

Section 2 - *Getting To Know Communities*

Introduction

This section provides ideas and examples of ways to make initial contact with communities within neighbourhoods and those of interest and identity.

The first article suggests ways to make initial contacts in a geographical community, and the second article on making contacts with BME communities, groups and workers is based on work undertaken as part of the Capacity Builders Improving Reach project and outlines a process that can be followed in other areas. The next article explains how a directory of community and voluntary groups was developed. These build upon the articles on the Skills Manual 2001 on making a wide range of contacts, networks and compiling a directory.

Getting to know new communities being created by migration and people seeking asylum is a relatively new area of work, which is facing community workers and activists right across the country. There are two articles based on work being undertaken in Glasgow on a neighbourhood level and with women. Manchester Refugee Support Network explains how to develop working relationships with Refugee Community Organisations.

The four articles on communities in transition provide models for developing work in areas with very weak or non-existent community organisations, based upon work undertaken in Northern Ireland and cross-border work with Ireland. The model used for working in neighbourhoods and with communities of interest and identity provides guidelines for ways to develop the infrastructure in areas with similarly weak community organisations. The second article outlines how to undertake a community profile and can be followed in any community.

Faith communities are being encouraged to be more proactive in working on issues affecting the communities that surround their buildings and to contribute to social cohesion and inclusion programmes. Two articles offer an insight into how to understand the different meanings and use of language between faith and community development as a precursor for working together.

Within the Skills Manual 2001 there are articles on contacting and working with communities of interest, identity and different kinds of location – from working with Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual networks, working with Older People and working in rural contexts, all of which are still relevant today.

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MAKING CONTACTS WITHIN A GEOGRAPHICAL COMMUNITY

Introduction

When you start to work in a new area or neighbourhood, or if your role changes within an area, you will need to find out who does what and who are the useful people and organisations to know. Knowing who are potential allies and supporters, who can help when you come across blocks and barriers and who can explain the local political context, is essential for effective working.

Although this checklist has been written for working in a geographical area it can be fairly easily adapted to working in specific communities of interest, you will be looking for the equivalents in that specific arena rather than general contacts.

Different starting points

There are a number of different ways into gathering the information you need:

1. The information provided more formally by the local infrastructure bodies who exist to support the voluntary and community sector locally
2. The informal networking and being given names of people to talk to
3. The statutory bodies who relate to, and provide services to, communities in the area

1. The formal voluntary and community sector

- Depending on the type of area that you are working in you are likely to have a CVS (Council for Voluntary Service) or a Voluntary Action or similar – the list of all these local infrastructure organisations can be found on www.navca.org.uk/liodir or on the web site of your local authority who tend to be the prime funders of these organisations. As these organisations role is to support the local voluntary and community sector in their area they often produce lists and directories of all the voluntary and community groups they can find in their district. They often produce regular newsletters with details of events and local groups.
- In more rural areas you may have a Rural Community Council whose details will be listed on www.acre.org.uk and they may well produce other listings and directories.
- In some areas and regions there will be Voluntary and Community Sector Forums which bring together VCS groups (mainly the bigger voluntary organisations with staff) at a district, sub regional or a regional level. They often have a role in representing the views of the VCS to decision makers in their area. A web search will reveal if you have any local ones.
- There are developing networks around specific communities – for some examples;- Networks for Gypsy and Travellers, consortia for LGB(T) – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and sometimes they include transgendered people, Coalitions or Disabled People, Consortia of BME (Black Minority Ethnic) organisations, and umbrella groups for refugee and asylum seeking communities. Details of these should be available from the local council or the CVS or RCC or regional forum.
- There may be community centres in the area which several community groups use to meet and run their activities; the centre manager or coordinator will often know people and groups who are useful to talk to.
- There may be buildings where several voluntary groups are sharing the premises and common resources who will have information about community groups and useful contacts. Scanning community notice boards may give you other contacts.

2. Informal networking

- In many areas there are local or sub regional networks of community development workers, some are generic and others are based on themes, such as a network for community development and health, or a BME network for voluntary and community sector workers, or on the type of work – such as a community empowerment network.
- All such networks will provide you with links to people who know what is happening, who can make things happen, the local political context and other invaluable information.
- Networks vary in the way they operate, some are virtual – an email based grouping of interested people, others meet occasionally, while some meet regularly for a shared lunch.
- The main regional community development networks meet together in a national network and they produce leaflets with details of the regional networks.
- Whenever you have a conversation with someone they are likely to recommend someone else to talk to, if not ask for their suggestions on other useful people to meet.
- Attending workshops, conferences, seminars, information fairs, training sessions, neighbourhood forums, and making the time to chat to people in the breaks and afterwards is an effective way to meet other people and representatives of groups.
- Simply walking or cycling around an area can give a sense of where people congregate at different times, where community information is shared, who uses which parts of the area for their day to day business, all of which will provide the context for your work.

3. Statutory agencies

There will be many statutory bodies with an interest in the community you are now working in, and often have paid staff to maintain their links with the voluntary and community sector groups in that area.

- The PCT may have a community link worker or voluntary sector development officer.
- The Local Authority may have a commissioning and grants section for the voluntary sector, their library service may maintain an on-line listing of community and voluntary groups, particularly those concerned with social welfare and care.
- There will be officers with responsibility for developing and updating a range of strategies which affect communities – from Local Development Frameworks to Sustainable Communities Strategies.
- Many areas have neighborhood forums or Area Panels, usually supported by council officers.
- The district, borough and county councils have more resources to put into staff posts, town and parish councils have fewer resources. All of them have elected members / councilors who may be closer to the ground and know more about what is going on although that isn't always the case!
- Depending on your particular interests you may want to make contact with local schools, youth service centers, health centres.

When making contacts with people and organisations it is always useful to have a sense of what information you are seeking, be open to following up suggestions that may at first seem unlikely to be useful, and to find a way to record what you have found out.

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Case Study

MAKING CONTACT WITH MARGINALISED GROUPS

As part of Capacity Builders Improving Reach programme, I was asked to carry out some outreach work with Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups in a small industrial town in Yorkshire. The purpose of the outreach was to explore what training and capacity building was needed to enable marginalised groups to make better use of infrastructure services.

I started by talking to the two infrastructure bodies that existed about what work they did with and for BME groups and what training they felt that staff needed to improve the service to them.

The next step was to talk with workers delivering front line services, which were few in number. As someone who has been a community development worker in the area, I was familiar with most of the groups and workers. They included a Race Equality Council, a small organisation offering support with accessing health and social care, another developing opportunities for sports activities and one run totally voluntarily providing a homework club, language classes and sport and recreational activities to a wide range of people and groups. I also included the BME mental health community development worker with Primary Care Trust and a worker with the bi-lingual support service of the local authority as both were carrying out some imaginative work with Polish and Portuguese people employed locally.

These contacts were able to put me in touch with other people delivering similar services.

There were also two Asian development workers employed by the council for voluntary service (CVS) and the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder respectively, who I arranged to meet because I knew they would have some interesting insights, one of which concerned the need for more models of Asian people employed in mainstream jobs and not just in short term jobs aimed at BME communities. They were now both in that position but were seen a source of expertise in working with BME issues, a perception I was perpetuating by approaching them about this work!

I designed a brief survey form to take with me which asked questions about what the issues might be for local BME groups, what support they needed to help to meet those needs and what was already being done. I sent this, accompanied by an information sheet ahead of the visit.

What emerged from the discussions was evidence of some high quality, imaginative work taking place which was accompanied by a plea for help and support. This included help with setting up and running groups, organisation development, funding advice – all basic infrastructure provision. As a result, finance was made available to deliver some community work training, training for trainers and some mentoring for workers.

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UNDERTAKING A SURVEY OF VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

Introduction

This list is taken from the full survey form that we used to undertake a survey of all community and voluntary groups in Darlington. For the Central Ward Directory 2007, the Community Development Worker sent out the forms. From sending them out to getting them in took around 5 months, as we needed to chase people up. The partnership members wanted the directory in a booklet format but we would recommend doing a Directory electronically, as the information can become old quite quickly and it is costly to update a booklet regularly.

The survey was in 5 sections

SECTION 1: The organisation and its activities

This section asked for information on:

- Contact details for the group/ organisation and charity or company numbers
- What does the group/ organisation do?
- Who are the principle users or beneficiaries?
- Who could use the services/ activities
- Are the activities/ services free to users or is there a charge for them?
- How many people currently use the services or are involved in activities?
- When was the group/ organisation set up?

SECTION 2: paid staff and volunteers

This section asked for information on:

- How many paid staff are there? Full-time/ Part-time ?
- How many management committee members are there?
- How much time do members of the management committee devote to the group/ organisation in a year?
- How much time do volunteers devote to the group / organisation each year?

SECTION 3: finance and funding

This section asked for information to determine the economic and financial contribution made by the voluntary sector. This included:

- The groups/ organisations total income and expenditure over the last two financial years and income for the coming year
- Asking about any financial support from local government, the NHS, Europe, local or regional funders or the Lottery
- Amounts of earned income such as subscription fees, membership fees, charges for services, rent or lease hire
- If they had secured funding for the coming year, and if so what this covered

SECTION 4: training and development

This section asked for information on:

- Qualifications required and held by staff
- Qualifications required and held by volunteers
- What training would the group/ members/ volunteers benefit from (If any)?
- What funding was available for training, and how training costs were met

SECTION 5: Authorisation

This asked for permission to include their contact details in the planned directory whilst assuring people that all information provided was confidential

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ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES: SUPPORTING INTEGRATION

Introduction

UK immigration and asylum law is complicated and there have been at least eight changes to UK legislation concerning asylum since 1993. However, community development workers do not need to be legal specialists to make a valuable contribution to work in this area. Armed with a few key facts and a willingness to find out more, grass roots practitioners have the potential to support integration as part of their everyday work.

Background

An asylum seeker is a person who claims asylum outside of their own country by asking for protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention. If, following consideration of their case, the Home Office recognises this person as a refugee, they will be granted leave to remain in the UK, usually for a fixed period of time. Positive decisions will be for Refugee Status (usually for 5 years), Humanitarian Protection (usually for 5 years) or for Discretionary Leave (usually for 3 years or less). Before the end of a fixed period of leave to remain, a refugee can apply for an extension of permission to stay. Asylum seekers who are refused have the right of appeal. Those granted leave to remain are allowed to seek employment, whereas asylum seekers are not permitted to undertake paid work.

All claims made after the 5th March 2007 are being dealt with under the New Asylum Model (NAM), which aims to process claims more quickly and allocates a 'case owner' to work on each case from start to finish. Any outstanding claims made prior to March 2007 are being dealt with as 'legacy cases'. There are around 450,000 cases and the aim is to clear these within 5 years. This means that a large number of asylum seekers in the UK who have been here for some time are frustrated at the time they have been waiting for a decision. Considerable numbers have had appeals turned down and face removal and are reliant on very limited financial support or are destitute.

Supporting Integration: Key Challenges

Asylum seekers and refugees are not a homogenous group and individuals may be at different stages in the claim process. An awareness of this background and how it relates to asylum seekers and refugees living in particular local communities will be useful when promoting cohesion. Asylum seekers and refugees can be from almost any country in the world and may have survived many appalling experiences. They may speak little or no English and are dispersed to live in areas where local people are already experiencing multiple deprivation and where xenophobic attitudes prevail, often fuelled by irresponsible reporting in the "red top" press. It is important to promote integration and community cohesion to enable all members of the community to achieve their potential and participate actively as citizens in society without fear of discrimination.

Community Development's Contribution: Practical Approaches

Community development workers are well placed to contribute to asylum seeker and refugee integration by using mainstream community development techniques.

1. Work with receiving communities

Spend time researching the countries of origin of the asylum seekers and refugees you are likely to encounter. Read some personal accounts of arrival and dispersal in the UK, to help you understand the prejudice and discrimination people have experienced. If possible engage with local people before dispersal to their area, work with groups to allow people to voice their concerns, challenge their attitudes and allay their fears. Work with local media to encourage balanced and accurate reporting about new arrivals. Look for opportunities for receiving communities and new arrivals to work together to solve communal problems or achieve a common goal. E.g. organising an event to mark an anniversary, Refugee Week or Black History Month.

2. Settlement support

One to one support is usually best carried out by a specialist agency. Find out who provides support to asylum seekers and refugees in your area and become fully aware of the services they provide. Source, or create a directory of services specifically for asylum seekers, including networks and forums.

3. Capacity building with asylum seekers and refugees

Recognise that capacity building with asylum seekers and refugees may require extra support, as many individuals will be facing 'double disadvantage' due to their unfamiliarity with UK systems. Adapt your usual techniques to engage with different groups by adopting informal approaches and getting translation support. Encourage established Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) to share their experiences of setting up groups to help new groups get off the ground.

4. Facilitating access to and involvement in mainstream activities

Encourage mainstream agencies to consider asylum seekers and refugees when looking to improve access to their services for other equality groups and explore the specific opportunities, challenges and barriers to asylum seeker and refugee involvement. Tackle prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory attitudes amongst staff by training and facilitated meaningful contact with asylum seekers and refugees.

Useful Contacts and Further Information

Immigration Law Practitioners' Association - Information Service www.ilpa.org.uk

Refugee Council - Practical Advice www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Community Development Foundation - Refugee Integration and Cohesive Communities: Community development in practice www.cdf.org.uk

Contact:

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Project Aims

Case Study

LINKES WOMEN'S GROUP: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WITH ASYLUM SEEKERS AND INDIGENOUS WOMEN

The LINKES Women's Group aims to assist the integration of asylum seekers and develop community cohesion, by supporting community members to understand each other's cultures and circumstances and to interact effectively.

Background

LINKES is located in the Knightswood area of Glasgow, which contains areas in the lowest 15% based on the Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation. The project began in 1998, as a voluntary organisation providing a parents support group. When asylum seekers were dispersed to Glasgow in 2000, large numbers were housed within the high-rise flats where the project is based. LINKES project responded to the changing demographic through provision of a playscheme, homework club and scrabble club. Funding applications were made to enable the employment of the first paid staff. Initial ideas for engaging women included a sewing group, cookery class and mother and toddler group. However, take up was low and as a result the LINKES Women's Group was launched.

Learning Points

Staff felt more confident in approaching the task by increasing their knowledge of asylum seeker countries of origin and the asylum system. The group was set up to run at a time of day that was accessible to all women in the community, which enabled an even mix of women to attend. The best form of promotion turned out to be word-of-mouth, and this was supported with simple and attractive fliers put through several doors in the flats.

The activity-based programme provided a structure and focal task for the group. The process of community development has been facilitated around this. At the beginning, staff provided icebreaker style activities to encourage communication. However, high attendance levels can partly be credited to the fact that group members have decided programme content. Activity choices have not always been what staff might have anticipated. The most popular choices have been singing workshops, drumming workshops, arts and crafts (e.g. card making, jewellery making and pottery) and restaurant trips.

The majority of activities take place at the flats. When required, attempts to plan transport in advance have proved almost impossible and using taxis has emerged as the most flexible and efficient way of transporting group members. Lack of childcare in the evening has also proved to be problematic. Many women have been reluctant to leave their children at home with their partner. The presence of children can act as an additional icebreaker but also detracts group members from the task. The project will continue to work towards striking the right balance in finding a solution to this.

Language barriers have been less of a problem than originally anticipated as many of the women asylum seekers already have a good level of English and also interpret for one another. Communication within the group has been improved by the use of pictures and visual aids. More formal interpreting services have not been required to date.

Planned review sessions at appropriate intervals have been helpful in assessing progress. However, staff are working towards developing a system of continuous analysis to prevent the onset of evaluation fatigue. The next steps for this group will be to address the age balance of indigenous group members by trying to attract some younger women as well as maintaining the interest of the older women currently involved.

Useful Information

For briefings on asylum issues see www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/briefings

For up to date information about countries of origin see:

www.hrw.org/countries.html or www.report2007.amnesty.org/eng/Homepage

Contact:

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TIPS FOR WORKING WITH REFUGEE-LED GROUPS

Introduction

This is a list of practical tips to consider when working with refugee and asylum seeker-led community organisations. There is as much variety among refugee community organisations as among any other community organisations, so it is important to remember to start from where the groups are at and not make assumptions about their needs.

1. Go the extra mile

Refugee groups tend to be under a lot of pressure due to the acute needs of their members. Always remind people about appointments the day before and ring round to remind groups about training days. Contact groups in between meetings to see how things are going.

2. Remember the language barrier

Allow for interpretation where necessary but if it's not required be prepared for written work to take longer. Make sure that people have understood things by asking them to repeat back at the end of a meeting what they think has been agreed. Provide a clear written record to take away with a copy for the group to provide an example of record keeping. Allow groups to have access to your notes if they lose track of their own records.

3. Allow for orientation and network locally

If there is an event in an unfamiliar venue, meet up with groups at a well-known landmark or your office and go to the training together. Take the time to explain where Support Agencies are, what they provide and how to get there. Offer to accompany people on a first time visit. Make sure groups are networked locally- have they got the key contacts in regeneration teams, Councillors, Sure Start etc.?

4. If in doubt, visit

Go to see the group in action, doing their activities. Insist on being invited to meetings, even if just as an observer. Be prepared to go at a weekend or in the evening. AGM's are also a very good indicator of how a group is operating - go to them as often as you can.

5. Learn about immigration issues

Immigration legislation is constantly changing. Try to stay updated through websites and newsletters. Get good signposting information in your office for legal centres and emergency help for asylum seekers.

6. Partner up with "specialist" refugee support agencies

Run training courses at the venue of a refugee-specific agency that refugee community organisations are familiar with. Work with specialist development workers to tailor courses to refugee groups' needs.

7. Get the caterers in!

Ask refugee community organisations to cater at your events- as well as the culinary benefits for you and financial gains for them it will help to build relationships.

8. Signpost to Refugee Agencies

For refugee community organisations to be able to network and influence policy, ensure that they know about existing advocacy initiatives and Forums. Support people attending these Forums by preparing together what they want to say or find out, and chat together afterwards about how well it went, what they would do differently next time. If there are issues about the Forum itself make sure this is tackled – such as people not speaking clearly enough.

9. Bear in mind cultural/ religious variables

If you are working with Muslim communities you will need to get Halal food and avoid Fridays for meetings as it is the main day for prayers. Find out when Ramadan will be as people will be fasting.

Buy the SHAP Calendar of Religious Festivals and keep their summary charts handy so you can avoid planning events on the main festivals. (SHAP telephone number is 020 7898 1494 www.shap.org.)

10. Attend refugee social events

Take the time to attend social events. You will get to know people better, learn more and gain trust. Social events can also be an opportunity for refugee community organisations to organise – don't expect everything to be done in formal meetings, so attending 'social' events can be essential if you are supporting the development of a group.

11. Contact and support your nearest Refugee Forum

Contact forum@mrsn.org.uk (Manchester's Refugee and Migrants' Forum) for contact details of your local or regional refugee-led forum, representing the interests of individual refugees and refugee community organisations.

12. Rely on facts not myths

www.refugee-action.org.uk/information/challengingthemyths.aspx

www.blss.portsmouth.sch.uk/asylum/rasgame/refugee.htm

13. Support individual anti-deportation campaigns

As well as financial support, help with media work, lobbying and campaigning skills, offering photocopying, circulating information of events through your own networks and offering venues for meetings can make a lot of difference. See www.ncadc.org.uk for information about anti-deportation campaigns.

Some definitions:

Refugee - In 1951 the UN defined a refugee as: "a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her origin and is unwilling or... unable to return to it." In 1984 this definition was expanded to include people who have fled because of war or civil conflict. The UN also talks about environmental refugees.

Asylum Seeker - When people escape from their own country and seek sanctuary in another country, they usually apply for "asylum". This is the right to be recognised officially as a refugee.

Migrant - A person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (12 months), so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence. Migrant workers are key to certain parts of UK society and economy, such as the NHS.

Illegal Immigrants - An illegal immigrant is someone who enters a country without the proper papers. However, many illegal immigrants are genuine refugees.

Refugee Community Organisation - RCO is the term used to describe any refugee-led community group. This can range from a small relatively informal group through to registered charities providing services to their community members.

Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) - This is the part of the Home Office (renamed in 2007) that deals with immigration policy and manages reporting and detention centres

Contact:

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Tel: 0151 232 7420 www.mrsn.org.uk forum@mrsn.org.uk

THE COMMUNITIES IN TRANSITION MODEL (1)

Introduction

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland initiated the Communities in Transition Programme in 2001 based on the findings of their previous Weak Community Infrastructure Demonstration Programme over the 1996 - 2000 period. The issue of weak community infrastructure was researched through an action learning and support programme.

The findings of the Demonstration Programme identified that generic practice models developed for the support of areas of weak community infrastructure were not the solution in areas where community tensions are a significant added dimension. The Community Foundation successfully sought funding from the International Fund for Ireland and a private donor to research this issue through a further action learning and support programme – the Communities in Transition Programme.

Background to the developing model

One of the main findings of the first Demonstration Programme was that many community groups find the complexity of grant aid application forms and the level of monitoring required (for programmes such as Peace II) to be very offputting. This is especially true in areas where there is no history of managing grants. These groups and areas require particular support to enable them to “catch up” with other areas that have benefited significantly from previous funding programmes.

For this reason, the Communities in Transition Programme was not designed to be a grant making programme, rather the areas supported by the Programme were selected through a process of in-depth research and area profiling.

Many of the areas selected had little history of previous community development and few, if any, active community groups. Those areas that did have community groups were either at a very early stage of development or very fragmented. None of the areas had any history of substantial previous investment in terms of finance and resources. In addition, all of the areas had experienced various forms of community tension and division for a wide range of reasons, marginalisation from resources and services, and social exclusion.

Most importantly in terms of the model, the Communities in Transition Programme accepted from the outset that the engagement and ongoing participation of those most excluded is crucial to the success of development work in areas of weak community infrastructure and community tensions.

Many agencies have difficulty engaging with or recognising community groups where the involvement of particular local community activists, political or paramilitary figures is evident. However, in order to effect long-term change, their inclusion is often essential. Confidence and capacity building is required for all stakeholders. This entails trying out new approaches and processes, taking risks and developing opportunities that may not have been available to date.

The Communities in Transition Programme sought to build relationships within and between people and communities, to promote local participation in community development and peacebuilding and to create community cohesion by offering opportunities and support that had not been previously

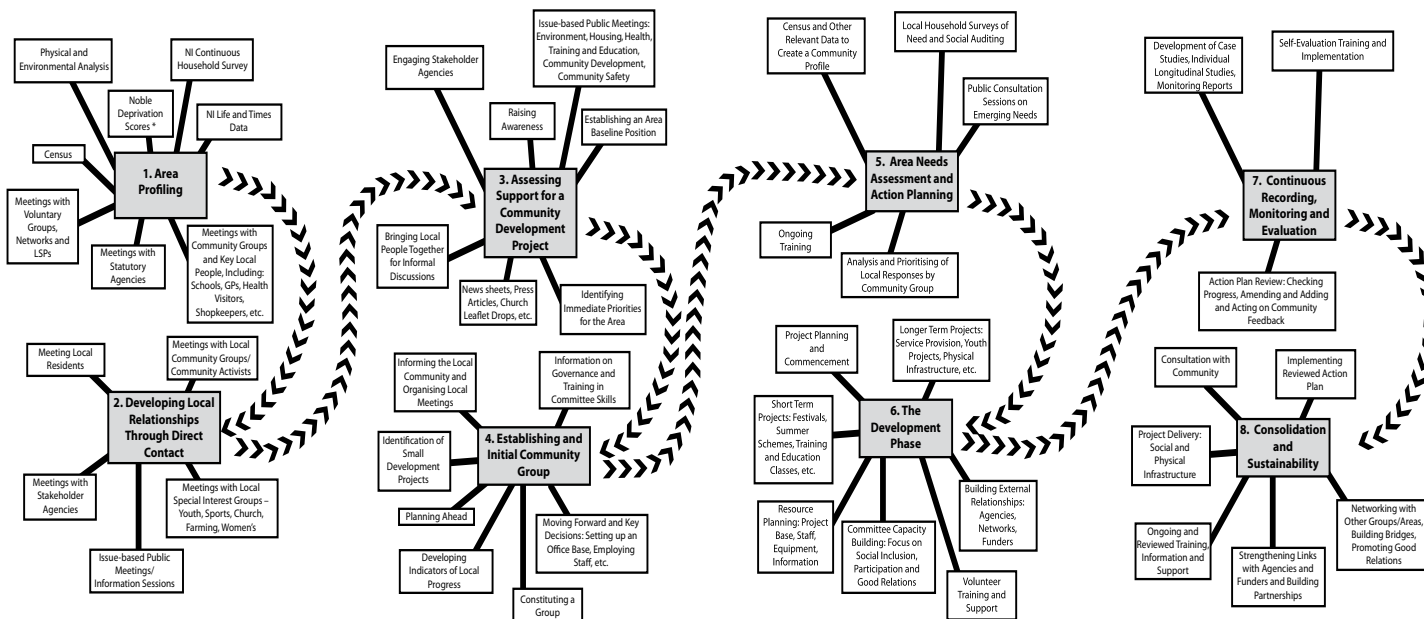
available to the selected areas. It recognises the particular difficulties facing communities experiencing weak community infrastructure and sees the process adopted by the Programme as an important step in redressing the imbalance created by the previous lack of investment in social capital, especially in areas that continue to directly experience either the legacy of the conflict, alienation and / or marginalisation.

Addressing weak community infrastructure and community tension requires long-term investment of time and resources (not just financial resources). The most critical element is that it requires face-to-face support and advice. It is not a process that can be managed from an office and is not one that can be resolved through a quick fix injection of cash, as is so often advocated. Many agencies and politicians appear to view the issue as one that will be solved if money is handed over to the local community. It is our experience that people prefer support and guidance as part of an ongoing process of development, rather than being handed money that they do not have the capacity to translate into much needed community development projects.

This Programme has adopted a risk-taking model for developing and supporting local work in areas of weak community infrastructure and community tension. Ongoing evaluation of the Programme's work and the model in general is a critical element, as is sharing the Programme's work and findings with a wide audience of community development practitioners, policy makers, funders, politicians and others with an interest in the development of support for such areas.

Ten areas were selected for inclusion in the Programme - eight in Northern Ireland and two in the Border Counties.

The key elements of the model are explained in diagrammatical form in the next article in this section Communities in Transition Model 2. Below is an outline of the model shown over the next 4 pages.



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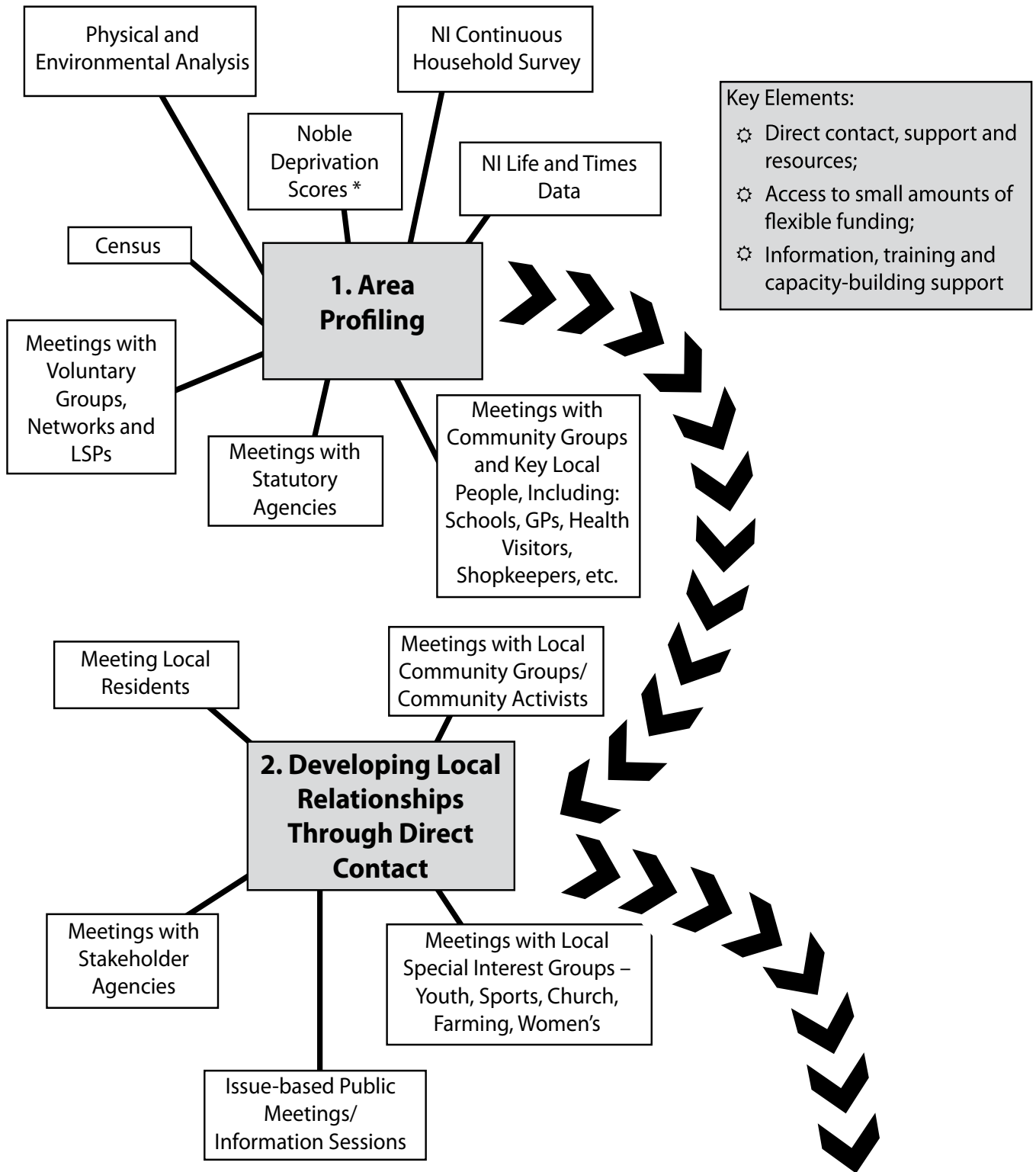
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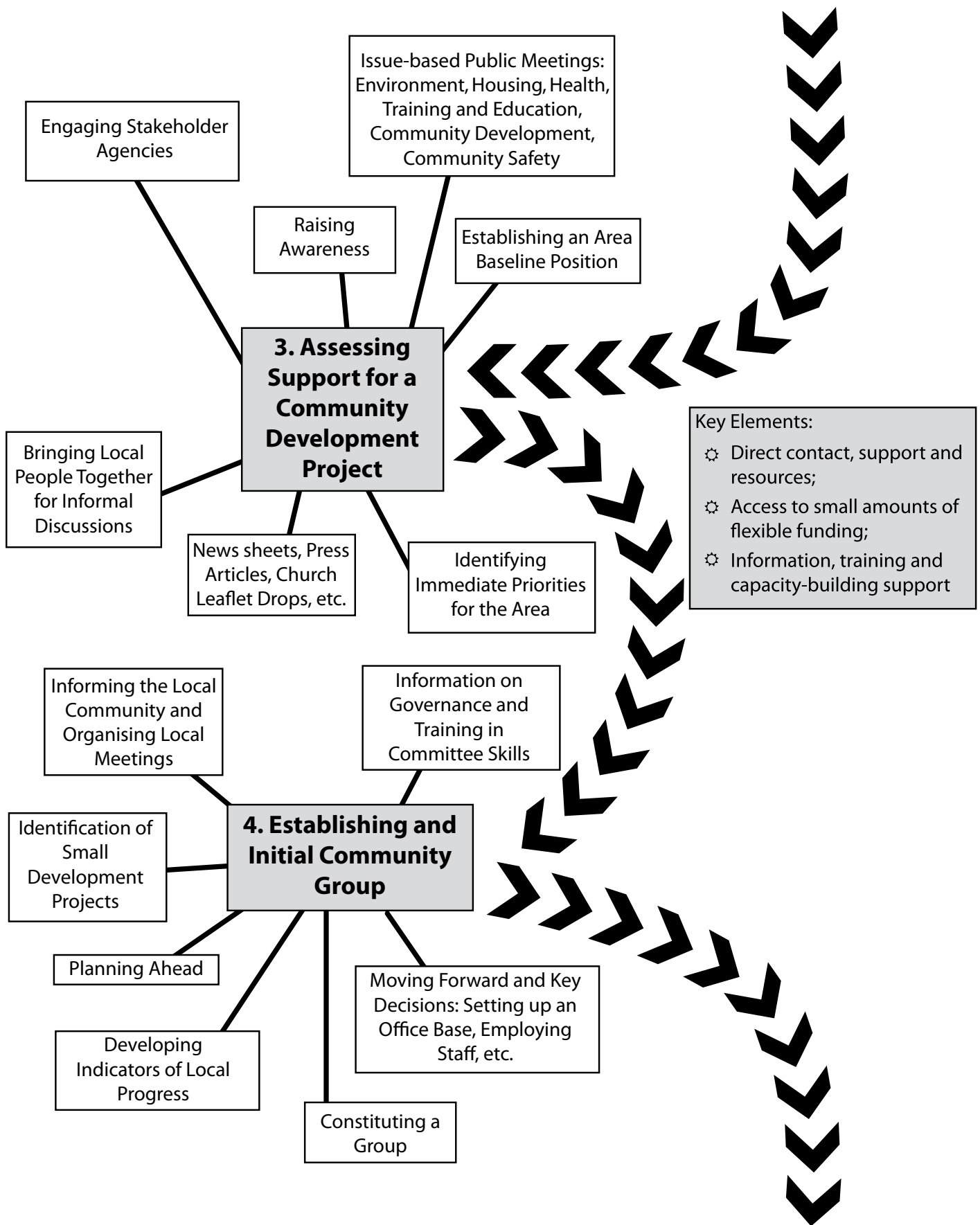
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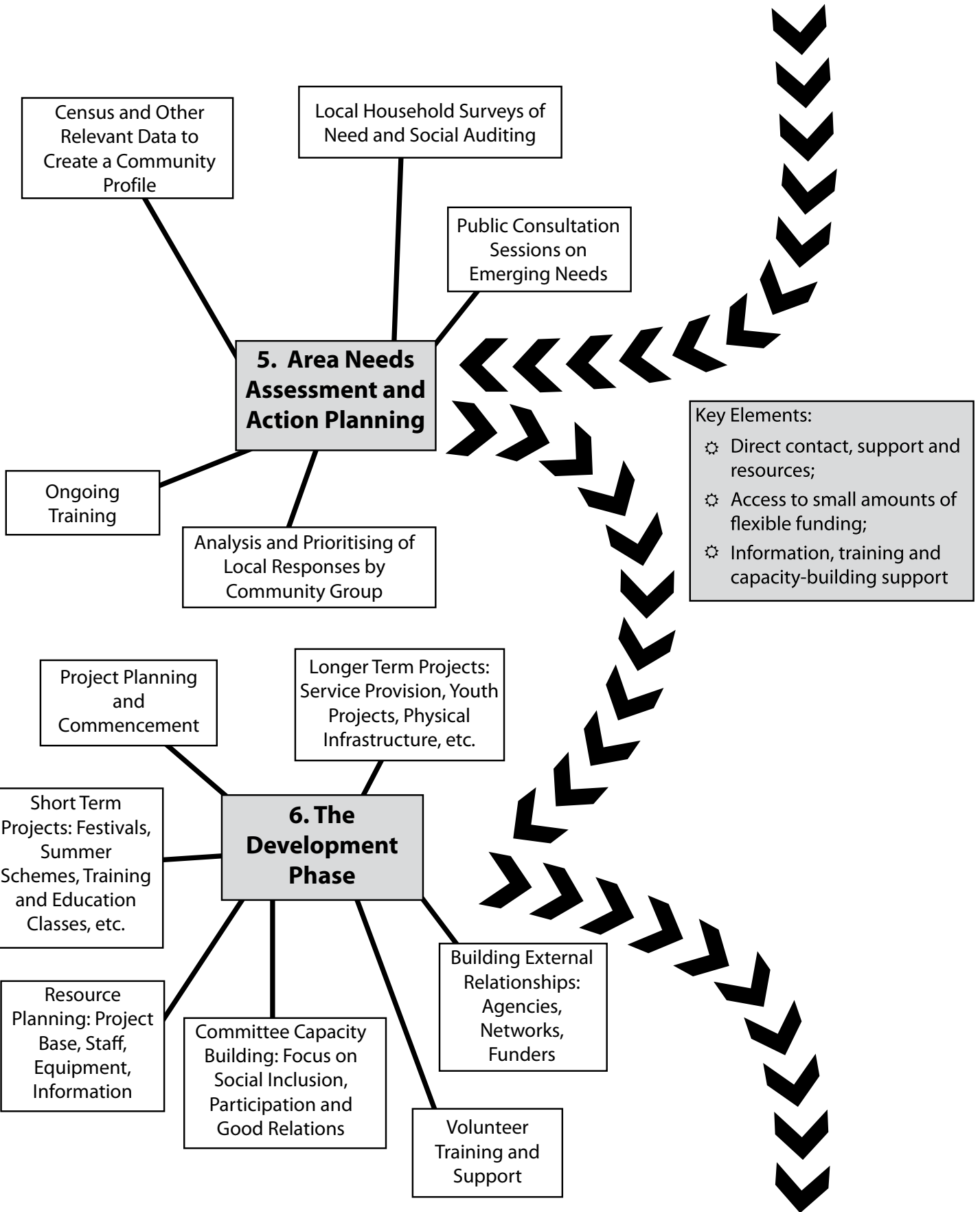
THE COMMUNITIES IN TRANSITION MODEL (2)

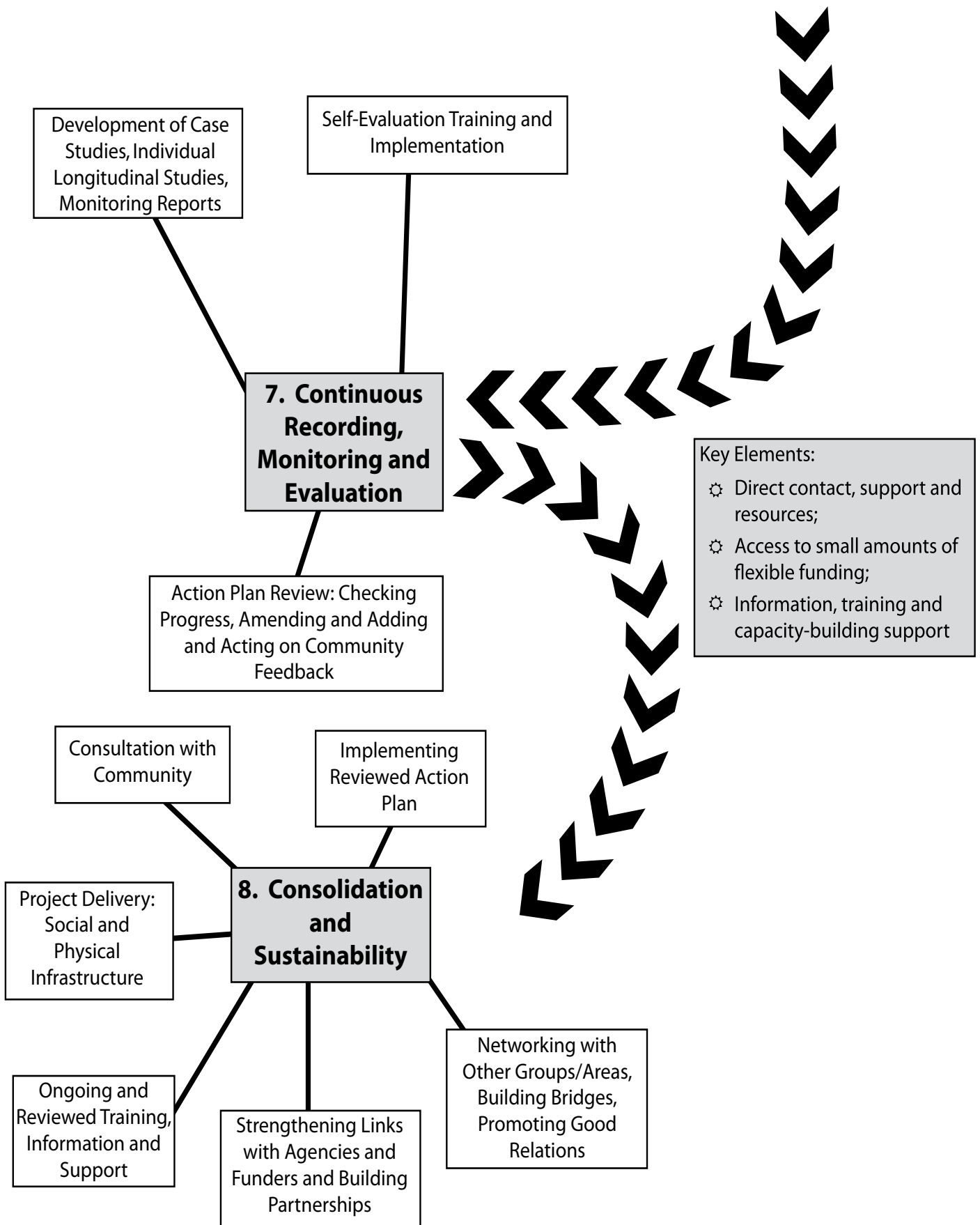
For the background to this model please see previous article – Communities in Transition (1).



* The Noble Measures of Multiple Deprivation were devised in 2001 (and updated in 2005) in order to be able to rank all of Northern Ireland's geographic communities on a scale of indicators of deprivation and a combined score of Multiple Deprivation. These rankings are frequently used in Northern Ireland as a criterion to allocate funding to local communities.







THE SUPPORTING TRANSITION INITIATIVE: A MODEL OF SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT FOR 'COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST'

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI) initiated the Supporting Transition Initiative (STI) in late 2004, with funding from the International Fund for Ireland. This Initiative was part of the Foundation's Communities in Transition Programme, which supports areas of weak community infrastructure and community tension. In contrast to the Communities in Transition Programme which focuses on geographical areas, the Supporting Transition Initiative included groups targeting different 'communities of interest'.

This Initiative supported communities of interest in the following ways:

- To build capacity within the group;
- To assess training and support needs;
- To develop awareness and skills in relation to peace building, social inclusion, participation and integration, conflict resolution and healing divisions.

Each group was supported to explore:

- Opportunities for development and learning;
- Issues and circumstances leading to conflict, division and tension within their current context, e.g. at local level or at the wider political level, with a view to developing the appropriate skills and awareness to deal with barriers to progress.

The process involved a Project Co-ordinator initiating discussions, developing ideas and talking about potential projects with relevant groups. Through this process, the groups put together the bare framework of an Action Plan to be developed and worked through over the course of the Initiative. Following on from these initial planning and ideas sharing sessions, a facilitator / mentor, selected by the group from a detailed list at the start of the project, worked with them over a period of time (fifteen to eighteen months) to implement appropriate training and awareness-raising to enable them to carry out their Action Plan.

The role of the facilitator / mentor was to work with their allocated group to identify and carry out a project, which could be completed within this timeframe, and which developed skills and awareness in relation to peace building, social inclusion, participation and integration, conflict resolution and healing divisions.

This entailed the organisation and commissioning of relevant training (following a Training Needs Analysis) and developing networking opportunities. Each group had a budget to organise a range of speakers and, when appropriate, meet with other groups and visit a range of relevant projects. Throughout the life of this Initiative, a series of seminars and workshops were organised to complement this work and involved a range of groups and individuals in discussions on peace building and other related issues.

This model differs considerably from typical funding and support programmes. It was a pilot, experimental Initiative, designed to explore whether the offer of support and funding would enable

groups to develop projects to meet their own needs, rather than needs identified by the funder. The process itself was also experimental, in that it was developed to test how this support and funding could be managed and delivered “on the ground”, through a flexible process of monitoring and returns. The communities included in the Initiative were “communities of interest” rather than geographically based communities. These communities were selected for inclusion in the programme, rather than having to apply for inclusion. If this had been a general grant programme, it is unlikely that many of these groups would have applied for the specific projects that they identified as important to their ongoing development.

In the overall evaluation of the Initiative, members of the local groups felt that being able to select their own Mentor and having a flexible budget of around £2000 per group were extremely useful in terms of contributing to their positive experiences of the Initiative.

The Mentors had been critical to the success of their projects because many of the groups involved in STI did not have any paid members of staff, and the Mentor enabled these groups to undertake work without adding to the pressures and constraints that voluntary members of their committees were already facing. Those groups that did employ staff felt that having a Mentor allowed the staff to get on with the day-to-day running of the group. Many groups chose their Mentor based on his / her level of expertise or experience on a specific element of work or in a particular field and this allowed them access to guidance that they may not otherwise have been able to obtain. The Mentor provided a perspective external to the group and challenged the group to tackle issues and questions that they may not otherwise have considered or been willing to address.

Having funding available meant that the groups did not have to spend time and resources applying for resources, and once a contract was agreed between the groups and CFNI, the projects were able to commence immediately. Provided that the budget was agreed in advance with CFNI, projects were allowed to use this funding for a wide range of purposes, including external training, group visits, publication costs, conferences. The process for financial returns and monitoring was very straightforward and user-friendly and was supported by the Finance Officer from the Communities in Transition Programme. There were no problems with financial returns from any of the groups. Groups said that this element of the Programme let them get on with the actual practical work of delivering the projects, rather than spending excessive amounts of time on financial monitoring, for what was a comparatively small amount of funding.

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Case Study

CASE STUDIES OF SUPPORTING TRANSITION INITIATIVE

For explanations of this initiative see the 3 previous articles in this section, these are illustrations of some of the projects supported through this initiative.

Belfast Islamic Centre

This Centre brings together Muslims of different nationalities in and around the Belfast area to address issues of common concern, support members in a variety of ways and celebrate Islamic culture and faith. Their project initially aimed to devise and run a cultural awareness-training course for adults from the Islamic community. They held two key conferences focusing on social inclusion, women's issues and education. The project developed an Action Plan to look into the possibility of setting up an Arabic or other linguistic educational entity for primary school aged children and to focus on analogies between the work required to make this feasible and the experiences of those involved in setting up Irish Language schools in Belfast.

PLACE Initiative

PLACE works to support estate-based community groups within Loyalist areas of Portadown. It originally covered four areas – Brownstown, Rectory, Edgarstown and Corcrain / Redmanville – with a fifth group (Genesis) joining the body in 2001. PLACE operates a mediation service to deal with issues relating to para militarism, feuding, flags and emblems, as well as carrying out general community development work in the area.

Their Supporting Transition Initiative project aimed to develop the capacity of their staff and committee members to address issues of sustainability. This included training, mentoring, networking and the development of a Young People and Training Project.

REACT / Ulster Prisoners' Aid

These groups work with Loyalist ex-prisoners and the Loyalist community in the Waterside area of Derry / Londonderry. They are involved in a number of projects, but have a particular interest in young people and cultural heritage, young people living with the legacy of having had a parent or other relative imprisoned as a result of the conflict and addressing barriers to employment for ex-prisoners. The main area of progress for this project was heightened communication and improved relationships between the two groupings, which come from two different Loyalist backgrounds. One of the main concerns for both groups was flashpoint interface violence and the role of the community workers in responding to this. They drew up an agreed Action Plan detailing the importance of the development of a coherent, transparent, strategic approach to the interface in relation to the Police Service Northern Ireland. The group presented this Action Plan to the PSNI and it was well received and welcomed.

Tar Abhaile

This Group provides support for Republican ex-prisoners in Derry. They run a successful gym, and offer advocacy and support services. Their project sought to develop the skills of their members and the ex-prisoners they support, in terms of mediation, advocacy, negotiation, lobbying and building positive partnerships with the statutory, community and private sectors. They also strove to form stronger links and share learning with other similar organisations.

Newtowncunningham / Strabane / Harryville Youth Forum

Following on from preliminary discussions with representatives of the Youth Forums of Newtowncunningham (Co. Donegal), Harryville in Ballymena (Co. Antrim) and the Melmount area of Strabane (Co. Tyrone), and using existing CFNI contacts, it was agreed to explore the possibility of organising a series of activities that would allow positive interaction and exchanges between the groups involved. Newtowncunningham Youth Forum initiated the project by hosting a day of activities in Donegal for the Melmount Youth Forum and then hosting another session with the Harryville Youth Forum. This was the first time that any of the young people from Harryville had been across the Border. These activities included young people aged between fifteen and eighteen and adult supervisors or youth workers. All three groups also engaged in a range of joint activities together, including paint balling, Go-Carting, sport and facilitated discussions about community identity and perceptions.

The Rainbow Project

The Rainbow Project represents a range of different backgrounds and opinions within the gay and bisexual men of the North West. They sought to build relationships and increase understanding with the Protestant community of the North West, including discussions and training on the subject of homophobia. This project culminated in an awareness raising conference, attended by the voluntary and community sector, local politicians, the police and agencies.

Regimental Association of the UDR, Coleraine

The Coleraine Branch of the Ulster Defence Regiment was formed in 1983 as a forum for people to share their memories, discuss problems and try to address the issues that arose from being part of the Regiment. This Supporting Transition Initiative project involved members of the Group recording, publishing and sharing the experiences of former members of the UDR and their families during the 'Troubles'. The end product of the project was a publication which details these memories and experiences, which was launched at a conference event.

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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORK AND FAITH COMMUNITIES: SOME CONSIDERATIONS

Introduction

Community development work around faith communities can be a delight, but is not always easy. Those two things are true of all community development work. So are faith communities very different? Well, yes and no. Faith communities have hopes and fears, gifts and sensitivities like any other community. But at the same time there are some factors it is worth bearing in mind, because there are recurrent patterns in work around faith communities.

In many ways working with or for faith communities is no different from working with groups who define their sense of being and belonging in other ways. There are, however, some repeated patterns which we can be ready for.

Whatever our personal stance on religious belief and belonging, we come across people who define themselves, at least in part, by reference to religious belief or membership of a faith community. Just as when we encounter different class or race identities, there are around and in faith communities many occasions when it is easy to base our attitudes on stereotypes and work without checking our assumptions about the other people.

All your other community development skills are resources to use when working around faith communities, here I offer some brief observations of ways in which real differences can be described and some of the misunderstandings resolved.

Certainty and uncertainty

Very many people in our society (whether believers or not) assume that religion is about certainty or dogmatism. Definite answers make shorter headlines, so it is often those who are offering certainties who are the most prominent speakers on a particular subject.

- Some faith groups are made up entirely of people who are looking for (or think they have found) the security / comfort / confidence of clear answers.
- Some faith groups are made up entirely of people who are looking for ways of holding fast to their values and living with uncertainty in a surprising and unpredictable world.
- Some faith groups have members who differ on the grounds of these basic assumptions.

This division - between those who seek certainty and those who are trying to face uncertainty - separates group from group and sometimes cuts a religious community down the middle.

What's the problem?

There is almost always a basic problem. Members of some faith communities very definitely want to change the people or the world around them. In other faith communities, the concern is principally with oneself, one's family, or fellow believers. There are no end of tensions and bits of miscommunication which can arise, if you are not clear what a particular faith community (or individual member) regards as the problem with the world and the appropriate way of responding to it.

As with a lot of political attitudes, people's individual ways of seeing the world are so clear to them, that they (we?) find it difficult to understand other people's viewpoints and ways of working.

The table at the end of this article describes briefly six different ways of working with groups.

Different approaches are appropriate on different occasions.

- If I am helping people learn how to mend their bikes, then the 'technological' approach may be suitable;
- When my friend Chris is teaching art appreciation, then the 'liberal' or 'humanistic' approaches may be appropriate;
- When I am working in community development, I think the most serious problem is oppression, so I try to work by a process of empowerment, so that groups will be able to liberate themselves - the 'radical' approach.

There can be no end of misunderstanding if we are not clear about our own concerns and purposes and so are not in a position to help others see where our approach differs from theirs.

It is obvious that there are likely to be tensions between the radical and the dogmatic approaches. People who think the problem is disobedience are going to find difficult the people who set out to challenge oppression.

But sometimes there are tensions between people who are closer together. Much of the time they may think they are "on the same side", but then suddenly the radical and the progressive workers may find that they are longing for different outcomes and are frustrated by one another's different concerns. I find that recognising that different hopes and fears lead to different styles of working helps me both to understand some others and also to be clearer about what really matters to me.

Matrix and adaptation of some terminology by Jonathan Adams
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WHAT'S THE PROBLEM? AND HOW DO WE HANDLE IT?

Here is a quick overview of six ways of working with groups which has been developed from work (with examples and much more detail) in *Learning for Life: a handbook of adult religious education* by Yvonne Craig (Mowbray 1994, ISBN 0-264-67318-2)

	Liberal	Progressive	Humanistic	Technological	Radical	Dogmatic
The most serious problem is	ignorance	need for social & individual change	meaninglessness	need for efficiency & productivity	oppression	crime, wickedness & disobedience
The role of the worker/ educator is	transmission	guidance	support	instruction	fostering critical consciousness	proclamation
What counts as knowledge is	wisdom	judgement & the ability to act	wholeness	performance	reflective thought & action (praxis)	grasp of truth handed down
Education works by a process of	initiation	problem-solving	growth	moulding	empowerment	obedience & trust
The key value is	reason	democracy	acceptance	efficiency	freedom	faithfulness
The educated person is	knowledgeable	responsible	integrated	competent	liberated	faithful

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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORK AND FAITH COMMUNITIES: ARE FAITH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN TENSION?

Introduction

Tension is not always a bad thing; any competent electrician will tell you that tension is about potential. Community Development is a discipline with strong commitments and these commitments can sometimes be in tension with the principles or habits of faith communities.

People working in faith-based community development projects can often find that they are seen as curious or suspect from both sides. Other community development workers may think they are mad to work for a faith community and people within the faith community may fear that the values of community development will be in conflict with things the faith community holds dear.

There are no simple answers that will resolve the tension in a moment. But there are some recurrent patterns. If you consider those patterns, you might be in a better position to listen and really hear what people with different viewpoints are saying.

The matrix on the following pages tries to show some of the suspicions and tensions.

- Doubts and questions about faith-based work sometimes expressed by community development workers and noted in the left-hand column.
- The second column lists community development principles or values.
- The column at the extreme right tries to express some of the suspicions and doubts felt about community development by some faith groups and their leaders.
- The third column - between the community development principles and faith-based doubt of community development - represents attitudes of some members of faith communities who share some of the commitments of community development and would value the support of allies outside the faith communities.

The patterns of faith groups that raise questions for community development	Community development principles	Community development values are shared by some people of faith	Community development values cause problems for some people of faith
scepticism - some faith groups have a history of oppression and of resistance to liberating change	commitment to human rights	some faith groups and many individual people of faith have a deep commitment to the dignity of all people	some faith groups find human rights uncomfortably political
acceptance of religious tenets can appear to conflict with self-determination	self-determination		some faith groups lay particular emphasis on individual duty, are suspicious of the language of 'rights', or believe that the individual's role is to receive and accept, not to claim
in the minds of some community development workers all faith groups are aiming to control	individuals and groups having a say in the decisions which affect them	(like some secular community workers) some faith-based workers are trying to change the institutions they work for	community development may be in conflict with some hierarchical institutions
is faith-based community development for the sake of the community, or for the sake of the faith group?	beginning where people are, with the issues which they identify	some within the faith communities are deeply committed to listening	some faith communities may have a dogmatic understanding of what needs changing in society
is there a hidden agenda in a faith-based CD? (eg proselytising or working only with members of one faith)?			
<p>who is setting the agenda? what is the Government really after with its new-found interest in faith-based work?</p> <p>Is the work community engagement (those with resources and power well-meaningly trying to use them more effectively)?</p>	is the work really community development (supporting those without resources or power to shape the circumstances of their lives)	<p>some faith groups have developed out of the powerlessness of their members and are part of how their members shape the circumstances of their own lives</p> <p>some faith groups have long traditions of inclusion and of work for social justice</p>	some faith groups are more familiar with holding power than with powerlessness

The patterns of faith groups that raise questions for community development	Community development principles	Community development values are shared by some people of faith	Community development values cause problems for some people of faith
are faith groups inherently conservative?	Social justice		some faith groups (eg most Christian churches) are more familiar with social justice than with social justice
some faith groups seek to be excluded from equal rights legislation - what are the relationships between psychology, culture, and theology?	inclusion and equal rights	within many faiths a minority has always worked for social justice	some faith groups may have difficulties with the insistence on equal rights (eg for disabled people, for women, for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people)
		some within faith communities are committed to improving the conditions for their own workers as well as for others	(like some other voluntary organisations) many local faith communities have little experience as employers/managers the combination of eagerness to get on with the work, personal self-sacrifice by volunteer management, and shortage of funds can lead faith communities to expect the workers to be self-sacrificial beyond normal working conditions
scepticism about the ability of faith institutions to promote the empowerment of their members	empowerment	faith communities vary widely in the resources available to them, in the extent of institutional development, in the prominence of their public profile, and in the patterns of distribution of power	
		some faith groups are deeply rooted in empowerment; in others a minority of members are actively working for change	some faith groups lay emphasis on revealed authority interpreted by the leadership - empowerment ideas will make these people uncomfortable

The thinking expressed in this matrix was sparked off by two seminars held in March 2005 to explore the links between faith groups and community development. The seminars were organised by three organisations working in partnership: the Community Development Exchange, the Churches' Community Work Alliance and the Faith Based Regeneration Network.

A full report of the seminars is available from the CDX office, or can be downloaded from www.cdx.org.uk www.ccwa.org.uk or www.fbrn.org.uk

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