

Guide to Working Together at the Local Level

**The
Faith
& Belief
Forum**



This resource is a guide to improve and to increase partnerships between local authorities and local faith or belief groups. It offers practical advice on how local authorities may better engage, celebrate and collaborate with local faith or belief groups; and how local faith or belief groups and other local groups may better contribute to local decision making and to more connected and cohesive local communities. Working together well is vital to making our local communities welcoming, safe, and beneficial for all residents.

Using this guide

This guide presents many different ways to work together. Each part of the guide is directed to a specific group: local authority staff, local faith or belief groups, and other local groups. On each page, the guide includes many ways to engage within your group and with other key partners. Each page also includes links to further resources for more reading.

This guide may be used by local authorities and local groups to:

- Assess the current state of working together in your area
- Find resources for working together with other groups in your local area
- Reflect on how to include new and overlooked groups in your existing programmes
- Guide a steering group on social cohesion / integration to create an action plan for partnerships

During consultation with people working for cohesion, some general principles about working together emerged. These principles may be useful to bear in mind when implementing suggestions in this guide:

- Be realistic: Each local area and each group will have its own capacity. In times of crisis and cuts, funding and staff time for cohesion work is often limited. Build on existing data and existing programmes when possible.



- **Be engaged:** There are many ways to improve how you work with others. Whether you want to develop an intensive action plan or make a few small changes, do what you can.
- **Be relational:** Relationships of trust at the local level matter. The more you encourage and invest in these relationships, the better the outcomes for all.
- **Be creative:** Working across divides requires creative thinking and action. Take a broad approach to engaging with others and try new ways of working.
- **Be local:** Each local area has its own profile of groups and its own unique challenges. Gather learning from other areas and then make it relevant to your own community.

How this guide was developed

In 2020, the Faith and Belief Forum (F&BF) and the British Academy commissioned a **report**, written by Theos Think Tank, that outlined social cohesion policy in the UK and examined the practical impact of the faith and belief sector on our communities. This report found that faith and non-religious belief groups' positive contribution to social cohesion deserves greater recognition and should have more influence on cohesion policy in the United Kingdom. While faith and belief can be a source of division, many faith or belief groups play a key role in social cohesion. Their contributions should be considered in the formation of cohesion policy.

Building on the learning from this report, we held a series of three roundtables in different parts of the UK, bringing together over 100 people from local authorities, local faith / belief groups and other community groups working on cohesion. At the roundtables, participants shared their success and challenges in working together and they made recommendations for working together well. They reviewed a draft version of this guide and made suggestions.



Local Authority

As members of a Local Authority, we share responsibility for making our community safe, welcoming and enriching for residents of all faiths and beliefs. What concrete steps may we take to realise this vision?

Vision:

Our local area is a place where people from different backgrounds work together and live alongside one another harmoniously.

Residents from different faith or belief backgrounds are included in local conversations and decisions and are well represented by the local authority.



Learn...

Within your local authority

- Understand who holds responsibility for engaging with faith or belief groups in your local authority (including staff members whose work is relevant to cohesion / integration), recognising that this responsibility may be shared between different roles (e.g. equalities, education, community engagement)
- Assess how inclusive your services are for people from different faiths and beliefs using tools such as Equality Impact Assessments [definition] [example]
- Review your forums for engagement: how represented are people from different faiths and beliefs on decision-making bodies?

With local faith or belief groups

- Understand faith and belief assets: what local faith or belief groups exist in the area, and what services do they provide to the community? [example of asset mapping]
- Review local forums which bring together faith and belief groups (e.g. faith forums, Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education): how inclusive and representative are they?
- Conduct listening exercises with local faith and belief groups to understand barriers to engagement with the local authority, including past challenges and tensions [example]

With other local groups

- Create an inventory of current activities and programmes which promote cohesion
- Conduct listening exercises to understand shared challenges to cohesion and integration in your area [example]
- Identify areas and groups which are not included in cohesion work, especially protected and underrepresented groups: which groups and neighbourhoods are left out or less engaged in this work?



Prepare...

Within your local authority

- Designate staff time and resources to engage with faith and belief groups as part of the wider cohesion and **integration strategy**
- Set priorities for improving local authority services which could be more inclusive and representative
- Establish or build upon decision-making forums (online and in-person) to include more voices from faith and belief groups

With local faith or belief groups

- Attend and support local forums which bring together faith and belief groups (**faith forums, Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education**)
- Set priorities for areas of shared policy actions and goals (e.g. **faith policy, faith covenant, charter for inclusion**)
- Broaden engagement with under-represented groups within faith and belief groups with a focus on **protected characteristics**: Is it always the same few faith groups being engaged with? Are there underlying reasons for the lack of engagement from some groups that need addressing?

With other local groups

- Attend and support community-led events which provide ways for local groups to share / connect easily (e.g. **National Interfaith Week, The Great Get Together**)
- Set priorities for cohesion/integration work by focusing on shared challenges which can best bring different communities together [**example**].
- Broaden engagement: how may cohesion / integration work include more people? Are there underlying reasons for the lack of engagement from some groups that need addressing?



...Act

Within your local authority

- Improve staff engagement with faith and belief inclusion training [example] and cohesion training [example] across staff teams
- Connect faith and belief engagement with other areas of service delivery (e.g. social care, schools, health care)
- Enact structures to oversee the delivery of policy and decision-making changes which include more faith and belief groups

With local faith or belief groups

- Recognise cohesion / integration work of faith and belief groups through award schemes [example] and capacity-building [example]
- Implement projects following identification of shared priorities, using funding and staff time when possible
- Ensure a diversity of faith and belief groups are engaged in decision-making forums, especially protected and underrepresented groups

With other local groups

- Support local hubs, networks and events where different groups can work together, focusing when possible on collaboration instead of security and risk
- Address shared challenges to cohesion by convening, supporting, funding and evaluating cohesion projects [example]
- Invest in inclusion and representation for groups which are not well-represented



Local faith or belief groups

As a leader or member of faith or belief group, I want to ensure that my local area is a place that all residents feel safe, welcomed, represented and are confident to connect across differences. How may I contribute to this vision?

Vision:

Our local area is a place where people from different backgrounds work together and live alongside one another harmoniously. Residents from different faith or belief backgrounds are included in local conversations and decisions and are well represented by the local authority.



Learn...

Within your faith or belief group

- Identify staff and volunteers in your group with interest and experience in supporting your local community and engaging in local cohesion policy
- Create an inventory of your group's community services (e.g. food kitchens, education, youth programmes)
- Reflect on how your group supports people facing difficulty and discrimination (e.g. based on race, class, gender, age, LGBT+, disability)

With your local authority

- Identify local authority staff who work on faith / belief or who work on social issues which are important to your group
- Identify local authority committees or forums that address issues which are important to your group (e.g. health and wellbeing, social care, homelessness)
- Discover the cohesion and inclusion priorities of your local authority in its action plans [[example](#)]

With other local groups

- Identify local faith or belief groups in your area: Do you know leaders or members of local faith or belief groups in your immediate area? Is there a [local faith forum](#) where you could meet people from different groups?
- Understand issues of shared concern: Are there other groups which provide services on the same issues as your group (your [local faith forum](#) or [voluntary service organisation](#) may have suggestions)?
- Identify networks working on issues that concern your group (e.g. [health and wellbeing](#), [inequality](#), [homelessness](#))



Prepare...

Within your faith or belief group

- Support leadership training for your staff and volunteers, with a focus on people facing difficulty and discrimination
- Seek **funding** for your group's services, especially funding which includes training and support
- Advocate for your group to engage more deeply in community issues and connect with groups from different backgrounds

With your local authority

- Invite local councillors and staff to your events and important celebrations
- Attend local council meetings and events and take advantage of opportunities to feed into consultations and planning on issues that concern your group
- Participate in setting priorities for shared policy actions and goals with your local authority (e.g. **faith policy**, **faith covenant**, **charter for inclusion**)

With other local groups

- Visit other places of worship and community groups to develop relationships and explore opportunities for collaboration
- Invite other groups to attend your events and participate in your campaigns
- Join and support existing initiatives which bring groups together (**National Interfaith Week**, **Sewa Day**, **Mitzvah Day**, **Open Iftar**) led by local faith forums and other connecting groups
- Encourage your staff and volunteers to join networks working on similar issues and explore opportunities for collaboration



...Act

Within your faith or belief group

- Support community service projects in your group to be run by new leaders, with a focus on projects that fit with the skills and abilities of your group
- Share and publicise your community projects through networks, recognition schemes and social media

With your local authority

- Ask local authority staff for mentoring support and **funding** for your community projects and for cohesion / integration work
- Collaborate with your local authority on cohesion and integration projects, taking advantage of opportunities to feed into consultations and planning (e.g. census)
- Advocate for your local authority to fulfil its commitments to cohesion / integration and to include more faith or belief groups from different backgrounds

With other local groups

- Organise and support joint events with other groups that bring different communities together.
- Expand your engagement on issues of shared concern e.g. **health and wellbeing, inequality, homelessness**)
- Advocate for better services for people and groups who face difficulty and discrimination [**example**]



Other local groups

As a leader or member of group or organisation working to improve my local community, I want to ensure that my local area is a place that all residents feel safe, welcomed, represented and are confident to connect across differences. How may I contribute to this vision?

Vision:

Our local area is a place where people from different backgrounds work together and live alongside one another harmoniously. Residents from different faith or belief backgrounds are included in local conversations and decisions and are well represented by the local authority.



Learn...

Within your group

- Identify staff and volunteers in your group with interest and experience in working with local faith or belief groups
- Create an inventory on how your group engages with local faith or belief groups, especially groups from minority backgrounds which often face difficulty and discrimination
- Reflect on how your group supports people facing difficulty and discrimination (e.g. based on race, class, gender, age, LGBT+, disability) [example]

With local faith or belief groups

- Identify local faith or belief groups in your area: Do you know leaders or members of local faith or belief groups in your immediate area? Is there a **local faith forum** where you could meet people from different groups?
- Understand issues of shared concern: Are there other groups which provide services on the same issues as your group (your **local faith forum** or **voluntary service organisation** may have suggestions)?

With your local authority

- Identify local authority staff members who work on social issues which are important to your group
- Identify local authority committees or forums that address issues which are important to your group (e.g. health and wellbeing, inequality, education, homelessness)
- Discover the cohesion and inclusion priorities of your local authority in its action plans [example]: what overlap is there with the priorities or focus of your group?



Prepare...

Within your group

- Support leadership training for your staff and volunteers, with a focus on people facing difficulty and discrimination
- Designate staff and volunteer time and resources to engage with faith or belief groups which share similar programmes
- Seek **funding** for your group's services, especially funding which includes training and support
- Advocate for your group to engage more deeply in community issues and connecting with other groups

With local faith or belief groups

- Visit places of worship and faith forums to develop relationships and explore opportunities for collaboration, or present your group's work at a **local faith forum**
- Join and support existing initiatives which bring groups together (**National Interfaith Week, Sewa Day, Mitzvah Day, Open Iftar**) led by local faith forums and other **connecting groups**
- Encourage your staff and volunteers to join networks working on similar issues and explore opportunities for collaboration

With your local authority

- Invite local councillors and staff to visit your events and projects
- Attend local council meetings and events and take advantage of opportunities to feed into consultations and planning on issues that concern your group



Within your group

- Hold faith and belief inclusion training [example] or cohesion training [example] for your staff and volunteers
- Support community service projects in your group to be run by new leaders, with a focus on projects that fit with the skills and abilities of your group
- Share and publicise your community projects through networks, recognition schemes and social media

With local faith or belief groups

- Organise and support joint events with other groups that bring different communities together
- Expand your engagement on issues of shared concern; identify networks working on issues that concern your group (e.g. health and wellbeing, inequality, homelessness)
- Advocate for better services for people and groups who face difficulty and discrimination [example]

With your local authority

- Ask local authority staff for mentoring support and funding for your community projects when appropriate.
- Collaborate with your local authority on cohesion projects and take advantage of opportunities to feed into consultations and planning (e.g. census)
- Advocate for your local authority to fulfil its commitments to cohesion / integration and to include more faith / belief and other groups from different backgrounds



