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# CHARITY ETHICAL PRINCIPLES



# ABOUT THE PRINCIPLES

These principles aim to support charities, their governing bodies and those who work and volunteer in and with them in recognising and resolving ethical issues and conflicts and make charities a safer place.

This is intended as an enabling document that draws together and underpins what many charities do already, and which all charities aspire to do.

These principles set out a framework for the ethical execution of charitable purpose, regardless of the charity's size, type or area of operation. They can help charities in their decision-making and in developing relevant policies and procedures.

**'...actively consider the principles and how they can be integrated in all their work and decision-making'**

# APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLES

All charities should proactively champion ethical behaviour and reflect and apply their charitable values in any activity they undertake, in addition to meeting their legal and regulatory requirements.

Governing bodies, staff and volunteers should actively consider the principles and how they can be integrated in all their work and decision-making. Individuals at every level of the organisation should be held accountable for modelling the behaviours set out by the principles.

When following the principles and in all their work charities should:

- Respect every individual's dignity and rights to privacy and confidentiality.
- Commit to challenging any instances of sexism, gender inequality and other power imbalances that leave some people at risk of harm.
- Value and improve diversity in their governing bodies, workforce and volunteers.

These principles have been developed by NCVO with the support of an advisory group comprising charities of all sizes, working both domestically and internationally and through an open consultation with the charity sector.

- These principles provide an overarching framework to guide decision-making good judgement and conduct. They do not provide a set of rules that prescribe how one should act in all situations.
- Endorsement of the principles is voluntary, but all charities are encouraged to reflect on the principles in their work and decision-making. The principles should be viewed as a benchmark of good practice, and by reflecting them in its work an organisation is more likely to maximise the difference it makes and champion its values.
- The principles are intended as complementary to existing sector codes such as the Charity Governance Code and individual charities' codes of conduct. They are not a substitute for charities' own codes of conduct.

**'The principles should be viewed as a benchmark of good practice'**



# THE PRINCIPLES

Charities agree to uphold the following principles throughout their work:

**BENEFICIARIES FIRST**  
**INTEGRITY**  
**OPENNESS**  
**RIGHT TO BE SAFE**

## BENEFICIARIES FIRST

Charities have a responsibility to carry out their purposes for the public benefit.

The interests of their beneficiaries and the causes they work for should be at the heart of everything charities and those who work and volunteer in and with them do.

### UPHOLDING THE PRINCIPLE

This means charities should:

Be clear what their purpose is and who or what their beneficiaries are.

Carry out their purpose to provide the greatest benefit to their beneficiaries and their cause, regardless of whether this might initially have a negative impact on the reputation or operation of the charity or its leadership.

When working with beneficiaries, ensure that their views and experiences are actively listened to and taken account of as part of how the charity operates, facilitating engagement and communication.

Ensure that all relevant policies and procedures are drawn up with the interests of beneficiaries in mind.

## INTEGRITY

Charities and those who work and volunteer in and with them should uphold the highest level of institutional integrity and personal conduct at all times.

### UPHOLDING THE PRINCIPLE

This means charities should:

Ensure appropriate systems are in place to help guarantee that all decisions are robust, defensible and free from conflicts of interest.

Consider the effect of activities conducted in private life on the reputation of the charity and of charities generally.

Ensure their resources are managed responsibly and their funds are properly protected, applied and accounted for, including policies and procedures to combat the risk of bribery, fraud, corruption and extortion.

Exercise due diligence in understanding the ethical standards of commercial partners and individuals, to seek support or collaboration from those with ethical values that are consistent with those of the charity.

Be sensitive to the impact of their activities on both the natural and human environment by:

- making responsible use of their resources
- adopting sustainable working practices
- undertaking initiatives to promote environmental responsibility.

## OPENNESS

Charities should create a culture and space where donors and supporters, as well as the wider public, can see and understand how they work, how they deal with problems when they arise and how they spend their funds.

### UPHOLDING THE PRINCIPLE

This means charities should:

Operate a presumption of openness and transparency; subject to complying with existing legal and regulatory requirements, charities should be willing to share information about how they work, ensuring it is easily accessible.

Publish, or (for the very smallest charities) at least make available on request:

- annual reports: this should include a section explaining how the charity's purpose and values are being fulfilled
- their approach to safeguarding, bullying and harassment
- their complaints procedure
- their whistleblowing policy.

Establish clear lines of responsibility and accountability for all their work, both internally and externally where applicable.

## RIGHT TO BE SAFE

Every person who volunteers with, works for or comes into contact with a charity should be treated with dignity and respect, and feel that they are in a safe and supportive environment.

All charities have a responsibility to create an inclusive culture that does not tolerate inappropriate, discriminatory, offensive or harmful behaviour towards any person who works for, volunteers with, or comes into contact with the charity.

Charities should also be places where people's wellbeing and mental health are valued and promoted, so that anyone working in the charity or coming into contact with the charity is encouraged to value and invest in their own health and wellbeing.

### UPHOLDING THE PRINCIPLE

This means charities should:

Stand against and have a clear approach to prevent abuse of trust and power including bullying, intimidation, harassment, discrimination or victimisation in all their activities.

Create a culture that supports the reporting and resolution of allegations, suspicions or concerns about abuse of any kind or inappropriate behaviour.

Ensure that anyone working or volunteering for the charity understands the expectations placed upon them, and provide the relevant training to support them in meeting their responsibilities.

Ensure that anyone who works or volunteers in the charity has access to proper support and advice if they:

- experience or witness unacceptable behaviour
- raise a concern or make an allegation about the actions of others
- don't feel safe.

# ANNEX

## APPLICATION OF THE CHARITY ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

The Charity Ethical Principles set standards that are often higher than those required by law. However, the Principles cannot override the legal obligations of charity trustees and those who work in charities.

Reference to the principles to inform the development and review of policies and procedures can support charities in recognising and resolving ethical issues and achieving best practice.

## THE CHARITY ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND EXISTING VOLUNTARY CODES

The Charity Ethical Principles are intended as complementary to existing sector codes such as the Charity Governance Code

<https://www.charitygovernancecode.org/en/front-page>

The principles are not a substitute for charities' own codes of conduct.

The principles should also be read in conjunction with other codes and standards, such as the government's codes of conduct for suppliers and grant recipients

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supplier-code-of-conduct>

## GLOSSARY

- **Beneficiaries** are intended as those who benefit from the charity's work, as defined by the charity's purpose.
- **Staff** include all individuals employed by charities and those working through contractors and third-party agencies.
- A **volunteer** is anyone who spends time, unpaid, doing something that furthers the charity's purpose.
- The **charity's purpose** is the reason the charity has been set up.

