

Equality and diversity in volunteering

Organisations, politicians and the media talk about Equality and Diversity a lot, and nearly everyone agrees equality is a good thing and that it is best practice for organisations to have and abide by an **Equality and Diversity Policy**.

Sometimes it might be called an Equal Opportunities Policy or an Equality and Diversity Statement, but they are all about developing inclusive organisations that do not discriminate. It is worth taking a moment to think about what these policies actually mean and why they are an important part of volunteering.

Many volunteer involving organisations are closely linked to the community and aim to include the community in all they do, as volunteers, as users, as members etc. Implementing Equality and Diversity Principles is a way to make sure you really are reaching all the community and the service you offer is truly accessible to all.

DIVERSITY CATEGORIES

These are all ways people can identify themselves, and which can be used to create barriers to involvement. You don't have to measure all of these, and the list is not exhaustive.

- ★ Gender
- ★ Sexuality
- ★ Race
- ★ Ethnicity
- ★ Nationality
- ★ Disability
- ★ Age
- ★ Social Class
- ★ Employment status
- ★ Caring responsibilities

Definitions (like all definitions you might find slightly different phrasing used elsewhere).

Equality: treating everyone the same, regardless of things that don't matter, giving them access to the same opportunities and services (adaptation may be necessary to give this access).

Diversity: all the ways we can be different.

The are practical as well as ethical disadvantages to not having a diverse workforce:

- ★ You will miss out on knowledge, experience and cultural viewpoints that could help you deliver a better service.
- ★ If you are claiming to be inclusive yet doing something that excludes one group your reputation will be affected.
- ★ Many service users feel more comfortable when the people helping them include someone they can identify with.

So, if you are committed to having a diverse volunteer team, open to all equally, what do you need to do.

First: do some measuring to find out if your volunteer team is diverse.

Using an Equality and Diversity Monitoring Form, find out what the current diversity profile for your volunteers is. A sample form can be found as part of the Good Practice Guide on the Volunteer Centre Hackney Website.

Next: Compare this profile against the profile for the community you are claiming to represent. It is important not to use the diversity figures for the whole country, instead use those for the area you are working in. This might be the whole of Hackney, it might be a specific ward, or it might be a specific community. For instance, if your organisation's aim relates to serving the Somali community, it would be expected that your ethnicity profile would be non-diverse, but you still need to check age, gender etc.

To get population figures for Hackney and its wards go to:

<http://www.hackney.gov.uk/xp-factsandfigures.htm>

<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk>

Then: By comparing the two profiles (community and volunteer team) you will be able to identify any gaps and see if there are any specific groups you are not reaching for some reason.

1. Work out why you aren't attracting this group of people as volunteers

E.g. Are all your volunteers recruited by word or mouth, so everybody is like each other

E.g. Do all your publicity materials (posters, leaflets, websites) show able bodied people, so people with a disability will assume they aren't wanted

2. Before recruitment, make sure there is nothing about your volunteer programme that would exclude this group:

E.g. Do your older volunteers talk down to anyone without 30 years experience, if so some Equality Training might be needed.

E.g. Would a wheelchair user be unable to access your office, if so you may need to investigate ramps etc (making it more accessible for everyone)

3. Develop a campaign to target this group and take that campaign to where the people you want to recruit can be found.

E.g. if you volunteers are all over 25 years old, do a presentation and take publicity material to your local college.

E.g. if you are short of male volunteers, try putting up posters at the local gym

For more information about developing an Equality and Diversity policy, monitoring your volunteer profile and addressing any gaps please contact:

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