

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

Understanding equal opportunities and developing an Equal Opportunities Policy is an important task for any organisation working in the community.

An Equal Opportunities Policy is a written document agreed formally by your organisation. The policy is your guide to complying with equal opportunities legislation and ensuring that your organisation works in a fair non-discriminatory way.

Developing an Equal Opportunities Policy for your organisation will require some thought and planning. There is no uniform policy, your policy will depend on the what work you do and where you work.

The most effective Equal Opportunities Policies are those that organisations design for themselves. This way the policy reflects local circumstances and objectives and goals of the organisation. The policy is also more likely to have genuine commitment from all the people involved on the group.

A useful start is to divide the policy into four section:

- * A statement of intent;
- * A set of clear policy objectives;
- * An action plan; and
- * A short statement acknowledging the current legislation on discrimination.

It might be useful to organise specific planning and training days.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES CAN MEAN

First consider what equal opportunities and discrimination mean.

Some of the issues to think about are:

- * Do we have stereotypical views of others?
- * Do we ever stereotype people without thinking?
- * Do we jump to conclusions about other people's abilities or circumstances?

- * By doing this do we ever limit people's choices?
- * What groups of people are more likely to experience discrimination?

Whilst considering these issues look at your own community and who lives in it. Is your service more accessible to some than others?

Think about this in terms of:

- * The members;
- * The community/public
- * The volunteers
- * The staff

Once you have carefully thought about these issues you will probably have identified why an Equal Opportunities Policy is important to an organisation. The Policy is more than just complying with legislation. It also works towards ensuring that your service is useful and accessible to all members of the community who would benefit.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- * Not treating people unfairly and discriminating against certain individuals or groups of people.
- * Not labelling or stereotyping people.
- * Serving all sections of the community.
- * Being accessible to all members of the community.
- * Recognising the barriers that people face.
- * Working to overcome these barriers.
- * Recognising individual worth.
- * Being fair about how you recruit your workers, both paid and unpaid.
- * Being aware of your own prejudices.

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

The pieces of legislation that govern equal opportunities are:

- * The Sex Discrimination Acts of 1975 and 1986
- * The Race Relations Act 1976
- * The Disability Discrimination Act 1995

These laws are directly applicable to employment but a good equal opportunities policy should ensure that, as well as staff, no customer, volunteer, trainee, etc suffers directly or indirectly from discrimination.

There are two types of discrimination that are illegal.

- * **Direct Discrimination**

Where an individual is treated less favourably on the grounds of race, sex or disability.

- * **Indirect Discrimination**

Where there is a condition attached to application/participation meaning that particular individuals or groups cannot take part. Some jobs may be exempt if there is seen to be "genuine occupational qualification" requiring that somebody of a particular sex, race or disability should perform the job.

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

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