



HOW TO WRITE AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

Although not required by law, it is good practice for voluntary arts groups 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 voluntary arts groups, including from lottery funds, are public money, and funders are concerned that they should be used to benefit everyone.

By adopting a comprehensive equal opportunities policy and thereby providing access to all that your group offers, good equal opportunities practice can improve your efficiency as a group, 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 Briefing explains how to go about developing your policy and outlines the areas you may need to consider.

What is an equal opportunities policy?

An equal opportunities policy 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 group 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 e.g. audiences and people who attend workshops.

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

The objective of an equal opportunities policy 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, group 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. If more people feel they own the policy, then the chances of it being more effective are likely to be increased.

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, jargon-filled text.

What should the policy contain?

A policy should contain four main components:

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

1. Statement

The statement should demonstrate that your group recognises that certain people are discriminated against, is wholly opposed to this and will take all necessary steps to eliminate discriminatory practices.

The statement could be general (that you

intend to treat everyone equally), or you could list the kind of discriminations you wish to avoid: eg. gender, marital status, age, race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, health, responsibility for dependants, political activity, physical, mental ill health and learning difficulties, etc.

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

2. Objectives

Set out your objectives, eg.:

- To provide our publicity material in any format that's requested
- To make our building more accessible to those with disabilities
- To have a broader representation from different groups on the board

It may also help to make a detailed list of all the activities your group is engaged in eg. board duties, management, publicity, administration, workshops etc, and all the job descriptions of the people involved in these activities. Identify where discrimination could exist.

3. Procedures & Action

This section is an outline of the specific steps you are going to take to put your objectives into action. Be realistic, though, and 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 and when.



Don't forget to build in an evaluation and monitoring procedure.

Responsibilities

- State that the policy applies to everyone involved in the group, and confirm that all these people have a responsibility to implement the policy by behaving in an anti-discriminatory way.
- Examine and evaluate the structure and composition of your decision-making groups in the light of the policy.
- Be clear about any specific responsibilities you may assign to people e.g. board members may have overall responsibility for implementation and monitoring.
- Outline your procedures for dealing with breaches of the equal opportunities policy: do you have procedures for dealing with disciplinary issues, bullying, harassment or complaints from the general public?

Action Plan

- Choose each objective in turn. Divide them into chunks with estimated times and state what you aim to achieve for each chunk.
- Delegate responsibility for tasks within each objective. State who will be responsible for which task and why they are doing it.

- Circulate the proposed plan, making sure everyone sees it and gives feedback.
- Ensure the finalised procedures and plan are available publicly so that everyone knows what's expected of them. Include information in induction programmes and keep everyone informed of changes.

4. Monitoring & Reviewing

Show that once your plan is up and running, you'll be checking on its progress.

State:

- how you will check that the policy action plan is being implemented
- who will be responsible for this
- how often progress checks will be made (monthly, quarterly?)
- how you will know when you have achieved an objective

A table may be a helpful tool. It may also be a good idea to form an equal opportunities advisory group comprising board members, staff, volunteers and special consultants who will be responsible for assessing the group regularly. If you intend to do this, make sure people know about it. Assessments will enable you to judge the progress of the policy and to amend or draw up new objectives if necessary.



OTHER AREAS

There are several other important areas to consider when creating your equal opportunities policy and 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 into the constitution? Does it include representatives from the disadvantaged groups with which the policy is concerned? How do you appoint new board members: 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 as key decisions are often made in discussions outside meetings. This could potentially lead to discrimination.
- Where and when are committee meetings held? Some people may not like attending them at night or may need assistance with travel.

Training

Implementing your policy may require training and the development of new skills. Training for volunteers, staff, board members and the management committee might include increasing awareness of race, gender, disability or legal issues, or being made aware of their roles and responsibilities

Encouraging participation for both audiences and members

How will you ensure that existing and potential members as well as audiences and users have access to all that you offer?

- **Publicity and information material:** is it available in various formats (Braille, PDF, video, large font) and languages? Are your images inclusive? Is information about disabled access prominent? If your information is only available online, how will you make it available to those who prefer not to access it via the internet, if requested?
- **Open days and conferences:** do you hold events to make your work known and give people a taste of what you do?
- **Participation:** do you have schemes for younger and older people, those on low incomes and disabled people? Are there any barriers to membership or participation in meetings and events such as transport, childcare, 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 workplaces have good disability access, provide for dietary differences (e.g. vegetarian, halal) 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'll use the legislation as a framework on which to develop good practice as laid out in the Equality Act 2010 (for Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland) or the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Bill 2014.





You will need to include a recruitment and employment procedure in your policy. Things to consider:

- **Recruitment:** how you advertise vacancies, write job descriptions, design application forms, how your interview panel is comprised, and your shortlisting, interviewing and selection procedures
- **Employment:** your contract, probationary period and induction process, training, support and staff development, and provision for individual employee needs

Health & Safety and Child Protection

It is best practice for groups to have a statement of intent with regard to both Health & Safety and Child Protection.

- **Health & Safety:** The Health and Safety Executive website has advice on how to manage low risk and features further advice on outdoor events, fire safety assessment and food standards (for issues in the Republic of Ireland, see the Health and Safety Authority website).
- **Child Protection:** If you work with children and young people you will need a statement that shows how you aim to safeguard them. The NSPCC sets out guidelines on the various policies and legislation across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; for the Republic of Ireland, go to the National Youth Council of Ireland's Child Protection website.

A final note

Simply making your statement and objectives known does not mean that you are an equal opportunities group. This will only happen if you take the practical action as outlined to implement your policy.

Equal opportunities will be an ongoing issue and although you'll reach many of your objectives, a plan to reassess them on a regular basis should be actioned.

Having an established EOP does not mean that the full requirements of equal opportunities legislation will necessarily have been implemented. Check the legislation and take practical action as and when it's required.

Further Information

The following organisations offer advice and many publish information sheets:

[Arts Council England](#); 0845 300 6200

[Arts Council Ireland](#); 00353 1 6180200

[Arts Council of Northern Ireland](#); 028 9038 5200

[Creative Scotland](#); 0845 603 6000

[Arts Council of Wales](#); 0845 8734 900

[Equal and Human Rights Commission](#); phone contacts for their offices in England, Wales and Scotland are on the website

[National Council for Voluntary Organisations](#); 020 7713 6161

[The Wheel](#) - voluntary sector body in Ireland; 00 353 1 454 8727

[Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action](#); 028 9087 7777

[Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations](#); 0131 474 8000

[Wales Council for Voluntary Action](#); 0800 2888 329

Creative Lives Briefings:

Creative Lives has a wide range of other Briefings covering useful topics including other regulations and legislation as well as areas such as marketing and funding. Some other relevant resources are listed below:

- Briefing 61: Health and safety for voluntary arts groups
- Briefing 67: Risk assessment for event organisers
- Briefing 76: Guide to good design
- Briefing 94: Cultural diversity and the voluntary arts
- Briefing 104: Older people and the voluntary arts
- Briefing 111: How inclusive are you? A checklist for voluntary arts groups
- Briefing 113: Welcoming people with a learning disability
- Briefing 122: Reaching out to new audiences
- Briefing 128: Events checklist - disability and access
- Briefing 134: Welcoming speakers of different languages
- Briefing 138: Welcoming newcomers to your group
- Briefing 149: Making your performances accessible to people with hearing and sight loss
- Briefing 161: Equality and diversity
- Briefing 172: Breaking down barriers to participation

Further reading:

On the UK Government's legislation website you can find a series of acts made to protect the rights of children and the disabled, as well as Health and Safety at Work, and Employment Rights guides.

- Voluntary But Not Amateur: A Guide to the Law for Voluntary Organisations and Community Groups (2009)
- Blackstone's Guide to the Equality Act 2010 (2012)

Do you need this publication in an alternative format?

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