

# SUFFOLK COMPACT

## Volunteering and Community Action Code of Practice

**Draft #1**

**This draft code of practice is linked to the principles and values outlined in the Suffolk COMPACT. The objective is to keep it straightforward and as accessible as possible. A more detailed exposition of good practice in Volunteering is made in the national code of practice on consultation. This document applies to Suffolk.**

### **1. Aims**

- This Voluntary Code of Practice sets out agreed undertakings by statutory agencies and the voluntary and community sector in Suffolk on good practice. The aim is to enable and support more people getting involved in the varied forms of voluntary activity that are a vital part of active citizenship.
- In the spirit of the Compact, this code sets out a shared vision of how the statutory agencies, can support and promote voluntary action while respecting volunteers' independence and free choice.

### **2. Definition, principles and scope**

#### Definition

- 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.”

#### The importance of volunteering and community activity.

- 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 many aspects of official policy not intended to affect volunteering and community activity may well impact on some form of volunteering – and / or vice versa.

### **Scope of voluntary and community involvement.**

The scope of voluntary and community involvement includes:

- Helping provide a service as an unpaid volunteer within a voluntary or community organisation, the public sector or a private sector body.
- Taking part in running a voluntary or community organisation, as a trustee or 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.
- In 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 a faith congregation or community

### **Four principles fundamental to volunteering and community activity-**

- **Choice.**

Volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. Any encouragement to become involved in volunteering or community action should not result in any coercion or compulsion. Freedom to volunteer implies freedom to not get involved.

- **Diversity.**

Volunteering should be open to all, no matter 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 in supporting diversity.

- **Reciprocity.**

Volunteers offer their contribution unwaged but should benefit in other ways in return for their contribution to wider social objectives. 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 social economy and to wider social objectives, is fundamental to a fair relationship between volunteers, organisations and policy and practice.

- **Who volunteers? . National or Suffolk Data**

## **3. Undertakings for both sectors**

1. Examine whether **management boards and committees especially for partnership initiatives, have or should have a member representing volunteers.**
2. Examine **management of any volunteers** to ensure that their interests and voices are taken into account and that they are included in internal communications.
3. **Annual and project reports should acknowledge the nature and extent of volunteer work contributed.**
4. Recognise as part of the reciprocal relationship, **volunteers should be given thanks and recognition for their contribution at the very least. They should get fair training and support** according to the resources of the organisation with which they are involved.
5. **In partnership with relevant accreditation bodies,** encourage and enable (but do not compel) accreditation of skills acquired through volunteering for recognised qualifications.

6. **Ensure that volunteers are not exploited by assuming that if a person is a volunteer with one or more organisations, their involvement with any other organisation or project should be unpaid.** Good practice guidelines need to be drawn up, through consultation, to ensure equal status, treatment and back-up resources.

## 4. Undertakings by Statutory Agencies

Because volunteers are active in all areas of life, all decision-makers need to be volunteering literate – that is, aware of ways that their actions and decisions may affect community and volunteer activity. The Statutory Bodies can play a vital strategic role here by helping volunteering and community activity to contribute to wider social policy objectives,

All departments and agencies should:

1. **Recognise that volunteering is an exercise of the basic human right of freedom to assemble and associate,** and fundamental to democracy.
2. **Recognise the value of unpaid work by volunteers as equivalent to paid work.** Volunteering is a substantial social investment that creates social capital and makes a major contribution to production in the County of Suffolk.
3. Ensure that all **proposed policies and practice are checked for impact on voluntary and community activity and funding,** before being adopted.
4. **Increase staff awareness** of volunteer contributions to objectives.
5. Ensure transparency of the **advertising and bidding process for tenders and contracts for volunteering schemes.**
6. Recognise that in return for their **contribution as active citizens, volunteers should expect recognition and support from the wider public sector and practice.**
7. **In partnership with employer bodies in all sectors encourage ‘citizenship friendly’ employment practices,** that allow time off for volunteering. Adopt citizen-friendly employment rules for public employees as a role model for other employers.
8. Relevant **spending programmes should set targets for spending on voluntary and community involvement,** and monitor quantity and quality of the involvement.

9. Adopt policies that ensure volunteering infrastructure bodies can rely on **realistic long term funding**.
10. **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 set up new structures.
11. Make clear that you expect **to resource and support good volunteer management practice** whenever volunteers are to be involved in projects you fund.
12. **Consider where volunteer involvement is or should be an objective. Where it is, give appropriate priority to projects that encourage and develop volunteering,** or involve volunteers.
13. **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 recognises good practice in volunteer management as an essential aspect of community involvement and partnership.
14. **Where match funding is required, auditable records of volunteer time donated should be accepted as equal in status to money.** For poorer areas of communities, people's volunteer time may be the only form of community investment that can be afforded.
15. recognise that **short-term funding creates problems for attracting, retaining, 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.

## 5. Undertakings by the Voluntary & Community Sector

1. **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 these is dedicated paid staff time.

2. **Activity carried out by volunteers needs to be budgeted for**, including office or other space, equipment to work with and management or peer support.
3. **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 support.
4. **Funded organisations should offer to reimburse out-of-pocket expenses incurred, including care costs.**
5. **Ensure proper records are kept** of how funding supports volunteering and the value this produces.
6. Ensure **volunteers are brought into policy-making processes** – both internal decision-making and responses to consultation.

## **6. Undertakings by voluntary infrastructure groups**

**Infra-structure groups agree to use public funding received to provide the following** at a local level:

1. Identification and dissemination of examples of good practice, including ways of increasing the diversity of volunteering opportunities
2. Advice to both statutory and voluntary agencies on matters of volunteer management
3. Promotion of the awareness and practice of volunteering in their local communities.
4. Support for voluntary groups

## **7. Scope & application of the code**

The Code of Good Practice is not a legally binding document. Recognising the diversity of the sector and its activities, it should be seen as an enabling mechanism to enhance the relationship between the statutory bodies and the sector. Its authority is derived from its endorsement by both through the consultation process. The Code applies to all signatories to the Suffolk Compact.

Following the good practice in this guidance will be the responsibilities of all in the Suffolk Compact. Where they do not follow this good practice, they must satisfy themselves that. If asked, they have good reasons for not doing so.

The Suffolk Compact will encourage other public bodies to adopt and adapt the Compact and its associated Codes of Good Practice.

As part of the process of making the Compact work there will an annual meeting of signatories from both statutory agencies and the Sector to review the Compact's operation & development, including the Code on Consultation. The report will be published & placed in public libraries.

## Appendix 1

### MANAGEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS

1. Prior to recruitment, be clear about why you want/need volunteers.
2. Provide the volunteer with a clear **role/task description**, identifying anticipated requirement/s of the organisation. Ensure that the work and contribution of the volunteer adds quality and value to the organisation's aims and objectives.
3. Provide the volunteer with an initial induction and training programme. Ask what they seek from their placement and share with them what you want. Remember – any placement should be by mutual consent
4. Provide appropriate **line management**.
5. Add volunteers to organisation charts. Encourage them to participate in the organisation's wider **decision-making** process.
6. **Monitor and acknowledge** the contribution volunteers make to the organisation, to the wider public, to funders and other volunteers.
7. Always offer to reimburse out-of-pocket expenses. These normally include travel and where appropriate a meal allowance. Where the placement is away from home, this might also include accommodation and subsistence.
8. 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.
9. Provide opportunities for them to acquire new (or develop existing) skills and also assist those wanting to gain recognised qualifications.
10. Volunteers should not be recruited to **fill the place of paid staff**. This could be perceived as exploitation or deprivation of someone's livelihood.

11. Ensure that Equal Opportunities and / or diversity policies are in place and applied equally to volunteers. Examine the ways of working that may pose a barrier for some members.
12. Encourage and promote a range of employees at all levels. This will help volunteers of different ethnic groups, ages disabilities, etc, feel welcome.
13. Try asking volunteers from groups that the organisation has previously failed to reach what would make volunteering appealing to them.

## **Appendix 2**

### **WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO**

1. Have time-off policies for volunteering and community activities in line with leave policies for public duties and family responsibilities. This may range from a few hours off a month to longer-term secondment.
2. Establish employee volunteering schemes. Provide guidelines on what the organisation will provide (e.g. use of accommodation/facilities; match-funding; time-off in lieu; secondments) to assist employees who volunteer.
3. Identify volunteering and community activities with the organisation's aims. Develop links and relationships with voluntary and community groups.
4. Incorporate voluntary and community into staff and human resources policies.