



# Pathways to good work:

toolkit for community  
organisations



Middlesex  
University  
London

locality

the power of community

Work that is decent and fair is crucial to creating a motivated and skilled workforce that is empowered to deliver high quality services and to innovate. Community organisations are already delivering on many aspects of good work. This toolkit is designed to help organisations understand what good work is and improve existing practices by focusing on seven key dimensions:

1. Meaningful work

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2. Voice, democratic governance and inclusive culture

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3. Contracts and job design

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4. Pay and benefits

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5. Skills and development

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6. Flexible working, work-life balance and family-friendly support

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7. Health and wellbeing

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## What is this toolkit and who is it for?

[Locality](#) has been working with [Middlesex University](#) to understand good work, what it means for community organisations and how they are able to provide it for their staff. Researchers from the university's Centre for Enterprise, Environment and Development Research have carried out a study exploring how community organisations can implement and sustain the different dimensions of good work. You can find this study [here](#). This toolkit is a resource for community organisations looking for a framework to start thinking about how they can provide this good work. The toolkit looks at each of the elements of good work outlining good practice and practical steps which employers can take.

## How can I use this toolkit?

This toolkit is particularly useful for organisations taking their first steps towards providing good work and those wishing to assess and improve upon their existing good work practices. The seven dimensions and good practice examples provide a helpful framework for identifying both existing good practices and areas where there may be scope for improvement. For other organisations, it can be used as a framework for organising staff wellbeing policies. It can also provide a common language for talking about the different facets of staff wellbeing and good work, and to demonstrate how this is provided within the organisation.

Woven into all of the seven dimensions should be an effective approach to diversity, equity and inclusion. Community organisations face huge challenges as employers especially when short of resources. This toolkit is an aid to identifying the practices that organisations can aspire to and how they can be combined for the benefit of the business as a whole and the community it serves.

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I feel very lucky to be working here

(Community organisation employee)



## What is 'good work'?

Good work refers to both working conditions and job quality which are seen as crucial to creating a skilled and motivated workforce. We know that so many of the jobs that have been created over recent years have been insecure, poorly paid and precarious, with much debate about the 'gig economy' and the prevalence of zero-hours contracts.

As mission-driven organisations, community organisations should be well placed to provide something different: meaningful and worthwhile work, with secure working conditions, prospects for personal development and the ability of employees and volunteers to participate in decisions.

There are seven dimensions of good work which are set out above. They have been adapted from those used in other related studies, including the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) Good Work Index used in the [UK Working Lives Survey](#).

The idea of meaningful work was a key part of how many of the research participants viewed good work. It highlights the importance of this as a feature of work in community organisations, achieving meaningfulness or having a sense of purpose by working to address a social objective. However, there is also the danger, as this toolkit explores, of employees allowing the meaningfulness of their work to overshadow other important aspects such as pay, job sustainability and health and wellbeing.

## Good work and economic resilience

Locality has long stressed the important role which community organisations play in local economies. The 2018 report '[Powerful Communities, Strong Economies](#)' highlights this. It shows how these organisations ensure that wealth they generate is redistributed in their neighbourhoods by employing local people, using local supply chains and investing in people themselves to become economically active. The quality of the local jobs provided is a key part of this case, but until now there has been limited evidence about what makes the employment opportunities created by community organisations distinct. The evidence in the research study shows that good work results in 'win-win' situations for both employers and employees, as it improves productivity, job retention, skills and motivation, as well as individuals' work-life balance and wellbeing. These, in turn, improve the quality of services provided to beneficiaries over the long term and are an important aspect in improving the economic resilience of communities.



# The Toolkit – art of the possible in providing good work

Good quality work is good for staff and volunteers, as well as the organisations they work for. Yet it is normal for community organisations to experience challenges in providing this especially when they are smaller or relatively new.

Funding opportunities are often short term and don't always cover the full costs of activities, making permanent contracts and higher wages difficult to establish. Many organisations also feel under significant time pressure, where it becomes harder to step back and reflect on issues like how to create an inclusive work culture.

However, community organisations rise to these challenges every day. By their nature they are creative, resourceful, and forward-thinking, which they apply to overcoming the obstacles to providing good quality work. This is why the Toolkit was produced by listening to their experiences.

Organisations participating in the research provided examples of working within the context of what their organisation can deliver to enhance their offer of work. They demonstrate both a commitment to their workforce, and willingness to work creatively and flexibly, to provide the best conditions they can. The experiences of these organisations also highlight longer term strategies to lay the foundations for best practice.

There are a variety of good things any organisation can do. This Toolkit draws on the practical experience of community organisations to distil some of the best advice – the 'art of the possible' in providing good work.



## The seven dimensions of good work

This section lays out what good work means in relation to the seven key dimensions. It highlights some good practice examples and practical steps which you can take towards achieving good work. We recognise that for many community organisations these elements of good practice may be aspirational. Some of these dimensions are far harder to achieve good work in, particularly for smaller organisations with limited resources and leadership capacities. Within each of the dimensions we have included some thinking around using good practice across diversity, equity and inclusion.



# 01. Meaningful work

A key part of good work is that it is underpinned with a sense of social purpose and value, as well as being engaging and stimulating.



**I think meaningful work is just anything that contributes to society [...] my job gives me a real sense of purpose and I feel quite proud of it.**

**Community organisation employee**

Many individuals working in community organisations highlight the increased wellbeing which doing good has at a personal level and the motivation which comes from knowing or seeing that you are making a difference. Community organisations, by their very nature, are focused on addressing the needs of their communities. The meaningful work they provide for their employees and volunteers not only increases the resilience of staff but also the communities they serve.

## Good practice examples:

- Clearly demonstrating to staff the part that they are playing in meeting the needs of the community.
- Having regular conversations with staff – whether formally, informally or both – to ensure that staff are able to cope with the demands of the job. Are they learning and developing? Has their work become monotonous? Is the job still interesting and stimulating?
- Creating opportunities for staff to see and work in other parts of the organisation to help broaden their experience, skills and development, as well as helping to better manage staff absence such as for sickness or maternity and paternity leave.

## Diversity, equity and inclusion:

- Encourage staff to consider all aspects of diversity in how they identify and meet the needs of customers/ clients and work colleagues. This could include the accessibility of premises and the language used by the organisation.
- Help staff to use their own lived experience in meeting the diverse needs of the communities they serve.



Democratic ownership and control is a core principle for many community organisations. It is important for employees and volunteers to feel empowered in their jobs and have effective channels to feed views to senior management and board members. Also key to good work are good working relationships, social support and cohesion. All of these things help to improve staff and volunteer motivation, retention and wellbeing.



**Building relationships is more important than building skills in the team. Our organisation has a very low staff turnover, largely because of the team, the people, and the support they get from one another.**

Community organisation leader

### Good practice examples:

- Open communication is essential, and any challenges or concerns can be more easily resolved when open and honest conversation can happen.
- Peer support is often crucial to ensuring that employees and volunteers feel heard and that issues raised are acted upon. Ensure contact is maintained with anyone working predominantly at home. It is important to check in on wellbeing through various means, whether virtually or in-person.
- Collaborative team decision-making – giving staff a voice and opportunities to input into decisions is often crucial to resolving challenges as well as enabling service improvement and can increase staff motivation and productivity.

### Diversity, equity and inclusion:

- In thinking about communication take care to consider the diverse needs of your staff. How inclusive is your organisation? Do staff from all backgrounds and at all job levels feel happy to speak out?
- It can be the case that certain groups or individuals dominate peer-to-peer or team relationships. Think about how you ensure all views are heard, acknowledged and acted upon.



# 03. Contract and job design

It is important to have certainty around the length and type of contract in order to achieve good work. While most employees would ideally prefer permanent contracts, organisations reliant on short-term contracts and grants find it hard to provide permanent posts. Employees will, nevertheless, often accommodate a degree of insecurity due to the importance they attach to being engaged in meaningful work or other aspects of job quality, such as a friendly workplace culture, autonomy or flexible working conditions. Growing the business and building healthy financial reserves can provide the confidence needed to be able to support longer-term contracts.

### Good practice examples:

- Permanent full and part-time contracts allow skill and experience to be built up for the benefit of the organisation and its beneficiaries, as well as stability and security for employees.
- Where there is no alternative to fixed-term contracts, flexibility can be provided by moving staff between departments or job roles, depending on funding streams and the direction of grant income. Moving employees around an organisation can have the benefit of employees learning about different parts of the business, increasing job variety, motivation and flexible deployment.

- Employers can support workers on temporary contracts in other ways, such as maintaining close communication about their efforts to source continued funding, helping them network across the sector, and providing recommendations to other employers who are better placed to offer permanent contracts.
- Diversifying income streams can reduce dependency on one type of income, help with financial resilience and the creation of permanent contracts. Unpredictable events such as the Covid-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis highlight the precarity of relying on any one source of income, whether public sector grants, trading, or public/philanthropic donations.
- A balance should be struck in job design to ensure that employees are neither over- nor underworked, as both can result in reduced wellbeing and motivation. It can be helpful to speak with staff about this to help ensure the number of contracted hours meets both their needs and those of the organisation.

### Diversity, equity and inclusion:

- What are the varied needs and situations of employees in terms of job design and flexibility? Some staff may be willing to sacrifice certain aspects of a role in order to achieve greater flexibility, e.g. to look after children or for those with caring responsibilities.



# 04. Pay and benefits

While it is clear that there is great variation in the pay and benefits provided by employers in the community sector, many do offer the real Living Wage and many others aspire to provide it for their staff. Also important here is the transparency of existing pay structures, the lack of which can create tensions between employees.

### Good practice examples:

- All community organisations should aspire to provide the [real living wage](#) to their staff and consider becoming an [Accredited Living Wage Employer](#). If this is not currently possible, it is good practice to set an aspiration and develop a plan for achieving this, which shows goodwill and commitment to the workforce.
- Having transparent pay structures within an organisation helps to avoid tensions and cultivates trust.
- Aspiring to match the wages offered by other employers in comparable activities.
- Where this is not possible, offering other benefits beyond the statutory level can help compensate, such as extra annual, maternity and paternity leave. This also shows long-term commitment from the employer and results in long-term commitment from the employee in return.

- Considering less obvious types of benefits, for instance: discounts with a local community café or supplier organisation, access to employee assistance programme, employee loan, or salary sacrifice scheme.

### Diversity, equity and inclusion:

- Undertake regular analyses of pay and benefits to identify gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps. Other gaps to consider might include family wealth.
- In developing other benefits, think creatively around what different staff might find valuable and useful to ensure that benefits are not targeted at one 'type' of employee. Benefits must be offered to all employees to ensure equity.



# 05. Skills and development

Employees and volunteers need to be sufficiently skilled to carry out their work and provided with development opportunities that meet their aspirations. Many community organisations focus on making good use of individuals' abilities and strengths. Ensuring that there are good career prospects within an organisation improves retention rates. This can also be achieved through recognition of the work that staff have done.

### Good practice examples:

- Access to both formal and informal training is important for employees. While it can be more expensive, formal training provides an opportunity for staff to feel that they are being invested in. Apprenticeships can be an excellent way of helping people to develop their careers while benefiting the organisation.
- Informal training, such as on-the-job training, mentoring or supervision can be a good option for community organisations. It is particularly well tailored to the specific needs of the job and mentoring and supervision have the positive side effect of strengthening staff relationships. Existing staff taking on a supervision role for new staff can have the added benefit of staff feeling that their experience is valued.
- Diversifying job roles can be helpful to upskill staff and prepare them for management roles, e.g. by providing opportunities to contribute to bid writing, while also strengthening meaningful work. Consider how you can identify and build on their strengths.



No two days are the same.  
It's interesting it's challenging  
it's rewarding.

(Community organisation employee)

### Diversity, equity and inclusion:

- Keep records of training and development activity and analyse this to ensure that opportunities are equitable according to need and pay particular attention to how these opportunities are spread across a range of diversity areas.



## 06. Flexible working, work-life balance and family-friendly support

These include the formal and informal provisions needed for employees to work flexibly and ensure that work is compatible with their personal lives. Many employees in the UK have some form of flexible work arrangement, such as working from home. Organisations of all types have found that flexible working can improve motivation, productivity and retention. It is important that flexible working supports both the employees' needs and those of the organisation.



**We haven't put on any formal benefits as such, but the flexibility if you asked [employees] what is the best thing about us, flexibility and the organisation's values and people is always on the top and, as I said, our retention rate is so high. I think we're doing something right instead of offering gym memberships and all that kind of stuff.**

Director of a community organisation

### Good practice examples:

- Offering flexible employment to mould roles around operational needs and other commitments outside work. This might include home working, flexible hours, compressed hours, part-time work, or job sharing.
- Having conversations with staff to support them to work in a way which is best for them individually. It is important that staff are kept informed of their rights and what is available to them.
- Considering where flexible work can compensate; for example, where remote working is not feasible, other ways of supporting employees include agreeing working hours which are flexible, or allowing them to bring children to work.

### Diversity, equity and inclusion:

- Staff from certain backgrounds may be concentrated in particular roles where the provision of flexible working is not easy to arrange. What other benefits can you consider for these staff or can you organise different shift systems, for example to allow for more flexible working?
- It is important that staff have equal access to options for flexible working, though special consideration must be given to staff with disabilities or health conditions who may require reasonable adjustment.



Work can have positive and negative impacts on mental and physical health. Good work is based on ensuring there is a health and safety culture throughout the organisation. There are a variety of ways in which employers can support the health of their workforce, such as ensuring employees and volunteers are not under excessive stress, providing flexible work arrangements to support different individual needs, being attentive to mental health, and encouraging healthy lifestyles.

### Good practice examples:

- Providing flexible working options for those who feel it has helped them to improve work-life balance and health and wellbeing.
- Understanding the mental health needs of staff and making sure that employees do not feel the pressure to show the same level of productivity every day.
- Ensuring line managers are trained in health and wellbeing and able to check in and offer support to staff through one-to-one catch up meetings. Organisations should have at least one person able to provide first aid for both physical and mental health.

- Supporting employees to adopt health and wellbeing practices, such as exercise, meditation, and yoga (perhaps by providing discount on community-run activities).
- Offering peer support and checking in on colleagues to help address loneliness, which may be particularly important for staff working remotely.

### Diversity, equity and inclusion:

- Recognise people from different backgrounds may have differing needs in relation to physical and mental health. There are well documented [inequalities in health and wellbeing across different groups](#) which you should be aware of in considering how to meet needs in the work context.
- Spend time considering how policies such as sick leave can meet the health needs of different individuals in the workforce, while treating everyone fairly and equitably.



# Pathways to good work

This toolkit shows how small changes in practice can lead to important improvements in working conditions and job quality for staff as well as for productivity and the business as a whole. It also provides ideas for how to consider good practice in relation to diversity, equity and inclusion. All seven dimensions of good work are synergistically linked. A positive change in one dimension can often have a knock-on positive impact on another dimension or 'multiplier effect'. For example, open communication can facilitate inclusion in decision-making, which in turn leads to a sense of recognition and increased motivation among staff, and translates into improved wellbeing, increased productivity and service improvement. Good work is about a culture of 'give and take' between employers, staff and volunteers – i.e. staff and volunteers will be more likely to go the extra mile for their employers, colleagues and fellow volunteers if treated well.



# What else is out there?

This toolkit has been tailored to the specific characteristics and needs of community organisations. Other useful initiatives and toolkits to help employers think about good work include:

## Greater London Authority

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- [Mayor's Good Work Standard](#) - a set of standards for employers in London based on best practice.

## North of Tyne Combined Authority

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- [Good Work Pledge](#) - a set of five pledges aimed at helping businesses think about offering good work to the people of North Tyne.

## Greater Manchester

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- [Good Employment Charter](#) - a voluntary membership and assessment scheme that aims to raise employment standards across Greater Manchester, for all organisations of any size, sector or geography.

## Mind

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- [Thriving at Work](#) - six core standards to help employers think about mental health in the workplace. A toolkit with practical examples.

## British Standard Institute (BSI)

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- The BSI provides free guidance on [diversity, equity and inclusion](#).

## My Community

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- The [My Community website](#) contains free guidance on human resources.

## Locality

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- Locality members can also benefit from HR advice from our in-house experts - please [click here](#) for more information.



Locality supports local community organisations to be strong and successful. Our national network of member organisations supports hundreds of thousands of people every week. We offer specialist advice, peer learning and campaign with members for a fairer society. Together we unlock the power of community.

#PowerOfCommunity

[locality.org.uk](https://www.locality.org.uk)

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