



FAITH ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME

NICVA

An outline of the Faith Engagement Programme including background and current programme areas and opportunities

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NICVA Faith Engagement Programme

Faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland have an important and distinctive place and reach in society and their work plays an important role in communities where they deliver many interventions on various themes by engaging large numbers of volunteers in a range of social and community development activities. In recognition of this the Department for Communities funds a Faith Based Engagement strand under the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme, to provide the following functions:

Aims:

- To promote good community development approaches in faith-based organisations across all of Northern Ireland.
- To develop awareness, relationships and partnerships between faith-based organisations, government, and other voluntary and community sector bodies
- To highlight and disseminate widely, details of innovative projects and best practice
- To promote involvement of faith-based volunteers in social action projects to alleviate poverty and improve the quality of life for people living in need and those living in disadvantaged areas from all sections of the community
- To promote collaboration and partnership between faith-based organisations and others as well as the range of public and private sector bodies and charities working to support those in need.
- Demonstrate ways of working together to articulate voices of the faith sector on social justice issues.

Outcomes:

The delivery of these functions leads to the realisation of the following outcomes:

1. Faith based organisations across Northern Ireland have access to the specialist support they need to function effectively and efficiently in providing services to those most in need
2. Faith based organisations are supported in making a valued and effective contribution to policy development across Government in areas of work that are specifically relevant to disadvantaged communities
3. Faith based organisations increasingly engage in community development across Northern Ireland
4. Faith-based organisations are supported in developing strong collaborative and partnership working within the faith sector, across the voluntary and community sector and with Government Departments and other funding agencies; and
5. Faith-based organisations seek to develop collaborative projects that serve the needs of disadvantaged communities across Northern Ireland.

Programme Activity:

1. Training and learning opportunities

Throughout the year the programme offers a range of training and learning opportunities to support those engaged in running organisations, managing communications, recruiting and training volunteers, overseeing governance and those responsible for fundraising.

Social Media – including practical webinars on how to use Facebook, Twitter & Canva. We also offer support and training designed to help organisations protect their online presence, manage risk and develop policies on cybersecurity.

Fundraising – including accessing unrestricted funding, funding from grants and trusts, how to get the most from NICVA's bespoke fundraising software 'GrantTracker', how to make successful funding applications and how to generate revenue by becoming a social enterprise

Governance – we offer practical one to one support with governance issues as well as training that focuses on good governance for new Trustees, how to be an effective Chairperson, how to keep an organisation on track, how to manage conflict, how to problem solve and make good collective decisions.

Engaging with government – recognising the difficulties some groups and organisations encounter because they are unfamiliar with how government works, we partner with the Northern Ireland Assembly's 'Community Connect' programme which offers insight into how the Assembly works and how to

effectively lobby a local representative. We also offer training in how to respond to a government consultation.

Reflecting on Practice – we also offer informal opportunities to enable practitioners to explore aspects of their practice and share learning with others. We do this through a series of conversations (Grounded | conversations) which bring practitioners together to reflect on practice issues and to ascertain what support may be needed in terms of future training. We are also developing a short course on faith-based Community Development.

2. Advice and support

Many faith-based initiatives in the community begin with action – a need is identified and an individual or faith group respond. Before long that first engagement becomes integral to the faith group's identity and the work undertaken becomes mainstreamed. For many, this is enough and their usefulness to the community is the provision of a venue, additional volunteers or the provision of a new community service. For others though, it becomes the trigger for fresh thinking about the role of faith in a community and what it means to engage with the issues people face such as poverty, disadvantage, and social isolation.

As groups journey towards more established projects or community action, the Faith Engagement Programme offers support through facilitation and consultation so that initiatives are strengthened and prepared for long-term engagement with the community. This may take the form of assisting with vision and strategic direction, building capacity, addressing sustainability and offering practical help with governance and management skills. The full resources of NICVA's skills

development, fundraising and governance teams are available in support of faith-based community work.

3. Connecting with the wider Faith Sector

The Faith Engagement Programme seeks to make connections with other faith-based community initiatives, by attending meetings and events organised by other groups that are addressing poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion. We want to contribute where we can, to help develop strong collaborative and partnership working within the Faith Sector.

4. Connecting with government and policy makers

The Faith Engagement Programme also works to enable crossover opportunities for those involved in faith-based community work to straddle and learn from the wider voluntary and community sector and with Government Departments, policy makers and other funding agencies. This is also about facilitating understanding in the voluntary and community sector and within government so that the contribution of the faith sector is valued. To date this includes the ongoing work of the Community Faiths' Forum, facilitating meetings of the Faith Leader's Forum established in response to Covid-19 Recovery Plan.

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