

NORTHUMBERLAND COMPACT

FINAL

VOLUNTEERING CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE

February 2009

The Northumberland Compact is a commitment to improve relationships between public sector organisations and the voluntary & community sector. This document sets out to make a positive impact on volunteering.

LW/compact reference group

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‘By 2021 Northumberland residents will be more prepared to volunteer and constructively find ways to help themselves in realising an opportunity or tackling issues of concern.’

Releasing the strength of our communities - Sustainable Community Strategy for Northumberland to 2021 - September 2007

1 Introduction

Volunteering is good for us. It brings us together; it makes us healthier; it raises our self-esteem and sense of purpose; it improves our chances of employment; gets us out-and-about and makes for stronger communities.

Although Northumberland as a whole has formal volunteering rates below the national average, that average figure hides a wide range – some parts of the county are among the best in England.

What is undeniable is that volunteering contributes hugely to our wellbeing, our culture and our economy. It is the essence of social capital.

This code of Good Practice sets out principles and undertakings for both the public sector and voluntary & community sector (VCS) in Northumberland on how to work together to **support and promote volunteering and voluntary action**.

Aim:

- to foster a good understanding of volunteering issues
- identify mechanisms which can take forward volunteering policy and practice issues
- to offer a practical guide which provides information to both the VCS and public sectors and contact point for volunteering

2 The Importance of Volunteering

Volunteering is a freely given commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society and the community.

It is an important expression of citizenship and democracy and is a good demonstration of an active community.

Volunteering can be viewed as either formal or informal, refer to Appendix for definitions. People volunteer for many different reasons. Whatever their reasons for volunteering they contribute widely to their community bringing valuable skills and experience to their particular role.

3 Principles of Volunteering

There are four principles fundamental to volunteering: Choice, Diversity, Reciprocity and Recognition.

- 3.1 Choice: volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. Any encouragement to become involved in volunteering should not take the

form of coercion or compulsion. For example, an individual's right to benefits should not be affected by a refusal to volunteer.

- 3.2 Diversity: volunteering should be open and actively promoted to all, regardless of background, age, race, sexual orientation etc. Equal opportunities principles are fundamental to supporting diversity
- 3.3 Reciprocity: volunteers offer their time and skills for no financial gains, but should benefit in other ways in return. Potential benefits include a sense of worthwhile achievement, useful skills, experience, contacts, sociability, fun and inclusion in the life of the organisation.
- 3.4 Recognition: explicit recognition of the value which volunteers contribute to the organisation, the community, the social economy and to wider social objectives, is fundamental to a fair relationship between volunteers, organisations and public policy and practice.

4 Voluntary & Community Sector

Voluntary & community organisations perform a number of roles in relation to volunteering. All involve volunteers on their management committees or trustee boards. Some community groups, for example, most village halls, are run entirely by volunteers.

Voluntary organisations may involve and manage volunteers in the delivery of services, and some provide infrastructure support or funding to other voluntary groups and volunteers.

Voluntary & Community Sector undertakings

- 4.1 Recognise the importance of high standards and effective management of volunteers and that achieving this requires resources, such as training and support.
- 4.2 Where appropriate, identify a senior manager or trustee/board member to be responsible for volunteer involvement and ensuring good practice in volunteer management.
- 4.3 Ensure that volunteers are trained and thanked for their work and that their contribution is recognised and acknowledged.
- 4.4 Encourage and enable volunteers who wish to do so to obtain accreditation of skills gained through volunteering.
- 4.5 Seek to widen the opportunities for volunteering and develop systems for working co-operatively with other organisations, to ensure that no volunteer's potential is wasted, and that volunteers are not discouraged by being offered unsuitable placements.
- 4.6 Work to develop a diverse volunteer base, recognising that people from different backgrounds can bring fresh ideas and skills.

5 Public Sector

Recognise that high levels of volunteering, to which Northumberland aspires, are indicators of healthy and active communities, good quality of life, and contribute to the building of social capital.

Recognise the importance of building a dynamic infrastructure for volunteering, to ensure best practice in volunteer management and equality of access to volunteering, funding and support.

Recognise that volunteering, regardless of the age of the volunteers, is an economic activity which builds skills, experience, employability and social cohesion, and creates employment.

Work to reduce the real or perceived barriers to volunteering.

Public Sector undertakings

- 5.1 Audit new policies and strategies for their impact on volunteers and volunteering, and take appropriate action.
- 5.2 Aim to increase staff awareness of volunteer contributions to organisational objectives.
- 5.3 Where directly involved in the management of volunteers, conform to 'good practice' standards. Refer to Volunteering England <http://www.volunteering.org.uk/> for best practice guides on all aspects of volunteer management.
- 5.2 Recognise the true costs of effective volunteer recruitment and management, in budgeting for service provision.
- 5.3 Where applicable work to reduce conflict and confusion between volunteering and training for employment, especially for young people.
- 5.4 Support events and activities which promote volunteering e.g. Volunteers Week.
- 5.5 Consider developing employer supported volunteering schemes within their organisations for their staff.

Volunteering England and the Nationwide Foundation are leading on delivering the skills based employer supported volunteering project and will work with local and regional infrastructure to identify new ways to broker and support this particular type of volunteering.

6 Joint Undertakings

- 6.1 Aim for good practice in volunteer management as an essential aspect of community involvement and partnership.
- 6.2 Voluntary activity should compliment the work of paid staff, not substitute it and within that, the role of the volunteer is valued and respected.

- 6.3 Establish clarity about what work is and is not appropriate for volunteers to undertake.
- 6.4 Recognise that managing volunteers effectively needs resources, and ensure that these resources are budgeted for.
- 6.5 Aim for greater publicity for the achievements of volunteers.
- 6.6 Work to improve the availability of accessible information about opportunities for volunteers, including making better use of ICT.
- 6.7 Work to improve the 'image' of volunteering.
- 6.8 Support initiatives to widen the profile of volunteering, including targeting groups which are currently under-represented as volunteers and provide additional support to volunteers with special support needs.
- 6.9 Recognise the importance of reimbursing expenses incurred by volunteers.
- 6.10 Volunteers are in a position of trust. Be aware of when it would be appropriate for a Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) check <http://www.crb.homeoffice.gov.uk/>, From November 2010 all those working with children, young people and vulnerable adults will need to register with Independent Safeguarding Authority <http://www.isa.gov.org.uk/>

7 Partnership and community participation

- 7.1 Partnership initiatives involving organisations from both sectors are an important aspect of modernising public services and regenerating disadvantaged communities.
- 7.2 Partnership boards and committees should ensure that:
 - o The involvement of volunteers and community representatives is worthwhile, rewarding and appropriate
 - o Explicit responsibility for volunteer involvement and interests is allocated to a named board or committee member.
 - o Processes for the reimbursement of volunteer's expenses in attending meetings are straightforward and speedy
 - o Opportunities to contribute to and be a member of partnerships are widely publicised
 - o There are clear policies in place to ensure equal status, treatment and resources for community or volunteer members, including opportunities for continued personal development.
 - o Meetings, structures, and processes are managed appropriately, taking account of the needs and situations of community or lay members.

8. Contact information

There are a number VCS organisations active across the county, which support volunteering. Contact **Volunteering Northumberland** as an initial point for information or signposting. Contact details:

Charles Tremeer, Volunteer Manager, **Volunteering Northumberland**,
Wansbeck CVS, 107/109 Station Road, Ashington NE63 8RS

Appendix

Useful definitions & information

Volunteering is defined as:

‘Volunteering 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.’ (Volunteering Compact Code of Good Practice, Home Office 2005)

- **Informal volunteering** is defined as giving unpaid help as an individual to someone who is not a relative.” e.g helping a neighbour.
- **Formal volunteering** is defined as unpaid help given to groups, clubs or organisations to benefit others or the environment.” e.g
 - helping develop public policy through involvement in campaigning and consultation processes
 - serving as trustee board or committee members of voluntary and community organisations

Some typical features of Community groups and Voluntary Organisations

The following list has been included to assist those who are unfamiliar with the Voluntary & Community Sector, and assume voluntary organisations do not employ anyone.

While there are no single characteristics for the community sector, many of the features on the left hand side of the table will be shared by most community groups and organisations. At the same time, individual organisations continue to change and some may move in either direction over time.

← Range →	
Community groups Member-led (where the community controls direction and purpose)	Voluntary organisations Employs staff
Neighbourhood, village or community of interest	Wider area
Less formal structure	More formal structure
Lower or no income	Higher income
Membership-based	Service delivery
Self-help and mutual support	Support and development
Providing informal and autonomous	Providing specialist or

(independent) services

contracted services

Representing community interests,
residents and community members

Supporting client groups