



Valuing Volunteers



Valuing Volunteers, a voluntary sector Code of Practice
was produced by Gateshead Council and GVOC.
© Gateshead Council, October 2003.

**A voluntary Sector
code of practice**

Working together for change

Introduction

This booklet sets out a Code of Practice agreed by Gateshead Council and the voluntary and community sector in relation to volunteers.

It describes:

- what is meant by volunteers;
- what it involves; and
- what the council and voluntary and community sector will undertake to do as part of their commitment to valuing volunteers.

This is one of a series of booklets on good practice produced by Gateshead Council and GVOG (Gateshead Voluntary Organisations Council) - the others are:

Black and Minority Ethnic Voluntary and Community Organisations

Community Participation, Consultation and Communication

Finance and Funding

If you would like more information on this or any of the other codes of practice please contact:

Gateshead Voluntary Organisations Council

John Haswell House
8-9 Gladstone Terrace
Gateshead
NE8 4DY

Telephone: 0191 478 4103
Email: enquiries@gvoc.org.uk
Web: www.gvoc.org.uk

Community Liaison Team Leader

Planning and Development
Community Based Services
Gateshead Council
Civic Centre
Regent St, Gateshead
NE8 1HH

Telephone: 0191 433 2396
Email: gevpringle@gateshead.gov.uk
Web: www.gateshead.gov.uk

Scope and application of the Code

The Code of Practice is not a legally binding document. It is an enabling mechanism to enhance the relationship between the Council and the voluntary and community sector. Its authority is derived from its endorsement by the Council and the sector itself through its consultation process. The code covers all Council functions and applies to the range of organisations in the voluntary and community sector.

The Compact partners will actively encourage the extension of this code to other local public bodies, who will be invited to adopt and adapt the Compact and its associated Codes of Practice.

The development of action plans to implement the good practice guidance in this code will be the responsibility of individual agencies such as the Council 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.

As part of the process of making the Compact work, there will be an annual review by the Council and the sector to review the development and operation of the Compact, including this Code of Practice. A monitoring report will be presented to Gateshead Voluntary Organisations Council's AGM and the relevant committee of the Council in October of each year.

Aim of code

To enable more people to become involved in the varied forms of voluntary activity that is a vital part of active citizenship and offer them the necessary support.

Definition, principles and scope of volunteering and community activity

Volunteering is 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.

In practical terms, volunteering is an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals, groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives.

Volunteers are active in all areas of life, which means that decision-makers need to be volunteer-friendly and also volunteer-literate, so that they are aware of ways their actions and decisions may affect community and voluntary activity.

The Council and the voluntary and community sector agree that there should be greater publicity for the achievements of volunteers, and a heightened public perception of volunteering.

The four principles fundamental to volunteering are:

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.

Diversity

Volunteering should be open to all, no matter what their background, age, race, sexual orientation, faith, or ability. 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.

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.

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 Council policy and practice.

Making an investment in volunteering and community involvement

The Council and the voluntary and community sector recognise that although volunteers and community activists give their time free, they need resources with which to work. 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. The undertakings that follow here are also reflected in the Code of Practice on Finance and Funding:

Where volunteer involvement is or had been considered an objective, appropriate priority for funding to projects that involve volunteers, or encourage and develop volunteering, should be provided.

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.

Where matched 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.

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 are detrimental to the wider public perception of volunteering.

Ensure safe working practices for clients and volunteers by the adoption of clear policies and procedures on working with vulnerable people and children for example, the Home Office 'Safe from Harm' code of practice.

Organisations must also consider whether they should carry out police checks (disclosures) through the Criminal Records Bureau. Checks should only be carried out after undertaking a risk assessment for every volunteering opportunity that is offered. The indiscriminate use of checks where a check is not warranted is illegal and is a barrier to volunteering.

Local partnerships and public bodies

The Government has brought into being many cross-sectoral partnership initiatives as part of the process of modernising public services and regenerating disadvantaged communities. Examples of such community participation include:

- consumer watchdog committees and representatives
- regeneration partnership boards
- health and social care partnerships

The Council and the voluntary and community sector recognise the importance of the role played by volunteers in these 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 into 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 a 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.

The Council and the sector will work together towards a set of consistent principles on:

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

The scope of voluntary and community involvement includes:

- helping provide a service as an unpaid volunteer within a voluntary or community organisation, international development organisation or the public sector;
- taking part in running a voluntary or community organisation as a trustee, board or committee member;
- serving as a non-executive member of a public body or participating in civic governance;
- 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;
- gaining skills and experience through volunteering, which will be useful when applying for paid employment;
- a group activity, within a neighbourhood or community of interest, providing a community service, or campaigning for a public cause;
- employer-supported community involvement;
- helping develop public policy through involvement in consultation processes and campaigning;
- volunteering overseas;
- volunteering through involvement in a faith congregation or community.

Council undertakings

The Council will:

- seek to ensure that all relevant proposed policies, guidance and practices are checked for impact on voluntary and community activity and funding before being adopted.
- 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 Council policy and objectives, to include:
 - what kind of volunteer and community activities support Council policy objectives;
 - numbers of volunteers involved, amount of activity, and details of the diversity of people involved;
 - forms and extent of support or volunteering and community activity provided by the Council; and
 - any barriers preventing involvement by specific groups of people especially socially excluded groups.
- Aim to increase staff awareness of volunteer contributions to Council objectives.
- Ensure transparency of the advertising and bidding process for Council tenders and contracts for volunteering schemes.
- Aim to adopt policies that ensure that volunteering infrastructure bodies can rely on realistic sustainable long term funding. Similarly, recognise the infrastructure 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 sector, review the strengths and weaknesses of local volunteering information and infrastructure, and make recommendations based on best practice examples identified.

- Support a cross-Council media and communications strategy, recognising volunteer contributions to raising the quality of life, and support activity motivating even 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.

Voluntary and community sector undertakings

The voluntary and community sector will:

- 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.
- Work to secure all necessary resources.
- 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, such as Volunteer Gateshead, to ensure no volunteer's potential is wasted.