

Consultation draft: May 2000

# **Draft Code of Practice on Volunteering and Community Action**

**For agreement by Government and by the voluntary and  
community sector**

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## **A Aim and context**

This Volunteering Code of Practice sets out agreed undertakings by the government and the voluntary and community sector in England, on good practice to enable and support more people getting involved in the varied forms of voluntary activity that are a vital part of active citizenship. This code of practice supplements the *Compact on Relations between the Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England* published in November 1998. A simple leaflet outlining the main points of this Code will be produced.

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 social exclusion strategy.

This code of practice on volunteering is one of five Codes supplementing the Compact. The others cover funding, consultation, black and minority ethnic organisations, and community groups. This Code can be referred to in drawing up Local Compacts.

## **B Definition, principles and scope of volunteering and community activity**

### Definition

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."<sup>1</sup>
2. A more operational definition is "Any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups) other than or in addition to close relatives, or to benefit the environment."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted by the UK Volunteering Forum, 15 June 1998

<sup>2</sup> National Survey of Volunteering definition, Institute for Volunteering Research

## Four principles fundamental to volunteering and community activity -

### 3. **Choice**

Voluntary involvement must be a freely chosen option. This means freedom not to volunteer without sanction or penalty. Encouragement to volunteer must not amount to pressure or coercion.

### 4. **Diversity**

Volunteering can provide opportunities for people from varied backgrounds. Inclusiveness can build bridges, helping a diversity of people to feel usefully involved and overcome social exclusion by gaining skills, experience and contacts 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 background experience. Equal opportunities principles are basic to supporting diversity.

### 5. **Reciprocity**

Volunteers offer their work unpaid but should benefit in other ways in return for their contribution to wider social objectives. Giving voluntary time and work must be recognised as establishing a reciprocal relationship in which the giver also receives.

### 6. **Recognition**

Explicit recognition of the value of the work volunteers contribute, to the organisation, to the community and to wider social objectives, is fundamental to a fair relationship between volunteers, organisations and Government policy and practice.

## Scope

7. Volunteers contribute to every facet of human life – whatever activity people see as worthwhile, some will get involved in it as volunteers. This means that any aspect of Government policy may well impact on the conditions for some form of volunteering – and vice versa.

Main forms of volunteer and community activity include:

8. **Formal volunteering:** volunteers who work within an organisation, which is responsible for managing and resourcing their work for it.
  - Around half of the UK's adult population is involved in formal volunteering, giving on average 1.9 hours a week, according to the 1997 National Survey of Volunteering<sup>3</sup>. This amounts to 88 million hours of voluntary work, equivalent to a £41 billion contribution to the national accounts or 7% of GDP.

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<sup>3</sup> Carried out by the Institute for Volunteering Research, in 1981, 1991, 1997

- 29% of the adult population or 12 million people volunteer at least once a month.
  - 84% of volunteering is with voluntary and community organisations
9. **Community volunteering:** volunteers forming or managing their own organisation, with whatever resources they can raise to support their work.
- More than three quarters of voluntary organisations are entirely volunteer-run, and many more consist mainly of volunteers, with just one or two paid staff. Much of the formal volunteering noted above is with community organisations. In addition, three-quarters of the population (74%) are involved in neighbourly helping out (informal volunteering).
  - The sections of this Code dealing with recognising the value of work done by volunteers, and resourcing hidden costs of volunteer activity are particularly important to community groups. The parts of this Code dealing with volunteer management good practice will not generally apply to them.
10. **Governance and public duties:** people serving on management and partnership committees, including charity trustees, school governors, and other forms of public duty. People involved in this capacity are both volunteers themselves, and set policies for the involvement of other volunteers in the organisations they govern.
- Charity trusteeship is estimated to involve between half a million and a million people, many of whom serve as trustees for more than one organisation.
  - CSV's *Hidden Volunteers* research (Jan 2000) found around 700,000 people carrying out various forms of public duty, including 345,000 as school governors, 218,000 trade union reps, and 30,000 lay magistrates.
11. **Public sector volunteering,** through schemes managed by statutory services
- 24% of formal volunteering was with public sector organisations (eg hospital friends, meals on wheels and day centre helpers, prison visitors, special constables, school and youth activity helpers)
12. **Employer-supported volunteering,** through schemes which may be organised by employers in private, public and voluntary sectors.
- 13% of volunteering was with private sector organisations
13. **Overseas volunteering:** placements arranged by international development and other organisations based in this country, eg Voluntary Service Overseas.
- This Code applies to Government policies towards volunteering overseas by British residents. It applies to some but not all aspects of England-based organisations managing overseas volunteering placements.

## 14. Who volunteers?

- The National Survey of Volunteering shows social inequalities in volunteering: people with higher incomes (over £25,000 pa) are two and a half times more likely to be involved in voluntary activity than people with less (under £4,000). This may indicate economic barriers that discourage or prevent people from getting involved in community and voluntary activity. The undertakings in this Code seek to reduce such barriers.

## C Undertakings by Government and the Voluntary and Community sector

### 1. Ensuring a volunteer-friendly and volunteer-literate policy environment

15. Because volunteers are active in all areas of life, all sections of society need to be volunteering-literate – that is, aware of ways that their actions and decisions may impact on community and voluntary activity, whether for helping or hindering active citizenship. Government plays an overarching strategic role in recognising and enabling the contributions that volunteering and community activity can make to wider social policy objectives.

Undertakings by government

All government departments and agencies should:

16. **Recognise that volunteering is an exercise of the basic human right of freedom to assemble and associate**, and fundamental to democracy.<sup>4</sup>
17. **Recognise the work done unpaid by volunteers as real work**, a substantial social investment that creates social capital and makes a major contribution to national production. Examine how this is shown in national economic accounts, and ensure that employment and economic policy is 'active citizenship-friendly' as well as family-friendly.
18. Ensure that all **proposed legislation, regulations, guidance and practice are proofed for impact on volunteer and community activity and funding**, before being adopted, and that the impact assessment is published.

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<sup>4</sup> *Universal declaration on Volunteering*, United Nations/IAVE, 1990

19. Carry out a baseline audit to **identify how volunteers and community activity contribute to achieving policy and programme objectives**, and the extent of their contribution – whether working directly with or in programmes and projects managed by the department or agency, or by way of independent community and public involvement. This **baseline audit** should be followed up in **annual reports, as part of the Compact review process**.
20. Undertake a baseline audit **to identify aspects of existing policy and practice that create barriers to or discourage volunteering and community activity**, and how to do away with them. Draw up action plans, with measurable and timetabled targets, on these, followed up with annual reports, as part of the overall Compact review process. Current examples of such barriers include:
- status of volunteers in relation to other workers in employment law and tribunals, health and safety, and anti-discrimination.
  - effect of national minimum wage law on benefits in kind for volunteers
  - fees for criminal record screening checks for volunteers
  - welfare benefits rules and how they are applied in practice
  - ensuring that reimbursed volunteer expenses and community exchange credits (eg LETS, timebanks) are not treated as taxable income
  - employer policies on time off for volunteering and community activity
  - consistent criteria on what public duties can be asked of volunteers, and what should be paid
21. **Publish a ‘Think Volunteering’ leaflet**, to increase staff awareness of volunteer contributions to departmental objectives, and how departmental objectives fit with the Active Citizenship, Social Exclusion, Lifelong Learning, Work-Life Balance and other broad social policy objectives relevant to volunteering and community activity.
22. Ensure transparency of the **advertising and bidding process for Government tenders and contracts for volunteering schemes**.

Undertakings for specific departments

23. The **Office for National Statistics should include a question on participation in volunteering and community activity in the next national census**, to provide comprehensive demographic information for comparison with other surveys and research.
24. The **Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions** should, in partnership with the voluntary and community sector, **develop a measure of volunteering and community action for inclusion as one of the Government’s headline Quality of Life sustainability indicators**.

## Undertakings for both sectors

25. Produce and publish their **policies for involving volunteers, with measurable targets** for extending involvement of volunteers.
26. Identify the level and targeting of current resources being put into **funding to support volunteering and community activity**, and the level needed to achieve policy objectives.
27. Examine **management of any volunteers directly involved in their work**, including how they are included in internal information flows, and how their interests and voices are brought into decision-making processes.
28. Examine **whether management boards and committees, especially for partnership initiatives, have or should have a member specifically representing volunteers** contributing to the initiative. In any case, ensure that the board or other decision-making body of any organisation with significant volunteer involvement has at least one member with lead responsibility for volunteer involvement and interests.
29. **Do not assume that if a person brought on board is a volunteer with one or more voluntary or community organisations, that their involvement in any other capacity should therefore be unpaid.** Good practice guidelines need to be drawn up, through consultation, to ensure parity of status, treatment and back-up resources for community or lay members of public bodies.
30. Ensure that **all annual, project and other reports acknowledge the nature, extent and value of any volunteer contributions** to their work.

## 2. Recognising the work that volunteers contribute

### Undertakings by government

31. **Ensure that encouragement to get involved in volunteering does not tip over into coercion or compulsion.** Volunteer involvement must always be a free choice – which implies freedom not to get involved.
32. Recognise that in return for their **contribution as active citizens, volunteers are entitled to recognition and support from wider government policy and practice.** Examine how this applies to the welfare benefits and pensions systems.
33. **Examine employment guidance and practices, in partnership with employer bodies in all sectors, to encourage ‘citizenship-friendly’ employment practices**, allowing time off for volunteering the same weight as time off for family responsibilities and public duties. Adopt citizenship-friendly employment rules for public employees as a role model for other employers – see Panel 2.

Valuing volunteer involvement -- undertakings for volunteer-involving bodies in all sectors

34. Ensure that **annual and project reports acknowledge the nature and extent of volunteer work contributed**. This may form part of a wider social audit.
35. Recognise that as part of the reciprocal relationship, **volunteers are entitled to expect thanks and recognition for their contribution as a minimum, and fair treatment, training and support** according to the resources of the organisation with which they are involved.
36. **Examine training and education policy and practices, in partnership with relevant accreditation bodies**, to encourage and enable (but not compel) accreditation of skills acquired through volunteering for recognised qualifications.

### 3. Investing in volunteering and community activity

Volunteers and community activists give their time free – but need resources with which to work. Ensuring volunteers and community activists are not left out of pocket because of their voluntary involvement is the key to enabling people on lower incomes to become involved. This section should be read in conjunction with the Code of Practice on Funding, which should in turn cross-refer to this.

Undertakings for Government

37. Ensure that relevant **spending programmes set targets for spending on voluntary community involvement**, and monitor the quantity and quality of such involvement.
38. Ensure that **departmental and other public bodies' budgets allocate funds and other necessary resources to support relevant volunteering and community action**, including provision for employee time off for volunteering.
39. For many volunteers – especially those working with unfunded organisations, without budgets to reimburse expenses -- other **forms of public support to ensure that volunteer involvement in community activity does not mean being left out of pocket are needed**. Work to identify how these might be fitted into benefit, tax, and other community funding frameworks is needed.

Undertakings for funders and service purchasers in all sectors

40. Make clear that you expect **to resource and support good volunteer management practice** whenever volunteers are to be involved in projects you fund.
41. **Consider where volunteer involvement is or should be an objective, and where it is, give priority for funding to projects that encourage and develop volunteering**, or involve volunteers.



42. **Guidance notes, application forms and other information materials** produced by funders and service purchasers should make clear that:
- any volunteer work and involvement should be identified,
  - resources to support and manage volunteer involvement should be budgeted for, and
  - the funder/purchaser recognises good practice in volunteer management as an essential aspect of community involvement and partnership.
43. **Where match funding is required, auditable records of volunteer time donated should be accepted as equal in status to private money.** For poorer areas or communities, people's volunteer time may be the only form of community investment that can be afforded.<sup>5</sup>
44. Acknowledge that **short-term funding may create problems for attracting, retaining, motivating and supporting individual volunteers.** Poor experiences of volunteering don't just affect the individual volunteer and organisation, but detract from wider public perception of volunteering.

Resourcing and recognising volunteer management: undertakings by volunteer managers in all sectors

45. **Work carried out by volunteers needs to be budgeted for**, including office or other space and equipment to work with and management or peer support.
46. **Recognise the importance of high standards and effective management of volunteers, and that fulfilling this responsibility requires allocation of organisational resources**, the most basic of which is dedicated paid staff time.
47. **Identify a senior manager who will take lead responsibility for volunteer involvement**, and for monitoring and reporting on it. Also identify a board level champion for volunteering.
48. **Staff recruiting, inducting and managing volunteers should have this work recognised as part of their job descriptions and work plans**, and receive appropriate training and organisational back-up
49. **Funded organisations should as a minimum offer to reimburse actual out-of-pocket expenses incurred.**
50. **Ensure proper records are kept** of how funding supports volunteering, and the value this produces.

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<sup>5</sup> Several standard frameworks for assigning monetary equivalents to volunteer hours exist. They include local 'going rate' for identifiable types of work; national average hourly wage rate. Some funders (eg, European Social Fund) produce standard rates they accept for types of work.)

#### 4. Strengthening the volunteering infrastructure organisations

51. Both the Warner report and PAT 9 report highlight the importance of strengthening the local and umbrella agencies that provide a 'volunteering infrastructure.' Volunteering infrastructure bodies are those that match up people interested in volunteering with organisations seeking volunteers, and organise good practice training, support and information networks for organisations that directly involve volunteers. Examples include local volunteer bureaux and councils for voluntary service, and national networks like CSV and, for volunteering overseas, VSO.
52. Many national organisations also provide infrastructural support for networks of affiliated local community groups.

##### Undertakings by Government

53. Recognise the **diversity of routes through which people become involved in volunteering** and the range of volunteering activity associated with them.
54. Recognise the **essential role played by volunteer bureaux, councils for voluntary service and similar local umbrella agencies, and overseas development agencies**, in supporting volunteer and community activity programmes in this country and overseas through brokering placements, advice and training, and ensure that these volunteering infrastructure bodies can rely on sustainable long-term funding to develop effective support for volunteering involvement and good practice. Similarly recognise the infrastructural support provided by many national umbrella bodies providing support, guidance and resources, for volunteers and community activists in their local affiliates or member groups.
55. **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.
56. **Support regional networking among volunteering infrastructure bodies**, and ensure these networks are involved and consulted as key social partners in all aspects of regional policy-making.
57. Working in partnership with the volunteering and community sectors, **review the strengths and weaknesses of local volunteering information and infrastructure**, and make recommendations based on best practice examples identified.

##### Undertakings by volunteering infrastructure organisations

58. **To use public funding received to provide the following** at local level:
- Identification and dissemination of examples of good practice
  - Promotion of the awareness and practice of volunteering in their local communities to individuals, groups, and volunteer involvers

- Collection and dissemination of information on volunteering
- Recruitment and referral of volunteers to agencies and matching them to tasks and roles
- Arrangements for supporting and training volunteers and volunteer involvers
- Development of new opportunities and projects involving volunteers
- Arrangements for liaison with other agencies and for encouraging community involvement
- Development, monitoring and evaluation of strategies and methods for informing people about volunteering.
- Maintaining registers of potential volunteers with professional expertise in areas such as law, management, accountancy and IT who would be willing to make their expertise available to small voluntary and community groups.

59. **Assist organisations seeking to link their volunteers with training accreditation and qualification bodies.** Consultation on how these links might best be set up and resourced is recommended.

60. **Develop links with local benefit and employment agencies,** to promote better and consistent treatment of volunteers and understanding of how regulations apply to them.

Undertakings by volunteer-involving bodies in all sectors

61. **Develop systems for onward referral of surplus volunteers or those unsuited to their needs,** to ensure that volunteers' potential is not wasted. Volunteering infrastructure bodies should provide support for these systems.

62. **Help potential volunteers 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. All organisations providing their local volunteer bureau with information about their volunteering opportunities and needs should be part of this.

63. **Understand the role and objectives of government schemes, and where volunteers can contribute to them** – and how government schemes can help support volunteering.

## 5. Promoting the status and image of volunteering

64. The Government and voluntary and community sector agree that there should be greater publicity for the achievements of volunteers, and that they will work together to expand the public perception of volunteering by improving the profile, status and range of volunteer activity. The Warner report sets out a strategy in pursuit of these shared aims. Actions set out in other sections of this Code will also help the status and image of volunteering.

### Undertakings by Government

- 65. **Support a cross-departmental media and communications strategy celebrating volunteer contributions to quality of life**, which should be developed with and involve the range of volunteering sectors.
- 66. **Support initiatives to provide accessible information about volunteering opportunities and how to join in**, at national, local and international level, including through use of internet technology.
- 67. Continue to support **appropriate recognition** for volunteering and voluntary organisations.

### Undertakings by voluntary sector

- 68. **Actively participate in volunteering events such as Volunteers Week and International Year of Volunteers** to secure greater media coverage and a higher public profile for volunteering and community activity.
- 69. Develop and promote innovative programmes **for rewarding and recognising the contribution of volunteers.**
- 70. Develop partnerships with organisations which promote volunteering or deploy volunteers, and the media, **to encourage greater media coverage of individual volunteers, community activists and special volunteering events.**
- 71. Exploit **new technology to communicate volunteering information.**

## 6. Support best practice in management of volunteering

### Strategic management in all sectors

- 72. **Be aware of good practice, implement and promote it.**
  - 73. **Consider how to make more innovative and strategic use of volunteers**, including as managers, policy-makers and trustees. Consult volunteers and community organisations on this.
  - 74. If an employer, **set up an employee volunteering support programme with senior management leadership and involvement.** See Panel 2.
  - 75. Ensure that **adequate resources and management back-up** are allocated for volunteers and community partners to carry out any work expected of them.
  - 76. Ensure that all **staff whose duties involve working with or managing volunteers or community representatives have this acknowledged in job descriptions and work plans**, and are adequately and appropriately trained and resourced for this work.
  - 77. **In all volunteer-involving initiatives or activities**, act on the good practice outlined in Panel 1 below and throughout this Code.
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## Panel 1: Main elements of volunteer management good practice – for volunteer managers in all sectors

1. Before recruiting volunteers, be clear about what you will ask them to do, why you want to involve volunteers, and the roles it is appropriate for them to fill.
2. Draw up clear role or task descriptions, setting out the work needing to be done, and expectations of what both organisation and volunteer will put in.
3. Provide initial induction and training, to introduce the volunteer to organisational systems and people, and any extra skills required for the work
4. Provide regular supervision by a line manager, on a similar basis as paid staff, to monitor achievements, identify and deal with any problems being encountered, and identify support or training needs.
5. Include volunteers in organisational information flows, and ensure that they have the opportunity to join in organisational decision-making processes, on the same basis as paid staff
6. Consider how the value of what volunteers contribute to the organisation will be monitored and acknowledged, both to the wider public, funders and to the volunteers themselves.
7. Recognise that volunteering sets up a reciprocal relationship between the organisation and volunteer; it is important to ask what volunteers seek from their involvement, and what the organisation can offer them. If there is a mis-match, the relationship will not be satisfactory.
8. Offering to reimburse direct out-of pocket expenses is the minimum a funded organisation should provide. These normally include travel and lunch. Where volunteering involves living away from home, they can also include provision of accommodation and a local living allowance.
9. A range of minor benefits in kind have been customary as tokens of appreciation and thanks to volunteers. Clarification to ensure that national minimum wage legislation doesn't affect this aspect of the reciprocal relationship is urgently required. Clarification of how tax and charity law rules apply is also needed.
10. **Safety:** relevant safety guidelines need to be understood and observed. Generally, good practice is to apply health and safety guidance for employers and workplaces to volunteers. Also ensure that insurance policies extend to cover volunteers working for the organisations.
11. **Training and accreditation:** for many volunteers, acquiring and exercising skills that will improve their employment prospects is an important motivation. This parallels the Government's lifelong learning and employment policy objectives. It is good practice for organisations to help volunteers wanting to gain accreditation towards recognised qualifications for skills exercised in their work to identify and enrol with relevant training bodies, and to seek to provide them with work relevant to their curriculum.
12. Ensure that volunteers are not brought in to do what should be paid work, delivering basic or essential services. This would be exploiting their altruism, as well as depriving someone of a livelihood. Work done by volunteers should provide additional quality, given distinctive character by being done by someone who is doing it because they care and want to help.
13. **Equal opportunities:** is important to the objectives volunteers work towards. Involving volunteers drawn from all sections of the communities an organisation exists to serve can help it ensure its work is accessible and attractive to as wide a user base as possible. Equal opportunities good practice is therefore fundamental to attracting and retaining volunteers.

14. Diversity of images of people involved in the organisation, at all levels, is important in making people of all ethnic groups, ages, disabilities, etc feel that they will be welcome.
  15. Ensuring volunteers are not left out of pocket because of their involvement is important to inclusiveness.
  16. Asking people from a group the organisation is failing to reach what would make people like them find it useful and attractive is the best source of expert advice on including them as volunteers.
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Panel 2: Citizenship-friendly employment good practice  
(for employing organisations in all sectors)

1. Include **time off for volunteer and community activities** in policies on staff time off for public duties and family responsibilities. This may range from a few hours a month to longer-term secondments. Partnership work to develop and promote good practice models is suggested.
  2. Set up **employee volunteering schemes** – which might include guidelines on what organisational resources employees can draw on to assist and supplement their own volunteering activities. Some employers match funds raised by employees, others allow time off up to specific limits to be matched by volunteering in the employees' own time. Some second employees to community or overseas development organisations or projects, organise group activities, or donate use of corporate facilities and equipment.
  3. **Identify forms of volunteer activity compatible with or relevant to the organisation's aims**, and seek to form employee volunteer relationships with community groups, or voluntary or overseas development agencies with similar aims.
  4. **Identify ways that staff development can benefit from voluntary and community activity**, and seek to develop these as part of human resources policy.
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## D Applying this Code

### Baseline audits and annual reporting

78. The baseline audits and annual reports called for in this code should form part of the annual report and review framework set out in the Compact. The Compact framework also includes a range of processes for dealing with compliance, including mediation and complaint to the Parliamentary Ombudsman.

### Application at national and regional level

79. The Government is committed to encouraging other public bodies and local government to adopt or adapt the Compact to enhance their

relationship with the voluntary and community sector. The Government similarly undertakes over time to promote at all tiers within the public sector the general application of the principles contained in this code.

#### Implementation of the code by the Government

80. This code will be implemented by government departments, government regional offices, regional development agencies, executive agencies, and the lottery boards. (References in this document to government departments will be interpreted to cover these other bodies too.) As a second stage, the government will promote the extension of the code to non-departmental public bodies.

#### Local application

81. Local steering groups drafting Local Compacts should look at this code, and may wish to either adapt it to their local circumstances, or incorporate reference to it.

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