.4** Diversity policies should cover a wide range of personal differences, including academic or vocational qualification, accent, age, caring responsibilities, ethnic origin, gender, learning difficulties, marital status, physical and mental disabilities, political affiliation, previous mental illness, religion, sexual orientation, spent or irrelevant convictions, trade union or non-trade union membership.



## APPENDIX 3: WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO

**A3.1** A well managed volunteering programme or set of activities can deliver benefit to the community and also to the volunteer in terms of personal satisfaction. It can also be an excellent tool for training and developing staff.

**A3.2** The following are points for employers to consider:

- a aim to establish flexible working practices and adopt 'time-off' policies for volunteering in line with leave policies, public duties and family responsibilities. Such flexibility may range from a few hours a month to longer-term secondments;
- b think about establishing an employee-volunteering scheme. Provide guidelines on what resources the organisation will provide e.g. use of accommodation/facilities, match-funding, time-off in lieu and secondments, to assist employees who volunteer;
- c seek to identify volunteering activities compatible with the organisation's aims. Develop links and relationships with voluntary and community groups, and overseas development agencies; and
- d ensure that voluntary and community activity is incorporated into staff development and human resource policies, and that it is valued and recognised.

**A3.3** All of the major Government Departments have signed up to the Prime Minister's Active Communities Challenge for employers to give their employees the equivalent of a day's paid time to volunteer. The Government is encouraging employers from all sectors of society to similarly make a commitment to this challenge.



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