

Gloucestershire Compact
Community Groups
Code of Practice

1. Who is this Code of Practice for?

- Voluntary and Community Sector Groups
- Public Sector Bodies

2. What is the Gloucestershire Compact?

The Gloucestershire Compact is an agreement between local public sector bodies and the voluntary and community sector to support and improve partnership working between the sectors. It is underpinned by Codes of Practice, based on the national Codes, which cover the following areas:

- Advancing Equality
- Commissioning
- Community Groups
- Consultation
- Mediation
- Multi-sector Partnerships
- Volunteering

The Gloucestershire Compact and its Codes contain specific undertakings for each sector, as well as a series of joint undertakings, which aim to make a positive impact on partnership working in the county. In this context, the term “undertaking” commits partners to work towards the principle or action in question.

3. What is the aim of this Code of Practice?

This Code of Practice aims to promote a better understanding of community groups within the voluntary and community sector as a whole, and to make a positive impact on the relationship in Gloucestershire between:

- community groups and the public sector
- community groups and the wider voluntary sector

It aims to set a framework for:

- recognising the diversity and contribution of community groups
- promoting a greater understanding of the nature of community groups and their specific needs

4. What is a community group?

There is a wide and diverse range of community groups in Gloucestershire, including:

- geographical community groups (urban and rural)
- community groups of interest or identity
- self-help groups
- faith groups

Whatever their background or structure, community groups play an important role in engaging local people in improving and developing their communities and environment.

“Community development is about building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about changing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives. It promotes the active involvement of people through sharing power, skills, knowledge and expertise.”

‘Strategic Framework for Community Development’ published by the Standing Conference for Community Development in May 2001.

5. Joint Undertakings

All partners to the Gloucestershire Compact are committed to working together to continually improve the effectiveness of the relationship between the public sector, community groups and the voluntary sector, and undertake to:

- 5.1 Commit to the definition of community development in Section 4 above as an overarching principle to bind the sectors, although recognising that some community groups may not necessarily define their work as community development.
- 5.2 Promote anti-discriminatory practice and comply with equalities legislation.
- 5.3 Strive to take account of the different timescales and speed with which community groups can respond to requests for information and/or consultation.
- 5.4 Recognise the contribution that community groups make.
- 5.5 Recognise that lack of time and resources may limit the participation of community groups in wider initiatives.
- 5.6 Respect the autonomy of each group and their right to work within their own boundaries.
- 5.7 Work with VCS infrastructure organisations and networks who are able to provide a bridge between the sectors, be active in locating and communicating with community groups, and work to build relationships between the sectors.
- 5.8 Recognise the core costs inherent in the running of community groups.
- 5.9 Consider the possibilities for effective non financial support through collaborative working and the use of shared resources.
- 5.10 Explore opportunities for partnership working when putting on events or training, as well as using accessible venues and advertising events well in advance.

6. Public Sector Undertakings

The Gloucestershire Compact public sector partners undertake to:

- 6.1 Value the work, knowledge and expertise of the community sector.

- 6.2 Recognise the importance of communities of people that share a common interest or concern, as well as communities of place.
- 6.3 Engage with the appropriate expertise and direct experience contained within community groups, working with VCS infrastructure organisations and networks when seeking solutions or information about a particular issue.
- 6.4 Take positive action to encourage fair treatment and equal access in applications to funding programmes for all community groups.
- 6.5 Recognise the monetary value of the contributions of volunteer time to projects.
- 6.6 Consider taking risks to support new ideas and activities within communities, but still use public money wisely.
- 6.7 Recognise the range of community ownership of assets, including land and property, as a basis for community enterprise and development at local level.

7. Community Group Undertakings:

The Gloucestershire Compact community group partners undertake to:

- 7.1 Recognise that community groups are part of the wider voluntary and community sector.
- 7.2 Accept the value of and the need for appropriate monitoring and evaluation.
- 7.3 Encourage quality partnership working and community involvement.
- 7.4 Ensure good communication between members, groups and networks when providing and seeking information and views.
- 7.5 Work with VCS infrastructure organisations to develop more effective systems of delivery, evaluation of services and better use of resources.

8. Voluntary and Community Sector Undertakings

The Gloucestershire Compact voluntary and community sector partners undertake to:

- 8.1 Consider the different interests of the voluntary and community sectors before responding to invitations for representation on partnership organisations and other local structures.
- 8.2 Challenge timescales that prevent community groups from getting involved.
- 8.3 Recognise that the interests of community and voluntary organisations are not always the same, and make it clear which part of the sector is being represented or discussed.
- 8.4 Respond to the needs of community groups in respect of information, involvement, facilitation, training and practical support.
- 8.5 Ensure that the needs and views of community groups are taken into account when planning and reviewing service provision.