**Equal Opportunities Policy**





# 1. Introduction

Community organisations will be aware that in our present society power is not shared equally and that groups and individuals have been and continue to be discriminated against on the basis of race, sex, disability and so on. Community Matters urges that measures to combat all direct and indirect discrimination be introduced into all community organisations.

Developing appropriate policies and practices concerning equality and diversity, however, are not just about writing an Equal Opportunities Policy. Any organisation needs to be aware of the demands of equality and diversity and to develop appropriate policies to ensure that those demands are met. The policy on equality will aim to ensure that people are treated fairly and given fair chances. This is not a case of treating everyone the same, but about recognising that different people have different needs which will be met in different ways.

The law focuses on equality in different areas, namely race, gender, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marriage/civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment and age. The law on all these topics is to be found in technical guidance note *‘Equality Act 2010’* In all these areas the law acts to prevent discrimination, especially but not entirely in the field of employment. Furthermore, under the new integrated Equality Duty all public bodies are under a duty to promote equality and to combat discrimination and harassment in the existing areas of race, gender and disability and gender reassignment in full, age, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

**Equality** is about preventing discrimination on grounds of status and enabling opportunities, access, participation and contribution that is fair and inclusive.

**Diversity** is about valuing individual differences. Its aim is to enable everyone to reach their full potential and to make an organisation better by ensuring that both employees and committee members recognise and value the differences between them and the value which this brings to the organisation. It is easier for individuals to approach an organisation which is itself diverse and which recognises and values that diversity.

This Guidance Note aims to cover Equal Opportunities Policies specifically, and to answer the following questions:

* Why is a policy necessary in order to promote equal opportunity for all?
* What does an Equal Opportunities Policy consist of?
* What steps can be taken to adopt and implement an equal opportunities policy in your organisation?
* What is positive action and why should it play a part?
* Where can you go for further advice and assistance?

# 2. An Equality and Diversity Policy

An equality and diversity policy is more than just an Equal Opportunities Policy. It is a statement of how the organisation will work with the different communities that make up the organisation and its users.

Diversity is **not** a replacement for equal opportunity. A diversity approach without equality practices will fail to combat discrimination against the most vulnerable groups.

## 2.1 The Business Case for Equality and Diversity

If an organisation is to deliver a high quality of service, then it needs to be aware of the reasons why equality and diversity is fundamental to that aim. Some of the reasons for adopting an equality and diversity policy are as follows:

* The recruitment of talented individuals is easier, since the market place is larger;
* There is evidence of a link between the progress of an organisation and how it performs in the areas of equality and diversity;
* Managing equality and diversity helps to improve the health and well-being of the local population and to reduce inequalities;
* It promotes a framework in which people are treated differently but with equal respect and fairness;
* Compliance with the relevant legislation is considerably cheaper than noncompliance;
* It demonstrates that the organisation has a flexible approach;
* The organisation is better equipped to prepare for and deal with new legislation;  Most funders insist on an equal opportunities policy.

## 2.2 Equality Impact Assessments

An equality impact assessment (EQIA) is a way of carrying out an audit of an organisation‟s policies, functions and services (or ones that are proposed) to determine whether they affect people differently, or have the potential to do so. The intention is to ensure that as far as possible any negative consequences, for a particular group, sector of the community or staff of the public body are identified and eliminated or minimised. .

An EQIA will identify ways in which an organisation‟s policies, functions and services operate to promote or to hinder equality and discrimination.

An impact assessment:

* Considers the organisation‟s current (or proposed) policies, functions and services;
* Determines what their aims and objectives are;
* Decides whether the policy is directed towards achieving that aim or objective;
* Ascertains ways in which the objective is hindered by a failure to consider issues of equality and diversity;
* Makes decisions to enable those gaps to be filled;
* Implements the decisions; and
* Monitors their success or otherwise with a view to a review.

All public bodies have a duty to carry out EQIAs.

It is also important for voluntary and community sector groups to know about EQIAs:

* If you are a voluntary or community group contracted to provide a public service, you may be required to produce EQIAs.

* It will benefit you group to start using them anyway since EQIAs will help to bring

equality into the mainstream.

* It will help you to determine the effects of a proposed policy/project and act as a guard against potential discrimination.

**3. What is Positive Action?**

We need to take action to promote equal opportunities because discrimination and disadvantage exist. Positive action simply means taking active steps to compensate for past or present discrimination or disadvantage. This may mean providing opportunities, support or training for disadvantaged people to help them to gain access to services, or to equip them to be considered equally for particular kinds of work or voluntary responsibilities.

Positive action is **not** positive discrimination. It is not about discriminating against people, for instance white people, able-bodied people, well-educated people. It is about taking steps to ensure that people who have been discriminated against, for instance people from black and ethnic minority communities, people with disabilities[[1]](#footnote-1), or gay people, have equal access to all the facilities and services of the society they live in. No-one would imagine that they were discriminating against people who are able-bodied by spending funds on installing wheelchair access or a lift in a community centre!

In the selection of staff or volunteers, positive action means ensuring the widest range of people have the chance to apply. It also means ensuring that people who are selected on merit, who have particular needs, have the support they need. It does **not** mean giving preference to someone simply because of their race or disability, unless that is a genuine occupational qualification.

In general, positive action means doing our utmost to ensure that **everyone** has access to the services and activities, and to the job opportunities, which our movement provides.

Here are some practical examples of areas which may need positive action:

1. Can everyone get to your activities, or if not why not? Do you need to provide transport and/or a crèche, or change the timing or even the location? Are there other adjustments you should/could make?

1. Can everyone afford to come, or do you need to set some concessionary prices?

1. Can everyone understand what's going on, or do you need to provide interpreters or signers for the deaf?

1. Can everyone hear what‟s going on, or do you need a better Public Address system and/or an induction loop system for those with impaired hearing?

1. Will everyone be welcome, or do some of your members allow their prejudices to govern their attitudes and actions? Will you need to use your Code of Conduct and your constitutional powers to challenge prejudice?

1. Can everyone get into and around your building, or do you need to build a ramped entrance, a toilet that people with wheelchairs can use, a lift for those who can‟t manage stairs, wider doorways, etc.?
2. If you use other people‟s buildings for your activities, or for training events or meetings, do you check first that they are accessible to everyone? If not, do you find another venue?

# 4. Equal Opportunities Policies

***4.1 Why is an Equal Opportunities Policy Necessary?***

The vast majority of community organisations aim to serve all without discrimination. This is certainly true of all neighbourhood-based community associations, (have a look at the objects clause in your own constitution).

However, it is also true that community organisations may often in practice ignore or discriminate against particular minority or disadvantaged groups, usually quite unintentionally. It is worth asking yourselves and your Committee whether your organisation caters equally for: all ages, both sexes, all races, both the able-bodied and people with disabilities and everyone regardless of their sexual orientation, political and/or religious beliefs.

## 4.2 Before you get started

It is important that you don‟t just try and write your equal opportunity policy without talking about it in your group first. You could use the following pointers to get your discussion going:

* **How does discrimination affect us?**

What do you know about discrimination? What personal experiences do people have Of being excluded/being treated less favourably that they are willing to share? What Other groups of people do you know about who face discrimination?

* **How is your group working at the moment?**

Are your services used by a wide range of people? Are there things that might stop some people from using your group/services? Do you feel valued in your group?

* **What do you want to achieve?**

How will an equal opportunities policy affect your group? What difference will it make to your members? What difference will it make to users/prospective users of your services/activities?

* **What practical steps will you take to:**
	1. Make sure your group is open to all?
	2. Ensure equality of employment and/or volunteering?
	3. Prevent harassment, and make sure everyone is treated with respect and fairness?
	4. Make sure your group is open to all

**The following are things for you to consider:**

1. Are the activities and services you provide really geared to the interests and needs of all sections of the community? How will you ensure that everyone gets the same amount of use out of the services and are treated with respect and fairness?

1. Have you tried to improve accessibility to and within your Centre for those who cannot easily use stairs, such as parents with pushchairs, wheelchair users, or elderly people?

1. When did you last start a new activity in your Centre or contact another group in your community for the first time?

1. Are you in contact with any black or ethnic minority groups, groups of people with disabilities or other minority groups in your community? Have you looked at ways of exchanging resources and working together? Bear in mind that the fewer members of an ethnic minority group there are in an area, the more isolated they are likely to be and the greater the need for them to have activities that they can be involved in. “We don‟t provide services for ethnic minority groups because there are so few of them around here” is a very short-sighted policy.

1. Do the posters, literature and so on used by your organisation reflect a multi-racial society? Do they reflect all ages, both sexes, and people of different abilities?

1. Is any of your information or publicity available in plain English and if appropriate in the languages (having checked first that people read the language) of any substantial ethnic minority communities in your area for whom English is not the first language?

1. Are you catering for any other cultures? For example: do you provide alternative menus in your canteen? If you have a bar, does it discourage particular groups from using your Centre?

***4.3 What does an Equal Opportunities Policy consist of?***

An Equal Opportunities Policy is simply a written policy which sets down how your organisation is going to make sure that it really does live up to its objects, and is „Open to All‟.

Normally, an Equal Opportunities Policy will consist of two elements. 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 the actions and procedures which you will need to undertake in order to implement the Statement of Intent. The Code of Practice should be very practical. Nevertheless it is important that you are realistic and do not expect to achieve every aspect of it immediately!

A third element is often included in the Code of Practice - a Code of Conduct. This is a statement which you can display or circulate within your organisation, making it clear that all people will be treated equally and properly and with respect. Community Matters has approved a Statement of Intent and Code of Practice. The Statement of Intent, which you could easily adapt for your own use, is set out below, and a suggested Code of Conduct for a community organisation.

# 5. Community Matters’ Statement of Intent on Equal Opportunities

This is the text of Community Matters‟ Statement of Intent:

1. Community Matters recognises that in our society power is not held equally and that groups and individuals have been and continue to be discriminated against on many grounds including, for example, race, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, class, religion, marital status and where they live.

1. Community Matters also recognises that where direct or indirect discrimination occurs within the national organisation and within community organisations, it is both morally and legally unacceptable, and is in direct contradiction of Community Matters‟ constitutional commitment to serve the whole community.

1. The purpose of the Equal Opportunities Policy is to set out clearly and fully the positive action Community Matters intends to take to combat direct and indirect discrimination in employment policy, management of the organisation, and the services it provides to community organisations and in its relationships with other bodies.

1. In adopting this Equal Opportunities Policy, Community Matters is also making an unequivocal commitment to implementing it, so as to ensure that equal opportunity becomes a reality.

1. Community Matters also commits itself to encouraging its member organisations to adopt an equal opportunities policy and to supporting and assisting them in the process.

# Suggested Code of Conduct (for a community organisation)

1. People will be treated with dignity and respect regardless of race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, disability and age.
2. 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 which is derogatory to someone with a disability.
3. No one will be harassed, abused or intimidated on the ground of his or her race, sex, age, nationality or sexual orientation. 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. in a case involving a member of the community organisation, he or she will be suspended from membership until such time as he or she can appear before the General Committee in accordance with Clause 7 of the constitution.[[2]](#footnote-2)

* 1. in a case involving staff, disciplinary action will be taken in accordance with the procedure outlined in their conditions of service.

# 6. Adopting & Implementing an Equal Opportunities Policy

Adopting a Statement of Intent on Equal Opportunities should not be difficult for most community organisations, since it is just another way of expressing what‟s already part of the Objects of the organisation, and to an extent is emphasising what is already the law of the land. However, it is essential that, in adopting the Statement, your members understand *why* it is necessary.

In the same way, it should not be difficult to agree a Code of Conduct. Developing a comprehensive Code of Practice is more complex, but also just as important. If your Statement of Intent is to be more than a piece of paper, then you need to think what it means in practice. You will need to look at:

* your activities and services;
* the way your organisation is managed, who is involved and how people become involved;
* how you recruit and support volunteers;
* the way in which you appoint paid staff and their conditions of employment.

Your whole committee will need to understand and agree the Code of Practice, but you may be able to delegate some of the detailed work involved to a sub-committee. Some organisations have found it useful to organise or attend training sessions, so as to better understand how discrimination occurs and how it can be avoided. Community Matters may be able to help or suggest other sources of advice and assistance. Some of the suggestions which follow will help you formulate your Code of Practice.

## 6.1 Here are some practical ideas for making sure that the policy you adopt is implemented

1. Publicise your Statement of Intent. This should be displayed in your premises where everyone can see it.
2. Include your Statement of Intent with all other appropriate correspondence; for example, with any major applications for grants and to groups applying for affiliation, which should be advised that this is the policy of the organisation they are seeking to join.
3. Ensure that volunteers and others concerned with the work of the organisation understand, agree and are willing to implement the policy. A copy of your Statement of Intent should be given to all new Committee members, volunteers and employees. It should be every employee‟s duty, written into his/her contract of employment, to explain the policy and to work towards its practical implementation in the Centre premises and the organisation's activities.
4. See that your Code of Conduct is displayed on your premises and that organisations seeking to hire rooms are sent a copy and asked to comply with the Code.
5. Ensure that where possible all new job vacancies are advertised in minority as well as mainstream papers and that there is no discrimination against any applicant on the grounds of colour, sex, disability, etc. All advertisements should state that you are an equal opportunities employer, but should also list any restrictions such as stairs in your premises.
6. Find out who makes up your local community - by age, ethnic origin, etc. Don‟t forget this may have changed since you last did a neighbourhood survey or profile.
7. Monitor who attends your events and activities. Do they reflect your local community? If not, start asking yourselves why not.
8. Make sure that your publicity and literature reflects your equal opportunities policy and is welcoming to all groups in your community.
9. Use local training opportunities to help your committee and members better to understand how discrimination occurs and how you can prevent it.

This Policy was adopted by Ferndale Community Tenants Group August 2017

Signed Steve Medlin Chair.

**Policy Review date October 2021**

# 7. Further Information

Community Matters staff will gladly advise on the anything covered in this technical guidance note and on the development of your own Equal Opportunities Policy. You may also be able to get advice and help from your local Racial Equality Council or Federation of Community Organisations, Council for Voluntary Service, Rural Community Council, or from your local authority. You may also want to consider engaging a trainer or consultant who

specialises in work in this field.

***7.1 Useful Addresses***

# Equality and Human Rights Commission

Helpline (England): 0845 604 6610

E-mail: *info@equalityhumanrights.com*

Helpline (Wales): 0845 604 8810

E-mail: *wales@equalityhumanrights.com*

Helpline (Scotland): 0845 604 5510 E-mail: *scotland@equalityhumanrights.com*

# BIS (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills)

1 Victoria Street

London

SW1H 0ET

Tel: 020 7215 5000

E-mail: *enquiries@bis.gsi.gov.uk*

Website: [*www.bis.gov.uk*](http://www.bis.gov.uk/)

# Government Equality Office

9th Floor

Eland House

Bressenden Place

London

SW1E 5DU

Tel: 0303 444 0000

E-mail: *enquiries@geo.gsi.gov.uk*

Website: [*www.equalities.gov.uk*](http://www.equalities.gov.uk/)

# Institute of Race Relations

2-6 Leeke Street

London

WC1X 9HS

Tel: 020 7837 0041

Fax: 020 7278 0623

E-mail: *info@irr.org.uk*

Website: [*www.irr.org.uk*](http://www.irr.org.uk/)

# RADAR, Royal Association for Disability & Rehabilitation

12 City Forum 250 City Road

London

EC1V 8AF

Tel: 020 7250 3222

Fax: 020 7250 0212

E-mail: *radar@radar.org.uk*

Website: [*www.radar.org.uk*](http://www.radar.org.uk/)  **Runnymede Trust**

7 Plough Yard

Shoreditch

London

EC2A 3LP

Tel: 020 7377 9222

E-mail: *info@runnymedetrust.org*

Website: [*www.runnymedetrust.org*](http://www.runnymedetrust.org/)

# Equality and Diversity Forum

Tavis House

1-6 Tavistock Square

London

WC1H 9NA

Tel: 020 3033 1454

E-mail: *info@edf.org.uk*

Website: [*www.edf.org.uk*](http://www.edf.org.uk/)

# LawWorks

National Pro Bono Centre

48 Chancery Lane

London

WC2A 1JF

Tel: 020 7092 3940

Fax: 020 7242 3407

E-mail: *enquiries@lawworks.org.uk*

Website: [*www.lawworks.org.uk*](http://www.lawworks.org.uk/)

1. There is a debate over the appropriate term for people who are disabled in some way. There is an argument that it is inappropriate to refer to “disabled people” as it implies they are a separate class. On the other hand, there are those who argue that the term “disabled people” is appropriate as it denotes those who are disabled by society because of a particular condition. We have used the term “people with disabilities” in this technical guidance note. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This refers to the appropriate Clause of Community Matters‟ 2005 version of the model constitution for a community association, but most other constitutions have a similar power to suspend or withdraw membership from those who offend against the organisation's objects and policy.] [↑](#footnote-ref-2)