



Engaging the perspectives of
offenders and former offenders

A code of practice

Equality and respect

Organisational management

Reward, recognition and payment

Training and support



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offenders and former offenders

A code of practice

**Developed by a
consortium including:**

Clinks

The Howard League for Penal Reform
nacro

The Prince's Trust

Prison Reform Trust

Revolving Door Agency

Smart Justice

Unlock

Terminology

Former offender

The term 'former offender' refers to any individual who has finished a community or custodial sentence, irrespective of age, ethnicity or gender.

Offender

An 'offender' is defined as an individual who is currently serving a community or custodial sentence under UK law.

Organisation

The term 'organisation' within this context defines a voluntary sector organisation that either has offenders or former offenders representing them as employees, volunteers or service users.

Review of code

This code of practice and set of standards will be regularly reviewed by the supporting organisations, and could be subject to change to ensure it continues to consider the welfare and support for the (former)offender who may wish to engage in advisory, media or policy activities.

The aim of the code

Voluntary sector organisations often use offenders or former offenders in an advisory capacity to inform policy, respond to government proposals and to speak at events or to the media.

The use of offenders and former offenders in these areas has a central role in raising the awareness of issues relating to offending behaviour as well as proposing potential solutions for effective resettlement.

Voluntary sector organisations are well placed to encourage and promote a more balanced coverage of offender-related issues and to support those involved in telling their story in an appropriate way. This code covers occasions when individuals are telling their story, representing an organisation or talking about the criminal justice system in general.

We have developed a code of practice and set of standards to ensure this process is managed effectively and to protect the interests of all parties involved. This code is relevant to all offenders/former offenders, whether they are an employee, volunteer or a representative.

The code has been developed by a coalition of voluntary sector organisations and includes best practice standards on the following sections:

1. **Equality and respect**
2. **Organisational management**
3. **Reward, recognition and payment**
4. **Training and support**

The coalition aims to provide support, training and documentation for colleagues within the voluntary sector with a view to getting voluntary and public sector organisations to sign up to the code.

1. Equality and respect

The welfare of the individual is paramount.

Voluntary sector organisations should:

- Have a nominated person within the organisation to take engagement/media enquiries on behalf of (former)offenders.
 - Supply guidelines to the enquirer/media agency setting out acceptable demands and questions. Ideally, these should be agreed before engagement, and it is accepted these may change depending on circumstance and subject matter. Agreed boundaries should be adhered to.
 - Ensure that the enquirer/media agency will, where necessary, agree to respect the anonymity of the former offender and anyone else (victim, family, etc) who may be directly or indirectly involved. No contact details should be given out without permission.
 - Agree from the outset what the individual (former) offender is prepared to do and with whom. A consent form should be signed and should be flexible enough to allow for different levels of participation, including a protocol allowing withdrawal of consent. Individuals should not feel obliged to discuss and present life stories and experiences without prior agreement and support.
- Be sensitive in selection of individuals, considering age, vulnerability and particular needs. Anonymity is particularly important for children who offend. It is also important to consult family or guardians: consent from an appropriate adult must be received, outlining the agreed level and scope of participation.
 - Ensure that media agencies adhere to the Press Complaints Commission Code of Practice¹ and Ofcom Codes of Practice². This means they should not publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information. Organisations should support the individual and respond to any negative or inaccurate coverage they receive.
 - Respect an individual's decision to decline any engagements, especially in the case of paid employees if it is not part of their job description.
 - Organisations should try not to over-use their (former)offenders to prevent over-exposure.

2. Organisational management

Organisations should ensure individuals are supported through the process of disclosing personal information.

The individual should have a good understanding of:

- How the information could be used.
- When the information will be used. Information could be presented at a later date when they might have limited or no control. This should be made explicit at the outset.
- How it could be presented, including possible misrepresentation.
- Only asking (former) offenders to talk about issues that they have direct personal experience of.

Written guidance should be offered to the participant on the implications of being involved in this kind of work.

Organisations should be working towards:

- A strategy for involvement of (former) offenders. This should include offender/former offender consultations, participation and a support mechanism.
- A minimum level of support, such as a pre-brief on the role they are about to undertake and what will be expected of them, public speaking practice or training, payment of all expenses and a debrief after the event.
- Linking up with other service user forums and/or capacity building organisations such as Clinks, who can offer additional training and support on attending conferences, meetings, being a member of a taskforce, etc.
- Allocating a senior member of staff to be an internal and external (former) offender advocate to promote and manage the strategy.

Ten top tips when working with the media and offenders or former offenders

1. Make sure you find out all about the (former) offender's life story. Does it fit in with the key messages of the organisation? Would you be happy to hear a media interview with (former) offender who says we need to build more prisons?
2. Ensure the (former) offenders are clear about the key messages of your organisation and what your organisation does. They are your ambassadors!
3. Be very clear what you may be asking them to do. If, for example, it is media work, ask if they are content to appear on TV, that details of their background will be in the public domain, etc.
4. When dealing with the media, when you first speak to a producer/journalist find out:
 - What is the subject being discussed?
 - What do they want the individual to talk about, what questions will they be asked and by whom?
 - Where is the location of the interview, how will the individual get there and back, timings?
 - Is there any payment and how will they get paid (you may have a policy in your organisation that you pay for media interviews)?
5. Don't give phone numbers of individuals out to media/organisations who want public speakers unless they have agreed first
6. Tell the (former) offenders whom you work with, that if they get any direct calls from the media they must ask them to talk to a representative from the organisation the (former) offender is working with before any conversation takes place between them and the (former) offender directly. In effect, you may need to take on the role of agent
7. Make contact after the media interview/talk and find out how it went.
8. Don't over-use (former) offenders. They are usually trying to cope with getting their lives together and struggling with money issues, etc. Be aware of this, and be helpful and supportive to them.
9. If a (former) offender is doing a talk for you or sitting on a panel at a conference, ensure they are paid travel costs and expenses. They should not be expected to give up their time for nothing.
10. If you are paying travel costs/expenses cash is better, if possible, as cheques will take time to clear, leaving (former) offenders out of pocket.

3. Reward, recognition and payment

- For paid employees, this code should be adhered to when they are asked to perform tasks over and above their normal job description. An additional agreed payment could be offered for this.
- Organisations should consider having their own standard set of rewards and recognition for the contribution of (former)offenders. Where joint events are held, organisations should ensure that rewards and recognition are equal among contributors.
- A (former) offender might choose to undertake work on a voluntary, non-payment basis. Where it is agreed there will be payment for services, this could come in the form of vouchers, tokens or cash and the amount will vary depending both on the type of task they are asked to perform and the particular case. All expenses should be covered including, where appropriate, loss of earnings. Additional planning and support time should also be allocated
- Organisations should agree terms, conditions and payment with external agencies.
- Where appropriate, organisations should encourage the enquirer/media agency to offer payment or, alternatively, offer a donation to the charity of the (former)offender's choice.

4. Training and support

- Organisations should establish a training and development policy both for (former) offenders and those involved in supporting them. The training required will depend on the needs of the individuals and should be reviewed as necessary. Training could include the following:
 - Presentation skills
 - Confidence building
 - Motivational interviewing
 - Public speaking
 - Negotiation and persuasion
 - Conflict resolution
 - Facilitation
 - Media skills.
- Training, development and support may be problematic for small voluntary sector organisations. Therefore, we would encourage these organisations to join capacity building bodies such as Clinks (www.clinks.org), who can offer additional services for this purpose.

For more information about the Code of Practice contact:

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Prince's Trust



UNLOCK
The National Association
of Reformed Offenders



changing lives
reducing crime



CLINKS

supporting voluntary organisations that
work with offenders and their families



the **Howard League** for **Penal Reform**