

Sunderland Compact: Volunteering Code of Practice

Introduction

What is the Volunteering Code of Practice?

This Volunteering Code of Practice sets out the principles and undertakings for both the organisations of the Sunderland Partnership and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations in Sunderland on how to work together to support and promote volunteering.

Organisations of the Sunderland Partnership and VCS organisations want to increase the pool of volunteers across our city, and to recruit more volunteers from under represented sections of the community. This Code of Practice sets out commitments to improve volunteering and resolve potential problems and so enable more people to become involved in varied forms of voluntary activity.

This code of practice should be read in conjunction with the Sunderland Compact document.

Understanding Volunteering

Volunteering is 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, such as volunteering to provide a service as a volunteer within an organisation, befriending and mentoring, organising sports and physical recreation, acting as a trustee or member of a voluntary board or committee, leading a voluntary initiative, community activism or campaigning to identify and tackle unmet needs. It is undertaken freely, through personal choice and not for financial gain.

People volunteer for many different reasons. They may choose to volunteer to develop skills or gain experience, to socialise or to give something back to society. They may also volunteer because they feel a moral duty or compelling reasons to take part in voluntary action or support a particular cause. The key element is that it is freely undertaken.

There can be significant barriers that stop people from volunteering. The organisations of the Sunderland Partnership and VCS will challenge barriers to volunteering through their policy and practice. Potential barriers to volunteering include, but are not exhaustive of:-

Age, time, disability, money, perception, benefits, transport, skills and experience.

We understand the term volunteering to include formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations, as well as informal community participation and campaigning. For the purpose of this Code of Practice, volunteering is defined as:-

'An activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups other than (or in addition to) close relatives'.¹

The Importance and Scope of Volunteering

Because volunteers are active in all areas of life, all decision-makers need to be aware of ways that their actions and decisions may affect volunteering and voluntary activity. Organisations of the Sunderland Partnership and VCS can play a vital strategic role by supporting and enabling volunteering and community activity.

Volunteering is a powerful force for change, both for those who volunteer and for the wider community. Volunteers offer support, expertise and innovation to any organisation, enhancing impact and adding value.

Key Principles

Sunderland Partnership and VCS organisations need to consider the possible impact of their decisions on volunteers. When doing this they should support these four principles of volunteering:

1. Volunteering must be the result of free choice by the volunteer. Freedom to volunteer also implies freedom not to become involved;
2. Volunteering must be open to everyone, no matter what their background, needs and personal circumstances e.g. ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, religion or disability.
3. Volunteer's contribution must be worthwhile, this should include the opportunity to gain new skills and develop existing talents whilst making friends and having fun;
4. Volunteer contributions must be measured, recognised and celebrated. This includes recognising the contribution to the organization, the community, the social economy and wider social objectives.

Sunderland Partnership organisations and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations commit to:

- Work together to encourage best practice in recruiting and supporting volunteers
- Identify and support the implementation of all proposed legislation and policies that impact on volunteering.
- Recognise and celebrate the contribution of volunteers.
- Safeguarding vulnerable people.

¹ *Building on success Report*, Volunteering England, www.volunteering.org.uk

Sunderland Partnership organisations commit to:

- Work to eliminate current barriers, including financial barriers to volunteering
- Increase awareness of the value of volunteering and promote opportunities to volunteer
- Increase the number of volunteering opportunities
- Gather relevant data on volunteering

Voluntary and Community Sector organisations commit to:

- Improve access, advice and information on volunteering opportunities
- Identify the current barriers to volunteering and support their elimination
- Give appropriate training and support to volunteers
- Assist volunteers to find appropriate roles
- Promote and encourage partnership working
- Promote the mutual and individual benefits of volunteering

Further information on the Sunderland Compact is available at www.sunderlandcompact.org.uk