



Developing an Equalities and Diversity Policy

What do we mean by an equalities and diversity?

Equality is simply about making sure that people are treated fairly and given equal access to opportunities and resources. Equality is not about treating everyone in the same way, it is about treating everyone fairly, with respect and recognises that people from different backgrounds may have needs that are met in different ways.

Diversity is about valuing individual difference. Diversity challenges us to recognise and value all sorts of differences that exist when people work together in order to build stronger communities and harmonious environments for the benefit of all.

People come from a wide variety of backgrounds and we can be different from one another in many different ways. These can include differences that are highlighted in current equality legislation such as race, religion and sex but also include things like our personality, personal interests and lifestyle choices, such as being a vegetarian or a smoker.

Why is promoting equality and diversity important?

Equality and diversity are becoming more important in all aspects of our lives for a number of reasons.

- We live in an increasingly diverse society and need to be able to understand and respect diversity and respond appropriately and sensitively to difference in others.
- Management committees, volunteers and the people who benefit from their work will reflect this diversity in many ways including ethnic and community background, gender, religion, political opinion, disability, sexuality and age.

- The successful implementation of equality and diversity standards in all aspects of volunteering will help to provide a good and harmonious environment for all. It will also ensure that volunteers, employees and service users are all valued, respected, motivated and treated fairly.
- We all have the right to be protected from discrimination and harassment. We also have a responsibility not to discriminate against others.

What do we mean by discrimination?

Essentially, we mean treating someone unfairly in some way because of their background but this can happen in different ways and for different reasons.

In the UK we have an equality and human rights legal framework which covers things like employment, housing, education and service delivery. It provides protection for everyone based on a specific list of equality grounds:

Equality Grounds: gender; gender reassignment; being married or in a civil partnership; pregnancy or maternity leave; religious belief and / or political opinion; race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins, being an Irish Traveller; disability; sexual orientation; age.

Equality legislation also identifies a number of types of discrimination that people need protection from:

- Direct discrimination occurs where a person is treated less favourably than other persons and where the only reason for the treatment is on one or more of the equality grounds.
- Indirect discrimination occurs where a provision, criterion or practice is applied equally to everyone but puts people from a particular background at a disadvantage compared to others; and which is not a reasonable and proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.
- Disability discrimination: One of the most notable features of the disability discrimination legislation is that in prescribed circumstances it imposes a duty on employers and service providers to make reasonable adjustments in order to remove or reduce disadvantages suffered by disabled people in those circumstances.

The duty to make reasonable adjustments may require that policies, practices and procedures are modified or waived; or that certain physical features of premises are

removed, altered or avoided; or that auxiliary aids or services are provided. A failure to comply with the duty, when it arises, is a form of disability discrimination.

Harassment is unwanted conduct which is related to any of the equality grounds and which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or of creating an intimidating, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person. Many forms of behaviour can constitute harassment including physical assault, using derogatory language and visual or written material containing derogatory words or images.

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An equality and diversity policy is simply a written agreement for your group about how you will avoid discriminating against people, and how you will create a safe and inclusive atmosphere for your members and service users. It will also help you to know how to manage a situation in which someone has been treated unfairly or disrespectfully within your group.

It is important to think about equality and diversity because some individuals, groups and communities are more likely to face discrimination, harassment and exclusion in society. Community groups can ignore or discriminate against particular disadvantaged groups unintentionally, without realising this is what is happening.

Thinking about what you can do about this will help you create an environment which is as safe and inclusive as possible for anyone who would like to join and participate in your group.

Your equality and diversity policy does not have to be long. The most important things are that you have thought about what you put in it and that you can and will do what you have said.

Sample Model Equality and Diversity Policy

Introduction

..... (Name of Group) accepts that in society certain groups or individuals are denied equality on the grounds of race, gender, marital status, caring responsibilities, disability, gender re-assignment, age, social class, sexual orientation and religion/belief or any other factor irrelevant to the purpose in view.

..... (Name of Group) recognises that it has moral and social responsibilities that go beyond the provisions of the above-mentioned Acts and Regulations, and that it should support and contribute to the wider process of change through all aspects of its work and practices in order to eliminate discrimination and promote equality and diversity.

We are committed to taking positive steps to ensure that:

- all people are treated with dignity and respect, valuing the diversity of all.
- equality of opportunity and diversity is promoted.
- services are accessible, appropriate and delivered fairly to all.
- the mix of its volunteers and management committees reflects, as far as possible, the broad mix of the population of its local community.

Policy

This policy applies to all volunteers, management committee members, users and the general public.

Commitment

Equality and diversity are central to the work of (Name of Group). We will treat all people with dignity and respect, valuing the diversity of all. It will promote equality of opportunity and diversity. It will eliminate all forms of discrimination on grounds of race, gender, marital status, caring responsibilities, disability, gender re-assignment, age, social class, sexual orientation, religion/ belief, irrelevant offending background or any other factor irrelevant to the purpose in view. It will tackle social exclusion, inequality, discrimination and disadvantage.

Aims

We aim to:

- Provide services that are accessible according to need.
- Promote equality of opportunity and diversity in volunteering, employment and development.
- Create effective partnerships with all parts of our community.

Objectives

Our objective is to realise its standards by:

- Sustaining, regularly evaluating and continually improving its services to ensure equality and diversity principles and best practice are embedded in our performance to meet the needs of individuals and groups.
- Working together with the community to provide accessible and relevant service provision that responds to service users' needs.
- Ensuring staff, volunteers and trustees are representative of the community served and the employment policies are fair and robust.
- Responding to volunteer's & employees' needs and encouraging their development to increase their contribution to effective service delivery.
- Recognising and valuing the differences and individual contribution that all people make to our group.
- Challenging discrimination.
- Providing fair resource allocation.
- Being accountable.

Procedures

This policy covers the behaviour of all people volunteering with our group or using the services and sets out the way they can expect to be treated in turn by our group. The overall responsibility for ensuring adherence to and implementation of this policy lies with the management committee.

We will ensure that the management committee, volunteers and users are made aware, understand, agree with, and are willing to implement, this policy. All volunteers will be given a copy of this policy as part of their induction. We will actively encouraging

Trustees, staff, management committee and volunteers to participate in anti-discriminatory training and making time and resources available for such training.

We will regularly monitor the services, publicity and events provided by the group to ensure that they are accessible to all sections of the population and do not discriminate, and take active steps to ensure that participation is representative.

Monitoring and Reviewing

..... (Name of Group) has declared its commitment to establishing, developing, implementing and reviewing a policy of equality of opportunity. Effective record keeping and monitoring, and acting on information gathered, are essential in order to measure effectiveness and plan progress. The management committee will review the policy annually.