



# COMMUNITY COHESION TOOLKIT FOR THE VOLUNTARY COMMUNITY AND FAITH SECTOR

Developing  
better and  
cohesive  
community  
anchors, and  
community and  
faith-based  
networks

**Through the  
Community Cascade  
Project**



Consortia of Ethnic Minority Organisations

## WELCOME TO COEMO'S COMMUNITY COHESION TOOLKIT

The Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector, often referred to as the Third Sector, is a growing sector providing a range of services and resources to help communities flourish and become an integral part to society.

This sector has been growing for a number of years, and its contribution in developing cohesive societies has helped shape societies to develop and live cohesively amongst diverse communities. According to the 2001 census, more than three quarters of us in the United Kingdom considered ourselves to have a faith. Faith has played a pivotal role in shaping the transformation of communities, in particular during difficult times.

The make-up and landscape of many communities has evolved through-out the last few decades, and more recently with the arrival of new migrant communities which has made Britain as diverse today as it could ever be. With the changes in landscape come diverse identities, religious and faith groups, from different languages and social and cultural groups.

West Yorkshire has a number of community anchors and faith-based networks who have worked extremely hard over many generations to develop communities and help communities engage with each other to live in harmony. People of faith have made a huge contribution to the wider society, and more recently various faith leaders have come together in solidarity to tackle the issues around social exclusion, preventing racism and extremism.

***This toolkit helps community and faith-based networks, and community anchors look at the various issues around developing a better understanding on community cohesion and allowing groups to reflect on their approaches to share resources, practices and spaces for the benefit of the wider communities.***

## COMMUNITY ANCHORS

Community Anchors are an essential ingredient in building communities to develop and prosper. West Yorkshire is enriched with various community anchors who continue to play a vital role in helping community members develop their skills, knowledge and awareness on a range of issues. Many are the hub of their community, acting as the central point of information and providing a means of contact between the statutory bodies and people at the heart of the communities.

The first use of the term Anchor Organisation was in the government report "Firm Foundations", which states: "We are calling them `community anchor organisations` because of the solid foundation they give to a wide variety of self help and capacity building activities in local communities and because of their roots within their communities."

## COMMUNITY AND FAITH-BASED NETWORKS

Community and faith-based organisations and networks are also an imperative mechanism in helping communities develop their skills and awareness on key issues which affect them. With a growing diverse community in West Yorkshire, there has been a need to help communities understand each other and share their experiences, in particular to hard-to-reach communities who often find themselves isolated and excluded from mainstream activities and resources.

The community and faith-based networks have played a key role in bridging the gap of differences and have helped communities come together and share their roots to increase tolerance and understanding.

## WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF THE TOOLKIT

Community cohesion lies at the centre of what makes a strong, vibrant and safe community. It is an important issue for all of us, whether we live in the heart of a big city or in a leafy village. Attempts to create sustainable communities by regenerating areas and renewing housing markets need to consider the impact on community cohesion in these areas. Community cohesion is about inclusion, making the effort to find out about others, treating each other with respect and building good relations between different parts of the community. It is not just about race, but is equally about, for example, the relationships between young and old and between residents of different estates or residents within a single estate. Community cohesion encompasses all aspects of the community and helps engage the diverse sections of the community to live together and share similarities and differences, whether it be in social, cultural, faith, demographic or other social attribute.

Many local communities have also been working to improve these relationships in their own areas and recognise that working together and collaboratively communities can be enriched with good practices and valued contributions.

**This toolkit identifies five key steps to developing community cohesion and examines key areas:**

- **Increasing Involvement**
- **Identifying Needs**
- **Engaging communities**
- **Providing Access for All**
- **Ensuring sustainability of programmes**



The toolkit also aims to provide community workers, faith-leaders and community anchors and networks with suggestions and practical examples of working towards community cohesion.

Practitioners are advised to use additional resources, including official toolkits produced by the Office of Communities and Local Government, to develop a wide perspective on community cohesion.

This toolkit will help community anchors and faith-based organisations and networks evaluate their services and look at ways of developing their community cohesion activities, thus enriching their communities to be more participative, out-looking and living with common shared values.

## DEFINING COMMUNITY COHESION

The last decade has seen a number of definitions given to the terminology of community cohesion. This toolkit adopts the definition of 'Community Cohesion' established by the Local Government Association and its partners, which was first published in the 2002 guidance.

A cohesive community is one where:

- there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities;
- the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued;
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and
- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds and circumstances in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.

## DEFINING COMMUNITY ANCHORS

Community anchors come in many shapes and sizes, ranging from big and small, to urban and rural, amongst many other forms.

For the Community Alliance\*, (Community Matters, Development Trusts Association and Bassac) the defining feature of a community anchor is that it is based in a building that is either owned or managed by the community. This provides anchors with the capacity to respond to local needs as well as being an asset that is a means for income generation.

The characteristics of a community anchor are that it will be:

- Independent and community controlled
- Multi-purpose in what it does
- A physical hub
- A provider of a 'leadership' role in the community by supporting less formal groups
- A focal point of community services
- Owner and manager of local assets.

West Yorkshire has a great number of long-lasting community anchors and a number of emerging ones who are working very hard with their communities to provide a number of services.

The following are some of the various things Community Anchors do:

**Resourcing** – helping to bring money into the local neighbourhood from the local authority, external funders and other agencies.

**Service Provision** - providing local services (e.g. older person's care services, community café) and acting as a gateway to helping people get access to the other services they need.

**Community Representation** - acting as a catalyst of and vehicle for change in public services and community development; helping people to get involved in groups and have a say about local issues and services.

**Supporting Community Organisations** - through community capacity building, helping groups develop their skills, organisation, representation and involvement.

**Strengthening Community Participation** – supporting active citizenship and contributing to civil renewal.

**Provision of a Community Resource** – community centres and general public access resources

\* Taken from [www.communitymatters.org.uk](http://www.communitymatters.org.uk)

# Step 1: Increasing Involvement

Many community anchors and networks have been established for many years, and often the membership has remained constant, with limited number of new faces. In order for such anchors and networks to flourish it is essential that plans are in place to increase involvement from the wider communities, in particular to meet the needs of the changing population and to strengthen community relations.

There are a number of ways in which community anchors and networks can attempt to help open the doors for the wider communities to access. Often communities will feel excluded from taking part in activities due to a number of factors, including feeling vulnerable, lack of social and cultural skills or simply because the organisation has not considered them more specifically.

Some points to consider to increase your community's involvement with your organization:

-Have frequent meetings with users to explore new ideas. If you have meetings on a regular basis, you will be able to keep all members updated and identify any possible gaps in services.

-Ask members for ideas. At every meeting, ask everyone to contribute an idea for an event or project. Be sure to get everyone to contribute. Oftentimes, the best ideas come from the quietest people.

-Have an exciting meeting. Invite a guest speaker, make it interactive, have free food and be creative, which are ways to increase membership and also revive current members' interest.

-Create an email mailing list. Through a mailing list, everyone will be able to stay updated and discuss ideas for action.

- **Customised methods of involvement.**

**Organisations need to examine which particular groups are not accessing their services. It may mean that meetings are run for women only to attract those communities who feel uncomfortable amongst others.**

**It is also essential that socially excluded groups like those with physical or sensory impairments are not able to access due to the lack of facilities. Thus it is essential to have meetings and activities whereby such community members are able to feel welcome, there is disability access, and there are comfortable arrangements to take such issues into account.**

**Often marginalised communities such as ethnic minorities, new arrivals, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender members of the communities are not involved in the development of services. It is imperative that the organisations are able to ensure that such communities' sensitive needs are addressed, where they feel welcomed and comfortable to take part in decisions and services.**

- **Operating an open-door policy.**

**In order to comply with various legislations and policies, in particular around the new Equalities Act, it is essential that organisations are able to illustrate that they have an open-door policy. All organisations have a comprehensive Equal Opportunities Policy which ensures that no sections of the community are excluded, marginalised or discriminated against. This is crucial where the communities are changing rapidly, in particular with the increase of new migrant communities and the diverse communities travelling across West Yorkshire.**

# Step 2: Identifying Needs

In order for community anchors and community, and faith-based, networks to develop new and creative projects, various aspects of identifying needs and programme planning are essential ingredients.

## How to identify needs

Developing your organisation's services to reflect the needs of your communities is essential to increase engagement and sustain projects. Addressing key community issues helps you to plan and deliver services and activities more effectively, and more importantly allows projects to develop further by submitting the evidences to funders and other potential supporters.

Some suggestions on helping you identify your community's needs:

- 1. Questionnaires –clear and focused questionnaires help you identify key issues and get the views of your community members**
- 2. Statistics – collect established data, and/or identify relevant research which has been done already to highlight the needs in your community**
- 3. Focus groups – use different methods to engage your community. Bring together a small group of people for a guided discussion which is aimed at highlighting what they really want to see**
- 4. Stalls – set up a stall in your local shopping centre, at an event, or at a youth club so that you can chat to people informally and gather information creatively**

## Why is it important to identify needs?

Such consultations and research tools will help identify the needs as identified by the community members, and furthermore will help you create specific projects. The data collected can also help raise the following questions, which can be used to support and strengthen your funding applications:

- **What is it that your community actually wants to see?**
- **Why are they not accessing all your services?**
- **How many people will your project benefit?**
- **How is your project different to similar existing services?**
- **How will you make your project accessible?**
- **How will the project benefit those that use it?**
- **How will you monitor and evaluate the activities of your project?**

## Taking things forward

All the services and activities delivered by the organisation should be inclusive and be accessible by each section of the community. If any particular community group is not accessing the services as much as the others, it is essential to work with the community to address the issue. It may be something simple like changing the day, or time which may be clashing with a religious activity, or because someone with a disability may require more time to get to the organisation etc.

Overall the services need to reflect the needs of the community and be sensitive to their social, cultural and religious requirements. If all the various have been considered and elements have been put into action, it is more likely that excluded communities will feel welcomed and thus engage more.

# Step 3: Engaging Communities

Building, promoting and sustaining community cohesion is a long-term commitment. As a sector, we must collectively develop and respond to a changing Britain that is becoming ever more culturally and socially diverse, ensuring that we are engaging with and responding to the changing needs of our communities.

To build diverse, just and fair communities it is imperative that every section of the community is effectively engaged and welcomed to take part in engaging activities. This is crucial to help ensure your centres, networks and activities are able to attract the wide section of the community.

Community engagement activity can take place in many different ways. It can involve simply asking people to fill in a survey, or take part in a focus group. Or it can mean supporting a group of people to set up their own community group, or get involved in a local partnership.

**There a number of techniques which can be used to engage the communities. Below are some methods which could be developed and used to engage with communities.**

• **Discussion group techniques – focus groups and consultations**

• **Public event techniques – community conferences and seminars**

• **Survey techniques – opinion surveys and feedback sheets**

• **Regular involvement techniques – regular feedback sessions**

• **Using arts and innovation – creative techniques to build confidence**



Engaging with hard-to-reach groups:

Communicating with hard-to-reach groups is extremely important. Some disadvantaged groups have a greater need for community services while also experiencing greater barriers to accessing them.



Local knowledge and understanding of the diversity of the community are essential, as is understanding the way different groups like to communicate. Some people will prefer direct contact with the community anchor, either face-to-face or over the phone. Others may prefer communicating through the website and through friends. Some may need very directly targeted communication because of disability, culture, language or literacy may be a factor.

People in deprived areas may have particular difficulties in communicating with the anchors and networks, such as:

- living on estates that do not receive the council newspaper
- lack of access to IT – the 'digital divide'
- lower literacy levels
- limited social interaction outside their immediate area because of higher unemployment, poor health and low incomes.

## Step 4: Providing Access for All

The various changes in local communities and the free movement of people across Europe has seen a big change in the makeup of local communities through-out the country which has had a huge impact in changing the perspectives and attitudes around accepting different cultures and valuing diversity.

Britain has long been culturally and ethnically diverse. The 2001 UK Census confirmed ethnic minorities made up 8% of the total UK population, which is quickly increasing. The UK is likely to become more diverse as global population movements become more frequent.

Challenging and changing racial and cultural attitudes and behaviour in communities has long been a concern in both regionally and nationally for the authorities. Government policies on citizenship education, community cohesion and criminal justice all seek to change society's attitudes and behaviour to racism and towards people of other races and cultures. Due to the growing diversity many different policies have been introduced, which emphasise multiculturalism by valuing and preserving different cultures and identities within society.

It is imperative that community anchors, faith groups and networks bridge the gap between communities and help them feel confident in accessing services and resources. The third sector has a pivotal role to play in developing more culturally diverse programmes to help shape the future of social cohesion in the region.



## Step 5: Ensuring sustainability of Programmes

As the funding climate continues to get tougher, it is crucial that organizations are able to continue to look at strategic and innovative methods of engaging with local and district partners to secure further much needed projects and activities.



Securing funding is an essential and integral part to the development of an organisation's survival and success. To ensure the continued development of the diverse communities there must be good planning and a good understanding of how the funding environment is changing, in particular in response to the needs of diverse communities.

To continue to promote community cohesion the voluntary, community and faith sector organizations and anchors must collectively look at continued approaches of engagement with hard to reach and disadvantaged communities. It is crucial that each anchor and network is able to bridge the gap between different social and ethnic groups to ensure the hard work done previously is not lost.

# SELF-ASSESSMENT

This section helps to assess your organisations current practices and ensures that you are able to effectively engage with the wider community and promote community cohesion. This is intended as a guide only, and is not a definitive toolkit, as some organisations are likely to face more challenging issues than others.

- 1 = very poor, not doing anything to meet the outcome listed
- 2 = have some knowledge of the outcome listed, but not actively looking at achieving outcome
- 3 = have a fair amount of knowledge and doing some of the activities listed
- 4 = have good knowledge and trying to meet the outcomes listed often
- 5 = excellent knowledge and regularly carrying out the activities

<b>1. INCREASING INVOLVEMENT – making the most of your community</b>		1	2	3	4	5
1	We continue to monitor the equality and diversity data					
2	We encourage involvement from excluded groups					
3	All our activities are open, accessible and reflect the needs of the local community					
4	We have a suggestions and feedback facility to encourage the community to share their views about their engagement					
<b>2. IDENTIFYING NEEDS - how do you know what your community wants</b>		1	2	3	4	5
1	We hold regular consultations with the community					
2	We encourage users to tell us what they want to see					
3	Our activities are focused and driven by the demand of the community					
4	We have regular open days and sessions for the community to see our facilities and make comments on what we do					
<b>3. ENGAGING COMMUNITIES - how to best consult and involve the communities</b>		1	2	3	4	5
1	We use various techniques to consult and engage with communities					
2	We use the feedback forms and data in our planning of projects					
3	We understand communities have different needs					
4	We consult partners to help us understand their social and cultural needs					
<b>4. PROVIDING ACCESS FOR ALL – having an open door policy</b>		1	2	3	4	5
1	We understand the social and cultural makeup of our communities					
2	We have policies in place to prevent social exclusion and intolerance					
3	We encourage participation from hard to reach communities					
4	We regularly bring diverse communities together to increase social and cultural awareness					
<b>5. ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY OF PROGRAMMES - plans to continue projects</b>		1	2	3	4	5
1	We continue to develop projects to reflect the national cohesion agenda					
2	We collectively look at developing new innovative programmes					
3	Plans are in place to keep projects running for the next 6 months					
4	We are collaborating with partners to increase our funding					

**Total between 70 – 100:** Well done. Your organisation is working very well to ensure that it reflects the needs of your communities and is responding to the changes. Keep on reviewing this toolkit to maintain the hard work.

**Total between 50 – 69:** Your organisation is working well. However you need to put the necessary changes to ensure that your communities are reflected in your activities. Go back to each sub-section and improve on the areas where you scored 3 or less.

**Total between 1 – 49:** You need to review each sub-section and evaluate your current position with your management/Board. It seems that you are falling below the standards expected in ensuring that your organization is meeting the needs of your community.



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