

How do I create an Equal Opportunities Policy?

Although not required by law, it is good practice for organisations to create an Equal Opportunities Policy to show that they are actively opposing discrimination and that their services, membership opportunities, employment procedures and management and decision making processes are accessible to everyone. An Equal Opportunities Policy is also a requirement of most funding bodies - many of the grants available to arts organisations, including the Lottery, are public money, and funders are concerned that they will be used to benefit everyone.

By adopting a comprehensive equal opportunities policy, and thereby providing access to all that your organisation offers, good equal opportunities practice can improve your efficiency as an organisation, the quality of your management, the range and quality of your group's artistic output and your relationship with audiences, artists, staff and volunteers.

This Information Sheet explains how to go about developing your policy and outlines the areas you may need to consider.

What is an Equal Opportunities Policy? (EOP)

Statement and Action

An EOP is your organisation's written statement about your commitment and intent with regard to equal opportunities. It should be supported with written procedures on how you are acting on your intentions now, and plan to in the future.

It shows that your organisation is aware of discrimination and that you are putting equal opportunities principles into practice. It applies not only to your members but also to anyone

with whom you deal eg audiences, inquirers and those who attend your workshops.

Every organisation's EOP will, of necessity, be different and so it is not appropriate to adopt someone else's policy. However, it can be useful to look at equal opportunities policies drawn up by other organisations as a guideline.

The objective of an EOP is not to reduce the diversity of artistic experience, but rather to value that experience more equally, allow it to be experienced more fully, and make it accessible to a broader range of people.

Developing Your Policy

Who should be involved in the development?

It is important to involve as many people as possible. The views of all participants need to be sought including the board, management, organisation members, paid and unpaid staff and audience members. In this way the policy will draw upon the skills and experience of a range of people and everyone will have their say. They will then feel ownership of the policy, and it is more likely to be effective.

What sort of language should we use?

The style of your policy need not be formal and stuffy. A short policy written in plain language that is direct and to the point is far better than pages of complicated text.

What should the policy contain?

A policy should contain four main components:

- A statement of intent;
- Your organisation's objectives concerning equal opportunities;
- Procedures and a programme to implement the policy;
- A monitoring and review process.

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1. Statement of Intent

Your statement should demonstrate that your organisation recognises that certain people are discriminated against, is opposed to this, and will take steps to eliminate discriminatory practices.

The statement could be general ie that you intend to treat all equally, or you could list the kind of discrimination you wish to avoid eg gender, marital status, age, race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, health including HIV status, responsibility for dependants, political activity, physical, mental and learning disability etc.

It could state how people will know about your intentions eg the statement will be included in your publicity material and job advertisements, and will be displayed so that it is visible to members of the public.

2. Objectives

Set out your objectives (what you want to achieve) eg

- To provide our publicity material on tape or in large format when requested;
- To make our building more accessible to those with disabilities;
- To have a broader representation from different groups on the Board.

(It may help to make a detailed list of all the activities your organisation is engaged in eg board duties, management, publicity, administration, workshops etc, and all the job descriptions of the people involved in these activities. Identify if and where discrimination exists, and in what way).

3. Implementation Procedures and Action Plan

This section is an outline of the specific steps you are going to take to put your objectives into action. Be realistic. Put down what you can do, and by when.

You may wish to tackle all forms of inequality at once, or address one issue at a time. Drawing up a table may help to clarify what needs to be researched, done, by whom, by when. Do not forget to build in an evaluation and monitoring procedure.

Responsibilities

- Identify to whom the policy applies eg everyone who is involved in the organisation, and state that all these people have a responsibility to implement this policy. ie to behave in an anti-discriminatory way.
- Examine and evaluate the structure and composition of your decision making groups in the light of your policy.
- Be clear about any specific responsibilities you may assign to people eg board members may have overall responsibility for implementation and monitoring.
- Outline your procedures for dealing with discrimination (breaches of the EOP) eg do you have procedures for dealing with complaints from the general public, disciplinary issues or harassment?

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Action Plan

- Choose each objective in turn. Divide it into estimated timed chunks and state what you aim to achieve in each chunk. (Note: everything will take longer than you expect.)
- Delegate responsibility for tasks within each objective. State who will be responsible for what and why they are doing it. You may wish to give overall responsibility to a senior manager.
- Circulate the proposed plan, make sure everyone sees it and gives feedback.
- Make sure the finalised procedures and plan are available publicly so that everyone knows what is expected of them. Include information in induction programmes and ensure everyone is kept informed of changes.

4. Monitoring and Reviewing

Show that once your plan is up and running you will be checking on your progress.

State:

- how you will keep a check that the policy action plan is being implemented;
- who will be responsible for this;
- how often progress checks will be made eg monthly, quarterly etc;
- how you will know when you have achieved an objective.

Again, a table may be a helpful tool. It may also be helpful to form an Equal Opportunities Advisory Group made up of board, staff, members, special consultants etc, to be

responsible for assessing the organisation regularly. If you intend to do this, say so. Assessments will enable you to judge the progress of the policy and to amend or draw up new objectives if necessary.

Other Areas to Consider

There are several other important areas to consider when creating your EOP. You may wish to include these in the policy:

Management

- Is your board (or management committee) committed to an equal opportunities policy, and has it incorporated this commitment in the constitution?
- Does it include representatives from the disadvantaged groups with which the policy is concerned?
- How do you appoint new board members ie are they elected, co-opted or nominated, and do you advertise widely?
- How are they inducted and trained?
- Be aware of informal decision making processes eg key decisions are often made in discussions outside meetings. This could lead to discrimination.
- Where and when are committee meetings held? Women may not like travelling at night and older members may need assistance with travel.

Training

Implementing your policy may require training and the development of new skills. Training might include increasing general awareness of race, gender, disability or legal issues, or the role and responsibilities of staff, members and the management committee.

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Set out the support and training that will be provided to different members of your organisation. (This might cost your organisation time and money. Remember to include this in both your equal opportunities action plan and your organisation's business plan.)

Encouraging participation - audiences and members

- How will you ensure that existing and potential members and audiences/users have access to all that you offer?
- Publicity and information material - is it available in other formats (Braille, tape, large font) and languages?
- Are your images inclusive?
- Is information about disabled access prominent?
- Open days and conferences - do you hold events to make your work known and give people a taster of what you do?
- Participation - do you have schemes for disabled, younger and older people, and those on social security?
- Are there any barriers to membership or participation in meetings/events - transport, childcare or carer responsibilities, timing?
- How will you ensure that specific groups in the community are not excluded? Are signers or interpreters available?
- Environment - do your venues and your workplaces have good disability access, provide for dietary differences eg vegetarian food or halal meat, and offer translation or signing facilities?

Recruitment and employment processes

If you take on staff or volunteers you will need to conform with anti-discrimination legislation. You may wish to state that you will use existing and future legislation as a framework on which to develop good practice eg

The Sex Discrimination Act (1975;1986)

The Race Relations Act (1976)

The Equal Pay Act (1985)

The Welsh Language Act (1993)

The Disability Discrimination Act (1995)

The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (1974)

You will need to include a recruitment and employment procedure in your policy. This is a complex area and it would be advisable to seek further information. In brief, consider:

- Recruitment - How you advertise vacancies, write the job description and the person specification, and design the application form; make up your interview panel, your shortlisting, interviewing and selection procedure.
- Employment - Your contract, probationary period and induction process; training, support and staff development and provision for individual employee needs.

Health and Safety / Child Protection

It is becoming increasingly necessary for organisations to have a statement of intent with regard to both Health and Safety and Child Protection.

Health and Safety

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) produces a series of useful guides including:
Writing Your Health and Safety Policy Statement.

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How do I create an Equal Opportunities Policy?

ISBN 0 7176 0424 1 (3.00)

Publications T: 01787 881165

Information Line T: 0541 545500

See Health and Safety

Child Protection

If you work with children and young people you will need a statement that shows how you aim to safeguard them. In some cases this is a legal requirement (The Children Act 1989).

However, whatever your case, it would be advisable to put the Safe from Harm recommendations into effect. (See publications.)

See Child Protection

Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)

If you provide goods, services and facilities you will need to take DDA Part III into account.

A Final Note

Simply making your statement and objectives known does not mean you are an equal opportunities organisation. This will only happen if you take the practical action that you have outlined to implement your policy. Equal opportunities will be an ongoing issue and although you will reach many of your objectives, you will have to plan to reassess them on a regular basis.

Having an equal opportunities policy in place does not mean that the full requirements of equal opportunities legislation will have necessarily been implemented. Check the legislation and take practical action as and when necessary.

Further Information

The following organisations offer advice and many publish information sheets:

Arts Councils and RABs (phone book)

Arts Disability Wales T: 029 2037 7885

Commission for Racial Equality T: 020 7828 7022

Disability Scotland T: 0131 229 8652

Equal Opportunities Commission T: 0161 833 9244

Lesbian and Gay Employment Rights T: 020 7704 6066

Local Authorities Contact the Equal Opportunities or Access Officer

National Council for Voluntary Organisations T: 020 7713 6161

National Disability Arts Forum T: 0191 2611628

Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action T: 01232 321224

Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations T: 0131 556 3882

Wales Council for Voluntary Action T: 029 20431700

Voluntary Arts Network's Briefing sheet: DDA Part III. www.voluntaryarts.org

Publications

The Children Act 1989

The object of the Children Act is to promote the safety and welfare of children. The Home Office has produced an indispensable supplement to the Act called Safe from Harm: A Code of Practice for Safeguarding the Welfare of children in Voluntary Organisations in England and Wales.

T: Home Office 020 7273 4000, ask for Publications.

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Safeguarding Children and Young People

This explains the Children Act and gives a summary of Safe From Harm. It also offers a model policy statement on safeguarding children and young people.

Tel: Community Matters 020 7226 0189

Voluntary but not Amateur - a guide to the law for voluntary

organisations (1998), LVSC. (14.95)

Equal opportunities - a guide for employers,
Equal Opportunities Commission (free)

Equal Opportunities - a practical handbook
(1994), Industrial Society
(19.95)

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Other Related Information Sheets

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Health & Safety
Legislation

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