

Equality and diversity

Equality

Legislation makes it illegal (in most cases) to discriminate on the basis of race, gender, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, or age - in employment and the provision of services. Age discrimination in employment is also generally illegal.

If people are paid for their work or receive payment in kind, men and women should receive the same for work of equal value.

Volunteering is treated in the same way as employment for the purposes of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 [see Handout 07 'Recruitment, selection and screening'].

The Equality Act 2006 establishes the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) that will come into being in October 2007. The CEHR will bring together the expertise and resources to promote equality and tackle discrimination in relation to gender, gender reassignment, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age and human rights. The CEHR will replace the three existing Commissions, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), Disability Rights Commission (DRC) and Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC).

Diversity

Diversity means recognising and valuing variety among your volunteers. It means celebrating difference. There are numerous benefits of having a diverse volunteer 'workforce'. For example, your organisation will:

- present a more welcoming face to volunteers, service users and the general public
- be more representative of wider society
- be more able to respond to the needs of your local community
- benefit from the new ideas and fresh approaches being generated by people from differing backgrounds, cultures, genders, ages and outlooks
- attract more customers and service users.

For these reasons it is wise to cast your net as widely as possible when looking for new volunteers, taking the trouble not just to attract people from similar backgrounds.

Further information

Volunteering England has published a number of free good practice guides, Click on the links below:

- [“Get it Right from the Start: Volunteer policies - the key to diverse volunteer involvement”](#)
- [“From Barriers to Bridges - a guide to overcoming barriers to volunteer involvement”](#)
- [“Volunteering for Everyone - A guide for organisations who want to include and recruit volunteers who have a learning disability”](#)
- [“Involving Ex-offenders in Volunteering”](#)
- [“Working with Volunteers: A management guide for refugee community organisations”](#)

Volunteering England has also published ‘You cannot be serious! - a guide to involving volunteers with mental health problems’ (2003, £7.95 including postage) see www.volunteering.org.uk/managingvolunteers/publications

The Commission for Equality and Human Rights website includes links to the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), Disability Rights Commission (DRC) and Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) www.cehr.org.uk