# 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

2. Voice, democratic governance and inclusive culture

3. Contracts and job design

4. Pay and benefits

5. Skills and development

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

7. Health and wellbeing

## 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 and Economic Development Research (CEEDR) 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 will be 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 the areas where there is already good practice in place and those that need to be improved on. 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) Job Quality Index used in the UK Working Lives Survey.

The idea of meaningful work was a key part of how many of the Middlesex 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, motivation, work-life balance and health 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.

# Keeping up the good work
# beyond Covid-19

Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020, we have seen the increasing importance of good work and the challenges which community organisations have had to overcome. Many community organisations will be looking at the aspects of good work which they may need to build into their recovery plans. Despite being an incredibly difficult time for communities, there have been some positive outcomes for working practices, such as increased flexible working and more attention given to the physical and mental wellbeing of staff. However, experiences of the pandemic have also revealed areas where organisations may need to think about further changes. Things like decent pay, job security and the impact the lack of these has on employees will be important and challenging, especially at a time of economic uncertainty.

So, as we move from the crisis response phase of the pandemic to medium- and long-term recovery, how can community organisations embed good work for staff?

Just as during the height of the pandemic, there are sure to be many unspoken questions and worries for staff. This will be true both through the reopening and the long-term recovery processes. Open communication will be key. Listening to the concerns and anxieties of staff will enable organisations to plan better and ensure that staff are looked after.

Locality's blog on good work emphasises that 'reflecting on what it means to be a good employer and maintaining trust has never been more important'. The seven dimensions of good work offer a framework for you to start thinking about how you can support staff through what continues to be a very uncertain and tough time.

# The seven dimensions of good work

This section lays out what good work means in relation to the seven key dimensions. It also highlights some good practice examples and suggests some 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. We also note that some of these dimensions are far harder to achieve good work in, particularly for smaller organisations with limited resources and flat structures. Within each of the dimensions we have included some thinking around using good practice across diversity, equity and inclusion.

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

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**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 as well as the motivation which comes from knowing or seeing that you are making a difference. Community organisations, by their very nature, address the needs of the communities they are in. 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 the organisation serves.

● Having regular conversations with staff – either formally or informally – to ensure that staff are still happy 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 staff 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:**

● Ensure that staff are encouraged to consider all aspects of diversity in how they identify and meet the needs of customers/ clients and work colleagues. This could be considering the accessibility of premises or about more carefully considering 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.**

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**If anything, [the pandemic] has made us more empathetic of each other. Because we know more about personal lives and impact on people because they've been more open to tell us. [...] I think [relationships] have improved.**

**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 any issues are acted upon. Many organisations have been maintaining contact through the pandemic, by checking in on wellbeing through various means. This will be important to continue 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.

**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 give permanent posts. Employees will 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 a business and having 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.

- Diversifying income streams can be a longer-term opportunity to reduce dependency on one type of income. This can help with financial resilience and allow permanent contracts to be considered. Reliance on grant-funding income has its problems with an uncertain funding landscape post-Covid, while the pandemic has also shown the precarity of relying on traded income.

- 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. The Living Wage Foundation states that employers should aspire to provide a guarantee of hours which employees will be contracted to work and the right to a contract which accurately reflects the number of hours worked.

### 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.

**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 become accredited Living Wage Employers.

- Having transparent pay structures within an organisation.

- 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.

## Diversity, equity and inclusion:

- Undertake regular analyses of pay benefits to identify gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps.

- 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.

**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.

- 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 has the positive side effect of strengthening staff relationships through mentoring and supervision.

- Existing staff taking on a supervision role for new staff can have an additional benefit of giving staff a feeling that their experience is being valued.

**Diversity, equity and inclusion:**

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

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

**(Community organisation employee)**

These include the formal and informal provisions needed for employees to work flexibly and ensure that work is compatible with their personal lives. Flexible working and working from home have become more common during the pandemic. Organisations of all types have found that flexible working can improve motivation, productivity and retention.

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**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**

However, this is an aspect of good work where there needs to be some caution. Employers should ensure that working from home does not mean employees are working unsustainable hours and being overworked.

**Good practice examples:**

- Offering flexible employment to mould roles around operational needs and other commitments outside work. It is important that flexible working supports both employees and the needs of the wider organisation.

- Having conversations with staff to support them to work in a way which is best for them individually. This might be continuing to offer home working or flexible hours beyond the pandemic.

- Where remote working is not feasible in all parts of a business, other ways of supporting employees include agreeing working hours which are flexible, or allowing them to bring children to work regularly or in emergencies.

**Diversity, equity and inclusion:**

- Staff from certain backgrounds may be concentrated in certain roles within your organisation and the provision of flexible working may not be as 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?

**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. In order to ensure that employees and volunteers are not under excessive stress and can benefit from a sense of purpose in their work, it is important to recognise individuals' needs and preferences when it comes to how they work. The pandemic has really exposed the importance of employee mental and physical wellbeing, especially when it comes to isolation and loneliness.**

**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.

- Support employees to continue the health and wellbeing practices, such as exercise, meditation or yoga, which they may have started during the pandemic to use time saved by not commuting.

**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.

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. We have also included ideas for how to consider good diversity, equity and inclusion practice in developing approaches to good work. All seven dimensions are interlinked and have crossover with each other. 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. However, there are also a variety of other initiatives and toolkits to help employers think about good work. These include:**

### Greater London Authority

- Good Work for All – one of the nine recovery missions. It is accompanied by a grant programme which all skills providers in the London area can bid for.

- Mayor's Good Work Standard

### North of Tyne Combined Authority

- Good Work Pledge – the combined authority has been working on a set of five pledges aimed at helping businesses think about offering good work to the people of North Tyne.

### Greater Manchester

- 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

- Thriving at Work – six core standards to help employers think about mental health in the workplace. A toolkit with practical examples.

Locality supports local community organisations to be strong and successful. Our national network of over 1,400 members helps more than 307,000 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

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