



Equal Opportunities Policies

Introduction.

Equality is a statutory responsibility for anyone providing a service etc. This information sheet explains why an organisation needs an equal opportunities policy, how to go about developing one, what needs to go into it and how to introduce it to an organisation.

The object of an equal opportunities policy is to set out clearly how you will go about combating discrimination and how you will promote equal opportunities in your organisation.

Why is an equal opportunities policy necessary?

Most Voluntary & Community Organisations want their services to be available to all without discrimination, however it is possible to quite unintentionally discriminate against certain sections of the community particularly minority or disadvantaged groups. Ask yourselves do you cater equally for all, is everyone welcome regardless of their race, sex, ability, sexual orientation political or religious beliefs etc. do you know everyone in your group feels the same way and if they don't what can you do about it?

An equal opportunities policy is simply a written policy, which sets out how your organisation is going to make sure it really is "open to all". Many funders require groups to have this policy so that they are reassured their money will be well used and they are supporting inclusive groups.

What does an equal opportunities policy consist of?

Usually a policy has two sections. It will start with a **statement of intent** which sets out broadly why you are adopting an equal opportunities policy and what you intend to do. Secondly it will include a **code of practice**, which describes in more detail what you will do to implement the statement of intent. The code of practice should be very practical, not high-flown ideas, you also need to be realistic and not expect to achieve everything immediately. Sometimes a third element is included called a **code of conduct**, this is a statement you can display and/or circulate within your organisation making it clear everyone will be treated properly and equally and what steps you will take to ensure this (an example of a simple code of conduct is on page 3).

An example of a very simple statement is.

We fully accept and welcome that society consists of many diverse groups and individuals and this diversity is an asset to the community, we also recognise that certain groups and individuals are discriminated against and we are opposed to this.

We recognise that we have a moral and legal responsibility to promote equal opportunities and we will pursue equality in all of our work.

Adopting and implementing an equal opportunities policy.

Hopefully this should not be difficult as it is simply a way of emphasising what is already the laws of the land and is probably part of your organisation's Objects, however it is essential that in adopting the policy your members understand why it is important and you may need to arrange some training or information sharing sessions. Once written, the policy must be agreed at, and recorded in the minutes of, a management committee meeting.

Your policy can start life as a quite simple document which you can develop as your organisation grows.

Equal Opportunities Policy Example.

You could start your policy with a Statement of Intent (see above) then follow with;

This document has been prepared to set out Uptown Voluntary Group's commitment and as a statement of its intent. The Policy will be reviewed annually to ensure effective implementation.

Uptown Voluntary Group is an Equal Opportunities Organisation. It is committed to the development of policies to provide for equality of opportunity in all aspects of its work. We will work to ensure that all our services are provided in a way that promotes awareness of the rights and needs of people from minority groups and enables all people to access to them.

Uptown Voluntary Group will take whatever steps are necessary including, if appropriate, use of the disciplinary mechanisms laid out in the code of conduct, to enforce the Policy. In addition, anyone connected to our organisation, helper, staff member or volunteer who considers that he/she is suffering from unequal treatment on any grounds may use this policy to bring it to the committee's attention for action.

The Management Committee will bring to the attention of all members, staff and volunteers the provisions of the policy and will provide such training as is necessary to ensure the effective implementation of the Policy.

The Management Committee shall have responsibility for the operation of the Policy. However, all staff, volunteers and members have a duty to do everything they can to ensure that the Policy operates in practice.

Example of a Code of Conduct.

- People will be treated with dignity and respect regardless of race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion or age.
- At all times people's feelings will be valued and respected. Language or humour that people find offensive will not be used, e.g. sexist or racist jokes or terminology that is deemed derogatory.
- No one will be harassed, abused, excluded or intimidated on the grounds of their race, sex, age, nationality, disability, religion or sexual orientation.
- Foul, insulting, abusive or racist remarks will not be tolerated from anyone associated with the organisation and behaviour of this type may lead to expulsion from the organisation. Incidents of harassment will be taken seriously. If the matter cannot be resolved by way of an acceptable apology and an undertaking that the offence will not be repeated, the following action will be taken:
 1. The person in question will be requested to attend a meeting of the full Management Committee/Board to explain their actions
 2. In the case of a helper/volunteer, action may be taken as appropriate and if deemed necessary their involvement with the organisation may cease.
 3. In a case involving a member of the organisation, membership to the organisation may be withdrawn.

Any directly involved person has the right to appeal against a decision made by the management committee who will consider that appeal before a decision is made and that decision will be final.

Further information about Equal Opportunities can be found by going to www.equalityhumanrights.com, the website for the Equality and Human Rights Commission – Equality Commission, Equality Act.

For further information

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