Ensuring Ethical Excellence

Practical Guide for Muslim Charities

mcf

Muslim Charities Forum

SUPPORT | CONNECT | REPRESENT

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Acknowledgments

MCF has a dedicated team of staff and volunteers who contributed to the production of this guide including: Fadi Itani, Zoheb Ali, Selma Bennehar, Muhammad Alkarmi and Francesca Floris.

Design by Muhammad Alkarmi.

Suggested Citation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Charity work sees organisations and individuals traversing complex situations, where the nuances and realities of vulnerable people's lived experiences are confronted daily. Safety in these scenarios is paramount, and this begins with the ethical principles and structures that charities implement within their organisations.

There are many different approaches we can take to improve the sector, and there is always more work to be done to maintain safety and ethics, so it is important that charities reflect upon and review their practices and organisational structures. By doing this, charity workers empower each other and the communities that rely on them, as well as driving forward global missions of sustainability, safeguarding, and environmental awareness.

Muslim charities cannot claim to be truly charitable in their nature if there is no consideration paid to the ethics of their practice. Inherent to the Islamic values that guide us are the principles of good akhlaq (virtue, morality) and adab (etiquette, decorum). We must also pay attention to the concept of Amanah (trust, promise). It dictates the operations of Muslim charities as the custodians of compassion and welfare in society.

Muslim charities must strive to be the beacons of these principles within wider society. We hope all charities, whether big or small, involved in all manner of campaigns and services, can benefit from the information found in this guide.

> *"We offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, yet they refused to undertake it and were afraid of it; mankind undertook it- they have always been inept and foolish."*
>
> *(Al-Ahzab, 33:72)*
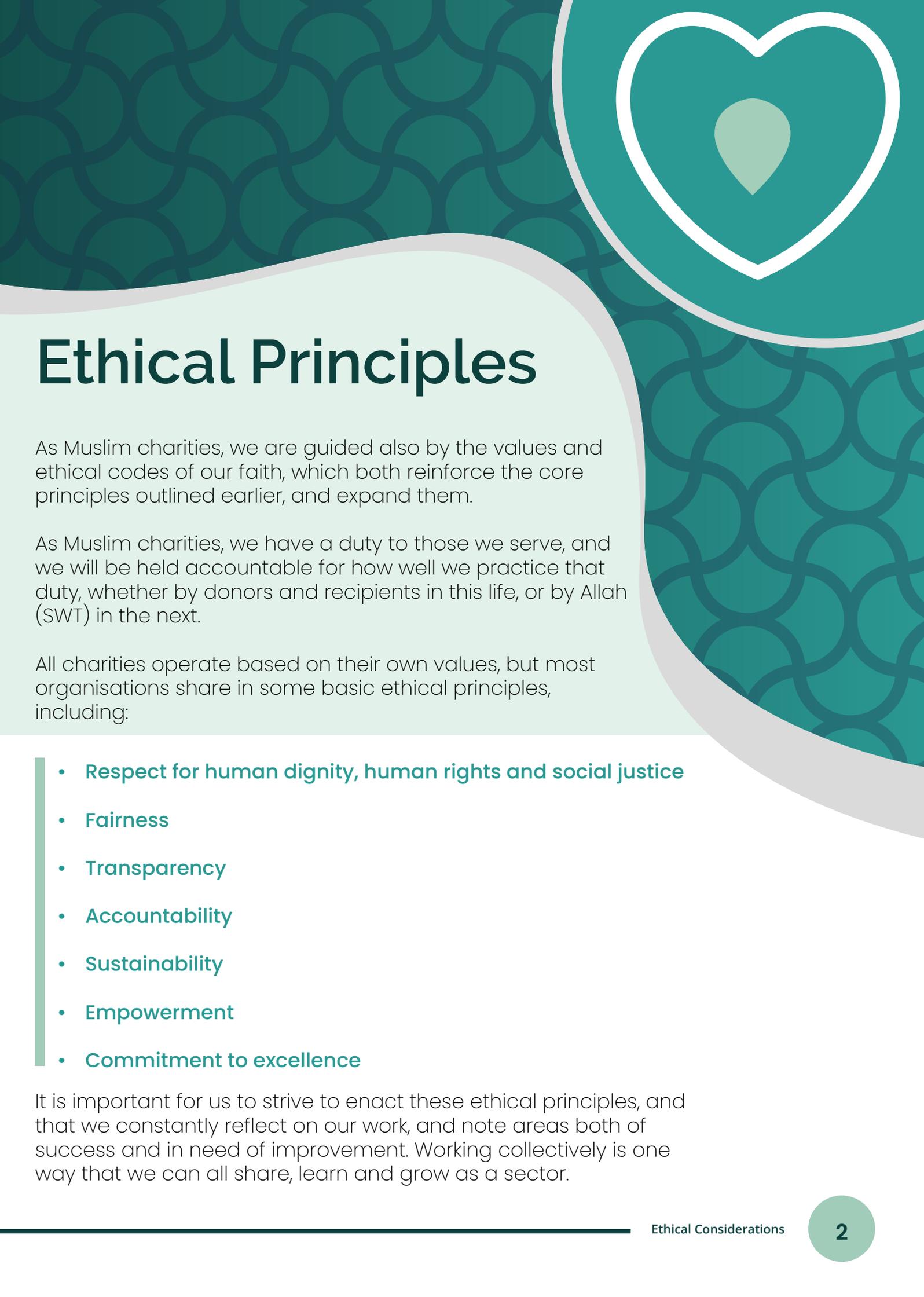
Ethical Principles

As Muslim charities, we are guided also by the values and ethical codes of our faith, which both reinforce the core principles outlined earlier, and expand them.

As Muslim charities, we have a duty to those we serve, and we will be held accountable for how well we practice that duty, whether by donors and recipients in this life, or by Allah (SWT) in the next.

All charities operate based on their own values, but most organisations share in some basic ethical principles, including:

- **Respect for human dignity, human rights and social justice**

- **Fairness**

- **Transparency**

- **Accountability**

- **Sustainability**

- **Empowerment**

- **Commitment to excellence**

It is important for us to strive to enact these ethical principles, and that we constantly reflect on our work, and note areas both of success and in need of improvement. Working collectively is one way that we can all share, learn and grow as a sector.

Competition and the Digital Space

Whilst a healthy level of competition can be beneficial to our area of work, we should all remind ourselves that, we share a charitable (and not a profit-driven) ethos, we exist to serve people in need (and not to make the most income at all costs) and that we constitute a relatively niche sector united by a common faith of reference, which emphasises solidarity and fair play.

With the coronavirus pandemic, reliance on digital campaigns and marketing has been extended, and it is expected that digital competition will increase with the reduced fundraising avenues for charities. Many charities have adopted real time bidding (RTB) practices to maximise the reach of their charity.

We would advise caution when using RTB as there are three main ways in which bidding on another charity's name can backfire on a practical level, and make it more expensive for your ad to be displayed.

1) Bidding War

One serious downside is that you may start a 'bidding war' because in response to your strategy - your 'competitor' may start bidding on your own brand name. Nobody in the Muslim charity sector wants to see this happening.

Not only for the ethical reasons summarised earlier, but also because nobody would benefit from such a scenario, as your bidding will make it more expensive for them to bid on their own name and vice versa. This is money that could be better spent on diversifying content, or on work in the field.

2) You still pay even if someone doesn't click your ad

When someone searches for a specific charity online, it is very likely that they have already set their mind on supporting that charity. This means that not many people will be clicking on your ads, causing a low CTR (Click-through rate).

While this may not seem bad given that you aren't paying when they don't click on your ads, low CTR can actually cause your Quality Score to decrease, which in turn will make it more expensive for your ad to show. In a way, you still pay when someone doesn't click on your ad.

3) Costs rise, whilst CTR and Quality Score may decrease

If you're bidding on another charity's name, your ad isn't going to be very relevant. Since Google's reputation is based on the quality of its search results, it is in Google's best interest to deliver relevant results, therefore, in all likelihood, Google will penalise you with a low-Quality Score. And the lower your Quality Score, the higher your cost per click. We are confident that all Muslim charities will appreciate the ethical and practical downsides of bidding on another charity's name, and we hope that all will refrain from adopting such a strategy.

We encourage all charities to apply the following to their online bidding strategy:

- **Do not intentionally bid on each other.**

- **To avoid accidentally bidding on other charities, we encourage all charities to add the other charity's names, and campaign names as a 'negative' input in your systems, both on exact match and phrase match.**

- **If you believe that your charity's name or campaign name has been bidded on by another organisation (whether intentionally or accidentally), we advise your organisation to formally inform the other organisation in writing, with the evidence. The two charities should resolve the issue between themselves, and if this is not possible, MCF can be called upon to mitigate if both parities see fit.**

Within the sector, we should be fostering a positive environment of cooperation and unity. We should not engage in defamatory language or the spreading of misleading information or rumours about other charities within the sector. This is where healthy competition ends and divisive and unethical behaviour begins. We may not be the same, and we may disagree on certain issues, but we all share in the same ideals of making the world a fairer and safer place for the most vulnerable.

"Those who unjustly eat up the property of orphans, eat up a Fire into their own bodies: They will soon be enduring a Blazing Fire."

(Surah al-Nisa: 10)

Marketing Materials

Marketing is central to the work of charities, and the accumulation of funds used to help vulnerable and marginalised people across the globe. Charities need to market the work they do in order to increase donations. Without it, the lifesaving work they do is simply not sustainable.

With this said, there are ethical considerations to be cognisant of when it comes to the creation of content and marketing materials. Not all content has the desired impact, and unfortunately, sometimes charities can be guilty of reinforcing the very same stereotypes, discrimination and oppressive behaviours they seek to eradicate in theirwork.

There are several ethical issues charities need to consider:

- **Depictions of those we serve**

- **Consent**

- **Empowering communities to tell their own stories**

- **Welfare and safety of those we serve**

- **Welfare of donors and those viewing content**

Depictions of those we serve

Whilst it is important to highlight the plights and struggles of those we serve, there is a fine line between what is acceptable and what could be seen as exploitative. We should be careful of reproducing and reinforcing damaging stereotypes and/or exacerbating the trauma and difficulties faced by those we serve.

Empowering communities to tell their own stories

Those we serve have incredible stories to tell, both of joy, and of sadness and trauma. They are best placed to talk about their life and their experiences, so it is important that charities empower communities to share their stories and to be part a central part of how their story is shared and presented.

Consent

Those we serve are human beings deserving of dignityand respect. Content should only be produced with their explicit consent, and those featured in marke ting materials should be made fully aware of how this content will be presented. They should be given full rights to remove their consent at any point.

Marketing and Welfare

Charities intend to do good, not harm those they work in service to. However, sometimes, the way in which charities present recipients within their marketing material can cause greater harm than good. It is important for charities to understand the social, cultural and political contexts of the communities they work with. In some scenarios identities or locations should be withheld so that those sharing their stories are effectively protected and do not face further harm, whether physically, emotionally or otherwise.

Charities also have a duty to protect the welfare of donors and those who view their materials. Charities should avoid causing excessive stress or trauma to viewers. Some viewers may have had direct experience of conflict and/or abject poverty and content should be produced in a way that is sensitive to this.

Fundraising

Advances in the digital age with the increased use of social media by faith-based charities has meant that fundraising, specifically online fundraising, has seen an acceleration. It is fantastic to see how eager the Muslim community is to donate towards charities that work tirelessly in the cause for social justice, security, and the development of some of the most deprived and vulnerable communities around the world.

The exponential rise of online fundraising has also meant that individuals are able to launch their own fundraising campaigns easily from home and through their mobiles. While charities should continue to champion such endeavours, they must also pay due attention to the ethical considerations that arise from this, such as:

- If you are conducting a fundraiser for another person, make sure you have their consent.

- If you are conducting a fundraiser for a project, ensure you have a detailed plan and have researched how you can deliver the money raised.

- If you are conducting a fundraiser for someone who has passed away, ensure you have their families consent.

- If you are conducting a fundraiser for an emergency situation, ensure that you can deliver the funds and that there is a need for your fundraiser.

- Charities should inform those who fundraise via personal fundraisers for their organisation that they should consider the ethical points made above.

Regarding the causes that charities raise funds for, our 2021 Ramadan Survey showed that the following positions on these statements were common:

'Muslim charities have a responsibility beyond fundraising and aid work, to advocate for Human rights and policy change on behalf of persecuted peoples'

77% Agreed   **17% Neutral**   **7% Disagreed**

For "'Muslim charities focus too much on the short-term (e.g. disaster alleviation); they should do more to help the needy become self-sufficient in the long-term, even if it costs more."

68% Agreed   **17% Neutral**   **15% Disagreed**

From this we can see how important it is to donors that funds raised by the charities they support are championing causes beyond the scope of any given campaign. Donors wish to see Muslim charities focusing on future oriented solutions to a problem, not just immediate responses to acute symptoms.

Donor Acknowledgment and Relations

Without the generosity and willingness to inspire change from donors, the operations of a charity would be significantly impacted. The donors are the lifeblood of a charity's campaigning, advocacy, and fundraising. Charities should always acknowledge and appreciate the munificent giving of their donors and maintain the relationships that their donors establish with them.

It can be as simple as an automated 'thank you' message, made even more special through personalisation, or it could be documented examples of how their donations have made an impact abroad, such as through videos or photos.

Other examples of what charities can do for donor relations could be: allowing long-term donors an insight into the charity's short-term goals or providing a space for such donors to influence or provide meaningful advice on a charity's strategy.

Communications are key to this stewardship of a donor, this could be through postal correspondence, regular or specialised emailing lists and/or newsletters, or through text messages and direct messages on social media.

"They ask thee what they should spend (in charity). Say: Whatever ye spend that is good, is for parents and kindred and orphans and those in want and for wayfarers. And whatever ye do that is good, Allah knows it well."

(Surah al-Baqarah: 215)

The showcasing of a donor's name and/or picture on a building or on an official charity document (only after obtaining their explicit consent) can also go a long way to showing how much their involvement means for a charity.

Charities can transform a one-time donor into a life-long supporter by going the extra mile to show their gratitude and appreciation.

The data below, taken from MCF's 2021 "The Muslim Charitable Giving Survey", shows donor opinions on gift aid and 100% donation policies. It is an example of what charities should consider from an ethical perspective in their marketing and communications.

67%

Donors said admin costs do not deter them from donating to charities .

65%

Donors said any Gift aid claimed should be split between the original donation and admin costs.

53%

Donors do not believe the 100% donation policy is an achievable practice.

*To read more about how donors make their choices to donate to charities, read our Charitable Giving survey:

https://www.muslimcharitiesforum.org.uk/mcf-resources/

Environmental Considerations

It is extremely important that the Muslim charity sector leads from the front in the fight against climate change and environmental disaster. Humanitarian disasters around the world that emerge as a cause of war or conflict are often exacerbated by environmental problems such as famine and drought. We need only look upon the suffering of those in Yemen or the flooding in Bangladesh, or indeed here in the UK in recent years, to see this.

The rapid decline in the health of our Earth is causing, for the most vulnerable communities, a doubly impacted depravity. There are steps that charities can take to mitigate their carbon footprint, and to work in a sustainable way, to benefit both global and local communities.

> *"And Allah has sent down rain from the sky and given life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness. Indeed in that is a sign for a people who listen."*
>
> *(Surah An-Nahl: 65)*

Environmental Awareness in the Field

- Delivering goods in conflict zones using carbon neutral transport vehicles and the limiting of air travel. This greatly contributes to the reduction of your carbon footprint.

- Source locally produced goods from neighbouring countries, this both lowers your carbon footprint and boosts the local economy by providing job opportunities for local communities.

- The use of renewable energy sources is another way charities can increase their eco-friendliness. For example, installing solar panels for schools and homes in developing countries reduces CO2 emissions.

- Charities can engage in and advocate for clean-up initiatives of green spaces, canals and rivers. Activities like these reduce land, water and visual pollution. Crucially, these activities also increase community cohesion, done so around a righteous mission.

- Increase fundraising strategies aimed at, for example, planting trees. This not only improves the quality of air and provides habitats for animals and birds but increases job opportunity and benefits the supply chains of local communities.

Creating an Eco-Friendly Workspace:

- **Use renewable energy sources in offices where possible.**

- **Limit paper-wastage by using digital copies of documents.**

- **Reduce the amount of energy consumed by switching off lights and electricity outlets when not in use.**

- **Switch to a carbon-friendly ink on marketing communications, which should also be fully recyclable.**

- **Stretch your office supplies as far as you can before buying new ones!**

- **Reduce the use of cars and vans as much as possible and instead make use of public transport, cycling and walking for your journey.**

Charities may wish to consider the upskilling and development of technological and digital access/know-how for impoverished communities as part of their other ongoing campaigns. The 'digital divide' that exists between developing and developed societies and economies is vast.

An important facet of eco-friendly practice on the part of Muslim charities is the digitisation of resources and services. In order to ensure that the beneficiaries of their work are not being left out, while also practicing sustainability, Muslim charities should ensure they are doing all they can to contribute to the advancement of technological infrastructure in such communities.

Safeguarding

Given the nature of the environments within which charities operate, and the vulnerable people and communities that they strive to benefit, there is a constant need for them to be cognisant of risk and vulnerability.

The protection of at-risk adults and the welfare of children requires extra consideration on the part of charities who deal with cases that involve them.

Charities must cultivate a strong safeguarding culture within their organisation and ensure that those who are in contact with the charity, in any capacity, are always safe from harm.

They can do so by:

• **Identifying and managing risks**

• **Implementing suitable policies and practices**

• **Carrying out the relevant background checks**

• **Asking for and checking suitable references from staff and volunteers, preferably at least 2**

• **Reporting any incidents through the appropriate channels**
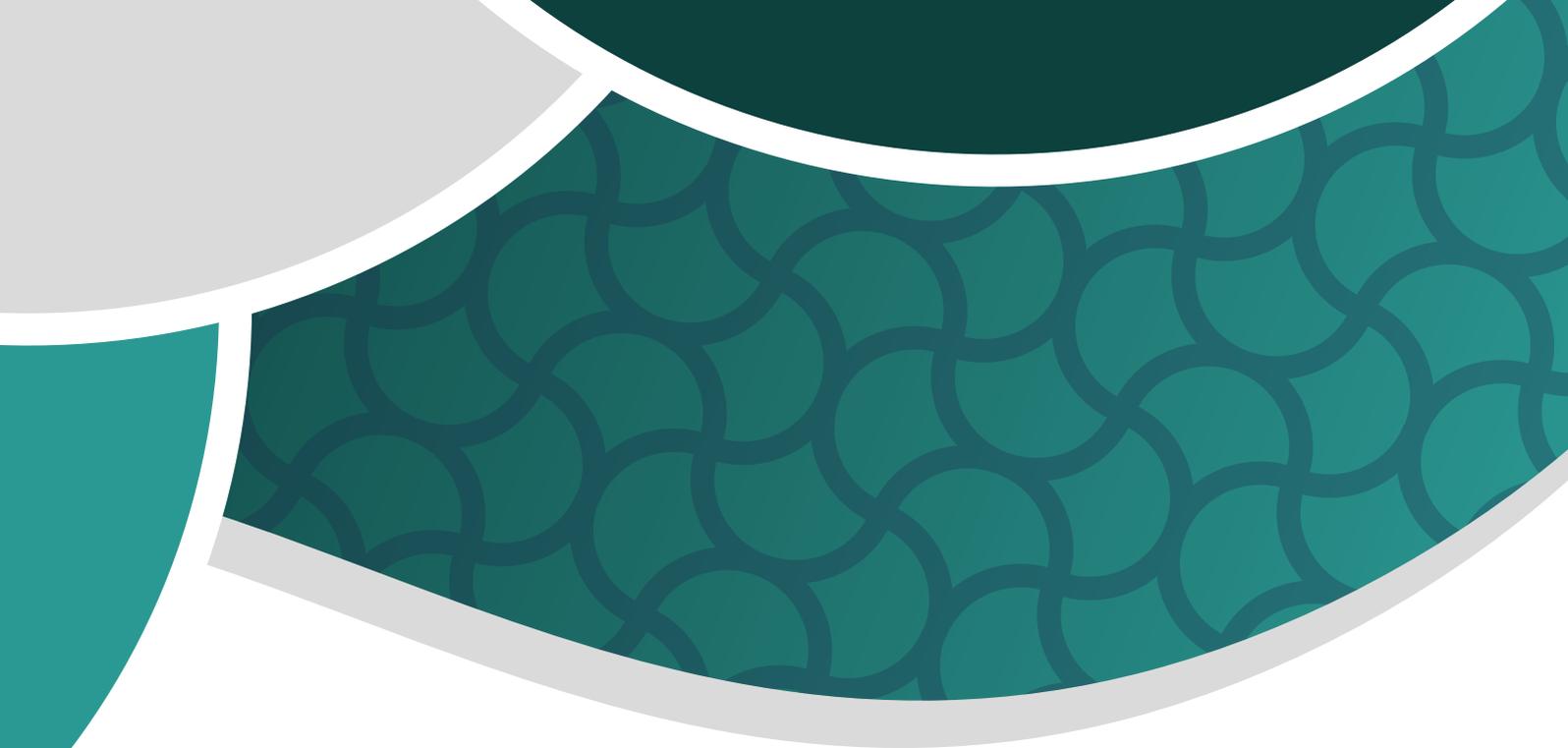
Volunteer Management and Welfare

It is incumbent upon charities to ensure that they provide their volunteers with a simple yet effective model of operation. Volunteers are the practitioners and representers of the important promises made by a charity, and they are galvanised by the generosity of donors.

Charities should ensure that they are providing their volunteers with the appropriate level of training relevant to the work that they will be carrying out. In order to do this, it is crucial that charities make the effort to invest their resources into regularly reviewing and updating their volunteer policies.

Charities should also look to invest in the career development of their volunteers, directing them towards any relevant opportunities, or organising sessions that could aid their personal development, either faith-based and/or generally.

Volunteers often carry out the hard work on the ground and sacrifice their own time for no physical or monetary reward. Charities should ensure that proper volunteer management and welfare protection structures are in place to safeguard their volunteers.

These structures are for the crucial protection of volunteer safety, which is paramount at all times, and should be given the same priority as the campaign or mission being carried out. The proper background checking of volunteers is crucial – an example of this would the DBS check.

Ensure that the volunteer role description is easily distinguishable from a job description, this can help avoid potential issues with remuneration and claims of unfair dismissal. Charities should ensure that they have taken out Insurance that covers their volunteers.

This should be done even when a charity cannot employ full-time staff. Volunteer insurance policies should be checked for their coverage of the activities a charity will ask of its volunteers and whether any age limits apply to the insurance coverage.

Volunteers should not be expected to pay "out of pocket" for any expenses that they may incur while carrying out volunteer work. Charities should ensure that volunteers are aware that they should retain all receipts for transactions and purchases, and that they should fill out the relevant forms and information for re-imbursement of any expenses that apply to the charity's finance policy.

Relevant expenses for a volunteer could be, for example: travel, telephone costs, protective equipment.

Conclusion

We pray that the information found in this guide has been of considerable use to organisations and individuals within the Muslim charity sector. The points that are put forth are recommendations that will contribute to the levelling-up of the sector's ethical considerations when carrying out services and implementing practices. It is crucial that we all operate collectively as a forward looking, environmentally aware, secure, and ultimately just group of charitable organisations. The suggestions made in this guide will contribute to ensuring that the sector is leading from the front in their ethics and their principles.

> *Abu Huraira reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "One who lends effort to the widows and the poor is like one struggling in the way of Allah, or one who regularly prays at night and fasts during the day."*
>
> *Sahih Al-Bukhari 5353, Sahih Muslim 2982*
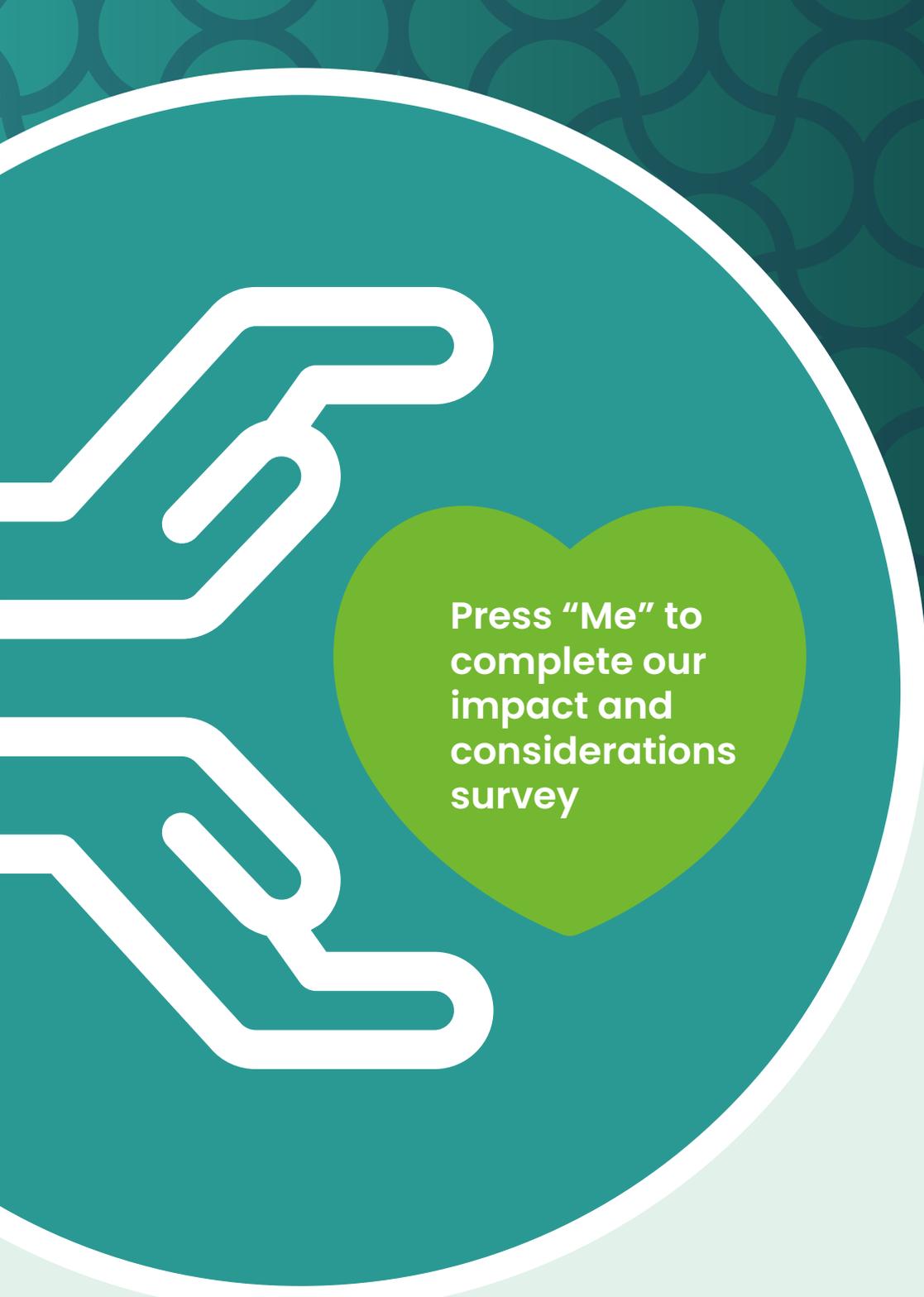
Press "Me" to complete our impact and considerations survey

www.muslimcharitiesforum.org.uk

6 Whitehorse Mews, 37 Westminster Bridge Road London , SE1 7QD

@muslimcharitiesforum

mcf
Muslim Charities Forum
SUPPORT | CONNECT | REPRESENT