

Volunteering
a code of good practice
Volunteering Volunteering

Volunteering
Compact Code of Good Practice

The Compact

The Compact is the agreement between the Government and the voluntary and community sector to improve their relationship for the benefit of each other and the communities they serve. It was published in 1998.

The Compact sets out:

- a shared vision and principles;
- undertakings from both sides;
- Government's commitment to respect the independence of the sector; and
- systems to help make sure that the agreement works.

The Compact has been supported by five codes of good practice, covering:

- funding and procurement;
- consultation and policy appraisal;
- volunteering;
- black and minority ethnic (BME) voluntary and community organisations; and
- community groups.

Local Compacts have been agreed in most areas to cover relations between local councils and other local public bodies and the voluntary and community sector. The national codes of good practice inform local codes.

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Summary of undertakings

Government and the voluntary and community sector undertake to:

- Work together to expand the public perception of volunteering by improving the profile, status and range of volunteer activity;
- Work to effectively tackle discrimination to ensure that volunteering is open to all;
- Adopt clear policies regarding the payment of volunteer expenses;
- Make visible the value of volunteers' contributions, for example in publications;
- Ensure that arrangements made for volunteers do not unfairly exclude particular groups from volunteering;
- Recognise that voluntary activity should not be seen as a substitute for paid work;
- Work together to create and maintain a modern and dynamic volunteering infrastructure.

Government undertakes to:

- Consult the sector so that proposed legislation or regulation, guidance and policies take account of the ways they may affect volunteers and volunteering activities;
- Work to actively reduce barriers to volunteering resulting from existing legislation, regulation and policies;
- Recognise that it is legitimate for voluntary and community organisations to include the costs of enabling greater access to volunteering in relevant applications for funding;
- Recognise that organisations that make up volunteering infrastructure are independent voluntary sector bodies;
- Adopt policies to help ensure that specialist volunteering infrastructure can develop realistic sustainable long term funding.

The voluntary and community sector undertakes to:

- Promote volunteering opportunities including looking at how volunteers are recruited to ensure equal opportunities to volunteer;
- Include reasonable costs for reducing barriers to volunteering in relevant funding bids;
- Ensure that they have both the time and resources to support and train volunteers;
- Encourage the involvement of volunteers in ongoing decision-making and include them in internal communications;
- Identify a named person within their organisations to be responsible for volunteer involvement, and for monitoring and reporting on it. Also identify a trustee board champion for volunteering.

1. Introduction

What is the Volunteering Code of Good Practice?

- 1.1** This Code of Good Practice sets out principles and undertakings for both Government and the voluntary and community sector in England on how to work together to support and promote volunteering and voluntary action.
- 1.2** It includes undertakings aimed at influencing behaviour to tackle barriers to volunteering so that more people are able to volunteer and so that volunteering benefits both the individual and the organisation or cause where that volunteering takes place
- 1.3** This Code offers good practice guidance, but in itself is not a best practice guide for the management of volunteers. Appendix B – Signposting offers further broad guidance on volunteering.
- 1.4** Each section in this Code outlines a key topic that covers volunteering, and provides undertakings for Government and voluntary and community organisations to help improve volunteering and resolve potential problems.

Who is the Code of Good Practice for?

- 1.5** The Code applies to central Government departments, including Government Offices for the regions, 'Next Steps' Executive Agencies in England and Non-Departmental Public Bodies. The Code also applies to the range of organisations in the voluntary and community sector. Separate Compacts have been developed in other parts of the United Kingdom.

How does the Code of Good Practice complement the Compact?

- 1.6** This Code of Good Practice is one of five codes complementing the Compact. The others cover funding and procurement, consultation and policy appraisal, black and minority ethnic voluntary and community organisations and community groups. This Code should inform the development and implementation of Local Compacts and local volunteering codes.

2. Understanding Volunteering

- 2.1** Volunteering is an important expression of citizenship and fundamental 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 freely undertaken and not for financial gain. The principle of non-payment of volunteers is central to this Code and to the wider sector and society's understanding of volunteering.
- 2.2** We understand the term volunteering to include formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation and campaigning. For the purpose of this Code, volunteering is defined as an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups other than (or in addition to) close relatives.
- 2.3** People volunteer for many different reasons. They may choose to volunteer to develop skills or gain experience, to socialise or to give something back to society. They may also volunteer because they feel a moral duty or compelling reasons to take part in voluntary action or support a particular cause. The key element is that it is freely undertaken.

Principles of Volunteering

The Compact recognises four principles fundamental to volunteering. These are Choice, Diversity, Mutual Benefit and Recognition. These inform every aspect of this Code.

Choice:

Volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. Freedom to volunteer implies freedom not to become involved.

Diversity:

Volunteering should be open to all, no matter what their background, race, colour, nationality, religion, ethnic or national origins, age, gender, marital status, sexual orientation or disability.

Mutual Benefit:

Volunteers offer their contribution and skills unwaged but should benefit in other ways in return for their contribution. Giving time voluntarily must be recognised as establishing a reciprocal relationship in which the volunteer also benefits and feels that his or her contribution is personally fulfilling.

Recognition:

Explicit recognition that valuing the contribution of volunteers is fundamental to a fair relationship between volunteers, voluntary and community organisations and Government. This includes recognising the contribution to the organisation, the community, the social economy and wider social objectives.

3. The Importance and Scope of Volunteering

What is this section about?

- 3.1** Because volunteers are active in all areas of life, all decision-makers need to be aware of ways that their actions and decisions may affect volunteering and voluntary activity. Government can play a vital strategic role by supporting and enabling volunteering and community activity.
- 3.2** Volunteering is a powerful force for change, both for those who volunteer and for the wider community. Volunteers offer support, expertise and innovation to any organisation, enhancing impact and adding value.
- 3.3** Though not an exhaustive list, volunteering can include:
- Helping provide a service as a volunteer within a voluntary or community organisation, or the public sector;
 - Community activism, campaigning and action to change society or identify and tackle unmet needs;
 - Befriending and mentoring;
 - Organising sports and physical recreation;
 - Taking part in running a voluntary or community organisation as a trustee or member of a board or committee;
 - Serving as a non-executive member of a public body or participating in civic governance, for instance serving as a school governor or a community representative;
 - 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;
 - Group activity, within a neighbourhood or community of interest, providing a community service, or campaigning for a public cause;
 - Helping develop public policy through involvement in consultation processes and campaigning;
 - Volunteering overseas;
 - Helping raise funds for an organisation.

What is the undertaking?

- 3.4** The Government and voluntary and community sector agree that there should be a greater understanding about the scope of volunteering and for there to be increased publicity about the achievements of volunteers. They agree to work together to expand the public perception of volunteering by improving the profile, status and range of volunteer activity, enabling volunteering and community activity.

4. Overcoming Barriers to Volunteering

What is this section about?

- 4.1** There can be significant barriers that stop people from volunteering. Government and the voluntary and community sector will challenge barriers to volunteering through their policy and practice.
- 4.2** Barriers to volunteering can be due to a variety of causes. They may include physical barriers, attitudes and behaviour by individuals, or access to opportunities in society. Examples include opportunities to volunteer being located far from where potential volunteers live or where transport is poor, the cost to the individual of volunteering or the institutional behaviour and culture of organisations themselves.

What are the undertakings?

- 4.3** Government and the voluntary and community sector will:
- Adopt clear policies regarding the payment of volunteer expenses. Volunteers should not be out-of-pocket because of their voluntary activity. Volunteers are entitled to reimbursement of all reasonable expenses and volunteers should be encouraged to claim;
 - Recognise that volunteering is freely given but not cost free. Resources, support, development and promotion for volunteers may incur costs;
 - Work to effectively tackle discrimination to ensure that volunteering is open to all;
 - Commit to free England wide access to criminal record bureau checks for volunteers.
- 4.4** Government will:
- Take forward 'joined-up thinking' across Government departments and agencies;
 - Consult the sector so that proposed legislation or regulation, guidance and policies take account of the ways they may affect volunteers and volunteering activities;
 - Work to actively reduce barriers to volunteering resulting from existing legislation, regulation and policies;
 - Recognise that it is legitimate for voluntary and community organisations to include the costs of enabling greater access to volunteering (eg removing physical barriers) in relevant applications for funding.
- 4.5** The voluntary and community sector will:

- Challenge volunteer-involving organisations to offer opportunities that match volunteers' motivation and abilities and that are diverse and inclusive;
- Work to put in place equalities schemes or other means to effectively remove unfair discrimination;
- Promote volunteering opportunities, including looking at how volunteers are recruited, to ensure equal opportunities to volunteer;
- Include reasonable costs for reducing barriers to volunteering in relevant funding bids.

5. Valuing Volunteer Contributions

What is this section about?

- 5.1** The contribution of volunteers and voluntary activity can often go unacknowledged. Volunteers make significant contributions to society. Volunteering is more than performing a service. Volunteers can spot and articulate unmet needs and emerging issues, and they campaign as activists. Their contribution should be measured, recognised and celebrated.
- 5.2** Government and the voluntary and community sector will develop policies that ensure that volunteer time is recognised as a significant contribution and of value. Volunteers contribute to the economic output of a country. They also bring added value through diversity, increase local accountability and help to build strong cohesive communities.

What are the undertakings?

- 5.3** In supporting the Code, Government and the voluntary and community sector will:
- Develop, promote and celebrate volunteering as an expression of both active citizenship and the basic human rights of freedom to assemble and associate;
 - Keep good data on volunteering;
 - Assess how volunteering can contribute to achieving Government policy objectives;
 - Make visible the value of volunteers' contributions, for example in publications;
 - Tell volunteers how their volunteering has benefited the organisation or group they are volunteering for;
 - Demonstrate that the contribution of volunteers is recognised as having more than economic value;
 - Acknowledge that volunteering can help tackle social exclusion. Individuals can improve their skills and employability and can show that they have a contribution to make to society. It can also bring people together from different backgrounds and contribute towards more cohesive communities;
 - Recognise and be clear that volunteers need support, management and other resources to work effectively;
 - Involve volunteers when developing new policies and ideas;
 - Ensure that arrangements made for volunteers do not unfairly exclude particular groups from volunteering, for example the timing and accessibility of activities.

6. The Volunteering Experience

What is this section about?

- 6.1** The relationship volunteers have with a volunteer-involving organisation is distinct from that of an employee. Government and the voluntary and community sector will ensure that they will work together to promote policies which recognise differences in volunteers' motivation and contribution, in the relationship they develop with a volunteer-involving organisation and in the need for this to be understood and reflected in the way they are managed.
- 6.2** Volunteers, while not paid staff, should have many of the same entitlements as employees – clarity about their roles and responsibilities, induction, managerial supervision and support, and relevant training and development opportunities. They are also subject to the same obligation to abide by, and be subject to, the organisation's agreements, policies and procedures. Quality of volunteering can enhance impact and add value broadly and should be supported to benefit volunteers and the place where they volunteer.

What are the undertakings?

- 6.3** Government and the voluntary and community sector will work together to encourage clarity, consensus and consistency about the appropriate roles for volunteers. They will:
- Acknowledge the distinctiveness of volunteering. Government and the voluntary and community sector recognise that voluntary activity should never be a substitute for paid work;
 - Challenge volunteer-involving organisations to examine their overall purpose, values and objectives, particularly focusing on how involving volunteers might relate to the purpose, values and objectives of the organisation.
- 6.4** The voluntary and community sector undertakes to:
- Encourage volunteer-involving organisations to ensure that they have both the time and resources to support and train volunteers and can provide something that will make volunteering with that organisation a valuable experience for the volunteer – for example increasing skills and confidence as well as supporting finding ways back to work;
 - Encourage the involvement of volunteers in ongoing decision-making and include them in internal communications, so that volunteers are acknowledged as important partners and stakeholders in the organisation where they volunteer;
 - Identify a named person in organisations or groups to be responsible for volunteer involvement, and for monitoring and reporting on it. Also identify a trustee board champion for volunteering.

7. The Volunteering Infrastructure

What is this section about?

- 7.1** The volunteering infrastructure is the physical facilities, structures, systems, relationships, people, knowledge and skills that exist to support and develop, co-ordinate, represent and promote front-line organisations to help them to deliver their aims more effectively. Organisations that make up volunteering infrastructure include volunteer centres.
- 7.2** The volunteering infrastructure has a unique role in supporting volunteers and the organisations where they volunteer, as well as delivering volunteering initiatives and programmes.
- 7.3** 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.

What are the undertakings?

- 7.4** Government undertakes to:
- Recognise the volunteering infrastructure as independent voluntary sector bodies;
 - Adopt policies to help ensure that specialist volunteering infrastructure can develop realistic sustainable long term funding.
- 7.5** Government and the voluntary and community sector will work together to create and maintain a modern and dynamic volunteering infrastructure.

Volunteering Infrastructure

At national and regional level, a range of umbrella organisations deliver different aspects of the volunteer development function. At a local level there should be at least one specialist volunteer development agency delivering the volunteer development functions. That agency should work with other agencies locally to develop volunteering. The volunteer development functions will be delivered from different perspectives at a local, regional and national level but in complementary ways to include:

Brokerage

The volunteering infrastructure will hold information on volunteering opportunities. It will offer potential volunteers accessible support and advice in matching their motivations to volunteer with appropriate volunteering opportunities.

Marketing Volunteering

The volunteering infrastructure will aim to stimulate and encourage interest in voluntary and community activity. It will market and promote volunteering through local, regional and national events and campaigns.

Good Practice Development

The volunteering infrastructure will have a commitment to promoting good practice in working with volunteers to all volunteer-involving organisations, and will actively support and maintain this.

Developing Volunteer Opportunities

The volunteering infrastructure will work in close partnership with other statutory, voluntary and private sector agencies, as well as with community and faith groups, to develop imaginative opportunities (both formal and informal) for potential volunteers. It will work to ensure that volunteering opportunities are available for all.

Policy Response and Campaigning

The volunteering infrastructure will devise and lead on policy development which serves to influence a policy environment in England (and by extension the UK and Europe) which takes account of the ways this may affect volunteers and volunteering activities. It will challenge received wisdom about the capacity of existing service provision and about the ways in which people can or cannot get involved in volunteering and its development.

Strategic Development of Volunteering

The national volunteering infrastructure will take strategic responsibility for the support and development of local and regional infrastructure, good practice development and networks, and support for the development of social policy that facilitates volunteering.

8. Taking the Code forward

- 8.1** The sector's Compact Working Group will put this Code into practice in partnership with Government. The Code applies to voluntary and community organisations in England. The Compact Working Group will promote the Code to voluntary and community organisations so that they know, use, understand and follow its undertakings and recommendations.
- 8.2** The Code applies in England to all central Government Departments; 'Next Steps' Executive Agencies; Non-Departmental Public Bodies; Government Offices for the Regions; and Regional Development Agencies. Departmental Compact champions and voluntary and community sector liaison officers will advance the Code in Government. Government will promote this Code as good practice and make suitable mention of it alongside the Compact and Local Compacts in relevant publications and communications.
- 8.3** Local Government and local public bodies are expected to take appropriate notice of the principles of this Code as recommended best practice in their work. This Code should inform the development and implementation of Local Compacts and local codes of practice on volunteering.
- 8.4** The Compact Annual Review Meeting will review progress on use and implementation of the Code. This will draw on Departments' own reporting for the meeting and any surveys of the voluntary and community sector carried out by the Compact Working Group. The Compact Annual Review meeting agrees the Joint Action Plan for the Compact. This sets out steps to achieve full implementation of the Compact and Codes in Government and the sector. Copies of the annual report and action plan are available from the Compact Working Group (www.thecompact.org.uk) or Active Communities Directorate in the Home Office (www.activecommunities.homeoffice.gov.uk)
- 8.5** In particular, the Compact Annual Review Meeting will monitor the following headline undertaking:
- Where there are new initiatives Government and the voluntary and community sector will agree that the definitions of volunteering are consistent with this Code.

8.6 The Compact sets out a general framework for enhancing the relationship between Government and the voluntary and community sector. As far as possible, disagreements over the application of that framework should be resolved between the parties. To assist this process, where both parties agree, mediation may be a useful way to try to reach agreement in line with the Government's commitment to use alternative dispute resolution methods. The Compact Mediation Scheme is available to help in these situations. Where behaviour which contravenes this framework constitutes maladministration, a complaint may be brought to the Parliamentary Ombudsman in the usual way. Cases involving Local Government may be referred to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Appendix A – The Local Dimension and Local Compacts

A1 Do you need a local volunteering code?

A Local Compact should be the catalyst for developing better local relationships that deliver results. This Code should be used to inform Local Compact development, but more important than developing a local volunteering code is local public bodies having a good understanding of volunteering issues.

A2 Ensuring volunteering is well positioned in Local Compact development

Local Compact Working Groups should ensure that volunteering is well positioned on their agenda. Entirely volunteer-run small groups form the majority of the local sector and contribute to key services such as hospitals. Communications should enable volunteers to know about their Local Compact and be involved if they wish.

A3 Policy and practice issues

Whether or not a local volunteering code is produced, it is useful to develop mechanisms that identify and resolve policy and practice issues, including training and checks. Examples may include: what job centre staff tell claimants; the scope allowed for asylum seekers to volunteer; sector workforce development properly covering volunteer needs; local funders being sensitive to the difference between paid and volunteer staff, prisons having a budget for volunteer expenses, and the timing of joint meetings.

Issues Checklist

- Adopting this Code in Local Compact development should also be subject to the same annual review as the Local Compact itself.
- Are volunteering issues included in the Local Compact Action Plan?
- Does the local infrastructure plan cover volunteering support adequately?
- How does the Local Compact support partnerships to address volunteering?
- How can cross-sector engagement on volunteering issues be made more effective?
- How can the local public sector better support their staff volunteering?
- When was the volunteer contribution to your local area last measured?
- Are volunteers and volunteering themes part of your Compact Week activities?
- What would increase BME volunteers and deploying volunteers to BME groups?
- How can schools and the youth sector help boost volunteering?
- Is there a local guide on how to volunteer?

Appendix B – Signposting

B1 Websites

www.thecompact.org.uk

Comprehensive resource on the Compact includes materials to download, good practice examples and news and articles.

www.volunteering.org.uk

Offers a range of resources for anyone who works with or manages volunteers as well as to those who want to volunteer.

www.russellcommission.org

Details of the national framework for youth action and engagement

www.energizeinc.com

Specifically aimed at volunteers' leaders

www.voluntarysectorskills.org.uk

Skills development in the voluntary and community sector – for paid staff, volunteers and trustees.

B2 The following publications will be useful in implementing the Compact Code of Practice on Volunteering.

A detailed guide to the national minimum wage, Department for Trade & Industry, London, 1999

ChangeUp: Capacity Building and Infrastructure Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector, Home Office Active Community Unit, London, 2004

Compact Black and Minority Ethnic Voluntary and Community Organisations: a Code of Good Practice, London, 2001

Compact Code of Good Practice on Community Groups, London, 2003

Attwood, Chris, et al, *2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey: people, families and communities*, (Home Office Research Study 270), Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate, London, 2003

Davis Smith, Justin, *The 1997 national survey of volunteering*, Institute for Volunteering Research, London, 1998

Forster Andy; Hurley Gail, *The Legal Position of volunteers in the United Kingdom*, Association of Voluntary Service Organisations, European Volunteer Centre, Brussels, 2004

Gaskin, Katharine, *A choice blend: what volunteers want from organisation and management*, Institute for Volunteering Research, London, June, 2003

Penberthy, Chris and Forster, Andy, *Building on Success: a strategy for the Volunteering Infrastructure in England 2004-2014*, Volunteering England, Birmingham, London, 2004

Volunteering for All? Exploring the link between volunteering and social exclusion, Institute for Volunteering Research, London May, 2004

The Good Practice Guide, Kate Bowgett, Kathryn Dickie & Mark Restall, National Centre for Volunteering, 2nd edition 2002.

Bhasin, S: *My Time, My Community, Myself – Experiences of Volunteering within the Black Community*, National Centre for Volunteering, London, 1997

Disability Equality in Volunteering by Rachel Wilson on behalf of Skill published by Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities: 1998

The A-Z of Volunteering And Asylum: A Handbook for Managers by Ruth Wilson published by Volunteering England: 2003

This publication is available on the Compact website at
www.thecompact.org.uk

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Web address: www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/thirdsector

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For hard copies of this publication, please contact the Commission for the Compact.

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