BCC 1037

Community Engagement, Good Relations and Good Practice

Guidelines on good practice in relation to community engagement to promote good relations in Northern Ireland

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Executive summary

Northern Ireland is a deeply divided society still coming to terms with the legacy of a conflict marked by inter-communal violence, death and injury, economic stagnation and social division. Arguably, this is no more evident than in the city of Belfast which has witnessed some of the worst atrocities of the conflict and is noted for its significant residential segregation, volatile interface areas, duplication of services and public disorder over contentious issues such as parades and flag-flying. A significant proportion of its citizens inhabit quite separate worlds, associated with religious affiliation and political orientation, and these differences have resulted in a society based on mistrust, intolerance and suspicion of 'the other'.

Traditionally, Northern Ireland has been viewed as having two distinct 'others' or collective identities, namely the Protestant and Catholic communities and efforts to build relationships between these estranged communities have preoccupied community relations work since the 1960s. However, the past decade has also brought new challenges and new opportunities, with changes in the ethnic make-up of the region as new communities of non-British or Irish nationals have

arrived, largely in the form of migrant workers. These new communities have augmented the small but significant minority ethnic communities previously in the region including the indigenous traveller community. While many welcome and celebrate the increasing ethnic and cultural diversity of the city, these new patterns of migration have brought a shocking rise in racially or ethnically motivated crimes, harassment and discrimination to Belfast, as elsewhere.

In March 2005, *A Shared Future Policy and Strategic Framework* was published which set out government policy regarding good relations in Northern Ireland. With it, the development of a shared society was placed at the centre of public policy and a set of underlying principles devised which would be the basis for this work. The document, and its accompanying Action Plan, placed the onus on a broad range of government departments and agencies to play a strategic part in the development of a society "where there is equity, respect for diversity and a recognition of our interdependence." (OFMDFM, 2005:7) One of the fundamental principles underpinning the *Shared Future* policy framework is the importance of relationships.

The building of relationships requires communities to create new lines of contact and develop meaningful engagement with one another. This poses a significant challenge for communities who have long been estranged or have a history of suspicion, mistrust or even hatred. A challenge too for those who have had no previous interaction or experience, as is the case for many of the minority ethnic communities - both long-established and newly arrived.

Recognising this gap, Belfast City Council's Good Relations Unit commissioned research which would assist in the development of a set of best practice guidelines to community groups wishing to engage with those representing different ideological, political, racial, ethnic or religious backgrounds in support of good relations, as envisaged in *A Shared Future*. What is clear is that there is no one way to engage with 'the other'. It requires a variety and flexibility of techniques and a detailed knowledge of the local context and the variety of players involved to ensure optimal results. The purpose of compiling a report on good practice in relation to engagement was three-fold. Firstly, to define what is meant by the term 'community engagement' as

it relates to good relations. Secondly, to identify the principles which encompass good practice in relation to such engagement and, thirdly, to develop a set of practical guidelines for community groups to assist them in the development of new relationships across existing divisions.

Following a detailed review of existing literature and an exploration of the characteristics it includes, a definition of community engagement to promote good relations and was developed for the purposes of the research. The following definition was agreed:

Community engagement in the context of good relations work is the active process of making connections and developing quality contact between individuals and communities, for the purpose of challenging stereotypes, developing respect and mutual understanding and building sustainable relationships which transcend current cultural, ideological, religious, ethnic or racial divisions in Northern Ireland.

A history of community relations practice in Northern Ireland as it relates to contact and engagement is explored in order to chart and understand its evolution. This included a detailed examination of the theoretical arguments which have informed and underpinned community relations practice over the past decades. A review of policy and practice in relation to community relations and good relations in Northern Ireland indicates an evolution and deepening maturity within the field. The early government and community-based initiatives were marked by efforts to increase contact between Catholic and Protestant communities and were greatly influenced by the 'contact hypothesis' which, in simple terms states that, under certain conditions, prejudice and therefore conflict, can be reduced by bringing together individuals from opposing groups. By the late 1990s, and in light of developments within the peace process, there were signs that the community relations agenda was shifting from being 'symptom driven' to addressing the root causes of the conflict. The emphasis on contact shifted from the *quantity* of contact a programme offered to the *quality* of contact and the conditions under which contact takes place, the depth of engagement experienced by participants and their ability to engage with the issues of contention rather than commonality. In more recent times, good relations practice and measurement of its success has been influenced by the 'social capital theory', as popularised by Putnam and others in the 1990s. Proponents argue that building social capital contributes to more integrated, active, capable and cohesive communities. The concept of 'bridging' social capital has particular resonance with those working on good relations practice in Northern Ireland, with its recognition that different communities need to interact with each other in order to increase the levels of social capital and improve civic life. Without this 'bridging' element, each group is in danger of remaining isolated and may be unable to develop any knowledge of others and unable to build mutual trust and respect.

There are a wide variety of reasons why communities from different ideological, ethnic, racial and political backgrounds and positions might benefit from increased contact and engagement across embedded divisions. These might include:
- dispelling of myths and stereotypes
- breaking down of prejudices
- promoting and encouraging dialogue
- learning about others
- developing friendships
- allowing for the exploration of shared values
- addressing issues of mutual interest or concern
- healing painful memories
- improving civic life
- being an inspiration to others

Community relations practice has developed and evolved over the past decades to reflect the context in which it is set, the needs of communities and the understanding of good practice at any given time. A number of typologies have been developed over the past decade or more, which aim to categorise the various practices of community relations in Northern Ireland. In a sphere of work which has vast varieties of approaches, these typologies offer some insights into the motivations behind each methodology and the importance of relating the appropriate technique to the context and capacity of those taking part. Based on the body of existing theoretical and practical material indicated previously, a hybrid model was proposed which may usefully assist those wishing to plot both *quality* of engagement and *type* of engagement, prior to, during and after any given project and offers the opportunity to plot progression over time.

The report outlines a range of principles which aim to inform good practice in the development of intra- and inter-community engagement initiatives and, when adopted by a project or programme, should form a solid foundation and value-base on which activities can confidently be implemented. In summary, these principles are:

- fairness, equality and inclusion
- respecting and valuing diversity and difference
- clear and agreed purposes
- appropriateness
- being challenging and progressive
- flexibility
- safety
- quality
- sustainability
- reflective practice

Informed by this set of guiding principles, the report goes on to outline a comprehensive set of guidelines to inform and advise those planning to undertake community engagement activities. Naturally, the specific approach taken will depend on the particular circumstances at play and on what is hoped to be achieved from the process. The local context in which engagement takes place is of central importance and it is imperative that an in-depth understanding of the participants, the context and the objectives is known or undertaken, in addition to an assessment of the techniques, methods and supports needed for each particular initiative. The guidelines are not intended as a step-by-step approach to be followed rigidly and should be adapted to the context under consideration and viewed as enabling rather than enforcing advice and suggestion.

The guidelines cover the various stages in developing a community engagement initiative, from the planning stages (which includes defining the overall vision and purpose of the project, reviewing internal structures and policies, reviewing the external context, developing appropriate methodology, planning activities and milestones, identifying potential barriers to engagement and developing programme management structures) to the establishment of contact (which includes the adoption of the appropriate technique, addressing barriers to engagement previously identified, developing ground rules for engagement and an appropriate communication strategy). Having established contact, the next stage to consider is the initiation of actions and addressing of all logistical and practical issues. A vital stage to give consideration to is the planning for long-term sustainability of the project (when relevant) which includes issues of funding, partnership development, development of new structures and training requirements. The final issue which requires particular attention is to reflect and learn from practice and monitor and evaluate progress against aims and objectives. Each section of the guidance is structured in two parts – firstly, a set of questions which a project might usefully ask of itself during its planning and implementation stages and a set of suggestions which might assist a project in achieving maximum impact.

The report ends with a set of recommendations that emerged from the research which are intended to further develop the work on community engagement and document and disseminate good practice in relation to contact and engagement work to promote good relations in Northern Ireland.

1. Background to Good Practice Guide

Northern Ireland is a deeply divided society still coming to terms with the legacy of a conflict marked by inter-communal violence, death and injury, economic stagnation and social division. Arguably, this is no more evident than in the city of Belfast which has witnessed some of the worst atrocities of the conflict and is noted for its significant residential segregation, volatile interface areas, duplication of services and public disorder over contentious issues such as parades and flag-flying. A significant proportion of its citizens inhabit quite separate worlds, associated with religious affiliation and political orientation, and these differences have resulted in a society based on mistrust, intolerance and suspicion of 'the other'.

Traditionally, Northern Ireland has been viewed as having two distinct 'others' or collective identities, namely the Protestant and Catholic communities and efforts to build relationships between these estranged communities have preoccupied community relations work since the 1960s. Social attitude surveys indicate that despite significant efforts, there is still a long way to go in bridging these traditional divides. However, the past decade has also brought new challenges and new opportunities, with changes in the ethnic make-up of the region as new communities of non-British or Irish nationals have arrived, largely in the form of migrant workers. These new communities have augmented the small but significant minority ethnic communities previously in the region including the indigenous traveller community. While many welcome and celebrate the increasing ethnic and cultural diversity of the city, these new patterns of migration have brought a shocking rise in racially or ethnically motivated crimes, harassment and discrimination to Belfast, as elsewhere. With these and other new circumstances, a more nuanced definition of what 'good relations' means for Northern Ireland was required.

New policy context

The period since the ceasefires of 1994 and the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998 have led to new spaces and opportunities for change being opened up between and within communities. The past decade has seen a renewed focus on dealing with the causes and consequences of the conflict and new policy initiatives aim to place the pressing issues of sectarianism and segregation at the heart of government and local authorities' work. There is real recognition that sustainable relationships are both the basis for, and the goal to be achieved in, a peaceful and democratic society. However, development and maintenance of durable relationships between those who have long been estranged, as well as those more recent arrivals, remains the key challenge.

In March 2005, *A Shared Future Policy and Strategic Framework* was published which set out government policy regarding good relations in Northern Ireland. With it, the development of a shared society was placed at the centre of public policy and a set of underlying principles devised which would be the basis for this work. The document, and its accompanying Action Plan, placed the onus on a broad range of government departments and agencies to play a strategic part in the development of a society "where there is equity, respect for diversity and a recognition of our interdependence." (OFMDFM, 2005:7)

Prior to this policy initiative, public authorities, including local councils, already had a statutory duty under Section 75 (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious beliefs, political opinion or racial groups. However, the *Shared Future* agenda ensures that all public authorities, including local councils, go beyond legal compliance and that good relations is afforded particular focus and is effectively mainstreamed into policy development at all levels.

Good Relations and Local Authorities

Under present arrangements, all local authorities (including Belfast since 2001) participate in the *District Council Community Relations Programme*, established in 1989 in an attempt to 'bring the two sides of Northern Ireland's community towards greater understanding'. As with the majority of community relations practice, this programme was predicated on the notion that contact between communities previously divided would assist in improving relationships and building greater tolerance (CCRU, 1992). Under this programme central government provides local councils with funding to support community relations activities at local level.

For its part, Belfast City Council administers a Good Relations Fund, which provides support to community groups wishing to undertake projects with a good relations focus. The objectives of the Good Relations Fund are:

- to work towards building a shared future by eliminating sectarianism and racism;
- to encourage communication, relationship building and trust in areas where communities are living apart;
- to enable people to live and work together without fear and intimidation;
- to promote dialogue and understanding of different faiths and cultural backgrounds.

It is intended that this District Council Community Relations Programme will be replaced in 2007 with an enhanced permanent *Good Relations Challenge Programme*, in line with the Shared Future Policy Framework and the Review of Public Administration currently being undertaken. Under this Programme, district councils will be required to draw up triennial good relations action plans, which will be fed into the overall three-year government action plan. Belfast City Council is currently in the process of developing its first Action Plan which also takes into account a range of other policy changes as they relate to equality, race relations and community planning, amongst others. In preparation for the development of this plan, the council has identified a number of values or principles, specific to the Belfast context which will underpin the Action Plan. These principles (consent, rule of law, inclusion, diversity, pluralism) also inform the development of the following principles and practices as they relate to community engagement to promote good relations. (Morrissey, 2006).

Good Relations and Engagement

One of the fundamental principles underpinning the *Shared Future* policy framework is the importance of relationships. The policy document states:

> It is … important for all parts of civic society to take responsibility for building a shared, tolerant and inclusive society. Relationships are central. There is, therefore, an onus on all of us to play a part in initiating, encouraging and developing dialogues. We need to ensure that the 'spaces' where we have a

responsibility are really safe for everyone and they are used actively to create those conversations to build relationships.

The building of relationships requires communities to create new lines of contact and develop meaningful engagement with one another. This poses a significant challenge for communities who have long been estranged or have a history of suspicion, mistrust or even hatred. A challenge too for those who have had no previous interaction or experience, as is the case for many of the minority ethnic communities - both long-established and newly arrived. In 1997, Hughes and Knox, in an article on community relations in Northern Ireland, wrote: 'An urgent need for reflection on rudimentary approaches to cross-community contact now exists.' (Hughes & Knox, 1997:354) It has been observed that, more than a decade later, this issue has yet to be adequately addressed and accessible literature on the theory and practice of contact and engagement in support of good relations in Northern Ireland remains in short supply.

Recognising this gap, Belfast City Council Good Relations Unit commissioned research which would assist in the development of a set of best practice guidelines to community groups wishing to engage with those representing different ideological, political, racial, ethnic or religious backgrounds in support of good relations, as envisaged in *A Shared Future*. This report is the culmination of this research. What is clear is that there is no one way to engage with 'the other'. It requires a variety and flexibility of techniques and a detailed knowledge of the local context and the variety of players involved to ensure optimal results. What follows is not intended as a prescriptive report on how to engage, but a set of general guidelines which might assist and support groups as they develop projects and programmes which aim to reach out to 'the other', engage with them in a meaningful way and develop and foster durable relationships build on equity, respect for diversity and interdependence.

Purpose of the research

The purpose, therefore, of compiling this report on good practice in relation to engagement was three-fold. Firstly, to define what is meant by the term 'community engagement' as it relates to good relations. Secondly, to identify the principles which encompass good practice in relation to such engagement and, thirdly, to develop a set of practical guidelines for community groups to assist them in the development of new relationships across existing divisions. In order to achieve this, the history of community relations practice in Northern Ireland as it relates to contact and engagement was explored in order to chart and understand its evolution. This included a detailed examination of the theoretical arguments which have informed and underpinned community relations practice over the past decades. A review of the existing typologies of

community relations and good relations practice was undertaken and a hybrid model proposed which could usefully be adopted by those wishing to plot both the type of activity and the quality of contact and engagement between communities during and after any given project. Drawing on literature from a variety of academic and practice-oriented sources, a set of principles which might underpin such engagement work was compiled, before focus was given to the practical guidance which might assist a community group or organisation which is considering or preparing for engagement work with members of another community.

Who is this report for?

This report was initially commissioned by the Belfast City Council's Good Relations Unit in order to inform the administration of their *Good Relations Fund*, which centres on 'the delivery of a programme of activities designed to improve community /good relations and which promote and deliver improved good relations in the Belfast City Council area'. (CRU/BCC contract) The Good Relations Steering Panel is currently in the process of reviewing its funding criteria for their grant programme in anticipation of changes to be introduced when the enhanced *Good Relations Challenge Programme* is introduced in 2007. It is hoped that the report will inform the development of new criteria for funding and scoring matrices for the grant programme. Most significantly, however, it is envisaged that this report will be used as a guide for good practice to assist Belfast-based community groups and organisations who are applying for funding under the council's grant programme. However, it is hoped that it will have a wider appeal outside Belfast and be a valuable document for other local authorities and those working on similar issues.

Use of guide

Promoting contact and engagement within (single identity work) and between (inter-community work) has been a central tenet of community relations for the past number of decades and significant resources and time has been expended in support of this endeavour. Despite this, only limited or hard to access guidance on good practice in relation to engaging with 'others' is available for those wishing to initiate such work. While brief, it is hoped that this guide goes some way to addressing this gap. Good relations practice is an art, not a science and as such, there are no simple formulae for success. This guide is not a step-by-step guide on how to engage with communities representing other cultures, traditions or beliefs. Rather it is a tool which will assist community groups and organisations to effectively design their own projects based on their own knowledge, experience and intuition of what will work, and hopefully will lead to practice which is more effective, efficient and sustainable.

2. Defining Engagement in Context

Before identifying the principles and practices of 'community engagement', whether within (intra-) or between (inter-) communities to promote good relations, it is important to devise a working definition of such engagement. In devising such a definition it was felt it needed to be broad enough to take account of the various levels which community groups may currently be at, or wish to realise, yet precise and succinct enough to acknowledge that community engagement is only one aspect of a broader practice of good relations.

Community relations work in Northern Ireland has been broadly defined as activities which develop contact and co-operation across communities, promote greater understanding and increase respect for cultural diversity and traditionally refers to the divisions between the Catholics and Protestants, nationalist and unionist traditions. Good relations, as a concept, tends to have a broader and more extensive remit. The promotion of good relations is about breaking through the denial and avoidance of the Northern Ireland conflict and acknowledging its impact on the community and organisations working within it. It is also about actively recognising the challenges faced by people in Northern Ireland who are members of minority ethnic communities and/or minority religious faiths and the additional difficulties that they may encounter. Good relations challenges sectarianism and racism, promotes equality, develops respect for diversity and raises awareness of the interdependence of the people and institutions within Northern Ireland. (Good Relations Framework: Community Relations Council)

The community relations sector has frequently been accused of certain woolliness of language, with terminology introduced but not properly defined, causing confusion, misunderstanding and a lack of clarity around its practice. By using the term 'community engagement'

this report does not wish to contribute to this confusion – rather it is felt that this is the most appropriate term to describe the process by which communities who have no relationships at all, or relationships built on mistrust, suspicion and stereotypes actively reach out and engage with one another in order to build new or transformed relationships.

During the course of this report, the term 'cross-community engagement' is generally avoided (unless referring directly to existing literature) as many associate the phrase 'cross-community' with efforts to build relationships between Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland, exclusively. As this report has a wider remit of supporting 'good relations' practice, which includes persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial and ethnic group, the term 'inter-community' is used to describe relationships which span these broader divides. Given that tensions and divisions exist within communities as well as between communities (addressed by single-identity work in good relations practice), the term intra-community is also included to acknowledge this circumstance.

Terminology

In reviewing existing literature from a variety of sources, but with the common theme of reaching out to communities other than one's own for a particular purpose, it became apparent that a myriad of words and phrases have been adopted to describe this activity. These include words and phrases such as: encounter; contact; engagement; meeting across the divide; dialogue; building of human relationships; creating spaces; interaction; creating common ground; integration; building bridges.

While there is merit in all of the above, the term 'engagement' has been used for the purposes of this

report as it implies more than just encountering another, sharing the same space as them. It suggests a more active process of creating durable bonds between communities who may share differing ideologies, cultures or experiences yet are willing to participate in meaningful dialogue, be challenged, embrace difference, reach mutual understanding and create durable relationships. The term does, however, have its limitations.

Much of the literature which exists in relation to community engagement is based on the relationships between government and communities, rather than intra- or inter-community engagement, and therefore, is not always applicable to the good relations context. 'Community engagement' is often replaceable with the term 'community consultation', which is a noted policy-shift since the 1990s towards the involvement, by government agencies or local authorities, of communities in decision-making and strategic planning as it relates to their locality or community.

Definition

With these caveats acknowledged a definition of community engagement to promote good relations is proposed.

Community engagement in the context of good relations work is the active process of making connections and developing quality contact between individuals and communities, for the purpose of challenging stereotypes, developing respect and mutual understanding and building sustainable relationships which transcend current cultural, ideological, religious, ethnic or racial divisions in Northern Ireland.

3. Role and purpose of engagement

There are many reasons why communities from different ideological, ethnic, racial and political backgrounds and positions might benefit from increased contact and engagement across embedded divisions. Building new and inclusive relationships is a significant challenge and it requires perseverance, determination and courage on all sides. In order to achieve the goal of *A Shared Future* for Northern Ireland, it is imperative that communication between communities is established, divisions are broken down, prejudices and stereotypes are dispelled and meaningful relationships are formed. There are years of hurt, suspicion and fears to be acknowledged and addressed and structural divisions to be overcome. Active commitment with these issues is the key to transforming these negative mindsets and this requires meaningful contact and engagement with those we may have viewed with suspicion or mistrust.

Before going into the role which engagement can play in the establishment of good relations in Northern Ireland, it is necessary to review the key policy developments as they relate to community relations work. In particular, we will explore the emphasis placed on reaching out and engaging with 'the other' over the past decades in policy terms. This includes an overview of dominant theories which has influenced policy and practice in this arena and concludes with a summary of the diverse reasons why engagement is a significant feature of this work.

Policy and Practice

Originating in the UK in the 1960s, in response to growth in immigration and related tensions, the term 'community relations' was first introduced into government policy in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s. Modelled on the Race Relations Board in Britain, the Community Relations Commission was established in 1971 with a remit of supporting community relations-focused projects, encouraging education programmes and initiating relevant research. The central focus of the Commission was to initiate a development strategy within communities in order that they might eventually gain the confidence to 'reach out' to the other community (Harbison, 2002). However, following the establishment of the new Power Sharing Executive in 1974 the Commission was disbanded on the basis that the new institution would fulfil its previous remit and responsibilities. In reality, responsibility for community relations issues fell to the Department of Education, local Government and community and voluntary organisations. While some community and faith-based initiatives were maintained in the face of intensifying violence and segregation, community relations policy initiatives fell dormant for over a decade (Hughes and Carmichael, 1998).

As indicated by Harbison, early community relations work tended to focus on the initiation of contact between Catholics and Protestants and funding support focused on those projects which developed contact activities, such as holiday schemes and one-off events. These projects predominately focused on areas of commonality rather than difference between communities and on the development of personal one-on-one relationships across traditional divides. It also included the early stages of development of the integrated schools movement which aimed to create physical connections between young children in a sector which was marked by single-denominational schooling. The approach adopted was based on the premise that cross-community contact can assist in improving tolerance for diverse cultural traditions and was significantly influenced by the 'contact hypothesis' of inter-group work, originating with Amir (1954) and Allport (1964), explored in more detail later.

By the mid 1980s, unfolding political events and pressure from outside government resulted in the re-emergence of community relations as a priority policy area. In 1987, the Central Community Relations Unit (CCRU) was established, with three broad objectives:

- to ensure that there was full equality of opportunity and equity of treatment for everyone in Northern Ireland;
- to encourage greater contact between the different communities in Northern Ireland; and
- to encourage greater mutual understanding and respect for cultural diversity.

CCRU funded a wide range of community relations projects and while specific goals for these projects were framed in fairly generic terms they concentrated ''primarily on facilitating contact between Protestants and Catholics'' (Cairns, 2000). In 1989, the District Council Community Relations Programme was introduced, funded by the UK government and implemented through local authorities. It was based on a commitment to 'bring the two sides of Northern Ireland's community towards greater understanding' and was again predicated on the notion that contact would assist in improving relationships and building greater tolerance (CCRU, 1992).

In 1990, the Community Relations Council was formed, as an independent limited company and registered charity, with a remit to promote better community relations between the 'two main traditions' and, equally, to 'promote recognition of cultural diversity'. 'Concerned primarily with promoting greater cross-community contact, the approach adopted at the time was criticised by those who believed the government was promoting an assimilist/integrationalist agenda that offered little more than a 'sticking plaster' solution to the conflict.' (Hughes et al, 2003) However, at a policy level, the government was implementing explicit community relations policies. In 1992, the Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment (PAFT) guidelines were introduced with three primary aims: [a] to increase contact between Protestants and Catholics; [b] to encourage greater mutual understanding and respect for diverse cultural traditions; [c] to ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland enjoys equality of

opportunity and equity of treatment. Areas which were the focus of PAFT proofing included religion, gender, political opinion, marital status, ethnicity and disability. Government departments were required to monitor the impact of their policies on designated groups, with limited results.

By the late 1990s, and in light of developments within the peace process, there were signs that the community relations agenda was shifting from being 'symptom driven' to addressing the root causes of the conflict. Academic research and practical evidence increasingly highlighted the limitations of contact as an end in itself. Cairns wrote:

'I want to suggest that this [a cessation of conflict] has not happened because in the majority of cases neither naturally occurring contact nor contact provided via cross-community contact schemes has led to the type of contact which changes attitudes. This is because in the main such contact has been relatively superficial.' (Cairns, 2000)

It was increasingly argued that participants in cross-community contact schemes or projects tended to avoid conflict or tension by generally adopted avoidance strategies and not discussing issues of contention or division. Thus, from the outside, they may have appeared successful in terms of physically bringing people together, but may not have resulted in any significant change in attitude or opinion towards the 'other'. The emphasis on contact shifted from the *quantity* of contact a programme offered to the *quality* of contact and the conditions under which contact takes place, the depth of engagement experienced by participants and their ability to engage with the issues of contention rather than commonality. The current strategic aim of the Community Relations Council reflects a more holistic view of their work, namely: 'To lead and support change towards a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society founded on the achievement of reconciliation, equality, co-operation,

respect, mutual trust and good relations' (CRC Strategic Plan, 2004-07). Hughes (2002) wrote: 'Current practice is less concerned with promoting cross-community contact *per se* than with promoting cultural, religious and political pluralism, and the equality agenda has begun to define the nature of some community relations activity.'

This change in recent years is perhaps unsurprising, given two significant developments in the area of good relations. Firstly, the enactment of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) requires public authorities in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and 'to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group'. Public authorities are required to produce an Equality Scheme stating how they propose to fulfil these duties and schemes must be submitted to the Equality Commission for approval.

Secondly, as mentioned previously, the 'Shared Future' agenda has emphasised the duty of all public authorities to place good relations at the core of their policy making. Other relevant policy developments in relation to good relations and equality work in Northern Ireland over the years included fair employment legislation, support for integrated education, targeting social need and the race equality strategy. Despite such initiatives, public attitude surveys indicate that relations between the two main 'traditions' remain low, while residential segregation is increasing and schooling continues to be sharply divided.

Aside from legislative changes, changes in the funding environment have had a significant impact on the level and types of good relations work being undertaken. The introduction of the European Union Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in 1995 brought a substantial injection of funds to an otherwise limited financial pot. To date, the programme has had two main phases, known as Peace I and Peace II (with the latter now extended as 'Peace II+'). With its introduction in 1995, this unique funding programme spanned the six counties of Northern Ireland and the six southern border counties of the Republic of Ireland. The strategic aim of the first programme (Peace I) was 'to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation by increasing economic development and employment, promote urban and rural regeneration, developing cross-border co-operation and extending social inclusion.' Although it was a significant investment in the development of community capacity, the programme which lasted until 1999, was criticised for not sufficiently embedding the concepts of peace and reconciliation. Harvey wrote: 'Although Peace I has done much to normalise cross-community (and cross-border) work, there was not full agreement on a model of cross-community and single-identity work' (Harvey, 2003, p22). Following an extensive review and laborious consultations, the Peace II Programme was belatedly introduced in 2000 with new priority areas, including economic renewal, social integration and locally based regeneration and development strategies. During the course of its implementation, the programme was again criticised for its over-emphasis on economic regeneration at the expense of the core elements of reconciliation, despite reconciliation being a 'distinctiveness' criteria that all projects had to meet.

The current extension to the programme (Peace II+) has seen yet another change in emphasis and responds directly to previous criticism. The core elements of reconciliation have been given greater priority, with applicants required to articulate clearly how their project or programme will address the issue of relationship building, in particular. By more clearly defining what the programme meant by 'reconciliation' as a core concept (see Hamber & Kelly, 2005), the tenets of engagement and relationship-building were

restored to the central focus of the programme.

Theoretical Influences on Good Relations Practice

Two main theories have influenced the development of community relations /good relations practice in Northern Ireland since the 1970s. Most substantially, the 'contact theory', which originated within the discipline of social psychology, dominated community relations practice with its emphasis on the physical 'bringing together' of individuals from different backgrounds, traditions and beliefs. More recently, significant attention has been paid to the theory of social capital, to which funding bodies, policymakers and practitioners alike are attracted, due to its focus on trust, interaction, networking and co-operative working. A brief overview of the key principles of each theory is useful to further understand the role and purpose of engagement in the development of good relations in Northern Ireland.

● Contact Hypothesis

For several decades, community relations practice has been dominated by the 'contact hypothesis', which, in simple terms states that, under certain conditions, prejudice and therefore conflict, can be reduced by bringing together individuals from opposing groups. This is based on the assumption that conflict arises from inadequate information about the 'other' and that enhanced opportunities for interaction will foster more positive attitudes towards the so-called 'out-group'. The underlying ideology supporting this theory is, therefore, that the more individuals are in contact and can learn about other ethnic, religious, ideological or racial groups (in the context of good relations in Northern Ireland), the more their existing prejudices and stereotypes will be undermined. The challenge lies in translating the amelioration of individuals' attitudes towards the particular members of a group or community with whom he or she has contact, into a more general change in attitude towards the group or community as a whole.

One of the initial proponents of the contact theory, the social psychologist, Gordon Allport suggested that contact, in itself was not enough and was dependent on the nature of that contact. He suggested a number of conditions which would be necessary for meaningful contact to take place. First, there should be equal status among the groups or individuals who meet. Secondly, the situation should require co-operation between groups or offer common goals. Thirdly, social competition among the groups should be avoided. Finally, the contact should be legitimised through local authorities or institutional support. Despite misgivings about his work in the decades which followed, Allport was not suggesting that contact alone can reduce prejudice, but highlighted the importance of the context and conditions which are established. Later researchers have argued that many of the conditions he prescribes are incompatible with typical elements of intergroup conflict, such as competition, status differences and animosity (Tausch, 2005).

Inspired by Allport, subsequent decades saw a significant body of work which built on his theory, adding nuance and increased sophistication. Early work emphasised the role of contact in decreasing ignorance of the 'other' or 'out-group' and increasing inter-group similarity. More recently, researchers such as Brewer and Miller (1984) have argued that contact works best in circumstances where participants come to perceive one another as individuals, rather than merely representatives of a particular community or group. This is known as the decategorisation model. However, Hewstone and Brown (1986) have argued to the contrary, emphasising the need for those in contact to view one another as group representatives rather than mere individuals and encouraged the acknowledgement of difference between groups. A third model, known as the 'common in-group identity model', suggested that

contact is most effective when people in contact think of themselves as members of a larger or super-ordinate in-group. (Gaertner & Dovidio J.F., 2000) Pettigrew (1998) suggested that these different models which were emerging from the psychological research on contact could be reconciled if inter-group contact is viewed as an evolving process, based on a number of stages or mechanisms, namely: learning about the outgroup and friendship forming; behaviour-driven attitude change and celebration of group differences; generating affective ties and, finally, consolidation of close friendships, resulting in individuals no longer defining themselves as members of separate groups and assuming a common identity.

Literature emerging in recent years has questioned the ability of contact alone to create positive attitudes and behaviours towards the 'out-group'. Even in the 1950s when Allport first formulated his theory of contact, he warned that poor contact may in fact have a negative impact. He wrote: 'Theoretically, every superficial contact we make with an out-group member could by the 'law of frequency' strengthen the adverse associations that we have' (Allport, 1954:264). Others have repeated this concern and suggest that for best results, the contact situation should concentrate not only on what makes groups similar but also on what divides them. ''Information about real differences should respect the cultures and traditions of other groups and should be supported by information which explodes myths about false difference'' (Stephan & Stephan, 1984). A further development in this field of theory and research has been the exploration of 'indirect' or 'extended' contact. While the traditional contact hypothesis refers to direct contact between members of two groups, it has been suggested that knowledge that a fellow 'ingroup' member has a close relationship with an 'outgroup' member can act as a catalyst for changes in attitude. (Wright et al, 1997, Paolini et al, 2004)
Despite the fact that proponents of the contact theory have never advocated the mere 'body-mixing' approach

as a means of reducing prejudice (Samson, 1996) the contact theory has consistently been criticised for a superficiality of approach. Some have argued that while conditions may be placed on the quality of contact required to erode prejudiced attitudes, these conditions rarely exist or can be replicated in practice. Another criticism of the contact hypothesis is that by focusing on individual change in attitude, little analysis is afforded to the broader social, economic and political structures and institutions which help to create and sustain ethnic or racial divisions. In this sense, the state or government is seen to play little or no part in the construction or maintenance of division and is therefore absolved of responsibility for it (Connolly, 1999:39).

Some have argued that the fault does not lie with the contact hypothesis *per se*, but that it has not been properly implemented in Northern Ireland. Others have argued that the theory itself has become disconnected from the reality of such societies. ''In several important respects, the contact literature has become detached from (and sometimes irrelevant to) everyday life in divided societies. Accordingly, it offers recommendations that are often of limited utility for understanding and promoting social change'' (Dixon et al, 2005:697).

However, while the theory has been criticised for identifying a list of conditions under which contact between members of different groups should be implemented, proponents of the theory argue that these conditions should be thought of as facilitating rather than essential conditions. Despite criticisms, the contact hypothesis still has much to offer in terms of suggesting the conditions which will ensure the possibility of more effective contact, reduction in prejudice and the development of inter-group bonds. ''…in attempting to theorise its influence and effects, it is clear that these cannot be fully understood without a proper appreciation of the broader social contexts within which participants are located and the various

factors that help to construct and sustain racial and ethnic divisions'' (Connolly, 1999:46). It is clear that any approach to addressing divisions between communities in Northern Ireland needed to be multi-layered, dealing both with the macro-level structures and institutions as well as the micro-level and inter-personal relationships.

● Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory, as most widely introduced by the American academic Robert Putnam in the 1990s, has become increasingly important and has had broad appeal in a variety of arenas from policy-making to community development across the globe. Putnam's definition of social capital states that:

> whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals - social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called 'civic virtue'. The difference is that 'social capital' calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital (Putnam 2000: 19).

Putnam and later advocates argue that societies characterised by high levels of 'social capital' have higher quality of life, where people trust one another, engage in informal networking and work cooperatively. Proponents argue that building social capital contributes to more integrated, active, capable and cohesive communities and increasing levels of social capital within individuals and communities result in societies which are socially healthier and economically more competitive. The existence of social capital is viewed as both an outcome of social networks and relationships and a necessary requirement for such networks to continue to

function effectively. As Beem explains:

> Trust between individuals thus becomes trust between strangers and trust of a broad fabric of social institutions; ultimately, it becomes a shared set of values, virtues, and expectations within society as a whole. Without this interaction, on the other hand, trust decays; at a certain point, this decay begins to manifest itself in serious social problems… The concept of social capital contends that building or rebuilding community and trust requires face-to-face encounters (Beem 1999: 20).

The concepts of social capital are increasingly finding their way into the public policy making arena across Europe and beyond and it is unsurprising that this theory has caught the attention of those wishing to create more cohesive, stable and civic-minded societies, particularly when the concept is broken down into more detailed parts.

According to Putnam's theory, social capital is said to exist in a number of different forms, each of which is considered to have differing orientations and benefits. *Bonding* social capital is regarded as the main element that helps to create cohesion *within* communities and is generally conceptualised in terms of single identity work such as capacity building and community empowerment. *Bridging* social capital is a key factor in building relationships *between* communities and is a useful descriptor for cross- or inter-community contact and engagement work. The third type, *linking* capital is the aspect that connects communities to institutions of power and authority through such processes as lobbying, influencing and consulting. Bonding capital is viewed, therefore as more inward-looking and having a tendency to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups. Bridging capital, on the other hand, is seen as being more outward-looking and encompassing people across different social divides – a key objective of good relations practice in Northern

Ireland. This concept of 'bridging' social capital has particular resonance with those working on good relations practice in Northern Ireland, with its recognition that different communities need to interact with each other in order to increase the levels of social capital and improve civic life. Without this 'bridging' element, each group is in danger of remaining isolated and may be unable to develop any knowledge of others and unable to build mutual trust and respect.

Evidence of the importance of social capital in preventing violence between ethnic groups was presented by Varshney (2002) in his sociological analysis of Hindu-Muslim relations in India. In his research study, he reported that inter-communal networks of civic life such as business associations, professional organisations, and clubs, as well as everyday interactions, promoted peace between the communities even whilst political parties were attempting to polarise the ethnic communities. He compared peaceful cities to those prone to violence across India and concluded that the factors that distinguish them are networks of civic life that cut across the two communities. These networks were viewed as significant and durable, rather than superficial and fragile, a criticism of much contact work in Northern Ireland in the past.

While still its developmental stages, the theory of social capital has gained more credence and is influencing the ways in which relationships in Northern Ireland are being described. A number of research programmes measuring social capital have been undertaken (Murtagh, 2002; Cairns, Van Til and Williamson, 2003; OFMDFM, 2006) which offer new perspectives on previous assumptions with regard to levels of community interaction, community spirit and social networks in Northern Ireland and new indicators to measure community-based and voluntary activity have been developed (CENI, 2001). More directly, there has been increasing commentary on the role of social capital in good relations work (Morrow, 2005; Muir,

2005; McAleavey & McCandless, 2004) and funding bodies have been using the social capital framework to analyse the development of specific funding streams and monitor the outcomes and impact of grantmaking programmes, including the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland for its 'Communities in Transition' Programme. With its emphasis on measuring levels of trust within communities and the lack of trust being a significant limiting factor in the development of good relations, social capital theory is certain to have an influence on the manner and means by which engagement is understood in Northern Ireland in the future.

Impact of Engagement

Good relations practice in Northern Ireland has emphasised the importance of relationship building within and between communities of varying beliefs, traditions and cultures. Academic theories such as the contact theory and social capital theory have set out to prove the impact of bringing people together for common aims. In his report entitled *Building the Peace: Good Practice in Community Relations Work in Northern Ireland*, John Lampen wrote: "A community relations project generally begins with a vision. Broadly speaking there are three types of aim, which are often interlinked:

- the wish for cross-community contact and friendship;
- the need for action on an issue which affects people on both sides of the divide;
- the hope of greater understanding of one another, and of the issues that divide us. (Lampen, 1995:17)

Lampen suggested three important reasons why people might wish to engage with 'the other'. A review of existing literature suggests that there are a wide range of potential outcomes from the bringing together of those who have been estranged as a result of conflict, mistrust, suspicion or fear. Potential consequences of such engagement might include:

Dispelling of myths and stereotypes

Through quality contact, individuals may increasingly perceive and identify differences within groups and communities, rather than viewing them as a homogenous grouping defined by stereotypes.

Breaking down of prejudices

Latent and overt prejudices held against 'others' will be challenged and more positive attitudes towards others are promoted. Through engagement, people who may seem intractably opposed, often change the way they view and relate to each other.

Promoting and encouraging dialogue

By engaging with others, the opportunity to ask questions, state positions, communicate views, experiences and values, discuss differences and learn of others opinions is made available. Effective dialogue offers the opportunity to obtain answers to pressing questions.

Learning about others

Details about how people live, what they believe, what is important to them, their hopes and fears are explored. This can lead to increased mutual understanding and new perspectives being heard and accepted.

Developing friendships

Engaging with others provided the opportunity for trust to be built, relationships to form and friendships to be built across traditional divides.

Allowing for the exploration of shared values

Engagement offers the opportunity to refocus away from the aspects that separate them and explore their shared values and beliefs.

Addressing issues of mutual interest or concern

In developing new relationships built on common values and experiences, greater co-operation between communities is encouraged and collaborative action can be taken to address commonly shared concerns or interests, potentially for augmented effect.

Healing painful memories

By engaging with those who may be viewed as the enemy or who have inflicted physical or psychological pain upon them, engagement offers the opportunity to address the past, explore painful memories and experiences and possibly contribute to individual or community healing.

Improving civic life

Through the development of increased networking and collaborative action across previous divisions, civic life is improved for all.

Being an inspiration to others

Engaging with those outside one's own community, makes a public 'statement' that it is possible to connect with others and can demonstrate how people can work together.

4. Types and stages of engagement

As outlined previously, community relations practice has developed and evolved over the past decades to reflect the context in which it is set, the needs of communities and the understanding of good practice at any given time. Contributions to the development of good relations in Northern Ireland can, and have taken many different forms, from significant legislative changes to the development of small grant programmes to support community-led activities. One aspect of this work is the opportunity to build relationships within and between communities – to engage with the other in a meaningful way which builds trust, respect and mutual understanding.

Before exploring how contact between groups or communities can be established and built upon, it is worth acknowledging the various typologies of community relations work which have been devised, the emphasis placed on community engagement within these typologies and how the progressive and incremental nature of engagement work has been described in the literature to date. Subsequently, a tool for identifying the current position of a community group or organisation in relation to engagement is suggested, which may be useful for both funders and practitioners alike in establishing where a community is, and where it wishes to go.

Community Relations Typologies

A number of typologies have been developed over the past decade or more, which aim to categorise the various practices of community relations in Northern Ireland. In a sphere of work which has an infinite variation of approaches, these typologies offer some insights into the motivations behind each methodology and the importance of relating the appropriate technique to the context and capacity of those taking part.

Fitzduff Typology

In 1989, Mari Fitzduff attempted to classify the various types of practice which might validly be called community relations work, defined as 'work designed specifically to assist the development of understanding, respect and communication between our communities.' (Fitzduff, 1993, Foreword) With the addition of new approaches to community relations work in the intervening years, the typology was updated in 1993, indicating that it is a constantly evolving area of practice. It was hoped that in classifying the variety and spectrum of approaches to such work, groups and organisations would identify their particular issues, use the skills available to them and move from one method to another, depending on their needs, capacity and context. The classifications were intended to be suggestive rather than definitive and were not placed in order of importance or priority.

Fitzduff identified two related areas of work, namely *Focused Community Relations Work* and *Contextual Community Relations Work*. The focused work includes eight categories of explicit community relations projects, while the contextual work was included in recognition of the parallel areas of work (community development; trusted and accessible security forces; pluralist environments; targeting social need, training in critical thinking) which would, if not addressed, limit the impact of direct community relations work.

The eight categories of work, described in detail by the author were identified as:

- Mutual understanding work
- Cultural traditions work
- Inter-church work
- Political options work

- Anti-sectarian work
- Anti-intimidation work
- Justice and rights work
- Conflict resolution work

 More recently, Hughes and Knox (1997) categorised the broad range of projects supported by Central Community Relations Unit (CCRU)[1] and subjected them to a 'matching' exercise whereby their relative contribution to effective contact was assessed according to the principles of good practice emerging from the theoretical literature on the contact hypothesis. They identified five categories with associated rationale, namely:

1. Key reconciliation bodies

Rationale: Public, voluntary or independent bodies set up with a specific community relations or reconciliation brief, with the aim of improving intergroup awareness and fostering respect.

2. Community, economic development and community relations

Rationale: Organisations, agencies and projects established originally with a community development brief, now incorporating a community relations agenda.

3. Cultural Traditions

Rationale: Bodies involved in the support of language and history as a means of promoting mutual respect and understanding of diverse cultures; both single-identity and cross-community in nature.

4. Education, training and personal development

Rationale: Projects, programmes or bodies with an education, training, personal development or information gathering remit, some of which have a community relations component.

5. Reactive community relations

Rationale: Organisations established in response to specific paramilitary atrocities and in support of a public mood towards peace and reconciliation.

In a review of community relations practice a year later, Hughes and Carmichael (1998) reiterated the above classifications, but added a sixth category, namely:

6. High Profile community relations

Projects included in this category were described as 'large-scale events often organised to engender 'first time' contact between Protestants and Catholics. The nature of the encounter tends to be largely superficial with little or no interaction between the participants.'
It is projects in this category which are often the target of criticism for their lack of quality contact and limited impact.

[1] Now known at as Community Relations Unit and located within OFMDFM

In 2001, Deloitte & Touche were commissioned to review the work of projects funded under the Peace and Reconciliation funding criteria. In their report on *The Work of EU Funded Groups Supported by the Community Relations Council* they developed a time-line typology for measuring community relations work, which integrated a categorisation of projects with their various stages of development. This timeline acknowledged the part played by 'single-identity' work in the early stages of development, but regards this as a stage in the ultimate goal of sustained cross-community activities. Diagrammatically, the timeline typology was seen as a linear progression. (Quirk et al, 2001:10)

● **Deloitte & Touche Time Line Typology**

Single Identity ——————————————————→ **Cross Community**

| Needs Analysis | → | Capacity Building | → | Political Education | → | Awareness Raising | → | Relationship Building | → | Sustaining CR |
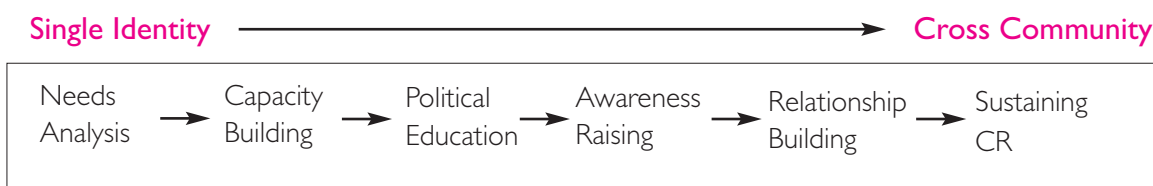
Focusing for now on the categories of projects, this typology identified six key types of work:

1. Needs Analysis
2. Capacity Building

These first two stages are largely single identity and community based in nature and are located in areas of low community relations capacity, high levels of social exclusion, political conflict and tension. Activities might include leadership development, information access and network building. Views outcome as: Increased understanding of local community and individual needs and increased capacity to undertake community relations work.

3. Political Education / Identity

This stage is viewed as equality focused and is based on a re-examination of political, social and economic structures with a view to empowering communities to address peacebuilding concerns at an individual and community level. While not directly about community relations in the sense of relationship-building, it contributes to the field by addressing social exclusion and inequality. This activity is generally single-identity in nature and activities may include exhibitions, discussion workshops, seminars on issue-based themes, such as history, human rights or cultural identity. Outcomes might include increased confidence or a sense of empowerment within a community.

4. Awareness Raising

The stage of awareness raising is defined as work which aims to promote awareness and understanding of, and respect for, religious, political and social cultures. These may be one-off projects designed to instruct or educate and might be delivered as workshops, seminars or training programmes, or developmental projects where community groups and organisations arrive at a better understanding not only of their own cultures but of others over a longer period. Much of this work may be single-identity in nature, but there are possibilities for cross-community working.

Outcomes might include greater awareness of equality and community relations issues or the development of networks which can facilitate the long-term sustainability of relationships established.

5. Relationship Building
The defining characteristic of this stage is that of relationship building in a cross-community setting. The first of two levels involves the use of common interest issues and community development themes to build bridges between communities. The second level approach involves activities which clearly set out to address community division and political conflict and address 'hard' issues of contention between communities.

6. Sustaining Relations
The final stage is strategic in nature and involves the establishment of sustainable relationships between divided communities by pro-actively addressing issues of mutual concern in a strategic and co-ordinated fashion. Types of activity in this category might include the development of partnerships and alliances within a geographical area at a community level to maximise the potential to address common issues.

• Belfast City Council Typology

Before returning to the development of matrices based on type of activity and stage of development, it is worth acknowledging a final typology of community relations work developed for Belfast City Council. The 2006 *Good Relations Audit for Belfast*, commissioned by Belfast City Council and the Community Relations Council, presents a typology of community relations work which had been developed in order to categorise the types of activities currently being undertaken by community-based groups in Belfast. This typology was based on classifications previously mentioned and enhanced to reflect the types of work currently being funded by the Belfast City Council Good Relations Grant Programme and the Community Relations Council, amongst others, and the outcome of informal interviews with key players on the field of community relations work in the city. Eight categories were identified, namely:

- Intra-community activities
- Cross-community activities
- Minority ethnic groups and issues
- Peace-building
- Mediation
- Addressing sectarianism
- Tackling racism
- Cultural diversity

In addition, a variety of methods in such good relations work was detailed, namely:

- Encouraging debate and discussion
- Addressing questions of marginalisation
- Engaging in discussion with the other side
- Engaging in mediation or conflict resolution
- Directly challenging stereotypes
- Examining different cultural traditions
- Directly addressing the legacy of the conflict
- Promoting specific programmes to achieve peace
- Creating alternatives to violence
- Intervening directly during times of inter-community tension
- Providing training in skills for conflict resolution (Morrissey, 2006:18).

A Word on Single-Identity Work

As can be seen from the above typologies, all categorisations make direct reference to the use of single-identity work within the broader field of community relations activities. Over the past decades, a significant proportion of community relations practice in Northern Ireland has focused on so-called 'single-identity work'. Hughes and Donnelly suggest that 'intra-community relations work' is a more meaningful phrase than 'single identity work' as it 'more accurately describes the nature of the work being undertaken.' They go on to say that "'identity' is complex and multi-faceted and the term 'single identity' disguises the multi-dimensional characteristic of cultural identity' (Hughes and Donnelly 1998:83). Church and Visser (2002) identify a number of reasons why a group might choose to engage in single identity work, including

- The only way to engage
- Represents minimum engagement
- Response to a request
- Confidence building
- Hope that it will lead to cross community engagement.

Advocates of single-identity work underline its importance in allowing groups to come to a strong sense of their own identity and opinions and to get to know and build trust with members of their own community before contact and engagement with others. According to the INCORE report on the topic, 'Single identity work, in a community relations context, aims at creating a situation where such cross-community contact can be initiated and can be both meaningful and valuable' (Church & Visser, 2002:8). Cross-community contact may not always be a viable option in some contexts for a variety of reasons, including fear, insecurity, lack of confidence or capacity and the nature of the issue. Those advocating intra-community work argue that a community needs to 'know' itself before you can reach out to others and it

is a useful pre-requisite to inter-community engagement. Those with reservations about the practice argue that it can solidify differences and does not enable groups to move to the next level. In a review of the contribution of community relations projects funded by the CCRU. Hughes & Knox observed:

> Ideally, when a group has not previously engaged in contact work, but is committed to doing so, it is important to address expectation states. This is best done at an intragroup level through single identity projects, where fears and prejudices can be addressed in a safe environment prior to contact (Hughes & Knox, 1997:353).
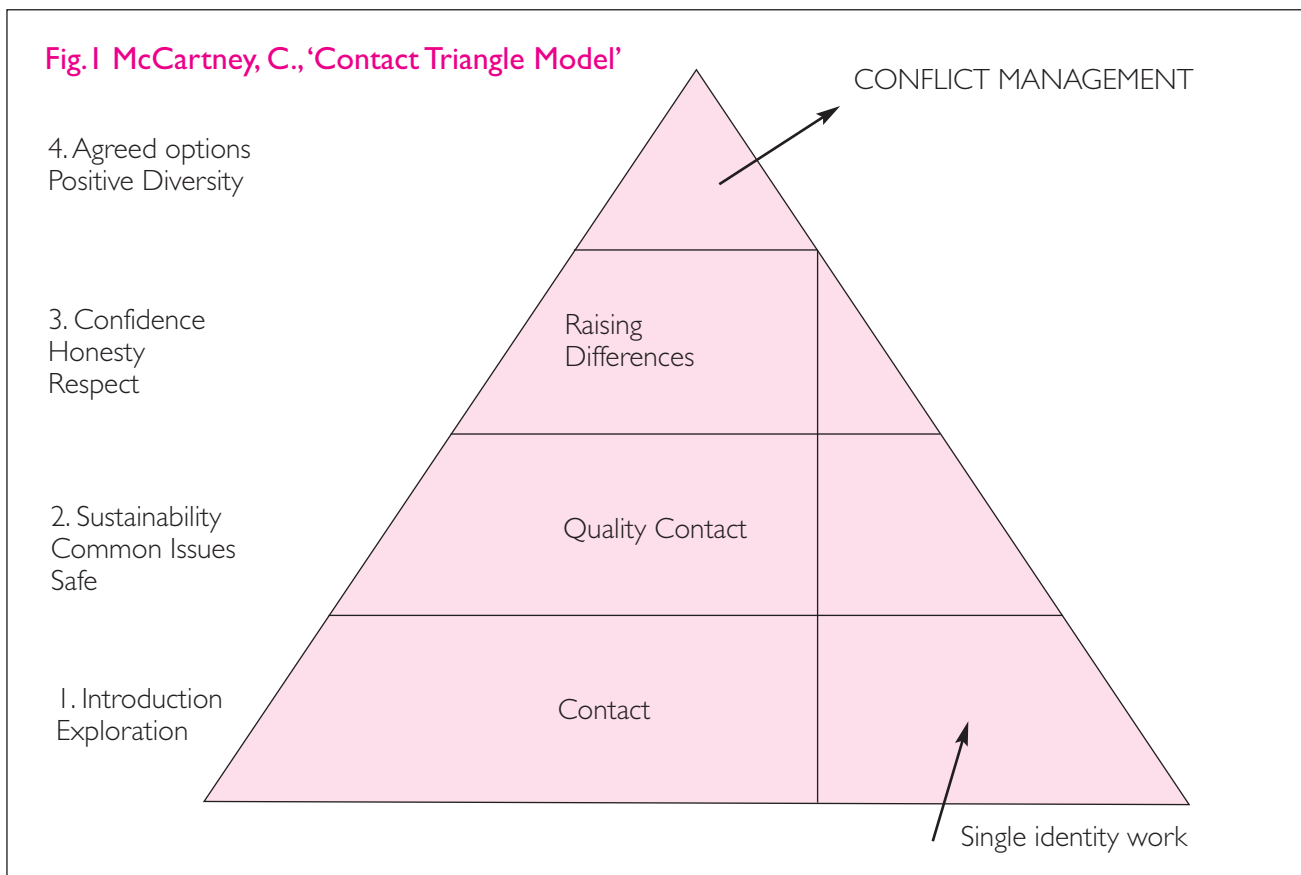
The Community Relations Council (2003) also placed single-identity work in the context of inter-community engagement, stating that:

> Provided single-identity work is clear and unambiguously part of a project which recognises our shared future, good single-identity work can be good community relations work. It can only ever be part of a journey, however. In the end, all groups in a shared society must contribute to an inter-cultural whole (CRC, 2003, p15).

Although there has been a movement away from funding of some forms of single-identity work, there is little doubt that it will remain an element of good relations as individuals and communities seek to gain confidence and trust before reaching out.

Levels of Engagement

Having assessed the number of typologies which exist to classify the types of community and good relations work being undertaken in Northern Ireland, it is worth detailing studies which have explored the levels or stages of engagement between previously disconnected communities.

Fig.1 McCartney, C., 'Contact Triangle Model'

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

4. Agreed options
Positive Diversity

3. Confidence
Honesty
Respect

2. Sustainability
Common Issues
Safe

1. Introduction
Exploration

Raising Differences

Quality Contact

Contact

Single identity work

Conflict Triangle

In the early 1990s, Clem McCartney (Lampen (1995:5); Church & Visser (2002:13); Hughes & Knox (1997:337)) suggested a model which aimed to represent the potential for dialogue and engagement with various groups diagrammatically in the form of a 'conflict triangle' (see Fig.1 above) The form of the model suggests that contact can be progressive and built upon in stages. He suggested that there are four levels of contact work, ranging from the basic level at the bottom of the triangle to advanced at the peak and that progression from one level to another is conditional on having satisfied the contact requirements of the previous level. Not all activities or projects have to start at the first level, but they must be in a position to address the more challenging issues which each level brings. Taking them in stages, McCartney explained the elements of each level of contact and engagement:

Level One: Contact: Basic, introductory, non-threatening discussions; exploratory contact.

Level Two: Quality Contact: Contact in which issues of common concern are discussed in a safe environment; more sustainable in nature.

Level Three: Raising Differences: Contact in which divisive or controversial issues can be discussed in an atmosphere of trust, mutual respect and confidence.

Level Four: Conflict Management: Contact in which groups can build on respect for cultural diversity in order to address macro-level issues such as conflict and segregation.

One additional aspect of the 'contact triangle' is the indication that a percentage of the first three levels of the model will be single-identity in nature. However, as progress is made through these levels the single-identity work becomes less important and is replaced by quality inter-community contact work.

• Deloitte & Touche Timeline Typology

As previously outlined, Deloitte & Touche developed a typology of groups which also indicated a developmental or time-line element for measuring community relations work – a continuum on which progress towards meaningful inter-community engagement and the development of sustainable relationships could be observed. This continuum provided funders, evaluators and community groups themselves, the opportunity to plot where they currently are in relation to community relations work, where they wished to go, and the methods or interventions which they might adopt to get them to this point.

Criticism of this model has focused on its linear nature, which may not fully capture the multi-dimensional nature of the context in which the project is set and the many diverse elements involved. Community relations work has rarely taken on the form of a logical progression and communities may go backwards as well as forwards along the continuum depending on their own situation and the changing environment which surrounds them.

• Community Relations Council

In its short document '*Community relations: a brief guide*' the Council identifies three types of community relations practice, namely:

• Single Identity Work,

It aims to increase confidence within a community so that people are better able to define their identity and needs in relation to others. Community relations work of this type should challenge long-held, unquestioned stereotypes which may no longer fit within that community and should open up channels of communication within communities and between communities.

• Cross-community work

Cross-community work involves bringing together groups/individuals from varying communities (be they religious/political) to engage with each other at a level which openly challenges perceptions, develops understanding, encourages meaningful dialogue and sustainable relationships based on the principles of equity, respect for diversity and interdependence.

• Cultural Diversity work

Cultural diversity work recognises the many diverse roles we play in our lives. It promotes difference and builds confidence to embrace our diversity and so adds to the richness of our society.

In assessing small grants, the Community Relations Council assesses the level of engagement at which a group or community currently stands, and what it wishes to achieve, based on a similar model. This model notes a progression in activity from single identity work, to cross-community work to community relations work, which it views as the active engagement with difficult issues, the opening up of spaces where new conversations can occur and the increased recognition and acceptance of the positions and perspectives of others.[2]

Towards a model for measuring levels of engagement

Based on the body of existing theoretical and practical material indicated previously, it was suggested that a model to assist in the funding decisions and later monitoring and evaluation of grant aid programmes for good relations work might usefully be developed. Essentially, what any funding body wishes is for a programme or project to demonstrate how it is contributing to the progression of practice along a continuum, which may begin as single-identity in nature,

[2]From interview with Paul Jordan, Community Relations Council.

inward-looking, lacking in trust or understanding of others, to a context in which communities are actively and confidently seeking out and engaging with others and having new and challenging conversations with those representing other traditions, cultures or beliefs.

Given the criticism of more linear models which plot either the type of activity or the level of engagement separately, it is proposed that a more two-dimensional model be created which could incorporate both aspects and offers the opportunity to plot progression from one position to another over time.

Engagement may take a range of forms and approaches depending on the context, the level of previous contact and engagement and methodology used. These approaches could be defined as the **activity** aspect and plotted on a line graph on the vertical axis. Along a continuum of progress, activities may begin and develop thus: [3]

• Intra-community capacity building
Prior to engagement, communities may need, or desire, to have time to explore their own view, positions and histories in order to build confidence and capacity to reach out to the 'other'.

• Passive or uni-directional contact
Passive or uni-directional contact refers to activities which involve one community offering information, insights or views of their own to another community. This might take the form of exhibitions, performances or lectures, where members of the 'other' community are the recipients of information, but there is no reciprocal exchange or dialogue between the communities. These may act as important 'first steps' in developing contact with other community by providing knowledge, dispelling myths or offering new insights.

• Reactive
These types of activities have been initiated as a reaction to particular negative events or to deal with worsening relations between communities. By their nature, these events are more spontaneous responses to unfolding events and more defensive than pro-active. They tend to be more concerned with restoring relationships to their pre-negative-experience state, rather than developing new or more significant relationships.

• Pro-active
Communities actively engage with each other for the direct purpose of dispelling myths and stereotypes, having new and challenging conversations and developing relationships for the stated purpose of contributing to good relations.

• Interactive or partnership working
Communities interact fully and collaborate together and sustainable structures are created in which multiple perspectives are represented. At some point these types of projects may no longer require funding from the same good relations sources.
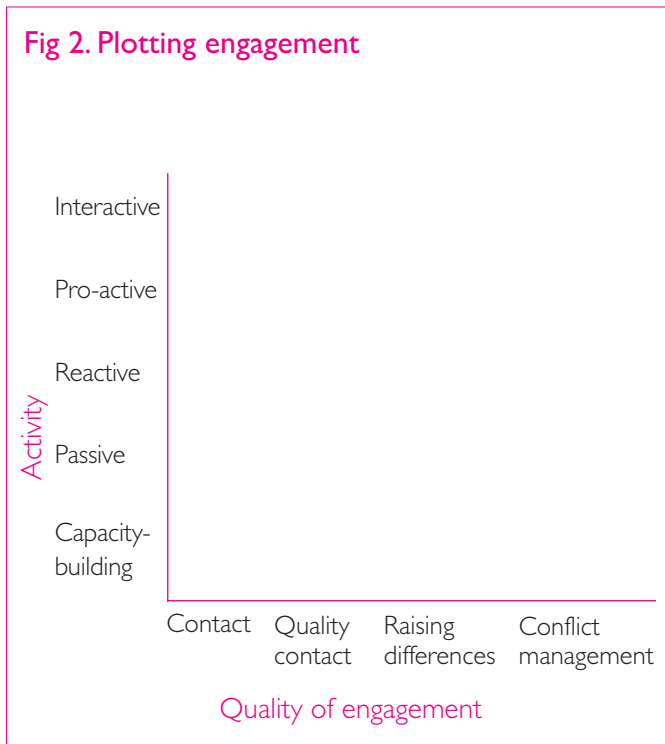
In order to gain a rounded picture of a proposed project, it is vital to have a sense of the **quality** of contact and engagement it is hoping to achieve. Clearly, this will be dependent on the existing level of contact, the confidence of the communities in the process and what the project is hoping to achieve. For this, McCartney's conflict triangle is informative and is represented on the horizontal axis of the graph (page 26).

Therefore, on a line graph, the developmental or incremental approaches to engagement can be plotted, depending on both the type of activity and the quality of contact.

[3] Adapted from Stuart Hashagen (2002) Models of community engagement, Scottish Community Development Centre, p5

Diagrammatically, this model may be presented thus:

Fig 2. Plotting engagement

Quality of engagement

(y-axis, labelled "Activity", top to bottom: Interactive, Pro-active, Reactive, Passive, Capacity-building; x-axis: Contact, Quality contact, Raising differences, Conflict management)

This model of engagement may prove helpful in the development of funding criteria to identify where a community or group currently is, what they are planning to do within their proposed project and where they hope to end up by the end of the project. It might also be helpful to monitor and evaluate how successful a given project is in achieving its objectives and planning for new initiatives.

5. Principles of Engagement

In a review of existing literature on both theory and practice of community relations and community engagement, the following set of principles have been compiled and proposed. These principles aim to inform good practice in the development of intra- and inter-community engagement initiatives and, when adopted by a project or programme, should form a solid foundation and value-base on which activities can confidently be implemented.

1. Fairness, equality and inclusion
The concepts of fairness, equality and inclusion must underpin all aspects of engagement and be reflected in both community engagement policies and the manner in which everyone involved is included and participates. Where possible, active steps should be taken to ensure that all who should be included, are included and equality and fairness afforded to all those involved.

2. Respecting and valuing diversity and difference
Community engagement activities should encourage and welcome a diversity of opinions and support communities in recognising the diversity within and between communities. Diversity should be recognised as an opportunity, rather than a threat and each individual's unique background, experiences and circumstances should be appreciated and positively valued, rather than merely tolerated.

3. Clear and agreed purposes
All engagement activities should have clear and agreed purposes, methods to realise these purposes and a clear commitment to their attainment. These should be based on an over-arching vision and a set of agreed values which underpin its contribution to the development of good relations.

4. Appropriateness

In initiating contact and engagement with 'other' communities, the most appropriate and suitable methods of engagement must be chosen to ensure the safety, trust and active participation of each individual involved. In good relations work, the process is often as important as the outcome. Approaches used in one setting should not be wholly transferred and imposed in another. Methods designed should ensure context-appropriate solutions and be 'fit for purpose'.

5. Challenging and progressive

Community engagement initiatives should be incremental in approach and have an integral challenge element to ensure progressive development. They should recognise the value of having new conversations, taking calculated risks and challenging existing divisions and boundaries, while continuing to ensure the safety and well-being of all involved.

6. Flexible

While clear purposes and appropriate methodologies are vital from the outset, community engagement initiatives should build in a degree of flexibility so as to be adaptable to changing circumstances.

7. Safety

All initiatives aimed at reaching out to other communities should ensure that measures have been put in place to ensure the physical and psychological safety, welfare and well-being of all involved.

8. Quality

Community engagement should have a depth and quality which allows for honest and meaningful dialogue, sustainable relations, collaborative working and the development of respect for others' values, beliefs, culture and traditions.

9. Sustainable

Engagement initiatives should be designed with the long-term objective of breaking down divisions between communities, developing sustainable structures which ensure long-term commitment and partnership working, within a supportive environment. A culture of informed and accountable decision-making should be developed, which will support individuals and communities to have the skills and confidence to build and maintain contact with 'others' and devise structures that enable communities to participate in initiatives effectively.

10. Reflective Practice

Improving the quality of contact and engagement requires commitment to learning from experience for continuous improvement, providing feedback to all involved and sharing good practice.

In summary, these principles highlight the importance of equity, diversity and interdependence within, and between, communities. They emphasise the importance of devising clear, appropriate, effective and flexible approaches to engagement, whereby differences are respected and embraced. They highlight the necessity of long-term commitment to collaborative working, the development of sustainable structures which will embed good relations and underline the importance of reflective practice to ensure continuous improvement and dissemination of good practice in good relations work.

6. Guidelines for Good Practice in Engagement

The following guidelines have been devised, based on the premise that a decision has previously been reached by a group, organisation or community that they wish to initiate contact and develop engagement with other communities for the purposes of building relationships and ultimately contributing to good relations in their locality, region or in Northern Ireland more generally.

There is no one 'right way' or 'best method' for undertaking this challenging work. The approaches chosen depend on the particular circumstances at play and on what is hoped to be achieved from the process. For some organisations, community engagement activities may be undertaken as one-off or ad-hoc events aimed at making initial contact between deeply divided communities. For others it may be a project devised in reaction to worsening relations between communities as a result of tensions, confrontation or violence. Another scenario might involve the engagement of two communities who have no previous experience of contact. Engagement might represent a new area of focus for an existing organisation or it could represent the core purpose of an organisation and its reason for existence. In some instances it may be one community *seeking out* contact and engagement with an 'other' group. In other cases, it may be a third party who is seeking to initiate contact between communities and acting as a mediator of these delicate relationships. The possibilities are endless.

Whatever the scenario, when undertaking community engagement work, it is important to have a comprehensive strategy in place from the outset. The local context in which engagement takes place is of central importance and it imperative that an in-depth understanding of the participants, the context and the objectives is known or undertaken, in addition to an assessment of the techniques, methods and supports needed for each particular initiative. There should be clarity in relation to those you wish to engage with, the

issues you wish to address and the timescale for carrying out the activity or series of activities. Consideration must be given for the most appropriate methods to be used, taking into account what you wish to achieve and who you wish to involve. In addition, the costs and amount of time needed must be detailed from the outset.

These guidelines are not intended as a step-by-step approach to intra- or inter-community engagement, to be followed rigidly. They are neither exhaustive nor definitive and should, at all times, be adapted to the context under consideration and viewed as enabling rather than enforcing. In each case, useful questions are detailed which should be given consideration and a range of suggestions offered which may be helpful to consider in the planning, implementation and evaluation stages of the process.

1. PLANNING FOR ENGAGEMENT

Before embarking on any activity or project which aims to develop contact and engagement with communities representing other cultures, traditions or beliefs, detailed and forward planning must be undertaken to ensure the organisation and all those involved have a clear understanding of what is involved and have the capacity to deliver on it. The preparatory stages are of the utmost importance and can take up a significant percentage of the overall programme time. If engagement is attempted without having fully explored the situation and prepared the ground, the effort may be ill-timed and bear no fruit. An ill-prepared initiative, albeit with laudable goals can unwittingly reinforce stereotypes, deepen divisions, intensify distrust, and even provoke violence. Participants who have had a bad experience may vow to avoid future contact and damage may be hard to repair. There are a number of areas which require particular consideration.

1.1 Defining Overall Vision and Purpose

The first crucial step in developing any activity, whether simple or elaborate in design, is to define the overall vision of the project from the outset. It is only from this solid foundation that the detail of the objectives, methodology and activities can be devised. Articulating the vision of the project gives it coherence, allows potential funders to understand the proposal, ensures all those implementing the project are in agreement with regard to direction and potential participants have information on what is being devised. If the purpose of engagement is not carefully and explicitly defined at this stage, potential participants will be unable to make an informed choice about their involvement. Relevant questions which might assist in the development of the project vision include:

- What is the overall vision of the implementing organisation and project?
- How do we wish to contribute to good relations in Northern Ireland?
- Who can assist in the development of the overall vision for the project?
- What individuals and communities or groups do we wish to work with?
- What are the issues which require attention?
- Can the vision be translated into a series of achievable long and short-term aims, objectives and actions?
- How can the vision be explained in a way which is clear for all currently or potentially involved?
- How can support for this vision be garnered?
- Are there aspects of the project's purpose which should remain undisclosed? Are you clear why this is necessary? What are the potential difficulties with this approach?

Actions which may be worth considering during the visioning of the project phase might include:

- Identify the key stakeholders who will be involved or affected by the project.
- In so far as is possible, consult all those you can during the development of the vision and purpose.
- Discuss the proposed vision with key stakeholders including potential funders, key community leaders, project leaders, Good Relations Officers and any others who might assist during the planning stages.
- Engage outside facilitators to assist in defining the vision and purpose of the project.
- Draw up an accessible document which sets out the vision and purpose of the project in clear and precise terms.
- Within the vision of the project, allow for changes in focus or adaptability.
- Consider ways of generating ownership of the vision among all key stakeholders.

1.2   Reviewing Internal Structures and Policies

During the preparatory stages, the initiating organisation(s) and relevant participating partners should examine their internal structures and policies to ensure that they have the appropriate policies and practices, capacity and commitment to manifest and support the vision of the project, undertake its practical implementation and bring it to a successful conclusion, if necessary. While completing this internal organisational audit, pertinent questions which should be asked by each group or organisation involved include:

- What is the organisation's overall strategic vision and main aims? Does it have a mission statement?
- Where does community and good relations work currently feature within the organisation? Is it a core activity? Is this a new area under consideration for the organisation? If so, does the organisation need to change its mission or emphasis?
- What is the organisation's current position in

relation to engagement with 'other' communities?

- How does the group or organisation *currently* outreach and engage with others?
- Where would it like to move to in terms of intra- and inter-community engagement in the future?
- If embarking on engagement-type activities, what policies or core values need to be revisited within the organisation?
- What is the current make-up of the organisation or group (including staff, board, members)? Is it relevant to the project or activity you are going to undertake? Are there actions which should be taken to address imbalances identified?
- Does the organisation have the relevant structures and internal capacity to support the vision of the project and to undertake the work?
- Are all staff, volunteers and board members on board with the community relations policies and objectives? Are their gaps in knowledge in relation to the community you wish to engage with? If so, how will these be addressed?

In order to ensure that the implementing organisations are prepared to undertake a good relations project with a community engagement element, a number of actions might be considered:

- Undertake an internal audit of the organisation to determine its policies and practices with regard to good relations.
- Explore the possibility that the original vision and aims of the organisation require revision or refinement on the basis of its new commitment to engagement. As an organisation grows and changes its focus, the structures and constitution may need to change.
- Develop a 'good relations charter', 'vision statement', 'framework for action' or other relevant document which establishes the values underpinning the organisation's work on good relations.
- Identify any training needs which may be required

for those involved in the delivery of the project.

- Using a consultative process within the organisation and with key stakeholders, draw up a specific policy or commitment with regard to community engagement and define how the policy relates to the organisation's overall vision and practices.
- Communicate the engagement policy and plan throughout the organisation to ensure support for any changes undertaken.
- Devise a strategy which ensures the development of a wider constituency base to support this vision.

1.3   Reviewing External Context

Before initiating a community engagement project, whether intra-community or inter-community, it is essential that the external context in which it is located is taken into consideration. This will necessitate not only an examination of the context, capacity, needs and interests of those directly involved in the project, but also the wider community which surrounds and influences it. By neglecting this stage, or assuming, rather than confirming information, you run the risk of the project falling at the first hurdle. In the case of groups or organisations which are single-identity in nature or traditionally address the needs of a specific group or community, they must ensure they have a clear understanding of their **own community** and assess the reaction to any inter-community engagement which might be proposed. This is not to suggest that a project should not go ahead if there is internal opposition, but that having an awareness of the views of a community ensures that possible resistance is acknowledged and addressed from the outset. Opposition to inter-community projects may arise as a result of misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the project objectives, rather than opposition to the idea *per se*. Sometimes a small adjustment in approach, without any surrender of principle, can defuse potential opposition (Lampen, 1995:12).

When engaging with the 'other' for the purpose of improving relationships, it is equally important to assess their interest from the outset. This ideally would include both the sub-section with which you will be directly involved, and the wider constituency of which this sub-section belongs. Again, this is not to suggest that any opposition from these communities should result in an abandonment of the project but that the more information you have on the community and any potential concerns they may have, the greater the possibility of ensuring a more successful project in the long term.

How thoroughly you will need to map the situation will depend on many factors, including:
- How much you already know about the community or situation.
- How emotionally charged the divisions are
- How complex the situation is
- How high the stakes are
- How much the community members believe you understand them.

Questions which may arise in relation to both your 'own' and 'other' communities include:

- What information do we need to obtain about the communities we wish to engage with, in order to ensure maximum success for the project?
- How can we access this information and community knowledge?
- How can we ensure we have obtained all relevant information?
- Who within the community, or with knowledge of the community, might usefully assist in providing this information?
- How can we elicit their support or opinions?
- What ideas do they have about what should be planned and who should be involved in planning or convening the project?
- What divisions or cleavages exist within and

between the relevant communities involved?
- How can I determine if conditions are ripe for engagement?
- Does this situation contain conditions that are likely to sustain meaningful engagement?
- Are there times of year or particular events which might spark or result in increased tensions within or between communities?
- Do the communities involved have the capacity to engage across the divide at this time? How will we know this to be true?

In developing this knowledge of the communities you could consider the following activities:

- Map the social, economic and demographic characteristics of an area or community, including ethnicity, faith, age.
- Draw on other statistical information from sources such as local councils, research studies, police statistics.
- Identify the range of organisations working with this community, including other community relations focused projects and map any previous engagement initiatives which are relevant, exploring their successes and failures.
- Identify common needs or issues between communities which may provide a focus for engagement.
- Seek input from people who are likely to have varied perspectives on the potential benefits and risks of engaging particular communities. Talk with community leaders and others who may need or wish to be involved in planning or implementation of the project or who may otherwise be in a good position to support the effort in other ways.
- Conduct both formal and informal discussions with prominent members of the community and aim to secure their support for the project. This might include elected representatives and community leaders. This may assist in providing a 'seal of

approval' or giving confidence to others to engage.

- If a community leader or member expresses reluctance to be involved, explore whether this should be viewed as a caution about proceeding, or just as an indication of limited personal interest.
- Keep lines of dialogue and communication open with all key informants for the duration of the project.
- Be aware that a small number of local people nearly always dominate community involvement and can deter others from taking part ('gatekeepers'). Develop a strategy for addressing this issue effectively.
- Be aware of external events which may have an impact on the success of any initiative. If the community is preoccupied with difficult decisions, traumatic events, or unrelated controversies, participants may have a hard time staying focused on the topic and goals of the process. In this case, it may be best to wait or to refocus the project on what is more likely to be acceptable.

1.4 Developing Appropriate Methodology

Before agreeing on a methodology, it is essential to define what it is you wish to achieve, who you wish to work with and what issues you wish to address. In doing so, the most appropriate methodology will become more apparent and can be devised and tailored accordingly. There are a myriad of methodologies which can be adopted. These can range from public discussions with a panel of speakers from different backgrounds, private meetings on issues of mutual concern, facilitated private discussions, educational residentials, community group twinning, inter-church forums, network building or festival events. What is clear is that whatever methodology is chosen should be appropriate and acceptable to all communities involved. Relevant questions to be asked during these planning stages include:

- What type of engagement are we hoping for?

- What do we wish to achieve in practical terms?
- What issues do we wish to focus on and address?
- Are these the same issues which the 'other' community wishes to address?
- Who do we wish to involve? How many do we wish to participate in the project? Is the chosen methodology capable of attending to such numbers?
- What is the capacity of those involved in the project?
- How can we maximise our existing resources and skills?
- Is additional training provision needed?
- Do we need outside facilitators?
- What is the degree of difficulty involved?
- Are the available human and material resources sufficient to match the known challenges and constraints?
- Is this methodology conducive to the maintenance of engagement? (if this is an inter-community training programme, are there opportunities for the participants to meet after the training is completed?) If not, how can we make it so?
- Is the methodology adaptable to different participants?
- Is the methodology flexible during the delivery stage of the programme?

Actions to consider:
- Map at which stage of development the communities you wish to engage are and assess their willingness and readiness to engage.
- Design a methodology according to this information, the local context and what you wish to achieve.
- Design the programme of activities, building in flexibility to accommodate change.
- Consider running a pilot session or project if possible, to test the appropriateness of the methodology.
- Ensure all those involved in the delivery stages are sufficiently trained and experienced to deliver their tasks.
- Document the stages of the methodology chosen to ensure transferability to others, if necessary.

1.5 Planning Activities and Milestones

Having agreed the overall goals and objectives of the project and the methodology to be employed, an overall plan of action with sets of activities and related milestones should be devised. A well-planned programme sets you up for a good start. Programme planning should include preparation of the programme of activities, a timeline of work and budgetary requirements, establishment of a baseline and determining relevant indicators for measurement later, and development of mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating success or failure. In designing the overall plan for the project, including all associated activities and intermittent milestones to be achieved, questions which might be helpful include:

- How do you transform the overall vision of the project into long-term (strategic) and short-term (operational) objectives?
- How are these transferred into associated activities?
- What is the overall timeframe for the project?
- How long will each associated activity or task take?
- Who will undertake, manage and take responsibility for each task?
- What issues require prioritisation?
- Have you built in contingency plans in case of changes?
- Is there a need to build in milestones, which can offer natural reflection points and assist with monitoring of success, failures and needs for readjustment?

Actions which may be considered appropriate during this stage include:
- Draw up a project implementation plan. This might include:
  - A list of actions and targets for each project;
  - Individual responsibilities for actions;
  - Key milestones in achieving goals;
  - Resource allocation;
  - How each action / project relates back to the overall vision of the organisation.
- Establish the clear parameters of the project. Ensure a clear understanding of what the programme will look like and what it will achieve.
- Make sure this understanding is passed on to all those involved.
- Build in 'reality checks' into the project of activities which can be used to amend the programme, validate the approach or change direction.

1.6 Identifying Potential Barriers to Engagement

When planning initial contact between communities which have previously experienced tensions, prejudices or feelings of mistrust, it is essential that the early developmental stages include a process by which potential barriers to constructive engagement are identified. These barriers may be physical, linguistic, educational or financial in nature and, therefore, more straightforwardly addressed given time, resources and knowledge. They may be more psychological or ideological in nature and, therefore, more challenging to address. However, if identified early, concerted efforts can be made to successfully tackle barriers as they arise. Questions to be addressed might include:

- What hopes or goals might motivate potential participants to engage with the other?
- What would they hope to experience or learn that would be worth their time and effort?
- Do they foresee risks in making the attempt?
- What are the potential *practical* barriers to engagement?
- Does the venue for activities provide a barrier to participation for individuals or groups?
- Are there emblems or symbols in use or on display which may cause offence or discomfort?
- Are all materials used in relation to the project written in a language that all people can understand?

Will translation be needed during periods of contact between communities?

- What other cultural issues might require attention? For example timing of events, food or drinks served, gender issues.
- What are the potential psychological barriers to engagement (fears, prejudices, culture, religious beliefs)? How can these be successfully addressed?
- Are there topics which are particularly sensitive to those potential participants which may need to be avoided, treated sensitively or named from the outset?
- Who might we need to engage or collaborate with in order to identify what these potential barriers might be?

Actions to be considered might include:

- Create a mechanism through the internal project management structures through which barriers can be identified.
- Identify and read relevant literature and information on the communities you wish to engage in order to understand potential barriers they may face.
- Identify individuals within the communities you wish to engage with who can advise you as to potential barriers to engagement.
- Discuss any religious or cultural practices which might be barriers to engagement with relevant church or community leaders.
- Call on the expertise of Good Relations Officers, cultural diversity and community relations practitioners to draw on their knowledge and experience of working with a relevant community or group.

1.7 Developing Programme Management Structures

Prior to initiating engagement, consideration should be given to how the project is directed and managed on a day-to-day basis. The degree of sophistication of the programme design and its associated budget will indicate the type of management structure which may be required to address all practical and financial aspects of the project. In the case of a complex structure involving several project partners, each may be required to take on a specific role in relation to the delivery and management of the project. The structure may be pre-existing or newly developed for the purposes of a particular initiative. Whatever structure is developed it must be 'fit for purpose' and have all of the relevant policies and practices in place to ensure maximum management efficiency. Questions related to programme management may include:

- Does the current organisation or structure have the capacity to ensure efficient delivery of the project?
- Who holds financial accountability for the project? Are all practical auditing requirements in place?
- Who reports to the board on project progress? To the funders?
- Is there appropriate staffing of the project? Are new positions required? Do we have appropriate mechanisms for recruitment?
- Is there a need to recruit volunteers?
- Who will line manage any outside practitioners who are engaged?
- Who will drive the good relations agenda of the project?
- Are all appropriate legislative requirements in place with regard to, for example, Health and Safety, Child Protection (if appropriate)?

Actions to be considered might include:

- Determine arrangements for management and financial accountability from the outset.
- Organise a facilitated discussion with management, staff and other project implementers to discuss any issues or concerns around the management or implementation of the project.
- Develop agreed chains of command and reporting

to the internal management structures.

- Ensure that all appropriate legal requirements with regard to, for example, Health and Safety, Child Protection have been addressed.
- Conduct an audit of the skills base within the organisation including staff and volunteers, identify any gaps in training or skills development with those involved and explore ways to address this gap. This may require the securing of additional funding in advance of project implementation.
- Ensure that there is a clear understanding of what the programme or project will look like and aims to achieve and that this is clearly communicated to all involved.
- Explore the possibility of all staff and volunteers involved in the project signing up to a good relations commitment.
- Resource all activities, including identification of funding avenues for current and potential follow-on projects.
- Plan in advance for the financial sustainability of the project or programme.
- Develop working relationships with partners and define what their specific role and contribution will be.
- Document evidence of attempts at engagement, if appropriate.

2. ESTABLISHING CONTACT

Having completed the initial preparatory phase, which involves the agreeing of aims and objectives, needs and purposes, methodological approach and project management strategy, the next stage is to establish contact with the individuals, groups or communities with whom you wish to foster relations. This second stage will look different for each project undertaken – in some instances this will be a very straightforward process of contacting another organisation and assessing their interest. For others this will be the most

challenging part of the process and may require significant time and effort, in order to build the trust and confidence of participating individuals in wishing to engage with the 'other'. Each project should be mindful of their initial objectives, how far they envisage this contact being developed and what quality of engagement they are ultimately aiming to achieve. There are a number of areas to consider during this contact development stage.

2.1 Adopt appropriate technique

Depending on the project methodology, the target audience and existing levels of contact, a range of techniques to attract and secure participation might be considered. Techniques vary from public advertising of the project directed at a target community to one-on-one private discussions with key community leaders as a first point of access into the community. Each technique of extending invitations to engaging participants has certain advantages. For example, written invitations ensure that all who are invited have received the same information and they can refer back to it later. Calling people by phone or talking with them in person gives you an opportunity to hear about their hopes and concerns and respond to their questions. Public invitations sent through existing networks, or through appropriate media, ensure a broad range of individuals are targeted. Whatever methods you use, the goal should be to ensure that participants accept the invitation only if they understand what it is they are being invited to (and what it is *not*), and accept the invitation freely, with no pressure.

Questions to consider include:
- What are the most appropriate tools of communication?
- What might be a useful first stage of contact which may lead to more significant engagement later? Is there an incremental approach which

might be adopted?

- What fears might individuals and communities have about their participation?
- Who should be involved?
- How are messages normally transmitted to target communities?
- Is the project open to all or by invitation only?
- What method will be used to secure participation in the event, project or initiative?
- Should a variety of methods be adopted to ensure broad participation?
- Do we need to compile an invitation list? If so, how?
- How can we ensure the right people will be invited?
- Who publicly invites or convenes the project?
- What needs to be communicated in the invitation to participants about project objectives and what will be asked of them?

Actions to be considered might include:

- Identify a limited number of key individuals from within the community who can act as key contact points and articulate a broad range of perspectives and views. Engage with credible people. Seek advice from relevant personnel, including Good Relations Officers, church leaders, community workers, etc.
- Identify networks within other communities where information on a project or event can be widely disseminated.
- Secure the support of a range of community leaders who might consider co-convening the event or initiative. This can lend credibility to a project and ensure significant participation.
- Consider the use of intermediaries if there are reasons to assume that direct contact might be difficult.
- Acknowledge the diversity of local communities and develop both targeted and universal strategies to reach all members of the local community including traditionally 'hard to reach' groups such as women, young people, people with a disability and members of minority ethnic groups

- Make efforts to understand the dynamics of the community with which you wish to make contact and engage. This includes an in-depth understanding of the cleavages which might exist within communities. It is important not to make assumptions but to deal with factual information.
- Do not make assumptions about the homogeneity of communities or assume they all have the same needs.
- Utilise and build upon existing channels and contacts. Contacts which are no more than friendly may prove important because of later events (Lampen, 1995:18).
- Consider the use of a more neutral or less contentious issue to begin first points of contact which can be built upon.

2.2 Address potential barriers to engagement

To maximise the potential for quality contact, any barriers to engagement (previously identified in the planning stages) which can be addressed, should be addressed. These may be of a practical nature and addressed in a straight forward way (with the appropriate knowledge and resources), while more psychological barriers may require particular attention, time and skill. It is acknowledged that not all barriers to engagement can be addressed at any given time. However, projects should be in a position to demonstrate that efforts were made to ensure that maximum engagement was actively sought, within the parameters of the project itself. Bearing in mind the identification of barriers in the planning stages of the project, the following additional questions may be informative in addressing them;

- Have we identified all potential barriers to engagement?
- Have we taken all necessary steps to ensure maximum participation from target groups?

- Have we explored all possible avenues to eliminate barriers, given our time, resources and manpower?
- Are there ways we can measure the impact that any barrier may have had on an individual's/community's non-participation in the project?
- If we cannot fully address these barriers, are there ways in which we can limit their impact?

Actions to consider include:
- Have a pre-project meeting where issues relating to barriers can be aired and actions planned to address them.
- In relation to physical spaces, make all appropriate efforts to ensure that any venues or facilities used in the course of the project are deemed safe, open, appropriate and accessible to all participants. The physical appearance of a building, whether it is an office or community centre, conveys crucial messages about who should be there. Decorations and artefacts should ensure that the space is either neutral or incorporates symbols that are meaningful to all local communities. In particular, it is vital to avoid images that might be offensive to some or suggest that one section of the community predominates.
- Ensure that all participants are afforded an appropriate welcome to the venue used, particularly if it is one perceived to be 'partisan'.
- Consider providing transport to and from venues if there are concerns over the safety of the participants or their property travelling to, or while attending project events.
- Consider the use of translators and translated written materials if engaging with communities with linguistic needs.
- Check calendar for key festivals, fasts etc, particularly when working with faith groups. See www.bbc.co.uk/religion/calendar/index.shtml for a list of holy days and festivals during the course of the year. In addition to special events, be aware of participants' patterns of religious observance in normal circumstances.
- Consider the provision of childcare facilities to ensure participation from those with dependants
- Consult with relevant public officials, such as good relations officers, equality officers and those working on cultural traditions and diversity issues to ensure that there are no local issues or tensions you should be aware of.
- In all cases, consult with those who know the culture and traditions of that community and seek their advice and insights into how best to address any barriers to engagement.
- Create safe opportunities both at the initial stages and during the course of the project for participants to express any concerns or fears they have in relation to their participation in the project. This will ensure that issues are named and efforts made to address them as they arise.
- Establish a mechanism by which decisions can be taken with regard to the project if issues arise, such as external political events or local tensions or incidents.
- If contact is initiated by one community but not reciprocated, strive to discover why the approach or invitation was not accepted – it may not be for the reason you suspected.

2.3 Develop ground rules for engagement

Having addressed the practical considerations, it is important to clearly articulate ground rules for engagement. Ground rules can serve a number of purposes. They can discourage old ritualized patterns of communication, they can develop a respectful environment in which participants can explore new ways of exchanging ideas, views, and experiences and they can ensure the safety of all involved, inspire trust in the process and act as guidance for steps to be taken if breached. Ideally, ground rules should be developed through a negotiated process with all participants

involved. However, this is not always possible or appropriate and there may be a need for pre-agreed rules or principles, which underpin the work, to be developed by project co-ordinators. In either case, ground rules should be agreed by all relevant parties and included as a pre-condition of their involvement. Questions which might usefully be asked include:

- Who should devise the ground rules? Is this a collaborative effort?
- What form should the ground rules take?
- How will ground rules be shared with all?
- Who will ensure the ground rules are adhered to?
- What penalties (if any) arise for non-adherence to the ground rules?
- Is there provision for adding to or amending ground rules at any point?

Actions which might be considered in developing ground rules for engagement include:
- Agree a process whereby ground rules for engagement are developed.
- Consider who might usefully be involved in the development of the ground rules. Participants? Facilitators? Programme designers? Good Relations Officers? If there has been no opportunity for participants to have a hand in developing the ground rules before contact is initiated, they may not feel much ownership or commitment to the process.
- Allow sufficient time and resources for the development of the ground rules.
- Consider the most appropriate timing for introducing a discussion on ground rules. Prior to first stages of contact? On first occasion of contact? Later?
- Clarify level of confidentiality or publicity with regard to the project.
- Ensure that all participants understand the purpose of ground rules and the potential consequences of breaking rules for themselves and others.

- Potential ground rules might include:
  ○ Respect for people's opinions, even if they differ from your own.
  ○ Be prepared to listen as well as speak.
  ○ Adherence to the Chatham House Rule.[4]
  ○ Be clear as to whether an individual is speaking for him or herself or representing the views of a community or organisation.
  ○ Ability to withdraw at any time.
  ○ Agreeing a common language – clarifying language people may find offensive.

2.4 Develop an appropriate communication strategy

Agreement should be reached and a strategy devised to communicate the existence of the project and the nature of its activities to the wider public, if appropriate. The level and detail of information provided about the project is entirely dependent on the type of initiative being undertaken and the wishes of those involved. Some projects may wish to maximise their publicity in order to attract as many people as possible from targeted communities, while others may wish to maintain privacy and confidentiality with regard to engagement activities due to their sensitive nature or potential for disruption. The amount and type of information which is provided about the project may change over time, but it is imperative that agreement is reached on this issue at the outset in order to ensure the confidence, trust and safety of all involved.

Questions which might be considered in planning a communication strategy include:
- Do we wish to publicise the project in any manner?
- At what stage might we wish to publicise the project? At the beginning? During its execution? On completion? Never?
- Who do we wish to reach out to?
- If publicity is required, what techniques and media

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[4]The Chatham House Rule states that: "When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed."

should be utilised to ensure target communities are reached?

- Do we need to agree a confidentiality policy between all those directly involved in the project?
- What are the potential consequences of the wrong or too much information being given about the project or of the project's objectives being misunderstood or misconstrued?
- Do we have or need contingency plans in case information erroneously enters the public domain?
- How can we ensure that the aims of the project are not misinterpreted or misunderstood?
- Is there a specific budget line for communication and publicity?
- Should we engage with public relations professionals to ensure wide dissemination of information?

Actions to consider:

- Agree a media or communications strategy from the outset with all involved.
- Consider drawing up specific ground rules on communication and engagement with the media for the duration of the project.
- Engage media where appropriate. Work with media to keep them informed of the project and ensure their support. In this way, they are less likely to report on the project without prior agreement.
- If you **do** want to generate media interest, the Media Trust, a UK charity which works with the voluntary sector, has short and helpful guides for community groups in how to deal with the media, such as press release writing and generating local media coverage. www.mediatrust.org to access them online.

3. INITIATING ACTIONS

With the objectives set, methodology designed and resources secured, the next phase of the project is to implement the plan. With adequate pre-planning, this stage should ideally be straightforward and follow the structure and timeline previously developed. However, consideration should always be given to the possibility of change, challenges emerging or new directions taken. Questions which might usefully be considered to ensure successful delivery of the project include:

- Are all the logistical issues associated with the project in hand?
- Do we have adequate resources to implement the plan in full?
- Are contingency plans in place if issues arise, timings slip or unexpected events occur?
- Is everyone involved clear as to their roles and tasks and to whom they report?
- Have relevant mechanisms been put in place to ensure all involved are supported through challenging aspects of the programme?

Actions which might be worth considering include:

- Develop decision-making processes by which everyone feels they have been heard and actions can be taken quickly to address emerging issues.
- Develop support mechanisms for all those involved to ensure their safe participation in the process.
- Develop a monitoring process or 'environmental scan' whereby events external to the project are considered and any relevant action taken.

4. ENSURING LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

Effective good relations work is work which is incremental, cumulative and sustainable. Some good relations projects are, by their nature, one-off events but frequently this is due to capacity issues or funding restrictions, rather than choice. If the ultimate goal of engagement is the development of relationships which are so strong and durable that they transcend and withstand any tensions or challenges which may occur, then efforts must be made to ensure that projects develop to the point where they achieve their

objectives and cease to exist in this format. Ultimately, community engagement to promote good relations is work which is mainstreamed into all aspects of public and private life, resulting in the development of robust partnership working across pre-existing political, ideological, cultural and ethnic divisions. In order to ensure its long-term sustainability, questions which might usefully be asked include:

- If the project is currently designed as a one-off event or of limited duration, are there other ways we can develop follow-up activities to build on contact made?
- Are we doing all that we can to ensure that contacts made and relationships formed will continue beyond the existence of this project?
- Are we now ready to address more contentious issues?
- Are there other funding avenues which could be explored to maintain engagement?
- Is there a need for new structures to be formed which can ensure the sustainability of contact?
- Are there people from within the communities who might take responsibility for the maintenance of contact between communities?
- How can we ensure the engagement developed by those directly participating in the project can be cascaded out to the wider communities?

Issues to consider:
- Revisit the original aims and objectives throughout the life of the programme to make adaptations if necessary.
- Explore the potential for moving the process on to a new level of engagement with project participants.
- Establish effective ways of partnership working between statutory and non-statutory agencies and the local community to secure sustainability of the project.
- Offer training. Lampen wrote: "It is when a group want to move from one level of contact and communication to a more demanding one that

training is valuable… The feeling that the group is ready to work at a deeper level is usually accompanied by some anxiety; this helps them to recognise the need for training" (Lampen, 1994:28).
- Discuss future project plans with funding organisations to assess their interest and potential for further or new support and grant aid.

5. REFLECTING AND LEARNING

A vital aspect of any good relations project is the monitoring and evaluation of its outcome and impact, not only on its completion but at key points during its implementation. Evaluation should not be considered as an after-thought which aims to fulfil the grant requirements, but an integral part of the project itself and an indication of good practice and lesson-learning. Evaluation is important in assessing what did and did not work, extending involvement, participation and buy-in, identifying gaps, improving practice, uncovering unexpected results or consequences and consolidating achievements.

In terms of community engagement, it is important not only to evaluate a project on the basis of whether engagement took place or not or how many people it did engage, but on the *quality* of that engagement and changes which occurred in both attitudes and behaviours of those involved or affected. Monitoring and evaluation does not necessarily have to be a long and formalised process and should be tailored to suit the size and significance of the project with a specific context. That being said, it should be formally built in to the planning stages of the project so that baseline measures may be undertaken, indicators of change may be developed, interim monitoring undertaken and appropriate methodologies for evaluation agreed. In developing a monitoring and evaluation framework, questions which might be considered include:
- Can the evaluation be undertaken in-house or do

we need to engage an outside facilitator? Can we use a mixture of both internal and external evaluation?

- What methodologies will be used to effectively measure inputs, activities, outputs, but most importantly, outcomes and impact?
- What can we learn about the participants' experiences that will help us to improve our practice generally or better serve them in a next phase?
- How can we ensure the learning from the evaluation is fully integrated into the implementing group or organisation?
- How will we disseminate the learning from the evaluation to all relevant bodies?
- How will progress on any recommendations made during the evaluation be monitored and assessed in the future?
- What next steps, if any, should be taken, for example, plans for future events or communications?

Actions to consider:
- For effective measurement of success, ensure the project objectives are clearly defined, along with the desired outcomes and any assumptions being made about a particular context. Make the ultimate aim explicit and specific – but also challenging but manageable.
- Develop a series of relevant performance indicators from the outset and establish a baseline prior to implementation of the project.
- Use regular evaluation of the initiative as a tool to identify barriers to community involvement and actions to address these.
- Adopt multiple, meaningful measures. The measures selected should address the project as a whole, including the amount of activity for example, numbers attended but also perceptions of the outputs and data about response or long term change. In relation to community engagement, simply counting the numbers of participants

involved tells you little about the quality of engagement, or the barriers which individuals had to overcome or the risks they took for the desired outcome to be achieved.

- Aim to address the five key measures of evaluation and use appropriate techniques to collect relevant data. It is important to make use of both qualitative and quantitative results. These five measures are:
  ○ *Inputs:* How much resource was invested in the project (financial, time, manpower)?
  ○ *Activities:* What happened in the course of the project?
  ○ *Outputs:* What did the activities produce, and how much and how many? Who took part?
  ○ *Outcomes:* What happened as a result? What direct response was there?
  ○ Impact: What changed in the community following the activity? How much is attributable to the project?
- Organise a designed time (maybe a morning, a full day) where those involved in the project can discuss the project and reflect on the learning.
- Consider the next steps. Ask questions such as: Is this project replicable elsewhere? What changes would we need to make? What might the next steps be? How can we build on the positives? How can we eliminate the negatives?
- Use multiple, meaningful sources of information and insight.
- Create opportunities for staff and volunteers to discuss both the achievements and the shortcomings of the project in an honest and open way.

7. Recommendations

Having examined the theory and practice of community engagement to promote good relations, a number of recommendations emerge which are of significance not only for Belfast City Council but the wider field of good relations practice in Northern Ireland.

1 Undertake an in-depth analysis of the role of contact and engagement between communities of varying cultural, ideological, religious, ethnic or racial divisions and the development of an incremental and sustainable approach to good relations practice.

2 Develop a set of indicators to measure the good relations outcomes of engagement, rather than merely the activities and outputs (for example number of participants involved). Outputs may indicate the number of people involved in a community engagement process but it does not demonstrate whether the engagement was meaningful or of long-term significance.

3 Consider the adoption of a scoring matrix for community engagement project funding which combines acknowledgement for the type of project which is being undertaken with the level of difficulty or challenge which this entails for the communities involved.

4 Consistently document examples of good practice in relation to community engagement and ensure they are compiled in a manner which is both informative and accessible to all interested parties.

5 Disseminate this guide to good practice in relation to community engagement to promote good relations as widely as possible to all interested parties.

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