



Policies and Procedures

Policies and procedures set out how a community organisation should be run. One of the most important ways a management committee can oversee the delegation of its work is via written policies and procedures. The specific policies and procedures you need vary according to the size of your organisation and the services you provide.

Why you need written policies and procedures

The main reasons for having written policies and procedures are:

The law

Some written policies are required by law. In other cases, such as recruitment of staff or managing your finances, you will need to meet certain legal obligations. An equal opportunities policy and a financial policy can help ensure you meet these obligations. Even your governing document will set out certain procedures for holding meetings, keeping accounts etc. which your organisation must follow.

Best practice

Most community organisations find ways of working which best suit them. Written procedures can help to ensure that these are not forgotten and that new people know what these are.

Fairness

Community organisations want to ensure they are open to all potential users or members who might benefit from their services. A written equal opportunities policy can demonstrate your commitment to others and provide a useful basis for considering how best to provide services.

Resolving disputes

Written policies and procedures can be referred to if disputes arise over the way a particular function is carried out or responsibility exercised.

Demonstrating professionalism

External organisations, such as commissioning bodies or funders, will want to see that you have policies and procedures in place.

How to go about developing policies and procedures

The easiest place to start is to get copies of model documents and adapt them. Northumberland CVA will be able to help with appropriate model policies for most areas concerning Voluntary and Community Sector organisations.

Governing document

Your governing document is your most important policy document. It states your objectives, the powers your organisations has, the way your management committee is elected and how the decision making process is conducted at meetings

Standing orders

Covering procedural matters not covered by the constitution, standing orders can be useful as you don't need to change your governing document every time you change the way you conduct your meetings

Health and safety including fire risk assessment

Organisations with five or more paid staff are required by law to have a written health and safety policy, although it is good practice for all groups to have one anyway. The policy sets out your responsibilities to staff, volunteers and service users and its contents will vary from group to group, depending on the type of work the group does and the potential risks involved. In addition, the current legislation with regards to fire safety states that a designated 'responsible person' must carry out a fire safety risk assessment and implement and maintain a fire management plan.

Equal opportunities

Your equal opportunities policy should cover issues of fairness, whether to service users, members, employees, volunteers, or committee members. Key areas are:

Employment – Your equal opportunities policy should cover all aspects of recruitment and selection of paid workers to ensure the process is fair and complies with the law. It is good practice to also apply these principles to the recruitment of volunteers and committee members.

Service provision – This covers how you will publicise and provide services with the aim that all people who might benefit are able to do so, as well as how you run them.

Financial controls policy

Your financial controls will set out your policies regarding the financial controls you have in place to enable you to manage your money. The policy would usually cover day to day issues such as banking arrangements, procedures for ordering and paying for goods and services, use of petty cash and trustee and volunteer expenses. It would also cover financial management issues such as preparing an annual budget and reporting to the committee on the group's financial position.

Safeguarding policies

If your organisation is working with children or vulnerable adults you will need a written safeguarding policy that includes your Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) procedures and a clear system for recording and reporting any concerns.

Confidentiality policy including data protection

All organisations that keep any information on living and identifiable people must comply with the Data Protection Act. Penalties for breaching data protection legislation can be up to half a million pounds with potentially even bigger fines on the horizon and so it is very important to get this right. The Act applies to computerised personal information and some manual records that may be held. It is your responsibility when collecting the data to inform the individuals about how the information is to be used.

Complaints procedure

Complaints, whether justified or not, are bound to happen from time to time. It helps to have a standard procedure in use which is seen to be fair by all concerned. Typically this would include how service users can make a complaint and to whom it should be addressed, the procedure for looking into the complaint and how the matter can be reviewed if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome.

You may also need to consider developing policies to cover the following subjects if appropriate for your organisation and activities:

- Use of IT equipment policy
- Volunteer policy
- Communications policy
- Conflicts of interest policy
- Induction and training of trustees policy

Organisations employing or intending to employ staff

Your organisation will be affected by a number of legislative provisions in relation to employment law, which can be very complex and which must be abided by. You need to consider developing written policies and procedures to cover the following areas:

- Recruitment
- Induction process
- Office standards
- Hours, leave and pay
- Performance appraisal
- Sickness
- Working alone
- Working for external organisations
- Disciplinary and grievance

Once you have developed and approved your written policies and procedures

- Use them (don't file them away and forget about them)
- Make sure that everyone who needs to know about them is aware of their existence
- Monitor their relevance and effectiveness (if they are proving unworkable, change them)
- Review and update them on a regular basis (say every two or three years) to take account of changes in the way your group works, or changes in legislation, or new and more effective ways of working

This fact sheet gives a brief description of the main policy areas you should consider. However it is for guidance only and not intended to be a definitive list of all policies available.

Getting further support

Northumberland Community Voluntary Action (Northumberland CVA) has access to a wide range of resources and model policy documents to help you draft appropriate policies and procedures. For more information, advice and support email enquire@northumberlandcva.org.uk or call 01670 858688.