

Quick Guide:

Policies your Organisation should have

A Guide for Community and Voluntary Organisations

Policies ensure that everyone works in the same way and the organisation functions smoothly and consistently. They can also be used to demonstrate to the public or to funders that your organisation is committed to certain principles. It is important to train staff and volunteers in your policies and it is also good practice to review them regularly to ensure they are still fit for your purpose.

Basic requirements

At the very least, your organisation should have policies which will help to keep you working within the law. To a certain extent this will depend on the type of work you do. For example, if you work with children or vulnerable adults you need to have policies in place which protect your clients and keep you within the current law regarding criminal checks etc.

In general terms, all voluntary organisations should have the following policies as a minimum:

Health and Safety

- Health and Safety legislation can be something of a grey area for voluntary organisations so it is recommended that you seek advice on the law and how it applies to you before you draft your policy.
- In basic terms your organisation has a 'duty of care' to avoid carelessly causing injury to anyone. This is a general legal duty which applies regardless of the size of the organisation, its income or whether the organisation has paid staff.
- If you employ any paid staff, the legislation is more stringent. If your organisation has volunteers and paid staff it is good practice for your policy to treat them as equal in terms of your commitment to their health and safety.

Equal Opportunities/Diversity

- The law does not require you to have an equal opportunities policy, but it is widely accepted as good practice and many funders require one when you apply for grant funding. Having a broad-ranging policy in place sends a strong message that your organisation will not tolerate unfair discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion or disability.
- Your policy should cover recruitment practices for staff, volunteers, members and trustees, working conditions, accessibility, how you deal with harassment and how you promote your organisation and provide your activities.

Child/vulnerable adult protection

- Many organisations exist to care for children or people who are vulnerable because of their physical or mental ability or health. Many more carry out activities which children or vulnerable people might participate in from time to time. This type of policy is therefore relevant to a high proportion of groups.
- Your board of trustees is responsible for ensuring that those benefiting from your work are not harmed in any way through contact with your organisation.

According to the Charity Commission and the NSPCC, your policy should establish the following principles:

- the welfare of the child/vulnerable adult is paramount;
- all children/vulnerable adults without exception have the right to protection from abuse
- all suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately
- all the organisations trustees, staff and volunteers have a responsibility to report concerns.

Volunteers

- Your volunteers need to know what they can be expected to do, how their expenses will be met and where they can go if things go wrong. The volunteer policy should set these things out, ensuring consistency and clarity for everyone in the organisation and showing its commitment to its volunteers.

For more information on developing policies relating to Volunteers please download the information sheet 'Involving People in your Organisation' which is available from www.devonva.org/information_and_guidance

Complaints

- Don't wait for a complaint to be made before developing a complaints procedure. You should make sure that everyone in your organisation understands the procedure and it should include details of:
 - what someone should do if they have a complaint
 - how their complaint will be investigated
 - how long the investigation will be expected to take
 - who will investigate and respond to the complainant
 - what they should do if they remain dissatisfied.

Data Protection and Confidentiality

- The **Data Protection Act** is the part of the law that lays down the rules and principles of handling, processing, collecting, storing, editing, or destroying personal information.
- If your organisation handles personal information, you must work in accordance with the eight principles of the Act but you also have additional legal responsibilities. For

example, you must register with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), with some exceptions (for instance, personal information that is being used for staff administration only, including payroll, accounts and records). You will also need to answer personal access requests from any individual concerned (the person who you hold information about).

- You may also have a separate confidentiality policy, the extent of which will depend on the nature of your work. However, you will probably need to collect personal information of some kind, whether that is a newsletter mailing list, a record of donors or a database of volunteers. Your confidentiality policy should therefore ensure that you deal with this information in accordance with the law – specifically the Data Protection Act 1998.
- This should not worry you unduly as for the most part what the law requires is common sense. The Data Protection Act says that organisations must keep the information they hold accurate and up to date, that they must only keep it for as long as they need it for a specified purpose, and that they must keep it secure. Guidance and advice to help you draft your policy is available from the Information Commissioner's Office at www.ico.gov.uk / 01625 545 745 or 0303 123 1113.

Writing your policies

- Writing policies should be a result of discussion and agreement about what is right for your organisation. When drafting a new or revised policy, it is essential to involve and consult everyone who will be directly affected by it.
- Aim to set out broad principles which can be applied as your organisation develops. Your group may have an umbrella body which has already drawn up policies or you may know of a similar organisation which is prepared to share theirs with you. Looking at existing policies can provide a useful guide, but don't be tempted to simply copy them and change the name. All your policies should be directly relevant to what you do.
- Most importantly, don't file your policies away where no-one can find them. Ensure all staff and volunteers are trained on the appropriate policies and that they are reviewed regularly.

Next steps

- Once you have your basic policies in place, you will probably want to extend your range. These could cover general management issues, such as employment, finances or volunteers, or they could be specific to your type of work.

For more information and support contact DeVA on 0845 6099901 or email us at support@devonva.org The full range of Information sheet are available to download at http://www.devonva.org/information_and_guidance