

Volunteering: A Code of Good Practice

Compact on relations between Public Bodies and the
Voluntary and Community sector in Northamptonshire



What is the Compact?

The Compact is the agreement between Northamptonshire public bodies and the voluntary and community sector to improve their relationship to benefit each other. **The Compact** sets out:

- ❑ a shared vision and principles;
- ❑ promises from both sides;
- ❑ a public sector commitment to respect the independence of the voluntary and community sector; and
- ❑ systems to help make sure that the agreement works.

The Compact has been supported by six **Codes of Good Practice**, covering:

- ❑ Funding;
- ❑ Consultation and policy appraisal;
- ❑ Volunteering;
- ❑ Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) voluntary and community organisations;
- ❑ Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People
- ❑ Community Groups

Glossary of Terms

Public Bodies

Statutory agencies including local government, NHS organisations, police forces, schools, colleges, etc.

Voluntary Sector

Consisting of those organisations that rely largely on volunteers to deliver their service. Includes charities and non-charities. Often having some paid staff to operate core functions.

Community Sector

Consisting of personal relationships, groups, networks, traditions and patterns of behaviour among people who share physical neighbourhoods, living conditions or common understandings, health conditions, interests or religious beliefs. It is the community itself taking action to get things done, although much of its activity is informal and often invisible. The community sector ranges from small informal community groups to large multi-purpose community organisations.

An Equalities Declaration

We, the Compact partners, declare ourselves wholeheartedly in favour of our diverse community in Northamptonshire and opposed to any form of unfair discrimination.

The main points for a volunteering framework of partnership between Northamptonshire public bodies and the voluntary and community sector:

- ❑ The public bodies 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 public bodies undertake to examine how this is shown in local economic accounts, and ensure that all appropriate policy is 'active citizenship-friendly'.
- ❑ The public bodies and the voluntary and community sector should ensure that volunteers are brought into policy-making processes, both internal decision-making and responses to local authority and other statutory agency consultation.
- ❑ Public bodies 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, local statutory sector organisations, 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 Northamptonshire's public bodies and the voluntary and community sector in the county 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 local government and other public bodies can support and promote voluntary action, while respecting volunteers' independence and free choice.

- 1.3 This Code of Good Practice is one of six codes supplementing the Compact. The others cover funding; consultation and policy appraisal; black and minority ethnic voluntary and community organizations; lesbian, gay and bisexual people; and community groups.

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 'a planned and managed 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. Public bodies can play a vital strategic role here by helping volunteering and community activity to contribute to wider social policy objectives.

2.4 The public bodies and the 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. Actions set out in other sections of this Code also aim to help improve the status and image of volunteering.

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

Choice

2.6 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.

Diversity

2.7 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. [See the Equalities Statement].

Appropriateness

2.8 Someone who is suitable to carry out work as a volunteer in one role may be unsuitable to carry out work in another. The future of volunteering in terms of its credibility with service users and statutory funders depends upon this matching of skills and aptitude to specific tasks and areas of activity.

In short, the same rigour regarding recruitment that applies to paid employment needs to be exercised with regard to specific voluntary roles.

Accountability

- 2.9 The effective deployment of people in a voluntary capacity can only be sanctioned if they are adequately managed or they are in some way accountable to others. This is what distinguishes voluntary work from “helping out” or befriending. A clear distinction needs to be drawn between these different modes of providing support or input into an activity designed to be of benefit to others.

Volunteers need to be part of an organized structure that not only designs and monitors voluntary activity but also enables the volunteer to benefit fully from the experience through a volunteer programme of personal and professional development [see Reciprocity and Recognition below].

Reciprocity

- 2.10 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.

Recognition

- 2.11 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 local statutory agencies’ policy and practice.
- 2.12 Volunteers contribute to every facet of human life because if an activity is felt to be worthwhile, people will get involved in it as volunteers. This means that many aspects of local government and other statutory

agencies' policy not intended to affect volunteering may well impact on some form of volunteering and vice versa.

- 2.13 The public bodies and the voluntary and community 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. [See Appendix 1]

3. An effective framework for volunteering

Statutory sector undertakings

- 3.1 In supporting this Code, the public bodies undertake to:

- Recognise that volunteering is an exercise of the basic human right of freedom to assemble and associate, and fundamental to democracy.
- Seek to ensure that all relevant proposed policy decisions, 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.
- Work to limit the barriers to volunteering and community action presented by existing policies and practices.
- Assess how volunteering and community activity contribute to achieving statutory sector policy and programme objectives. An initial assessment should look at:
 - what kind of volunteer and community activities support statutory sector policy objectives;
 - numbers of volunteers involved, amount of activity, and details of the diversity of people involved;
 - forms and extent of support for volunteering and community activity provided by the statutory sector; and

- any barriers preventing involvement by specific groups of people especially socially excluded groups.
- Aim to increase staff awareness of volunteer contributions to statutory sector objectives. Additionally, how these objectives fit with Active Citizenship, Social Inclusion, Lifelong Learning, Work-Life Balance and other relevant social policy objectives.
- Ensure transparency of the advertising and bidding process for statutory tenders and contracts for volunteering schemes.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Support a cross-agency media and communications strategy, recognizing volunteer contributions to raising the quality of life, and support activity motivating more people to become involved.
- Support initiatives to provide accessible information about volunteering opportunities at local and regional level. This includes Internet technology while not excluding those without access to this technology.
- Seek ways in which statutory bodies can work with the community and voluntary sector to

address how detailed demographic information on volunteering and community activity can be collected for comparison with other surveys and research.

- Take action to promote volunteering amongst those in schools, colleges and universities.

Voluntary and community sector undertakings

3.2 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.

In supporting this Code, the voluntary and community sector undertakes to:

- 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.
- 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.
- Ensure proper records are kept of how funding supports volunteering, and the value this produces.
- 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.

- ❑ Encourage and enable (but do not compel) accreditation of skills acquired through volunteering for recognised qualifications, in partnership with relevant accreditation bodies.
- ❑ 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.
- ❑ Develop systems for referring surplus volunteers, or those unsuited to their needs, to other organisations, to ensure no volunteer's 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:

- ❑ consumer watchdog committees and representatives;
- ❑ regeneration partnership boards; and
- ❑ health and care partnerships.

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

- ❑ produce and publish policies for involving volunteers with measurable targets for extending the involvement and diversity of volunteers;
- ❑ seek to identify the types of resource being put to supporting volunteering and community

activity, and the level needed to achieve policy objectives;

- 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;
- 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
- 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:

- what level of commitment is fair to expect from a volunteer and at what level the commitment required needs to be properly paid; and
- 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 freely, 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 should be provided to projects that involve volunteers, or encourage and develop volunteering.

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

- any volunteer contribution and involvement should be identified;
- resources to support and manage volunteer involvement should be budgeted for; and
- 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.

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 The public bodies 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.

6.3 Some real and perceived barriers to volunteering have been identified, and are listed below:

- ❑ the effect of the national minimum wage law on benefits in kind for volunteers;
- ❑ the benefits rules and how they are applied in practice;
- ❑ enabling mechanisms to ensure that low-income volunteers are not left out of pocket because of their volunteering;
- ❑ tax allowances in relation to volunteering including petrol mileage allowances for volunteer car drivers;
- ❑ possible treatment of reimbursed volunteer expenses and community exchange credits (e.g. LETS¹, Timebanks²) as taxable income;
- ❑ employer policies on hours of work, flexible working and time off for volunteering and community activity;
- ❑ consistent criteria on what public duties can be asked of volunteers and what should be paid;
- ❑ conflicts and confusion between volunteering and training for employment schemes, e.g. New Deal;
- ❑ availability of disability aid subsidies for volunteers as well as for employees;
- ❑ definitions of work and economic activity that currently exclude unpaid volunteers, community and household activity;
- ❑ poor image of volunteering in the media and amongst young people in particular;
- ❑ social isolation which can make it difficult to obtain information about volunteering; and

¹ Local Exchange Trading Systems or Schemes: local community-based mutual aid networks in which people exchange all kinds of goods and services with one another without the need for money.

² A national charity acting as a volunteering exchange.

- ❑ a lack of clarity and consensus about what constitutes volunteering activity.

7. Volunteering infrastructure

7.1 Both the Warner Report³ and PAT 9⁴ highlight the importance of strengthening the volunteering infrastructure at national and local level.

7.2 Both the public bodies 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 local level, there should be at least one identified local development agency undertaking a range of functions:

- ❑ promoting volunteering and community involvement, as well as specific volunteering opportunities;
- ❑ matching up people interested in volunteering with opportunities and/or volunteer-involving organisations;
- ❑ acting as local partner for national promotional campaigns;
- ❑ building local partnerships which support volunteering;
- ❑ developing strong local networks across all three sectors: statutory, voluntary and community;
- ❑ providing information, training and consultancy including a register of volunteers with professional expertise available for small community groups;
- ❑ developing innovative volunteering opportunities and promoting diversity; and
- ❑ working with the local media.

³ "Giving Time Getting Involved": by the Working Group on the Active Community – 1999

⁴ Report of the Policy Action Team on Community Self-Help - 1999

7.4 Both the public bodies and the voluntary and community sector undertake to work together to identify:

- what level of resources are required to deliver these essential services; and
- a funding framework that allows for independence and accountability with minimum bureaucracy.

8. Promoting volunteering

8.1 The public bodies and the voluntary and community sector agree the need to promote the status and image of volunteering and community involvement. Ways in which this can be achieved include:

- 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;
- developing and promoting innovative programmes for enabling the contribution of volunteers e.g. time banks;
- developing partnerships with organisations that promote volunteering or deploy volunteers; and with the media, in order to encourage greater media coverage that will inspire, promote and encourage individual volunteers, community activists and special volunteering events;
- 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
- 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 As part of the process of making the Compact work, there will be an annual meeting between the statutory sector and representatives of the voluntary and community 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.

MANAGEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS

1.1 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:

- ❑ prior to recruitment, be clear about why you want/need a volunteer;
- ❑ provide the volunteer with a clear role/task description, identifying anticipated requirement/s of the organisation;
- ❑ provide the volunteer with an initial induction and training programme;
- ❑ provide the volunteer with appropriate line management;
- ❑ add volunteers to organisation charts. Encourage volunteers to participate in the organisation's wider decision-making process;
- ❑ monitor and acknowledge the contribution that volunteers make to the organisation, to the wider public, to funders and to other volunteers;
- ❑ 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;
- ❑ 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;
- ❑ 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;
- ❑ provide opportunities for volunteers to acquire or develop new or existing skills and assist

volunteers who want to gain accreditation towards recognised qualifications;

- 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;
- ensure that the work and contribution of the volunteer adds quality and value to the organisation's aims and objectives;
- 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;
- 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
- 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

- 1.1 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’.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 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.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 The following are points for employers to consider:
- 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;
 - think about establishing an employee-volunteering scheme. Develop 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;
 - 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
 - ensure that voluntary and community activity is incorporated into staff development and human resource policies, and that it is valued and recognised.

Further Information and Contact Details

For copies of all the national Codes of Good Practice (including this one), the Compact or for further information, please contact:

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