FAITHS WORKING TOGETHER
TOOLKIT

The
Inter Faith
Network
for the
United Kingdom

CONNECTING FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Undertaking cross-faith work to make a positive difference to local communities, be it through social action or dialogue and shared learning, can be hugely beneficial to your area. Yet engaging people of different faiths in community projects can seem difficult. Reaching out to someone who may appear very different and wondering how to strike up a conversation can be daunting, let alone coming together in dialogue or to act on shared issues within your local neighbourhood.

This toolkit aims to help you to reach out and engage with people of different faiths in your local area, to create a successful project that engages people of different religious backgrounds, as well as to develop and deepen cross-faith understanding and relationships along the way. Many projects will naturally encompass a mixture of different perspectives, including non-religious beliefs.

Included are some **Key Principles** (pg2) to consider: the overarching values that need to be accounted for when working across faiths. This is followed by some **Practical Steps** (pg5) to consider to make your project a success. Finally, some information on **Promoting Your Activities** (pg12) is included, helping you to share your project and involve more people.

CONNECTING FOR THE COMMON GOOD

When you look around your community and think about how you can develop friendships and working relationships with people who have a different faith from you, it is important to remember that one thing you already have in common is your neighbourhood. This toolkit works from the understanding that the development of cross faith relationships is helped when you work together to tackle an issue of shared concern in your neighbourhood. This toolkit does not offer exhaustive explanations and guidance but can help you to take the first steps to bringing people together in your community.

We have partnered with the Inter Faith Network for the UK to develop this resource. It has a long track record of supporting and encouraging inter faith understanding and cooperation. As well as this toolkit you may find its existing materials and publications of use. These are available on their website: *www.interfaith.org.uk/resources*.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Work relationally

In working with others to identify and act on issues of shared concern for your community, an important first step is to work relationally. Wherever possible, look to build friendships, rather than simply working partnerships. Grassroots cross-faith engagement can be more fully supported if you are able to take this approach to your work. Furthermore, each person will have their own experiences and values to bring to the table. Allow time to get to know each other - to learn a bit about them and share something about yourself. Working together also brings a sense of genuine co-ownership and commitment to your work.

Build on your existing acquaintances: Who do you already know from another faith? Existing relationships can give you a good foundation to start from as you reach out to others.

From here, starting to reach out might be as simple as talking to a fellow parent at the school gate, a workmate or asking the person who lives across the road to have a cup of tea. Think creatively about who you know and don't be afraid to reach outside of your comfort-zones.

Remember that the aim of cross-faith projects is to build lasting relationships, not simply to bring people together as project participants. Enjoy the work you are doing, and keep a relaxed and positive atmosphere. This will help to create an environment which enables trust and friendship to develop between you and your neighbours.

When we interact with someone of a different faith – or ethnic, or cultural – background, we can sometimes feel as though we do not understand where they are coming from and they may feel the same way. This is a normal feeling, and the other person may well feel the same way about you. Regardless of their background, the person you are working with is a person with strengths and vulnerabilities just like you. Bearing this in mind in your interactions will allow you to develop mutual respect and trust. This is the foundation of all good relationships, including friendships with people of other faiths.

A willingness to share and learn

In developing strong relationships with people of other faiths it is important to move beyond surface level interactions. Being willing to listen to what others say about their values and aspirations and to share your own is key to building the kinds of relationships which will last even when circumstances are challenging.

It is through actively listening to our neighbours that we can learn, and through learning that we can understand the world views of others and how best to relate to them.

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Be accommodating of difference

As you begin to share and learn with people of different faiths and backgrounds you may well discover that they have different perspectives on certain issues to you. However, meaningful friendships between neighbours allow for honesty on those differences while also maintaining a shared commitment to your neighbourhood.

When working with people of other faiths, you don't need to sacrifice deeply-held convictions. However, it is important to hold these with humility and a recognition that not everyone will share your views.

Mutual respect does not mean that you and your friend have to agree on everything. It is common in projects for people to disagree on some issues, occasionally profoundly. You can still work together, finding ways to do that which leave room for respectful disagreement. Try to be honest if you feel hurt by what someone has said, and encourage others to be too. It is important to work through such issues openly but also carefully and respectfully.

In engaging with others of different faiths it is also important to be aware where painful histories exist between communities as well as challenging interactions globally in the present day can sometimes lie close to the surface. Part of listening and hearing well is to be able to hear this – and respond if you feel it appropriate. However, it is important to recognise that in cooperative social action projects the main focus is the shared commitment to your area and one another, and that dialogue in this context cannot hope to resolve all the issues of history.

CASE STUDY

In one very diverse area, a poorly judged speech by a political figure led to serious tensions and concerns for the safety of some religious and ethnic groups. A local faith leader took the initiative of reaching out to leaders of other faith communities locally. This led to a fruitful and lasting partnership, and considerable goodwill between people of different faiths and cultures locally.

Look for shared values and experiences

Remember that beyond potential differences and difficult conversations, you will have shared values and experiences with the people around you that can unite you as you work together and build friendships. Many faith perspectives share a belief in treating others in a way that you would like to be treated, something commonly known as the Golden Rule. That's a crucial starting point to keep in mind and, as you share and learn in a trusting environment among those you are working with, you will likely begin to see numerous ways in which your similarities outweigh your differences. Social action in local communities is often a common means by which this Golden Rule can play out and thus makes for a good starting point by which people can be brought together.

Create a safe and trusting environment

People can find it difficult to meet if they are uncomfortable and it is important that we can talk freely without feeling threatened. It is good to ensure that people know they are in a safe environment and that they should treat such an environment with respect. While this is relevant to all cross-faith projects, if the focus of your work is dialogue then this may be particularly important to consider. Naturally, many want to talk about what matters deeply to them. However, it is important to make clear that the aim of your project is to work together for local benefit; not to convert those you are engaging with or to argue for the merits of a particular faith. These are important ground rules that should be established for engagement with the project.

The Inter Faith Network's Building good relations with people of different faiths and beliefs is an example of some short guidelines which have been used widely to enable such trusting environments to be developed. This can be found here: *www.interfaith.org.uk/about-ifn/values-of-ifn*

PRACTICAL STEPS

Start with who you know

Think about the connections you already have in your neighbourhood; the neighbours you are friends with, the people in a faith community you may be a part of, the people already acting as community workers. Through these individuals you can build up an initial network of contacts that can support you as you reach out to those you don't yet know.

Find who the right organisations and people are to contact

When you reach the stage when you want to branch out from your existing networks into other communities, consider who will be the most helpful people to talk to. There are numerous ways that you might be able to build your connections through existing institutions in your local community. Faith based groups including places of worship are one option. You may also want to try a local inter faith group or faith forum. Alongside these, however, non-faith-based organisations may also be useful, such as community centres, schools or residents' associations.

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Talk to those you already know about who they think the valuable groups are in your neighbourhood. Consider taking a walk about the neighbourhood and make a note of what institutions there are around you.

Places of worship and faith based community organisations

You might wish to start this process by contacting local places of worship or faith-based community organisations. Local faith communities are increasingly aware of the importance of working across faiths on local issues and in many areas they are leading the way on this, so their organisations will likely be open to being approached.

Faith communities are structured in many different ways. Below are just a few examples of how you might wish to engage with people from different faith groups. They are not exhaustive of all the groups or denominations within each faith group, nor are they exhaustive of all of the ways you might wish to get in touch with a faith community in your neighbourhood. However, these examples should give you a good starting point as you begin to engage with other faiths. Many faith communities will welcome people contacting them, and some have national structures which are happy to help support people wishing to contact local places of worship; both Near Neighbours and the Inter Faith Network are happy to help put you in touch with these national structures.

When working to get support from your local Christian church of any denomination, the minister (vicar, priest etc) might be the most helpful first point of call. Many areas will have structures through which Christian churches from different traditions engage together. A directory of these can be found at *www.churchestogether.org*. Additionally, the Church of

England has an official responsibility of care for everyone in England; the vicar of each church has this duty for all people in their parish, not just members of the church congregation. It can therefore be important and helpful to contact them at an early stage.

For a Sikh gurdwara or Hindu mandir or temple, you might wish to approach the committee or trustee board rather than a person with responsibility for particular ritual roles or aspects of teaching or spiritual care. A pandit (or swami) at a mandir, or a granthi at a gurdwara, may put you in touch with the right person, but their role is primarily a ritual one. Patterns within Buddhist contexts vary and influence the role monks play in relation to their local community, although most temples and centres will welcome contact and have someone who can respond.

If you want to reach out to members of your local Muslim community it could be good to get the support of your local mosque or mosques. This might mean getting in touch with an Imam at the Mosque, particularly if you have met before. However, many mosques are managed by a Board of Trustees, which then employs the Imam. Sometimes the Chair or President of the Trustees may be the best person to reach out to.

Within the Jewish community, you might find that the best approach to gaining the support from members of a synagogue is through contacting the Rabbi. However, this will not always be the case, and the synagogue President may also be good to contact.

CASE STUDY

A group of local people decided to unite their community through sport and set up an indoor interfaith mini-cricket tournament. The idea was a good one and received whole hearted support from a Near Neighbours coordinator.

They advertised widely through local faith leaders and put a lot of thought into planning the event. However, on the day they found that they had very poor attendance. Afterwards, they spoke with their Near Neighbours coordinator to try and diagnose the problem.

It emerged that, although the faith leaders they advertised their project with did know their communities well, they didn't have the time to publicise the project as well as they might.

From this, the organisers learnt that a better method of advertising their projects would be through placing posters and flyers on community boards, asking for advertising space on local faith websites, and letting more than one person at each faith institution know about the event.

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There may, of course, be many other different religious groups in your neighbourhood: Baha'is, Jains, Pagans, Zoroastrians and others are all to be found in England. Your local authority will be able to give more advice on your area and may also be able to provide a list of places of worship – as may your local inter faith group.

Local Inter Faith Organisations

There are many established inter faith organisations working at a local level across the UK, and these may be a natural starting point if there is one in your area. You can find out about groups near you using IFN's locator tool: *www.interfaith.org.uk/uk-activity/local-inter-faith-locator*

Other community bodies

Sometimes, you might find that another way to get support in your neighbourhood for your project is through non faith-based institutions. For example, a local school, college, or pre-school might have strong community ties and be very good at getting support from local parents and young people. In some areas, cultural societies and centres may play a more visible role than faith communities in public life.

Your local Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) is likely to be a helpful resource. There might also be a residents' association in your neighbourhood that is particularly active, or a community centre or café that is acting as a useful hub of activity in your area. It might be the case that these organisations might bring in lots of people that happen to have a faith as well. Certainly, it is true that these groups will have their own specialist knowledge of their neighbourhood that could prove invaluable to you.

By getting in touch with existing organisations, you will have created a springboard from which your neighbourhood project might be able to receive wide support and engagement.

Develop commitment and shared ownership

When you make contact with other groups, take time to discover with them your mutual concerns for your neighbourhood. Perhaps you are all concerned about homelessness in the area, perhaps there is a litter problem, or maybe there is not enough green space.

Once you've begun to develop an understanding of your shared concerns, start to talk together about how you can tackle them. Ideally, any action you take will have come about through discussions between all groups engaged in the project. You may find that if you create fully-developed project plans before consulting other local groups, their interest in participation may be limited. On the other hand, if you involve others as you plan and develop an idea there will be a deeper desire to engage and support the shared initiative.

Sometimes you might be motivated to do an activity and make great plans to start it only to find out that it is already being done in the neighbourhood. Build in time at an early stage to walk around your neighbourhood, contact community centres or places of worship and ask the question 'Is there a need for this activity? Is anybody already doing this locally?' If you find out it is already being done you might wish to offer help rather than developing duplicating projects, or decide to do something different so that you can offer as wide a service to your neighbourhood as possible.

CASE STUDY

A group of local people set up a youth group that aimed to bring together young people of different faiths from their community. As the first few sessions began to take place they realised that they didn't have much problem attracting attendees of some faiths, but that Christian young people weren't coming along.

They spoke to some people in the area, particularly at the local churches, to try and find out why they weren't getting Christian attendees. It emerged that this youth group was offering services that the churches had been doing for years already, so the Christian young people had less incentive to show up.

Once they had determined what the problem was, the organisers started to work with church youth leaders to do joint events with church youth groups on issues such as social and world development issues.

Having asked people in their community and determined a problem, this group remedied the issue by working with the local churches to offer something new to their neighbourhood.

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Planning with faith needs in mind

As you move towards the practicalities of ensuring your project will work, keep in mind the impact that faith can play on running your project. People observing different faiths may well have times and days of the week, types of project work, and often dietary requirements that will impact on their ability to engage with a project. This is where, as mentioned above, it is important to be accommodating of difference.

There are times where certain faiths will observe congregational or individual worship. The main Muslim congregational prayer takes place at lunchtime on Fridays, Jews observe Sabbath rest from Friday evening until the end of daytime on Saturday and Christians traditionally gather to worship on a Sunday morning. Other faiths will have their own patterns of worship.

Religious festivals also take place throughout the week and the year; you will need to be sensitive and accommodating over this as you plan your neighbourhood project. A useful resource here is the Shap calendar of religious festivals, key dates from which you can view on the Inter Faith Network website: *www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/*

Dietary requirements are another consideration for cross faith engagement. Most faiths will have these, with some also observing fasts: abstaining from some or all food on certain days or during certain periods of the year. If you plan to share food together, try to ensure that this is a

CASE STUDY

Members of a faith community invited others from different faiths to an event they had organised. There was much interest and a good turnout, but the organisers became aware that some people were not eating the sandwich lunch.

It turned out that they could not eat because the ordered sandwiches were of a variety of kinds, including meat, fish and egg, but the different sandwiches were mixed up on platters and their contents were not clearly labelled. This had prevented a number of people from eating, including those whose dietary requirements were strictly vegetarian or vegan and were not able to eat such food where it had been mixed up on serving plates with meat products. It also impacted those whose requirements were for halal or kosher food.

The organisers asked for the food that had not yet been put out to be plated separately and asked for some further sandwiches to be made which could meet as many other requirements as possible. Their next event was catered bearing in mind learning from this occasion.

meal in which all can participate. Often the best way to find out what people will be able to eat is simply to ask them. A tailored vegetarian meal can be the most inclusive option with some additional kosher vegetarian options provided if needed. Some guidance on food can also be found on the Inter Faith Network's website: *www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/briefing-notes/*

Venue is a further factor to take into consideration when working with people of different faiths, especially if you intend to use a faith-based venue for your project. Some faith traditions may feel uncomfortable, or even unable, to attend events based in a venue that would be considered a place of worship such as a church, synagogue or the place of devotion in a mandir. Often a place of worship will have an adjacent community hall which is not a consecrated space or used for religious practice that may be a suitable alternative.

Be aware, some faith venues may require a certain dress-code or have regulations on what can be brought into the venue – for example tobacco, alcohol or certain foods (such as meat).

It is best to ask project members what venues they are comfortable with and your hosts what is expected of you when using their venue.

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You won't be expected to understand everything about another faith. Indeed most people of faith will be happy to share any such requirements and it can act as a great opportunity to get to know one another better, especially if it will help to build stronger connections and friendships in the community.

PROMOTION

Face-to-face connections

Often the best way to generate support and commitment from others for the project that you wish to run is to talk with them directly. This might be a little bit more time consuming than other forms of promotion, but it is often the most effective.

Think about what would make you more likely to attend an event or take part in a project. Knowing that there will be a friendly face there is much more likely to make people take part. Perhaps encourage your team to make sure they go out of their way to talk to people they have not met before; if people are welcomed with friendly conversation then your project is likely to attract far more people.

Be sensitive to how your neighbours might seek to communicate, including their understanding about issues such as gender or age that might be relevant to this. Sometimes there can be an expectation, for example, that women and men will not be intermingled in contexts such as seating.

There can be a range of views on such matters even within one faith community and so, again, the principle is to ask what is helpful. If you particularly want to engage a mixture of people, be it of age, gender or otherwise, explain this from the outset.

CASE STUDY

Two inter faith practitioners wanted to run a workshop that would attract people of all faiths. They planned months in advance and ensured that the venue and catering was accommodating to all. They also ensured that the content of the workshop would suit individuals of all backgrounds, skillsets, and language ability.

Thinking they had planned everything well, on the day they found that there were no Muslim participants at the workshop, despite the location being in an area with a large Muslim population.

They realised that the day might be a festival day in the Islamic calendar and, sure enough, quick discovered it was Eid-al-Adha, a major Muslim festival.

Both organisers of this event are now sure to check an interfaith calendar before they plan any more events, and all subsequent workshops took place on days that weren't religiously sensitive.

Additionally, English may not be the first language of some potential participants and where that is the case, friendly uncomplicated language is best, as it is for most people.

You also might find it useful to learn if there are themed days and weeks which you can link with, to raise the profile of your project. These include Inter Faith Week, Mitzvah Day, Sewa Day or Buddhist Action Month.

Know your audience

Of course, there are plenty of other ways to promote your project. When deciding which approach you wish to use, make sure you think about your audience.

For example, if you are running a project that is designed to appeal to young people, think about which channels of communication they are likely to use. The chances are that they will be communicating online, such as through social media, including Facebook or Twitter. Equally, if you wish to work with the elderly in your community, printed newsletters or notices on noticeboards may be the best approach. For people who have office jobs, you may find that email works best.

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It is good to leaflet the area you are working in, explaining what you want to do. You might want to consider getting in touch with local newspapers and radio stations to see if you can promote your project through them.

As well as considering how to reach people, you need to consider what to say to them. Appeal to the shared interests that you believe will unite people around your project. Perhaps your message is about a park clean-up, in which case you might want to appeal to parents regarding the safety and happiness of the children in your neighbourhood as the theme that will unite people around your project.

Another example is that you might live in area of low employment and be working on a skills based project which can help to make people more employable, so you might want to highlight the CV-building potential in the work that you are doing to capture the interest of your neighbours.

As you work to promote your project, always keep in mind who your audience is, where they'll be, and what they'll want to see.

CASE STUDY
Recognising that not everyone of all ages uses email or social media, inter faith organisers in one area have developed a multi-pronged approach: website, emails, social media –

and delivery of traditional letters (and printed out emails) by bicycle!

SUMMARY

Successful cross faith projects can make a big difference to their neighbourhoods and are very achievable. Discovering your differences and similarities can be aided by working relationally and developing environments of trust.

It is helpful to think creatively about how to engage your neighbourhood with your work. Get in touch with local institutions; whether they are religious or secular, they can be a valuable resource for you.

Be aware of the practical implications of working across faiths, appreciate both commonality and distinctiveness and work with mutual respect.

Keep your message relevant to the people you wish to engage with. Spread the message far and wide across as many different channels as you think are relevant.

This toolkit is designed as a starting point from which to run a project that will connect with people of different faiths and can transform your neighbourhood. If you would like more detailed guidance, including information on setting up and running cross-faith projects, this can be found at *www.interfaith.org.uk/resources*. If you would like more information on faith-based, grassroots community work, this can be found at *www.cuf.org.uk/near-neighbours/resources*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

In addition to the resources offered by Ner Neighbours and the Inter Faith Network for the UK, below are some further links that you might find useful.

Three Faiths Forum. 3FF builds understanding and lasting relationships between people of all faiths and beliefs, running education, engagement and action programmes: *www.3ff.org.uk/resources/*

The Feast. The Feast work to bring together young people aged between 11-18, to live well with others who are of a different faith and culture to their own: *www.thefeast.org.uk/resources/*

St Ethelburga's. Supporting dialogue and encounter, they help people build relationships across divisions of conflict, culture and religion: *www.stethelburgas.org/resources*

Just Act. Providing practical advice for anyone wanting to make a difference and improve their community: *www.justact.org.uk/category/faith-groups/*

JHub. Inspiring and supporting positive social change in the British Jewish Community and beyond: *www.jhub.org.uk/knowhow/*

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AFTERWORD

The Near Neighbours programme and the Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) have a shared commitment to supporting the development of cross-faith engagement for the common good and inter faith understanding. This short resource has been developed by them as a contribution to these outcomes that are so vital for our shared society.

The material was developed drawing on learning from the work of Near Neighbours and IFN. We are grateful to members of IFN's Faith Communities Forum and the Faith Advisory Panel of Near Neighbours who offered comments on draft material, and to Near Neighbours projects whose experiences have fed into the resource, as well as to participants in a linked discussion group at IFN's 2015 National Meeting.

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