

Equality and diversity policies for small groups

Planning and writing an equality and diversity policy for small, volunteer-run community groups

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 and fancy. 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.

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Have a discussion

Have a discussion in your group about equality and diversity and what it means to your group to treat everyone with equal respect. Here are some ideas to get you started.

What do we think about discrimination and harassment?

- ♦ What does discrimination mean to you?
- ♦ What does harassment mean to you?

Here are some basic definitions, but you might have more to add.

Discrimination is when a person is prevented from taking part in something based on a particular characteristic they have.

For example, if a gay person was made unwelcome at your group activities because of their sexual orientation, this would be discrimination.

Harassment is when someone behaves in a way which makes someone else feel distressed, humiliated or threatened.

Some people in your group may be more likely to experience harassment than others – for example, teasing someone because of their disability, or making racist or sexist remarks, would be harassment. Harassment based on disability, race, religion, transgender identity or sexual orientation is considered by the law to be hate crime, and can be reported to the police.

- ♦ What kinds of discrimination and harassment are you aware of?
- ♦ Do any of your group have any personal experiences of being treated less well or excluded because of who they are?
- ♦ Which particular groups of people are more likely to face discrimination and harassment? How could this affect your group?

The Equalities Act 2010 identifies a list of “protected characteristics”. It is illegal for an organisation to harass or discriminate against anyone because of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. Have a think about each of these, and whether there is anything your group could do to improve equal access for all people.

How is your group working at the moment?

- ♦ Do a wide range of people take part in your activities and meetings?
- ♦ Are there practical things that might stop certain people using your group and attending your meetings (such as the time of day of your meetings, or the venue you meet in)?
- ♦ Does your group ever treat people differently, or not include people as much, because of any particular characteristic, such as gender or race?

What do you want to achieve?

- ♦ How will a good equality and diversity policy affect your group?
- ♦ How will you use it to improve the way your group works together?

Writing your equality and diversity policy

Write a policy based on your group discussion. It could include:

1. What are your aims?

What does your group believe about equality and diversity? What are the aims of your policy?

This could include:

- ♦ recognising that your group knows that some people are particularly likely to experience discrimination and harassment;
- ♦ committing to making sure your group is as inclusive and welcoming as possible.

This could be quite short and simple. For example:

“Anytown Association is committed to treating all people equally and with respect irrespective of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation”.

If you prefer, you could make a more detailed statement that reflects the discussions you have had. For example:

“We aim to create a safe and welcoming atmosphere for everyone. We want to challenge all forms of oppression including those based on race, ethnicity, nationality, creed, gender, sex, class, sexuality, gender reassignment, learning ability, physical impairment, mental illness, HIV status, age, occupation, income, wealth and unrelated criminal conviction. We aim to design our activities, services and decision making processes specifically to encourage and support participation from people who face disadvantage in society, including women, BME people, disabled people, LGBTQ people, and people on low incomes.”

2. What will you do?

What will you do to help you achieve your aim of making your group equally open to all?

Some ideas to get you started:

- ♦ Can you improve access to your group for people with physical impairments (e.g. wheelchair users, Deaf people)? How?

(Possability People¹ publishes an award-winning Accessible City Guide which provides information about accessible community venues in Brighton and Hove. The Resource Centre has an induction loop and an infrared hearing system that you can hire to make your event more accessible to people who use hearing aids.)

- ♦ Can you improve your publicity to make it more accessible? Is it easy to read? Is it available to people who don't have access to the internet?

¹ www.thefedonline.org.uk

- ♦ Could you make it easier for parents to come to your meetings by changing the time of day you hold them or having a play corner at the meeting?
- ♦ Can you change how you allocate tasks and roles, to make sure a range of people get their voices heard? For example, could you encourage more women to take on roles such as chairing meetings?

You should be able to do some things without making too many changes or causing lots of extra work. Some may be more effort but you might decide to prioritise them because you think they are particularly important. Some may cost money that you don't have, or might be impossible in the short term for other reasons.

Think about things you will aim to do, as well as those you can do immediately.

3. How should people behave?

What rules can you agree in your group about how you will treat people? These rules make up a "Code of Conduct" for your group.

- ♦ How do you want people to be treated in your group? What types of behaviour are unacceptable?
- ♦ If someone feels harassed, what should they do about it? Who should they tell? What will the group do about it?
- ♦ If someone breaks the code of conduct, what will the group do about it? How will you help the group to move forwards? How will you support and protect the person who feels harassed or bullied?
- ♦ How will you make sure that everyone is aware of your code of conduct?

4. Reviewing your policy

It is a good idea to look at your policy regularly to see if it is working and the things that you need to change or update. This also gives your group an opportunity to regularly discuss equality and diversity, evaluate whether you are meeting your aims, and reaffirm your commitments.

You should include a commitment to do this at the end of your policy, by saying: "This policy will be reviewed every ... years."

Adopting and using your policy

- ♦ Your draft policy needs to be discussed at a meeting of your members, and adopted as the policy of your organisation. There's no point having a great written draft that no-one has agreed to and no-one is aware of!
- ♦ Make sure all new members are aware of your policy, and that you discuss and review it regularly.
- ♦ Keep it in mind in your day-to-day work and regularly think about how you could improve it to make things in your group run better for everyone.
- ♦ If somebody in the group feels discriminated against or harassed, refer to your policy to ensure this is dealt with in line with the agreements the group has made.
- ♦ If, when you come to use your policy, you find there is something missing from it, make a note of this and return to the group to discuss amending the policy.

Sample policies

Below are two example policies.

We recommend you use these to get some ideas, but write your own policy which really reflects your group.

Merry Street Tenants' Association Equality and Diversity Policy

Aims

Merry Street Tenants' Association is open to all tenants of Merry Street. We aim to help the street to have an atmosphere of friendship, respect and care for each other. In particular, we aim to treat every tenant equally, regardless of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation

Accessibility

All our meetings and events are held in venues that are accessible to wheelchair users. When there are more than 40 people at an event we aim to use a PA system and a hearing loop.

When we organise outings for our members we provide free places for carers of members who can only attend if they bring a carer.

We are committed to ensuring any tenant of Merry Street is able to attend our activities, so we will reassess our access requirements to meet the needs of new tenants.

Diversity

Our Association belongs to all tenants. We aim to organise a range of events and activities to suit the interests and meet the needs of a wide variety of people.

For example, we hold parties for Christmas and Eid, because we have members who are Christian and members who are Muslim.

The Association should be open to new ideas, and particularly prioritise opportunities for residents to share their cultural heritage with one another.

Inclusion and respect

Every tenant of Merry Street should be made to feel equally welcome and included at all Merry Street Tenants' Association meetings and events.

Sexist, racist, homophobic, transphobic or otherwise offensive and inflammatory remarks and behaviour are not acceptable. These constitute harassment, and have no place in the Association.

Dealing with discrimination and harassment

If any tenant feels they have been discriminated against by the Association or harassed at an Association event they should raise this with the committee.

The committee will investigate the complaint, listening to all members involved. (If the complaint is against a committee member, that member will not be part of conducting the investigation).

If the complaint is against a particular individual, this person will have the opportunity to express their point of view, accompanied by a friend. The person making the complaint will also have this opportunity.

If the complaint is against the Association as a whole, the Committee must work to ensure that such discrimination is not repeated in the future, and must inform the members of how they propose to do this.

Any decision to exclude a person from the organisation due to discriminatory or harassing behaviour will be made with reference to the Association's constitution. The Association will support people who feel they have been harassed or discriminated against, and will not victimise or treat them less well because they have raised this.

This policy was adopted at a meeting of Merry Street Tenants' Association on 17th December 2016, and will be reviewed at least every 2 years.

Signed:

Signed:

Hindu Elders' Group Equality and Diversity Policy

Aims

- ♦ The Hindu Elders' group 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.
- ♦ The Hindu Elders' group also recognises that where direct or indirect discrimination occurs within the Hindu Elders' group, it is both morally and legally unacceptable.
- ♦ The purpose of the Equality and Diversity Policy is to set out clearly and fully the positive action the Hindu Elders' group intends to take to combat direct and indirect discrimination in the organisation, in the services it provides and in its relationships with other bodies.
- ♦ In adopting this Equality and Diversity Policy, the Hindu Elders' Group is also making an unequivocal commitment to implementing it, so as to ensure that equal opportunity becomes a reality.

Code of Practice

- ♦ The Hindu Elders' group provides activities, guidance and assistance for Hindu men and women over 50 years old. The group will take action to ensure that group activities and events are open and welcoming to everybody entitled to become a member.
- ♦ We aim to make our meetings and events accessible to people with disabilities - e.g. provide transport, meet in accessible premises, provide sign language interpreters when necessary and produce information in large print.

- ♦ We provide interpreters in both Hindi and Gujarati at all our activities and meetings so everyone can participate.
- ♦ We aim to use local training opportunities to help our committee and members better understand how discrimination occurs and how to prevent it.
- ♦ We organise regular women only meetings and activities, to support women to play a full and equal role in the group.
- ♦ All members of the Hindu Elders' Group will have the Equality and Diversity Policy explained to them, and will undertake to comply with and implement this policy.
- ♦ Members who have experienced discrimination can make complaints to the co-ordinator, who is present at all weekly meetings. If the co-ordinator is unable to resolve the complaint, it will be referred to the Management Committee.

Code of Conduct

- ♦ People will be treated with dignity and respect regardless of race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, disability and/or age.
- ♦ 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.
- ♦ No one will be harassed, abused or intimidated on the ground of his or her race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, disability or age. Incidents of harassment will be taken seriously.

Dealing with Complaints

- ♦ The Management Committee will take complaints of discrimination and harassment very seriously.
- ♦ They will investigate them thoroughly, and provide opportunities for the person making the complaint to speak in a safe environment about their experience.
- ♦ If the complaint is against a particular individual, the committee will hear their point of view.
- ♦ The Committee will decide the action to take based on the principle of ensuring the continued inclusion and safety of any member who has experienced discrimination or harassment.
- ♦ Any decision to terminate someone's membership will be made in line with the rules set out in the constitution.

Review

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years

Signed:

Date: