



Building Cohesive Communities

What frontline staff and community activists need to know



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October 2009
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The findings of this report are those of the author's and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department for Communities and Local Government.

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Introduction

This is a short practical guide for busy activists and frontline staff working on community cohesion.

The guide is based on current research and our practical experience. How you go about building community cohesion will depend on your community, its histories and current challenges. So some topics in this guide may be just what you need, and others may not be relevant. Just use the parts that help.

The topics we include are chosen because current research and our practice have indicated that these are some of the most important things to get right in building cohesion. But these are not the only issues. For further details of all the activities that promote cohesion you might want to look at the *Cohesion Delivery Framework*¹, *What Works in Community Cohesion*², and the Institute of Community Cohesion (iCoCo) good practice portal³.

In writing this guide we have made the assumption that you have the skills to run groups and hold difficult conversations with people in your communities. If this is not the case investment in developing these core skills will be needed.

Most staff and activists we've worked with have needed these:

- Promoting Interaction between people and groups
- Tackling attitudes, perception and myths
- Building trust in local institutions
- Developing the role of young people
- Developing effective community leadership.

These are also core topics in our view and might help cohesion in your area:

- Developing a sense of belonging
- Developing commitment to a shared future
- Building community resilience
- Using communications and the media to promote cohesion
- Working on underlying causes.

¹ Communities and Local Government, *Cohesion Delivery Framework*, (2009)
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/cohesiondeliveryrevised

² Communities and Local Government, *What Works in Community Cohesion*, (2007)
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/whatworks

³ www.cohesioninstitute.org.uk/home

The authors would like to thank the many frontline staff, community activists and local residents who have developed their knowledge and skills since 2003. Thanks also to our colleagues who made suggestions that considerably improved this Guidance.

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Section 1

Promoting interaction between people and groups

What's a group?

Groups are most often identified along ethnic, faith/religion, gender lines. However, 'people's identities are multi-layered and single identities do not capture people's sense of who they are.'⁴ People may belong to formal groups (eg Residents Association, a political party) and less formal groups (eg family, friends, a local estate etc.⁵) People may belong to groups because of particular activities or stages in life, (eg young mums, day care centre users, leisure centre users etc). Sometimes belonging to these groups is more important than identifying along ethnic, faith/religion lines.

People's sense of themselves is also influenced by age, values, and class. Many people identify strongly with particular localities or places. Different groups may have different relationships to the same place (eg young people and older people may have a different experience of territory and safety in the same locality). The groups people feel they belong to can change over time.

Why bring groups together and promote interaction?

Bringing people together is one way of 'developing strong and positive relationships between people of different backgrounds.'⁶ Research by Professor Miles Hewstone has demonstrated that prejudice is decreased, and understanding increased when groups interact. It is not enough for groups to just live alongside one another.⁷ Groups feel less anxious and threatened by the existence of the other group when there is meaningful and sustained interaction between them.⁸ Those who live in areas which are currently mono-ethnic or majority mono-ethnic are often most anxious about change and may need to be supported in bridging activities with groups from outside their local areas 'Cohesion is higher amongst those who bridge for almost every ethnic group.'⁹ ('Bridging' is defined below.)

⁴ Commission on Integration and Cohesion (CIC), *Our Shared Future*, (2007) p.33

⁵ S. Creasy, K. Gavelin, and D. Potter, *Everybody needs good neighbours*, (Involve, 2008) www.involve.org.uk

⁶ Communities and Local Government, *Government Response to Our Shared Future*, (2008)

⁷ M. Hewstone, *Mixed communities: How 'intergroup contact' can promote cohesion*. University of Oxford. Presentation to the Housing and Community Cohesion Conference. London, 15 March 2007 www.housingcorp.gov.uk/upload/ppt/Miles_Hewstone.ppt

⁸ M. Hewstone, *Intergroup Contact and Social Diversity. Cohesion or Conflict?* University of Oxford. Presentation to Newcastle Upon Tyne Social Capital Forum, 28 September 2009.

⁹ Commission on Integration and Cohesion (CIC), *Our Shared Future*, (2007) p.156

How do you do it?

- As a service provider remember that the groups you assign individuals to may only capture part of their identity and other factors may also play a significant role in their needs and choices
- Use the Community Cohesion Impact Assessment¹⁰ to assess whether groups are ready for 'bridging' activities, or if further 'bonding' activities are required. ('Bonding' means developing confidence within networks of similar identity. 'Bridging' means developing connections and relationships between different identity groups within a community.)¹¹
- Work towards each group having identified leaders or spokespeople who are neutral or open to interaction with other groups; they can show their group that contact is possible and lead by example
- Create opportunities for contact because it reduces anxiety, people's perception of threat from other groups, and it improves attitudes between groups¹²
- It's not necessary for everybody to have direct contact; by knowing people from your group who have friends in the other group prejudice will still be reduced¹³
- You may need to pay attention to the fears and concerns of individuals within the groups even if they are not openly expressed by the majority. It's important to include them in the process without allowing their concerns to stop the activities from taking place
- Talk to the groups to determine issues of mutual concern or aspiration. Even when groups seem to have little in common there will almost certainly be some underlying issues that will matter to them all. Assessing groups *Positions, Interests and Shared Needs* will help you do that¹⁴
- Use conflict resolution skills and tools.¹⁵

Watch out for

- Only looking at identity from the perspective of race and/or faith – people have many aspects to their identity
- When there is a history of conflict, or a high level of prejudice, or perceived threat from one group against another the bonding and preparatory work might take considerably longer. If the perception of threat is too high, contact should not take place as it will not be beneficial
- National or international events may impact on individual and groups' confidence in interacting.

¹⁰ J. Broadwood and N. Sugden, *Community Cohesion Impact Assessment and Conflict Prevention Tool*, (2008) www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communitycohesiontool

¹¹ Commission on Integration and Cohesion (CIC), *Our Shared Future*, (2007), p.106

¹² M. Hewstone, *Intergroup Contact and Social Diversity. Cohesion or Conflict?* University of Oxford. Presentation to Newcastle Upon Tyne Social Capital Forum, 28 September 2009.

¹³ M. Hewstone, *Intergroup Contact and Social Diversity. Cohesion or Conflict?* University of Oxford. Presentation to Newcastle Upon Tyne Social Capital Forum, 28 September 2009.

¹⁴ Fisher et al., *Working with Conflict*, (London, Zed Books, 2000), p.27

¹⁵ Fisher et al., *Working with Conflict*, (London, Zed Books, 2000)

To make our community cohesive we aim to:

Promote interaction between groups and people

START PLANNING HERE

Who are the groups in your area? Would the area benefit from them meeting with others?

Use the Community Cohesion Impact Assessment tool to assess if groups are ready to get together.

Work towards each group having identified leaders who are open to interaction with others.

Watch out for

Make sure you are aware of any histories of conflict locally and high levels of prejudice or threat currently.

Only looking at identity from the perspective of race or faith.

Not everyone needs to meet face to face for benefit to spread.

THEN

If it suits your area:

- Either work with groups individually to bond and develop the group further before doing any bridging with other groups.

OR

- Prepare the groups for coming together – establish issues of mutual concern or aspiration as a focus.
- Ensure you listen and respond to any expressions of concern from members of the groups.

NEXT STEPS

Review the impact and achievements of your work against the aims set out in the original Impact Assessment and share them with others.

Section 2

Tackling local attitudes, perception and myths

What do we mean by local attitudes, perception and myths?

Although racism and prejudice have not disappeared, over recent decades there has been a sharp drop in the number of people who are comfortable with publicly expressing overt racism or prejudice.¹⁶ And where people do express themselves in racist or prejudiced ways, it often masks underlying concerns and anxieties about a perceived lack of fairness, eg in housing allocation, employment, local services, etc. These underlying concerns affect how local communities and groups think and feel about other groups. People's perceptions are often different from the facts, but people believe them very strongly and their attitudes and behaviours are influenced by them. This can then provide fertile ground for myths to develop. In addition where remaining racism and prejudice have gone unchallenged, myths are more likely to be propagated and maintained about other groups and communities.¹⁷ Some people's attitudes and perceptions can be altered by the facts alone, but for many it is really important that their underlying concerns and anxieties are listened to and addressed.

Why is it important to tackle local perception and myths?

Perceptions can influence how people feel about local institutions and groups in their local community. They can also influence people's own sense of belonging and equity with others. If perceptions and myths about other groups remain unchallenged they can become the fuel for escalating community tensions. These negative attitudes towards one minority group can spill over into hostility towards other minority communities. If local leaders don't act to counter these attitudes tensions can escalate into acts of aggression, and can be used as justification for outright acts of prejudice and discrimination.

¹⁶ Equalities Review Panel, *Fairness and Freedom: The Final Report of the Equalities Review*, (2007)

¹⁷ Institute for Public Policy Research, *Challenging Attitudes, Perceptions, and Myths*, (2007)

How do you do it?

- Spend time finding out the relevant facts about your local area, eg the numbers of A8 migrants, housing allocation policy, etc, and work out how you are going to keep this information up-to-date
- Support local community leaders to understand the current complexities of racism and prejudice, and how it impacts on people in your area
- Ensure that local politicians are well informed about all local communities and understand the impact their words might have on community relations and community tensions
- Promote the benefits of diverse communities, more equal societies and a shared future¹⁸
- Tackle difficult conversations with care and allow fears to be expressed
- Recognise the need to engage communities in a longer term discussion and debate about the issues, whilst being proactive in responding to new rumours and myths in a community which fuel or escalate tension¹⁹
- Use your workforce to share information with their networks
- Word of mouth is a more trusted means of communication than a written myth busting approach²⁰
- Ensure that doctors, teachers, police in the local community have access to the correct facts – those most trusted to tell the truth are public facing officials
- Provide the opportunity for meaningful interaction between groups so that myths and stereotypes can be explored, challenged and dispelled
- Work in local schools and colleges, and with local youth to raise awareness about all local minority communities
- Use the Community Cohesion Impact Assessment tool to test out if activities you are planning are helpful in addressing common negative perceptions held by one group about another.

Watch out for

- A simplistic approach to myth busting that only provides information or refutes myths with facts which is not trusted by residents and can reinforce prejudice²¹
- A hectoring approach which will only put people's backs up and entrench their views.

¹⁸ R. Wilkinson and K. Pickett, *The Spirit level. Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, (London, Allen Lane, 2009)

¹⁹ Institute of Local Government Studies, *Communicating Cohesion: Evaluating Local Authority Communication Strategies*, (2009)

²⁰ M. Mean and P. Spires, *State of Trust: How to build better relationships between councils and the public*, (Demos, 2008)

²¹ Institute of Local Government Studies, *Communicating Cohesion: Evaluating Local Authority Communication Strategies* (2009)

To make our community cohesive we aim to:

Tackle local attitudes, perceptions and myths

START PLANNING HERE

Spend time finding out the relevant facts about your local area, eg the numbers of A8 migrants, housing allocation policy, etc, and work out how you are going to keep this information up-to-date.

Support local leaders and workers to understand the complexity of the issues.

Think about the range of ways you can tackle myths.

Watch out for

A simplistic approach which makes things worse.

Encourage colleagues to use the CCIA to make sure they don't make things worse rather than better.

THEN

If it suits your area:

- Provide opportunities for meaningful interaction between groups aiming to reduce stereotypes.
- Develop the skills of local leaders and community facing staff in challenging attitudes and myths.
- Share the benefits of diversity and the importance of equalities.
- Tackle difficult conversations with care and allow fears to be expressed.
- Involve schools and colleges in raising awareness.

Ensure that factual information about different local communities and issues affecting cohesion remains up-to-date and relevant.

Ensure you keep communicating the facts in a variety of ways and through a variety of different channels.

NEXT STEPS

Ensure that there are adequate resources to continue tackling perceptions and myths so that deep seated and entrenched prejudice is not sustained.

Section 3

Building trust in local institutions

What do we mean by trust in local institutions?

By local institutions we are mainly referring to local councils; however, building trust is also relevant for housing, health, education providers and the Criminal Justice System, and your organisation. 'Building trust is a complex activity as trust is based on both rational and emotional responses'.²² People's personal experiences are the main mechanism for building trust, followed by word of mouth, or hearing about the experiences of friends, neighbours and peers. Local media can influence people's trust in local institutions but people's own experiences and what they hear firsthand from others can be more influential.²³

Why is it important to develop trust in local institutions?

In areas where people trust their local institutions individuals are more likely to feel that they belong, that they can influence decisions locally, and that they can collaborate with others to improve their environment and their community. When people feel truly engaged and empowered in their communities, their workplaces and everyday interactions they feel a greater level of satisfaction with their lives.²⁴ In the long term it may result in members of the community looking for solutions to problems through collaborating together rather than relying on the council.

How do you develop trust in local institutions?

Different areas will require different strategies to develop trust.²⁵ The levels of deprivation, use of public services and people's perceptions of their own power to exert pressure or influence will determine your approach.

- Give people high quality personal experiences of services
- Service should be flexible, have a human face, and allow for occasional human error in their service users. The words and behaviour of frontline staff are central to people developing trust in you and your organisation
- Services need to deliver on promises and to be seen to be delivering

²² Sir Michael Lyons, *The Lyons Inquiry*, (2007), p.17

²³ M. Mean and P. Spires, *State of Trust: How to build better relationships between councils and the public*, (Demos, 2008)

²⁴ M. Mean and P. Spires, *State of Trust: How to build better relationships between councils and the public*, (Demos, 2008), p.12

²⁵ M. Hopi, N. Bacon, M. Brophy and G. Mulgan, *Neighbourliness + Empowerment = Wellbeing: Is there a formula for happy communities?*, (The Young Foundation, 2008)

- Be transparent and communicate how decisions are made – even if decisions do not go in people’s favour, if the process by which the decision is made is fair then people are more likely to accept it
- Improving the physical environment can influence how people perceive local institutions such as the council to be performing
- Engage people in debate about difficult decisions over resources and services, so that people can see the rationale for how unpopular decisions are being made
- Develop local leadership that is representative and diverse, that listens and is responsive to communities concerns and needs
- Close the loop – feedback to communities when action has been taken on a particular issue
- Develop people’s understanding of how they can debate and influence decision making at a local level.

Watch out for

- Remember that trust is based on both rational and emotional responses
- It is important to deliver on services promised, and to demonstrate that you are actively listening to local concerns and issues even if you cannot address them.

To make our community cohesive we aim to:
Build trust in local institutions

START PLANNING HERE

There are two main parts to this activity and you may need to plan interventions for both:

Ensuring the quality of people's experience of involvement with your service.

Improving people's ability to influence and hear back from your service.

Watch out for

Remember that trust is based on both rational and emotional responses.

It is important to deliver on services promised, and to demonstrate that you are listening to concerns.

THEN

If it suits your area:

- Practice high quality interactions so that you and others know what is expected.
- Ensure people are encouraged to give feedback and are also kept up-to-date by your service on issues of concern to them.
- Be transparent and discuss difficult issues with customers.
- Deliver on visible improvement of local concern, ie the physical environment.

NEXT STEPS

Encourage continuing involvement and influence by local people and ensure your service is continually responsive and transparent.

Section 4

Developing the role of young people

What role can young people play in developing cohesion?

Young people can be trained as peer mentors, facilitators, mediators, and leaders to support, educate and influence other young people and the wider community. Provided with appropriate resources young people can be supported to understand what escalates and what defuses community conflict, and their role in it. Young people can form relationships across existing ethnic and social divides and be role models in promoting good community relations to their peers and elders.

Why develop a role for young people?

Young people are tomorrow's community makers or community breakers. Involving and including children and young people in local cohesion work, decision-making and democracy develops their sense of belonging, civic trust and responsibility, and develops them as a lasting resource for the community. Engaging with the more challenging young people can positively impact on a community's sense of well being and belonging, eg by reducing vandalism, graffiti, crime levels and improved relations with their peers and elders. Community Cohesion work therefore should include a focus on schools and young people as there is now a statutory duty on schools and colleges to promote community cohesion.²⁶

How do you do it?

- Develop a comprehensive action plan for young people's contribution to cohesion in your agency
- Assess your own and other local provision used by young people. Does it engage with disaffected young people? What are the existing structures for engaging and involving young people in local democracy and decision-making? Use a tool such as *Hear By Right*, developed by the National Youth Agency, to measure and improve young people's participation in local decision making²⁷
- In areas where schools and colleges are mono-ethnic consider introducing school linking programmes²⁸ and education programmes focussing on cultural diversity. Ensure that the learning and experience of the young people directly benefiting are fed back to the wider community²⁹

²⁶ Department for Children, Schools and Families, *Guidance on the Duty to Promote Community Cohesion*, (2007) www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/Communitycohesion/

²⁷ B. Badham, *Hear By Right*, The National Youth Agency, (2008) <http://hbr.nya.org.uk>

²⁸ DCSF is funding the School Linking Network to support schools and LAs with establishing linking projects between schools: www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk

²⁹ Department for Children, Schools and Families, *Guidance on the Duty to Promote Community Cohesion*, (2007) www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/Communitycohesion/

- Engage young people in intergenerational activities and projects with older community members to break down intergenerational divides
- Work with local youth services, schools and colleges to support them in developing young people's understanding and skills in relation to community cohesion
- Challenge any negative stereotyping of young people, providing positive examples of local young people who are making a difference
- Engage with challenging hard to reach young people. They are often experts in community conflict. Given the right support and resources they can become responsible powerful leaders for other young people locally
- Develop youth leaders who can act as cohesion champions
- Ensure clear onward progression routes for young people which are integrated into educational and vocational Awards
- Ensure that you carry out a Community Cohesion Impact Assessment on any activities undertaken.³⁰

Watch out for

- Stretching young people beyond their current capabilities
- Setting young people up to fail – promising much and not following through
- Always using the same small group of young people as a resource and not providing progression routes onwards for them so that they become bored or disengaged.

³⁰ J. Broadwood and N. Sugden *Community Cohesion Impact Assessment and Conflict Prevention Tool*, (2008)
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communitycohesiontool

To make our community cohesive we aim to:
Develop a role for our young people

**START PLANNING
HERE**

Plan young people's contribution.

Look at your current engagement work – who is missing?

Look at current influencing work – can it be improved?

Look at your community – what are the key cohesion issues?

Watch out for

Stretching young people beyond their capacity.

Always using the same group.

Not having progression routes for young people.

Negative stereotyping.

THEN

If it suits your area:

- Develop young cohesion champions and community leaders.
- Increase participation of young people in local democracy.
- Do a School linking programme.
- Develop young people's understanding and skills in relation to community cohesion and conflict resolution.
- Promote and provide onward progression routes and vocational awards.

NEXT STEPS

Celebrate the success of young community leaders and cohesion champions.

Section 5

Developing effective community leadership

What do we mean by effective community leadership?

Effective community leaders are in touch with and listen to all sections of their community including young people and local minorities.³¹ They are able to involve others and work in partnership. They make things happen locally and make good use of resources. They are accountable to the community and are committed to empowering and developing new leaders. They are gateways rather than gatekeepers, able to speak for the interests of their community yet able to understand and work for the benefit of all communities. They take a stand against prejudice and can calm emerging tensions.

Why is it important to develop effective community leadership?

Developing effective community leaders is a key factor when building cohesive communities.³² It is important that all voices within a particular community are heard and feel able to influence local decisions. Research has shown that 'Feeling able to influence local decisions is a strong positive predictor of community cohesion'.³³ Without hearing the diverse views of all sections of a community the important decisions eg funding of local groups, housing, transport, local services cannot be made fairly and accountably.

How do you develop effective leaders for your community?

- Analyse the current community leadership. Does it truly and effectively represent the groups and communities in your area?
- Agree gaps and recruitment targets
- Plan how to recruit new leaders and develop emerging leaders
- Undertake a Community Cohesion Impact Assessment (CCIA) on the plan before moving on to recruitment phase, incorporating any actions from the CCIA³⁴

³¹ Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA): *Characteristics of effective community leadership*
www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=73211

³² Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) and the Local Government Association (LGA), *Leading cohesive communities*, (2006) www.lga.gov.uk/lga/publications/publication-display.do?id=21989

³³ J. Laurence and A. Heath, *Predictors of community cohesion: multi-level modelling 2005 Citizenship Survey*, (2008)
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/predictorscohesion

³⁴ J. Broadwood and N. Sugden, *Community Cohesion Impact Assessment Tool*, (2008)
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communitycohesiontool

- Engage with current leadership. Develop their understanding of cohesion and abilities to facilitate difficult debates and issues
- Provide ongoing resources and training for community leadership development
- Ensure your structures enable new and emerging leaders to develop their role
- Recruit leaders or champions for specific projects or strategies, who can engage and inspire others
- Young people might also be recruited as leaders or champions, or ambassadors for changes and new initiatives.

Watch out for

- Established communities – don't ignore the need to recruit new leaders in these communities, even if it is hard because local meeting places/institutions may have fallen out of use
- Newly arrived communities often do not have developed infrastructure and established community representatives or leaders
- Burn out of committed energetic community leaders who are over-available to the community they serve
- Leaders who promote themselves and their own interests rather than the communities they serve
- Elected members and council officers who resist sharing power with communities.

To make our community cohesive we aim to:
Develop effective community leadership

**START PLANNING
HERE**

Analyse current leadership.

Agree gaps.

Plan how to recruit new and emerging leaders.

Impact assess the leadership development plan.

Watch out for

New communities – economic migrants are often excluded due to employment patterns.

Burn out.

Elected members not wanting to share power with others.

THEN

If it suits your area:

- Work to recruit new and representative leaders.
- Engage with current leadership and address any issues about skills or bias.
- Provide resources for training and skill development of current and new leaders.
- Focus on developing understanding of cohesion and skills in facilitating.

NEXT STEPS

Review the impact after a year and two years. Benefits may be seen in mid to longer term.

Section 6

Developing a local sense of belonging

What is belonging?

Belonging comes from feeling connected and loyal to a place and to the other people in that place. But it's also more than that: it is a "shared commitment to a community" brought together by "ties of common interest"³⁵ Often a sense of belonging and loyalty has "a strong local focus"³⁶, although many people also feel a strong sense of national belonging. Practically, it's about living in an area where you have established relationships and friendships, and friendly neighbours and familiar (non-hostile) strangers. It can also be about feeling proud of your area (this may be connected with its facilities, history or buildings) and getting involved in local activities. It can be about feeling that people in your area share the same values as you – for example about the importance of family or a desire to look after the local environment. We can also feel we belong to a number of places at once³⁷ eg an older English person retired to Spain will still feel connected to the UK, a younger Muslim person in Bradford feeling lifelong connection to Pakistan.

Why is a sense of belonging relevant to community cohesion?

Belonging builds confident individuals and communities, and reduces tensions and the risk of future tensions.³⁸ Many people have lost a sense of belonging to their locality, either because they have moved and been unable to establish themselves in the new locality, or because the locality has changed due to population churn and they don't feel connected to their new neighbours.

How do you do it?

- Identify who needs to develop a greater sense of belonging and to where
- Identify the historical stories of place in your area and the current stories
- Develop a shared 'story of place' that takes into account the history of the locality and its communities
- Promote understanding of others in the locality in order to reduce negative interactions, harassment and tensions between individuals and groups

³⁵ B. Parekh, *What is Multiculturalism*. www.india-seminar.com

³⁶ Commission on Integration and Cohesion (CIC), *Our Shared Future*, (2007), p.6

³⁷ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Immigration, faith, cohesion*, (Compass, 2008)

³⁸ S. Creasy, K. Gavelin and D. Potter, *Everybody needs good neighbours*, (2008) www.involve.org.uk

- Run creative activities to increase involvement and understanding
- Develop local pride, celebrate both place and people
- Increase participation in civic activities such as volunteering, tackling local issues together, taking part in local decision making³⁹, voting
- Challenge discrimination and promote equality
- Run welcome programmes for new arrivals⁴⁰
- Ensure access to education, training, and employment
- Help people to learn and practice English

Watch out for

- Getting the balance right between respect for diversity and an area's longer history and achievement.

³⁹ Sir Michael Lyons, *The Lyons Inquiry*, (2007)

⁴⁰ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Immigration, faith, cohesion*, (Compass, 2008)

To make our community cohesive we aim to:
Develop a sense of belonging

START PLANNING HERE

Who needs to develop a greater sense of belonging?

To what place or places do they need to feel they belong?

What are the historical stories of that place/those places?

What are the current stories of place?

Watch out for

Thinking it's necessary to bring groups together to do this work – it's not.

Getting the balance right between promoting diversity and an area's longer history and achievements.

THEN

If it suits your area:

- Run activities that welcome and involve the widest range of individuals and groups in developing a story of their place.
- Promote both local history and understanding of current diversity – develop a sense of local pride.
- Work constructively with the differing views and visions you will encounter, using conflict resolution skills. Discuss openly any concerns about inequality or discrimination.

NEXT STEPS

Plan future events too – this work needs ongoing attention and investment.

Section 7

Developing commitment to a shared future

What does 'commitment to a shared future' mean?

The commitment of individuals and communities to a positive and shared future for their neighbourhood is seen when people:

- want to live in the area
- use local services, shops, schools and businesses
- invest in local social capital, for example by volunteering at the local school, attending neighbourhood forums, being local leaders
- feel safe, and have contact with neighbours
- have a sense of their own power to be involved and to influence
- understand and welcome the range of different people in the area
- develop a local identity focusing on shared local experiences.

Why is it important in promoting cohesion?

Commitment to a shared future is important because it helps people develop a shared sense of belonging to a particular place, it builds community resilience, and it builds individual relationships across identity groups. In focusing on the future we can both concentrate on "what binds communities together"⁴¹ whilst recognising and valuing difference.⁴²

How do you develop it?

- Bring individuals and groups together to address local issues
- Develop strong local democracy; help people to influence decisions about the services and environment of their area, and help those with power to listen and act on what they have heard⁴³
- Develop local social capital (through volunteering and skills development)
- Work with partners to create safe neutral spaces for people to meet in⁴⁴

⁴¹ Commission on Integration and Cohesion (CIC), *Our Shared Future*, (2007), p.7

⁴² M. Hickman, H. Crowley and N. Mai, *Immigration and social cohesion in the UK*, (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2008)

⁴³ Spectrum of Public Participation: www.iap2.org/associations/4748/files/Spectrum.pdf

⁴⁴ Communities and Local Government, *Cohesion Delivery Framework*, (2009), chapter 3
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/cohesiondeliveryrevised

- Create spaces within which people learn to understand and invest in the area – you may use photography, story telling, intergenerational work to help people discover the commonality of reasons for living here, and the diversity of places people have arrived from and why
- Be present and future focused, but also tackle local history such as conflict between groups⁴⁵
- Work on overcoming people’s fear of difference, and anger at change, whilst focusing on the future not the past, and challenging when appropriate
- Be aware of current cohesion indicators in your LAA in order to measure impact of your activities against baseline.

Watch out for

- Remember that “it is necessary to enable and support expressions of both difference and unity in local areas”⁴⁶
- Individuals and groups who focus on the past and not the future, and only on differences rather than commonalities
- Strategic vision statements that are short on practicality – you will have to do the work to turn them into reality.

⁴⁵ Communities and Local Government, *Community Conflict: A Resource Pack*, (2006)
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communityconflict

⁴⁶ M. Hickman, H. Crowley and N. Mai, *Immigration and social cohesion in the UK*, (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2008), p.180

To make our community cohesive we aim to:

Develop a commitment to a shared future

START PLANNING HERE

Are there local issues that could be addressed?

Can you help people influence local decisions?

Is there scope for improving social capital - volunteering and skills?

Do you have a neutral venue?

Watch out for

Making sure differences and similarities are acknowledged.

Remaining future focussed.

THEN

If it suits your area:

- Do a CCIA to see if different groups in the area can be brought together to work on local issues.
- Acknowledge and discuss fear of difference and anger at change.
- Focus on the future and commonality of experience.
- Create safe spaces in which people can come together on issues of mutual concern.

NEXT STEPS

Measure your achievements, possibly using your LAA indicators as a baseline.

Section 8

Developing community resilience

What is community resilience?

Resilience of individuals and communities can be described as their ability to face challenges, and cope with crisis. In relation to Community Cohesion it is about having the necessary structures and skills in place at a local level to respond rapidly to tensions and issues between communities. It's also about a community's capacity to respond to change constructively. It is not about being invulnerable to the feelings and worries that difficult community problems bring; it's about having the skills and capacity to work with others to deal with them.⁴⁷ Resilient communities will already have developed bonding social capital and be resourceful in terms of bridging with other communities.⁴⁸ Resilient communities are empowered communities who have the resources to anticipate and prevent social problems.

Why develop it?

Community resilience may help people in divided communities to manage challenges effectively without an increase in stress and tension. Resilient communities cope by collectively finding solutions to problems.⁴⁹ Faced with the same challenges as less resilient communities, a resilient community will feel empowered to anticipate and prevent those challenges, lessening their impact.⁵⁰

How to develop it?⁵¹

Many of the actions associated with development of resilience are actions undertaken routinely by community development and youth workers across the country over many years. Activities include:

- Developing a rapid response network that can respond effectively within 24 hours to escalation of tension between or within communities
- Ensure information about local area is shared with local people
- Enable groups to express concerns
- Ensuring that all sections of communities have forums to express their views and influence local decision making

⁴⁷ M. Stein, *Resilience and Young People Leaving Care*, (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2005)

⁴⁸ Commission on Integration and Cohesion (CIC), *Our Shared Future*, (2007), p.111

⁴⁹ T. Newman, and S. Blackburn, *Transitions in the Lives of Children and Young People: Resilience Factors*. Interchange 78. (Edinburgh, Scottish Executive) www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/ic78-00.asp

⁵⁰ S. Creasy, K. Gavelin, and D. Potter, *Everybody needs good neighbours*, (2008), p.32 www.involve.org.uk

⁵¹ Canadian Centre for Community Renewal, *The Community Resilience Manual* www.cedworks.com/communityresilience01.html

- Enable groups to participate in the locality and contribute ideas
- Providing opportunities for the development of conflict resolution skills
- Providing mediation where neighbourhood and community disputes can be resolved
- Provide volunteering, and other opportunities for communities to participate and engage in positively impacting on their local area
- Developing action planning mechanisms
- Developing strong supportive local networks.

Watch out for

- Community resilience is not about people putting up with the problems in their community, eg housing, worklessness. It is about developing community capacity to deal with change and conflict.

To make our community cohesive we aim to:
Develop community resilience

START PLANNING HERE

Do the different communities in your area communicate regularly with each other and/or belong to overlapping networks?

Do local leaders and community reps have conflict resolution and mediation skills?

Plan to build and sustain networks and opportunities for people to participate and engage with others from the area, and to share information and support.

Watch out for

Community resilience is not about people putting up with the problems in their area, it's about developing the collective capacity to deal with change and conflict.

THEN

If it suits your area:

- Develop a rapid response network.
- Develop the capacity of local leaders and community reps in conflict resolution and mediation skills.
- Increase opportunities for volunteering.
- Increase and encourage forums for people to express their views and influence decisions and actions in the area.
- Develop problem-solving mechanisms and action plans to deal with problems that arise.

NEXT STEPS

Consider how else to assist your particular community to be collectively resilient and resourceful.

Section 9

Using communications and the media to promote cohesion

What does using communications and the media mean?

Communities and employees get their information about local issues in a variety of ways and your communications strategy needs to reflect that. All forms of communication should be considered, including: information provision, newspapers, free papers, radio, websites, blogs, tweets, social networking sites, press releases, interviews, film, images, YouTube, arts and media events. Frontline staff can play an important role in communicating with the public, and will need to be kept informed.⁵² Residents feel a greater sense of involvement and connection to their locality if they are regularly informed and involved.

Why are communications and the media important in promoting cohesion?

Government research in 2007 found that the media can have a positive impact on improving people's attitudes and reducing prejudice and discrimination.⁵³ Influencing and changing the way people feel and therefore talk about an area is partly achievable through communications; for example, by openly acknowledging and talking about changes in population.⁵⁴ Taking a proactive approach to communications may positively influence cohesion perception indicators (National Indicators 1, 2, and 4, and others in your Local Area Agreement).⁵⁵ Bear in mind that where there is an information vacuum, myths and stories may flood in to fill that gap. The role of the media was a factor leading to the disturbances and breakdown in cohesion in northern towns 2001; adopting a proactive approach to communications, and building relationships with journalists will help avoid this in future.⁵⁶

How to use communications to improve cohesion

- Your starting point is being able to provide residents with accurate up-to-date information about cohesion issues that are relevant to your neighbourhood and to their concerns

⁵² www.mediatrust.org

⁵³ Communities and Local Government, *Getting the message across: using media to reduce racial prejudice and discrimination*, (2007) www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/gettingmessageacross

⁵⁴ M. Hickman, H. Crowley and N. Mai *Immigration and social cohesion in the UK*, (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2008)

⁵⁵ Communities and Local Government, *The New Performance Framework for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships: Single Set of National Indicators*, (2007) www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/nationalindicator

⁵⁶ Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA), *Taking forward community cohesion in Leicester*, (2003) www.leicester.gov.uk/index.asp?pgid=5515

- You will need to have a communications strategy and action plan in your organisation. This will help you get your message across, promote your vision and values, and challenge any negative perceptions of your cohesion and equalities activities
- Work with partnership organisations to co-ordinate your communications⁵⁷
- Audit how communities and identity groups in your area get their information now, and use the information to inform how you communicate in future⁵⁸
- Build positive relationships with local journalists and volunteers from all information sources. Be aware that journalists have their own agendas but adopt a positive helpful approach
- Ensure your range of contacts provides you with representation from all the diversity of identities in your area
- Plan ahead and be proactive, communicate regularly and confidently
- Run campaigns as well as one offs. Repeating the message makes a difference
- Remember that using facts is not sufficient to change attitudes⁵⁹
- Promote positive good news stories about local people⁶⁰
- Welcome new communities⁶¹
- Focus on commonality between groups identified in features and stories⁶²
- Do a Community Cohesion Impact Assessment before running campaigns to avoid unintended consequences, eg embedding of negative stereotypes.⁶³

Watch out for

- Missing out a community by not using their preferred information source
- Embedding negative perceptions of identity groups by oversimplifying the message or image
- Proportionality – make sure your coverage of different groups is proportionate and perceived to be so
- Avoiding communicating about a difficult topic because it feels difficult... it won't get any easier if you delay
- Top down communications – messages from frontline staff are trusted more than communications seen to be coming from the top.

⁵⁷ Institute of Local Government Studies, *Communicating Cohesion: Evaluating Local Authority Communication Strategies*, (2009)

⁵⁸ Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA), *Managing Media Relations*, (2008) www.idea.gov.uk

⁵⁹ Communities and Local Government, *Getting the message across: using media to reduce racial prejudice and discrimination*, (2007) www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/gettingmessageacross

⁶⁰ Institute of Local Government Studies, *Communicating Cohesion: Evaluating Local Authority Communication Strategies*, (2009)

⁶¹ Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA), *Communicating Community Cohesion*, (2008) www.idea.gov.uk

⁶² Communities and Local Government, *Guidance for local authorities on how to mainstream community cohesion into other services*, (2009) www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/mainstreamcommunitycohesion

⁶³ J. Broadwood and N. Sugden, *Community Cohesion Impact Assessment and Conflict Prevention Tool*, (2008)

To make our community cohesive we aim to:
Use communications and the media

START PLANNING HERE

Have a strategy and action plan.

Make sure you have up-to-date relevant information about your local area.

Talk to your partners about sharing communications activities.

Audit how your communities get their information now.

Invest in using new technologies.

Watch out for

Missing a community by not using their preferred source.

Proportionality.

Avoiding communication about a topic because it feels difficult.

THEN

If it suits your area:

- Build positive relationships with media and communications providers.
- Communicate regularly, using both campaigns and one offs – and do an Impact Assessment first.
- Promote positive good news stories about local people.
- Focus on commonality between groups in stories and articles.

NEXT STEPS

Review your impact.

Section 10

Tackling the underlying causes of poor community cohesion

What are the underlying causes of poor community cohesion?

There is no simple answer to this question. Cohesion is influenced by multiple interlocking factors. We do know that diversity or population churn alone do not make cohesion worse. We also know that deprivation can be a key negative factor. However, some deprived areas are much more cohesive than might be expected, with research suggesting that this was because of strong community spirit.

An underlying cause of poor cohesion can be people and communities seeing (or believing) that they do not have something that others in the neighbourhood or country have. This can mean they see differences in income and employment, health, education, skills and training, housing and services, living environment, crime, transport.⁶⁴ So it is not enough to promote equality – you also need to demonstrate fairness in your policies and procedures and tackle perceptions of unfairness.

Work done on predicting low cohesion⁶⁵ shows how cohesion can work differently in different neighbourhoods. You may want to look at the three charts that show this research in summary in the Cohesion Delivery Framework Overview Annex A so that you can see which factors relate to your neighbourhood.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ M. Noble, D. McLennan, K. Wilkinson, A. Whitworth, H. Barnes and C. Dibben, *English Indices of Deprivation 2007*, (Communities and Local Government, 2008) www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/indicesdeprivation07

⁶⁵ J. Laurence and A. Heath *Predictors of community cohesion: multi-level modeling 2005 Citizenship Survey*, (Communities and Local Government, 2008) www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/predictorscohesion

⁶⁶ Communities and Local Government, *Cohesion Delivery Framework: Overview*, (2009) www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/cohesiondeliveryrevised

Why do frontline staff and community activists need to tackle this?

As a frontline worker or manager you may feel that tackling the underlying causes is too big an issue for you to be able to address. However, your actions can contribute to wider strategies in your area, which will lead to improvement in cohesion over time. The links between disadvantage and cohesion are complex and how you factor them into your work will depend on the characteristics of your area. Tackling deprivation is also important because “deprived communities with little to offer their own members have even less to offer newcomers”; and “deprivation can be blamed on new arrivals”.⁶⁷ Some people on low incomes may (understandably) have little capacity for social participation.⁶⁸ As low educational attainment is a predictor of poor cohesion, improving the educational attainment and increasing the work prospects and income of both individuals and communities can have a positive impact on perceptions of cohesion.⁶⁹

How do you tackle the underlying causes?

Tackling the underlying causes of low cohesion means tackling both individual and community level disadvantage, and tackling perceptions of disadvantage if it is exaggerated.

- Find out about the predictors of cohesion that are relevant to your area – this will help you decide what the priorities for action are⁷⁰
- Find out what your local cohesion strategy focuses on, and decide how your organisation can contribute to the strategies and address underlying causes
- Build on your network of contacts to help you tackle this agenda alongside others. Build partnerships with business and local enterprise to involve them in your work. Use local services and also specialist providers from further afield
- Tackle issues about education. Help to raise aspirations. Consider providing learning and skills development or encourage use of other providers (such as colleges who can provide a second chance if people didn’t achieve at school)
- Consider running a homework club, or learning support services, or provide mentoring for people going into the workplace after a long break. If you already provide these services can you share your expertise with others or widen your client group perhaps across identity divides?
- Tackle issues about the local built environment, involving the widest possible range of people

⁶⁷ M. Hickman, H. Crowley and N. Mai, *Immigration and social cohesion in the UK*, (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2008)

⁶⁸ Townsend, 1987, p131 and 140 Deprivation).

⁶⁹ J. Laurence and A. Heath *Predictors of community cohesion: multi-level modeling 2005 Citizenship Survey*, (Communities and Local Government, 2008) www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/predictorscohesion

⁷⁰ J. Laurence and A. Heath *Predictors of community cohesion: multi-level modeling 2005 Citizenship Survey*, (Communities and Local Government, 2008) www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/predictorscohesion

- Tackle financial exclusion through the provision of money advice services, credit unions, etc
- Challenge perceptions and myths about your neighbourhood
- Have aspirations and strive to meet them.

Watch out for

- Feeling this is too big or too difficult to tackle. A step by step approach with achievable targets for achievement is appropriate
- Remember that deprivation in an area does not always result in poor cohesion
- Make sure that interventions are available to the long-term settled population and new immigrants alike
- Don't try to go it alone. Working with other strategic partners on shared priorities will improve your chances of making an impact.

To make our community cohesive we aim to:
Tackle the underlying causes of poor community cohesion

START PLANNING HERE

Find out about the predictors of cohesion that are relevant for your local area.

Find out what your local cohesion strategy focuses on and assess how your organisation can contribute.

Find out about local networks and build partnerships with other agencies including local business.

Watch out for

Feeling this agenda is too big to tackle - working step by step and in collaboration with others makes it possible.

Making interventions available to only some groups.

THEN

If it suits your area:

- Provide support to individuals and groups
 - to improve education
 - to increase enterprise and aspirations
 - to improve the environment
 - to reduce myths and negative rumours
 - to tackle financial exclusion
 - to build community spirit.

NEXT STEPS

Evaluate the impact of your work on an area wide basis, with partners, and taking the long-term view.

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