

why?

Fact sheet 10

Why the Compact?

What is the Compact?

The Compact is an agreement between Government and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) to improve the way they work together for benefit of each partner and the wider community. It was first set up nationally in 1998 to address concerns that the way central government departments worked with the VCS led to the sector being disadvantaged. Following a wide consultation, the Compact will be reviewed and refreshed and the updated Compact launched in November 2009.

Although not legally binding, the Compact recognises where there are shared values and principles between the sectors and sets out specific actions needed by each partner to improve relationships. These specific actions are called 'Compact undertakings'. The Government and the VCS have different undertakings, some examples of these are given below.

Government undertakes to:

- respect the independence of the voluntary and community sector;
- consult early enough to make a difference; and
- recognise the cost of doing business when funding public service delivery.

The voluntary and community sector undertakes to:

- operate through open and accountable organisations;
- involve all stakeholders and embrace diversity; and
- contribute constructively to public policy.

There are three partner agencies working together to oversee the work of the Compact: Compact Voice, representing the VCS; the Office of the Third Sector, representing Government; and the Commission for the Compact, an independent body which oversees the development of the Compact.

Local Compacts

The national Compact has now been extended and similar agreements developed by each local area. These local Compacts build on the commitments made in the national Compact and address more localised issues in partnership working. They are often developed through the local strategic partnership (a partnership of public, private and VCS organisations in a local area) so that all local public sector bodies (council, primary care trust, police, fire service, probation service etc) and VCS organisations are included in, and commit to put into practice, their local Compact.

What are the Codes of Practice?

Codes of Practice are nationally agreed guidelines of good practice on how the Compact undertakings (the specific actions agreed by each partner to improve relationships) will be carried out by each partner. They have been developed to strengthen the Compact and provide guidance on how government departments and VCS organisations should put the Compact into practice in key subject areas:

- Consultation and Policy Appraisal;
- Funding and Procurement;
- Volunteering;
- Community Groups; and
- Black and Minority Ethnic Voluntary and Community Groups.

Local Codes of Practice

Codes of Practice have also been developed by individual local areas to support the implementation of their local Compacts. These are often based on the national Codes of Practice but focus on addressing the key issues faced by local VCS organisations and public sector bodies working in partnership. In light of this some local areas have Codes of Practice covering different or additional subject areas to the national Codes such as commissioning, multi-sector partnerships or equality and diversity.

What happens when things go wrong?

In addition to Codes of Practice many local Compacts also have a dispute resolution procedure for use by all partners when either party feels the Compact agreement has been breached. This procedure explains the key steps involved and the support available to partners undertaking the process. The dispute resolution process would be the first option to try and resolve any disputes between partners.

Nationally, the Compact Advocacy Programme has been set up to advocate for fair treatment for the VCS by Government, and to give advice and support to VCS organisations on how to use the Compact and how to challenge Compact breaches.

Does the Compact really make a difference to me?

The Compact undertakings, alongside the more specific commitments by Government in the Compact Codes of Practice should lead to real changes in the way your organisation is treated.

For example, wider consultation, and being paid the full cost of delivering public services, on time and in advance of expenditure should give your organisation more opportunity to get involved and a stronger voice in shaping public services. It should also reduce some of the key barriers faced by organisations wanting to deliver these services as part of their work. In return carrying out your commitments under the Compact (such as keeping accurate financial records and making constructive contributions to policy development) will strengthen the reputation of your organisation and the wider VCS with partners as an essential, skilled and effective provider of services to local communities.

Where can I find out more about my local Compact?

To find out more about your local Compact, how you can use it and who is responsible for it in your area see www.thecompact.org.uk or contact the Compact Voice Administrator on 020 7520 2451 or email susannah.rigg@compactvoice.org.uk.

The Concise Compact Guide and a draft version of the refreshed Compact are available from www.thecompact.org.uk.

For more information about the support available through the Compact Advocacy Programme see www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/compactadvocacy or contact the National Advocate on 020 7520 2460/ daniel.fluskey@ncvo-vol.org.uk.

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