

Community building:
What really works
Handouts pack



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Definitions

Identity-based violence:

Any act of violence where the perpetrator targets someone because of how they view an aspect of their victim's identity – for example targeting someone because of their gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation. It affects individuals (for example, hate crime) as well as entire groups or communities (for example, violent extremism and genocide) all around the world.

Social cohesion:

The level of connectedness or solidarity in a society, including the quality of relationships between people, sense of belonging, and willingness to work together towards positive solutions.

Marginalisation:

When an individual or group is treated as less important, or when they have less power, and therefore they are excluded from full participation in a community.

Prejudice:

When somebody holds a (usually negative) opinion or belief about a person based on a characteristic such as their political affiliation, sex, gender, beliefs, values, social class, age, disability, religion, sexuality, race, ethnicity, language, nationality, occupation, education, criminality, or health rather than because of the experience they have had with that person.

Community:

A group of people with a shared interest or characteristic in common, rather than a geographic area. You likely are part of many different communities at once - it could be your workplace, an online group, a club, a faith group, or even the street where you live.

Community building:

Initiatives such as events, campaigns, projects or clubs designed to make a community a better place for all its members – particularly those who are most marginalised from a community they are a part of. This might mean activities that help people feel more a part of a community, that increase the connectedness between people in a community, or that tackle injustices in a community.

Divisions:

We speak about divisions broadly. In the UK context, we see signs of worsening inequality, social disintegration, political polarisation, and rising prejudice.

Resilience:

Often understood as the capacity to 'bounce back' after a disaster or difficult event, resilience includes both *Individual Resilience* (when a person has lots of positive relationships, wellbeing, a sense of purpose, and a positive outlook on life) and *Collective Resilience* (the ability of social groups to express solidarity and cohesion in order to cope with and respond to change together.)

Threats to social cohesion and risks of identity-based violence

Identity-based violence:

Any act of violence where the perpetrator targets someone because of how they view an aspect of their victim's identity – for example targeting someone because of their gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation. It affects individuals (for example, hate crime) as well as entire groups or communities (for example, violent extremism and genocide) all around the world.

No community, society or country is immune to identity-based violence. Ongoing effort is required, from local grassroots groups to political leaders, to ensure that everybody's rights and freedoms are protected and respected. In times of political, economic, or social crisis, societies become more vulnerable. When a sense of local or national anxiety becomes widespread, minority and marginalised groups very often pay the greatest price. There are certain risk factors that can reduce a society's social cohesion and resilience to divisive and hate-based behaviours. We use these indicators to assess the social cohesion of states and societies, both in the UK and around the world.

Society wide

- National-level political or economic or social crisis
- Widespread perception of threat posed by certain identity group / groups
- Normalisation of hate speech, dehumanising language, and incitement to violence against identity groups
- Widespread acceptance of disinformation, propaganda, and fake news
- Widespread lack of trust in the media / government
- Growing inequality or sense of inequality
- Growth in number and legitimacy of groups who use violence or the threat of violence
- Impunity for those who commit, incite, or threaten violence

Individual / personal

- Not feeling valued by those around you
- Not feeling represented by those who make decisions affecting your life
- Not feeling in control of your life or its direction
- Believing that certain groups are responsible for problems or pose a threat to your security or prosperity
- Believing that certain groups are 'less legitimate', 'less human', or deserving of punishment including violence
- Limited personal networks or relationships with corrupting individuals

Community building principles

How community building work is done is just as important as **what** activities take place. Community building principles provide a guide for approaching how community building is envisioned and implemented in a way that is people-oriented, empowering, and long-lasting.

Self-awareness, including awareness of your own identity and power dynamics in relation to the communities you work in and with: Before starting any community initiative, first ask yourself reflection questions. Who am I in this space? What is my power and influence in relation to others? In relation to the project design? If I am an outsider to this community, am I co-designing with affected communities? Do I have an exit strategy to ensure that this work is not dependent on my being present? How will my identity be seen by others in this space? How will my actions influence others in this space? How am I mobilising assets that already exist in this space? Is a new initiative needed, or can I use my skills and networks to mobilise existing strengths?

Awareness of local context: When activities are imposed from the outside without a deep, meaningful understanding of the local context, they often fail - or worse, have harmful consequences. Awareness of local context entails a detailed understanding of the social, economic, and political situation; local power dynamics; drivers of identity-based violence; and the actors of change in that area. As these factors are constantly changing over time, awareness of local context needs to be updated regularly.

Inclusiveness, particularly of marginalised individuals/groups: New initiatives, activities or actions must be inclusive across communities and different identity groups. No community or identity group is homogenous; diversity needs to be defined in a diverse way to be truly inclusive. To be empowering, inclusion should be based on participation, fostering meaningful interactions, and mutual support. Inclusion is a process, not an event, and requires ongoing efforts to work with diverse stakeholders and ensure meaningful engagement of all.

Building on existing positive initiatives: Every local area has existing positive initiatives, no matter how small. Often the best way to tackle intolerance, hate and prejudice locally is not through launching new projects but by building upon or supporting existing initiatives. Indeed, every community already has strengths, assets, and gifts. These are starting points for mobilising and growing change. By working with these existing positive initiatives in partnership through a process of mutual empowerment, we can better challenge and support one another.

Sustainability or durability of programming: Ensuring sustainability of programming often means avoiding launching big new local efforts that cost money and energy to maintain but instead working to build mutually supportive networks of individuals and organisations who share some of the same aims.

Accountability: Accountability entails being responsible towards those we work with and for. Community builders are accountable to their communities and each other. It is essential to understand and respond to needs, to be open and transparent.

'What works' in Community Building

There are all sorts of different things we can all do to bridge community divides and strengthen cohesion. Building cohesive societies requires everybody to play their part. This handout lists some of the things we know to work in building kinder, more inclusive, and more just communities. These examples are not meant to be comprehensive but rather serve as starting points for thinking about approaches each of us can adopt to strengthen our communities.

Fostering meaningful Interactions between different people

Prejudice and division in communities can be overcome through long-term, meaningful interactions between different members of a community. Meaningful interactions go beyond surface-level conversations, delving into shared interests, hopes, concerns, or even each other's differences. By learning about one another through a purposeful connection, people can break down prejudices they might have had about one another and build common ground. Meaningful interactions cannot be forced as this will reduce willingness of participants to get to know one another. Similarly, events organised with the intention of promoting interaction for its own sake can be of limited use in bridging divides.

Therefore, it's important that activities and events that provide opportunities for meaningful interactions are things that lots of different people actually want to be a part of, and ideally are ongoing rather than one-offs. By talking to different members of your community and existing networks or organisations you can understand what sort of activities are needed and will attract a diverse group of community members. Some activities that tend to be popular at attracting different people include regular sports activities, events or activities focused on creating or performing music, and opportunities for skills sharing between community members. Fostering meaningful interactions doesn't need to be about organising new events; instead we should be thinking about how we bring people together in our daily lives and in existing spaces that we frequent such as workplaces and clubs.

A great example of fostering meaningful interactions...

Shahid has been a community builder in East London for many years. He noticed that there were not many spaces where people of different backgrounds could meet each other in a meaningful way. He decided to set up free English language classes at the Minhaj-ul-Quran Mosque where he worked to provide practical skills to recent immigrants, but also to bring people together from different cultures and backgrounds. Most of the learners, from all over the world, had never visited a mosque or had meaningful interactions with Muslims before. After a short time attending these classes, where everyone was encouraged to share stories about their lives and discuss current topics, any misconceptions they may have had about Muslims or each other were broken down. Many of the participants formed strong, lasting friendships.

Reaching people in their own space

Inviting community members to new activities or formal events may result in the participation of only the most vocal or able rather than a genuine representation of the community. Similarly, simply advertising events or activities as “open to all” through emails, posters or flyers may not result in the most marginalized groups actually feeling welcome or like they would ‘fit in’. It is vital that organisers are proactive in outreach, and tailor materials and engagement to the local context and community needs. Particular attention to those who have been excluded or marginalised in the past is critical. It can be more effective to take an informal approach and to work through existing channels such as classes, forums, and community events that already reach a wider and more diverse audience – particularly those from vulnerable communities. In any outreach effort, it is vital to build relationships based on trust and sensitivity and with a view towards long-term partnership.

Creating local networks of skills sharing and support

All of us have skills, abilities or networks that could support our local communities. Sometimes the best way to build our communities is by sharing those skills, abilities and networks to help empower others. For example, you could share your writing skills to help a small community group write grant applications to ensure they have the funds they need to continue to support some of the most vulnerable community members. Or perhaps you could use your experience and confidence to support a vulnerable neighbour to have their say at a resident’s association meeting. You can share your skills on an ad hoc basis when there is a particular need; however, an even more powerful way of sharing skills is to build informal networks that bring people with diverse skill sets together with community groups. Sustaining local networks of skills sharing is a stepping-stone towards building more resilient, self-reliant, self-sustaining networks of empowered citizens.



Challenging prejudice and misinformed views in a constructive manner

When prejudice and misinformed views against certain groups in our communities are not challenged they can spread, leading to community divides and discrimination.

It is important to challenge prejudice, but it often does not work to tell people with firmly held but misinformed views that they are wrong, as they might become defensive. Similarly, one-off initiatives or ones that do not take into account causes or prejudice are unlikely to have a lasting effect. Initiatives to reduce prejudice are most effective when they take into account why people hold their beliefs and work to bring people together in meaningful ways. Intercultural education, dialogue, and initiatives that foster meaningful interactions have been shown to reduce prejudice and bias.

In some cases, it might be necessary to actively challenge prejudice that you encounter online or in person. When doing so:

Speak up constructively. Do not minimise the situation or brush it off - do hold the other person accountable for the impact of their words or actions.

Ask questions. When asking questions (e.g. why do you think this way?) you provide an opportunity for them to reflect. By understanding their logic, or the sources of information that inform their beliefs, you can also challenge them in a more constructive way.

Engage in respectful dialogue. Attacking the other person might make them go on the defence which is counterproductive. Try to convey the impact of the wrongdoer's words and actions as this can foster empathy or at least reflection and self-awareness.

Educate. Tell them the historical and cultural context of the words that hurt. Let them know that the impact is not minor at all but can affect peoples' mental health, wellbeing, and sense of physical safety. Provide them with factual information and different perspectives.

A great example of challenging prejudice constructively...

Derick Black grew up in an extremely racist family in the USA and as a young man became a vocal supporter of the white supremacist movement. When university classmates found out about his views, the immediate reaction was condemnation. People that he respected said how his words hurt them, which slowly began to change his thinking. But he really changed when a Jewish friend invited him to weekly Shabbat dinners, without confrontation, as this friend believed it would be counterproductive to try to debate with Derick. During these dinners, Derick engaged in thoughtful conversations with his Jewish friends and he began to realise that his beliefs and words were really harming them. Eventually, he broke away from his family and became a public speaker on behalf of antiracism.

Recognise, champion, and celebrate differences

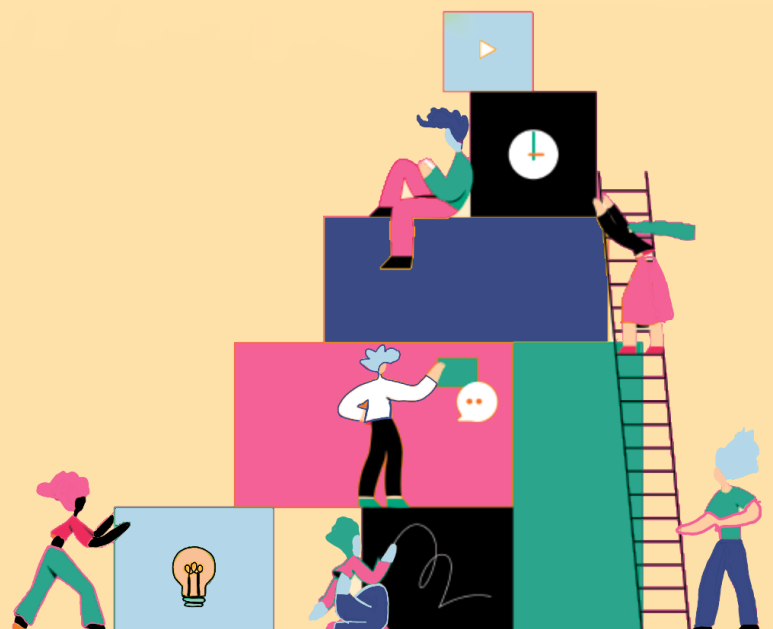
A common way that diversity is recognised is through events, particularly around occasions such as Black History Month or Disability History Month. This can be a powerful way to champion a certain cause and highlight the experiences of marginalised groups. However, when poorly planned and implemented, such events risk being tokenistic or even reinforcing stereotypes.

There are many ways to create a meaningful platform for exchange. As a starting point, define 'differences' in a diverse way, encompassing race, religion, gender, disability, and more. Engage different stakeholders, actively listening to their stories, and then reflect their concerns and ideas in planning. Ensure that the initiative is not a one-off but central to a long-term vision for change.

Key to the success of any initiative is creating the opportunity for individuals to find out about one another, as this has longer lasting effects than simply giving a talk or presentation. You could find ways to ensure the issues are explored deeply, enabling participants to ask questions that come from a place of respect and empathy and get to know one another in a meaningful way.

A great example of recognising, championing, and celebrating differences...

The online and print magazine collective gal-dem is a platform for stories of women and non-binary people of colour. It aims to address inequality and misrepresentation in the media by platforming a range of stories across the community. Beyond representation gal-dem also seeks to shape new, more inclusive ways of thinking and acting through events and debates. Recognising that many public cultural spaces lack the representation and participation of BAME communities, in November 2016 gal-dem curated an event at the V&A focused on celebrating the worth and value of BAME communities. The event showcased contemporary work made by young people of colour and shone a spotlight on different lived experiences, thereby simultaneously celebrating differences and reclaiming cultural space. The event was not designed to be a one-off but rather part of programming to bring people together in new ways, to increase cultural knowledge, and foster creative skills.



Empowering marginalised groups to take part in local civic processes

Developing understandings of the views and concerns of the different groups that make up our communities is key to overcoming division and building a stronger, safer, and more inclusive society. When our local civic spaces and processes don't reflect the communities they are supposed to represent, we run the risk of upholding stereotypes, pushing prejudice, and so damaging social cohesion. (Civic spaces include local volunteering opportunities, tenants' and residents' associations, local party politics, school governor boards, police ward panel meetings, and local clubs or groups.)

There are barriers that can prevent some groups from getting involved in civic spaces. While marginalised groups may be engaged with national and local issues, they might also think that these spaces or processes are not open to them due to issues such as historical lack of representation. This can make members of our communities feel even more alienated and excluded.

Community builders should work in partnership with underrepresented groups to create spaces for everyone's views to be heard. In our projects, workplaces, groups and clubs we can actively ensure that we support those from less represented communities to become involved and place marginalised voices at the centre. Sometimes we should give up our seat at the table and support somebody who wouldn't normally feel comfortable doing so to take that space.

Community organising

Community organising is an effective way to build communities because it brings together people from different walks of life, uniting them with the common goal of increasing the community's say in what local issues are prioritised and how they should be tackled.

Although different community organisers may address different problems, the goal is the same: to bring people together, identify the root causes of problems, build on shared interests, nurture a sense of collective action, and implement a strategy for change. In order to create that change, community organisers work with local leaders from various sections of the community, create opportunities for community members to influence local political decisions, and sometimes even establish sustainable practices or structures for the community to work collaboratively with decision-makers.

A great example of community organising...

Street Space works together with communities to reimagine safe, inclusive spaces in which stronger, kinder communities can flourish. 'Unloved spaces' – such as a bridge or street associated with crime - can really harm a community's sense of safety and pride. Reimagining what that unloved space could look like together with the community is a powerful way to bring people together around a common purpose and thereby build community.

The starting point for organisers is deeply listening to community members in order to start a conversation about space and to identify people's views, concerns, and ideas. Rather than expecting community members to attend a formal event, organisers go to where people are such as supermarkets and busy streets. Street space works with residents in a collaborative manner to co-design, test, and deliver new ideas – thereby acting as a catalyst for locally-led change.

The theory of making positive change

When we see things we don't like, that we think are unjust, harmful, or broken we often want to do something to change it for the better. When we see things that make people's lives better, we want to support them, help them to grow and spread.

Every day, all over the world, people take it on themselves to make their communities kinder, safer, more inclusive, and just places. It is people inside communities who are the experts in and of those communities and are best placed to make meaningful, positive change.

But sometimes people who have nothing but good intentions and a passion for change aren't aware of some of the methodologies, approaches, or principles that could help them to best achieve that change. This means that sometimes, despite best efforts, actions don't always create the change intended, or at worse lead to unintended harms.

What follows are some of the processes used by experienced changemakers around the world to identify how their interventions can have the greatest positive impacts and lead to real change. It is a simple process which anyone, anywhere can undertake to help to ensure their efforts stand the best chance of succeeding.

Don't forget that throughout this whole process you should always be thinking about the principles of community building or making positive change outlined in the previous handouts!

Step 1. Identify and understand where change is needed

This step is about understanding where change could contribute to making your community a better place.

A good way of identifying this change might be visioning what a better world, future or community would look like and thinking about all the things that stop that vision being a reality. You might choose to tackle a problem that is hurting your community, or you may wish to support and grow something that you see is making your community a better place.

If you are tackling a problem the key to understanding that problem is understanding its root causes. It is not enough to say "the problem is that my community is divided" you need to understand and analyse why and how it is divided. A good way to do this is by asking "but why" again and again until you have thought about all the causes to the problem.

Step 2. Map stakeholders

Part of making change is to map stakeholders – those who have some sort of interest in the change you want, either because it affects them, or because they can play a part in supporting or blocking it. You can map stakeholders by trying to answer these four questions:

- Who does the problem effect?
- Who is contributing to the problem?
- Who has the power to solve the problem?
- Who is already working to try to solve the problem?

Step 3. Identify your strengths and areas of influence

Before deciding what we are going to do it is also useful to think about our strengths or areas of influence.

Your strengths are what you are good at—maybe you are good at writing, public speaking, making friends with different kinds of people, building networks, doing accounts, understanding complicated documents, design, coding, sports, languages, teaching, medicine, legal matters, organising events, gardening, arts... The list is endless. All of us have different strengths and when thinking about what we will do to make change it is important to play to those strengths. There is no point in deciding to tackle community divides by putting on an event where you are going to bring different people together if you don't like event planning and don't like meeting lots of different people!

Identifying our areas of influence means thinking about where we already have power to make a difference. You might want to think about what you do in your job and whether there are opportunities to make change through your work or at the place you work. You might think about places you volunteer or groups or clubs you are a part of. You might think about your personal networks, your friends and family.

Step 4. Understand what works / what is needed

Before thinking about what we are going to do we need to understand what sorts of things work and also what is actually wanted or needed by those who the problem is affecting.

Do some research on what sorts of things have worked for others to deal with similar problems in the past. Handout 6 of this handout pack outlines examples of what works to build cohesive, inclusive, and just communities – you might find these examples useful.

A really important part of this process is involving those affected by the problem wherever possible. Ask them what they want, what solutions they would like to see.



Step 5. Decide the Outcome/s you are going to work towards

Many problems are so ingrained, structural, widespread, and complicated that we can't solve all of the root causes we have identified. Indeed, we may only be able to play a small part in tackling one of the root causes in a very local or small way.

When many people think about making change they often jump straight to the activity they are going to do like making a petition or holding a protest. But by following the previous 4 steps of this process you can be more confident that what you are going to do will actually make a difference.

When working to solve problems in a community, identifying the solutions or “outcomes” of your intervention helps you focus on exactly the change you want to achieve. Outcomes should be aimed at tackling one or more of the root causes of the problem you have identified – even if it is only in a small way.

A good way to start thinking about your outcome/s is that they should always be SMART which means they should be:

Specific | **M**easurable | **A**chievable | **R**elevant | **T**imebound

The important thing about an outcome is that it is about changing the behaviour of one or more other people. It is not something you can directly control.

Step 6. Plan your activities

Your activities are what you are actually going to do to achieve your outcome/s. As with your Outcomes, your activities should also be SMART. This is a really key part of your planning and should be based on all the research and work you have done over the first few stages of the process. Think about:

- What you have learned from the people who have been affected by the problem (if possible work with them to co-design the activities perhaps through an interactive workshop)
- Your strengths and areas of influence
- Which stakeholders have you identified who you could work with
- What you know to already work

Step 7. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and Evaluation is how you make sure that you are achieving what you set out to achieve.

Monitoring is about checking that you are achieving your activities as you had planned. It is a regular time – perhaps each month – that you look at what you should have achieved by that point and think about what you have actually achieved.

Evaluation is about understanding if your interventions are working to reach the intended outcomes. Did people's behaviour change because of your intervention and if so why? Often people will use things like surveys or focus groups to evaluate if their activities have had impact.

the 1990s, the number of publications on the topic has increased steadily, and the number of authors has increased from 1 to 100.

There are a number of reasons for the increase in research on the topic. One reason is the growing awareness of the importance of the topic. Another reason is the increasing availability of data and methods for studying the topic. A third reason is the increasing interest in the topic among researchers and the public.

The research on the topic has been carried out in a number of different disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and anthropology. The research has been carried out in a number of different settings, including the laboratory, the field, and the clinic.

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www.protectionapproaches.org
info@protectionapproaches.org