

Faith Groups and Government

Faith-based organisations and government at local and regional levels

by Rita Fentener with Penelope Daly, Robert Foster and Malcolm James



Faith Groups and Government

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Foreword

I am delighted to introduce this report exploring the relationship between faith-based organisations and government at a local and regional level. This new publication will be of value to policy makers, practitioners and anyone who is working in a faith and inter faith context. It presents examples of work funded through the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund.

This Fund was set up by Communities and Local Government. Between 2006 and 2008 the Community Development Foundation administered the grant programme on their behalf. The Fund has supported a great variety of activities that have helped faith organisations engage better with their local authorities and other organisations around them.

Many funded projects and organisations have used their grants to help increase understanding between faith-based organisations and government at regional and local levels. This publication draws out their learning and explores the experiences of people working both in the faith sector and in local and regional government bodies.

Faith Groups and Government offers ideas and recommendations on what works at a practical level and suggests how the relationship between the two parties could be improved in the future.

I hope you find this publication engaging and helpful in your work.



Alison Seabrooke
Chief Executive
Community Development Foundation

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Additionally, we would like to thank Malcolm James for his guidance and for sharing his knowledge from his previous evaluation of the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF), and of course, for his direct contribution to the report.

We would like to thank the local and regional government bodies that agreed to be interviewed and helped us understand the relationship with the faith sector from their perspective.

Finally, this report would not have been possible without the FBBCF funded organisations that responded so openly to our questionnaire and generously shared their experiences with us during interviews.

Community Development Foundation (CDF)

CDF is the leading source of intelligence, guidance and delivery on community development in England and across the UK. Our mission is to lead community development analysis and strategy to empower people to influence decisions that affect their lives.

CDF's key aim is to spread ways of building engaged, cohesive and stronger communities and a more effective community sector:

- by advising government and other bodies on community development
- by analysing policy to identify good community development practices
- by conducting research and evaluation
- by supporting community development work through networks, links with practitioners and work with partner organisations
- by managing funding schemes for local projects
- through training, events publications and consultancy.

We work with government departments, regional and local public agencies and community and voluntary sectors. We also operate at a European and international level. We are a non-departmental public body sponsored by Communities and Local Government (CLG) and a charity registered in England and Wales and recognised in Scotland.

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Summary of findings

Research into the relationship between faith-based organisations and local and regional government focused solely on the organisations funded by the Community Development Foundation (CDF) during both rounds of the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF). This report summarises information collected from responses to self-completion questionnaires (44 questionnaires completed) and presents feedback gathered from phone interviews carried out with 20 funded organisations and 12 local and regional government bodies.

This investigation into relationships between faith-based organisations and statutory bodies paid particular attention to:

- defining and exploring the current relationship
- evaluating relationship-building experiences
- looking at the funding relationship
- examining the benefits of working together
- identifying the challenges hindering relationships
- improving the relationships and addressing challenges.

Community development and reaching communities through the engagement between the faith sector and government were kept at the forefront of the evaluation of their relationship, in line with CDF's aims.

Defining and exploring current relationships

- The faith sector is very diverse and the organisations funded by FCCBF reflected this in their size, structure, purpose and services. Faith-based organisations deliver services, support people and communities and often work beyond single geographic or religious boundaries, as is the case with faith forums.
- Similarly, statutory bodies that make up local and regional government are complex entities, with varying degrees of engagement with faith communities and the voluntary and community sector.

- As there is no typical relationship between local and regional government and faith-based organisations, the report presents and evaluates the existing network of multi-dimensional relationships.
- Over 80% of responding organisations (37) described their relationship with government as good or very good. Despite generally positive answers, many organisations gave mixed feedback and highlighted a number of significant difficulties. The remaining groups described their current relationship as fair or poor, indicating there were a number of challenges they hadn't overcome.

Evaluating relationship-building experiences

Faith-based organisations' experiences

- Sixty-four percent of FCCBF funded organisations surveyed (28 organisations) indicated that the experience of building a relationship with government was mostly positive. They also reported that local or regional authorities had been supportive and understood their work. Nearly 40% of organisations (16) highlighted that their experiences varied depending on the department, individual or project involved.
- Many felt that government was sending mixed messages and that there was still resistance on the part of statutory bodies to engage with the faith sector. No respondent indicated that the relationship was mostly negative; however groups complained about the difficulty of engaging effectively and voiced their concern at being used as a box-ticking exercise.

Government's experiences

- Local and regional government responses also reflected diverse experiences. Partnerships with the faith sector were generally seen as helpful, and sometimes necessary, in achieving local agendas and serving the best interests of the community. Some statutory bodies reported that they were only just starting to realise the benefits of engaging with the faith sector or were being led by policy directives.
- Others acknowledged the different degrees of enthusiasm with which individuals in their departments engaged with the faith sector. Issues of representation and the lack of unity within the faith sector were also raised.

Looking at the funding relationship

- The levels of reported positive relationships with regards to funding were only slightly lower, at 52% (23 organisations). Over a third of faith-based organisations contacted (16) had managed to get funding from their local or regional government and a number of groups received support from their council or councillors to attract external funding.
- A number of respondents were much less satisfied and reacted negatively to a funding process they believed could be significantly improved and was plagued with inconsistencies. Although only three organisations reported a mostly negative experience with funding, 28 called for more transparent and clearer processes.
- The statutory bodies interviewed acknowledged that they funded faith-based organisations with more ease and supported work from the faith sector when commissioning public services, particularly through the sector's involvement in local strategic partnerships (LSPs).
- Many local and regional authorities highlighted that their own resources were constrained and they could not fund every organisation. They added that they could provide a lot of support outside of funding.

Examining the benefits of building relationships

- Faith-based organisations were very keen to work with government and continue to develop relationships. They acknowledged the main benefits of engagement to be access to practical resources (funding and support), the enabling of democratic participation for faith communities and the possibility of having a wider social impact through cohesion, regeneration and participation in various public initiatives.
- Local and regional government's response to this line of investigation generally recognised the distinctive contribution of faith communities and the need to engage with the faith sector to meet their own agenda. Some authorities were able to give examples of how this partnership had been beneficial locally, whilst others had simply executed, at times with mitigated enthusiasm, the policies from central government.

Identifying the challenges hindering relationships

- The faith-based organisations surveyed acknowledged that a number of internal challenges acted as barriers to improving their relationship with government. These included stretched resources and limited capacity as well as a lack of understanding about how government works and how to engage effectively.
- Competition within the sector and over-reliance on specific individuals when developing relationships were also described as important weaknesses or risks to organisations.
- Respondents also reported a number of government-based challenges that affected the relationship. These included the lack of faith literacy and government's limited understanding of faith-based organisations and their work, as well as the resistance by some to engage with and fund the faith sector.
- Equally important was the fact that the engagement processes were reported to be complex and time consuming, and affected by inadequate signposting.

Improving the relationships and addressing challenges

Suggested strategies

- The faith-based organisations surveyed demonstrated a real desire to improve or develop their links with government: 38 organisations (84%) were currently working on this. Addressing aforementioned challenges was seen as a necessary part of achieving better relationships.
- Some respondents within faith-based organisations and statutory bodies argued that the faith sector and its organisations needed strengthening from within. They referred specifically to improving communication, developing more professional systems to manage their organisation, improving and presenting track records and acquiring a better understanding of how relevant government bodies operate.
- The creation of relationships outside government, particularly within the faith and voluntary and community sectors, was seen by

faith-based organisations as a key way to get involved in public life and create opportunities to engage with government.

- Finally, both parties recommended increased direct engagement with statutory bodies through improved networking and engagement within local consultative bodies and LSPs.

Examples of suggested initiatives

- Organisations described a number of specific initiatives that they had successfully implemented.
- Faith-based organisations suggested getting training on how to influence government policy, joining faith forums and LSPs, and learning to define and communicate their organisation's purpose effectively.
- Organisations also shared how inviting public figures and involving them in local events to meet with communities could enable an otherwise difficult dialogue.
- Local and regional government interviewees also suggested involvement in LSPs and reaching out to political figures, no matter at which level, who have an interest in faith communities. They also mentioned that identifying specific needs or findings and presenting those to government is likely to facilitate engagement.
- Faith-based organisations wanted to see an increase in faith literacy within local and regional government, and suggested specific faith training and more direct engagement with local faith communities. They also wanted government to work directly with the faith sector in order to be more appreciative of the contributions that faith-based organisations are making in their constituencies.
- They also felt that the resistance of some government bodies to engage with the faith sector should be addressed: local and regional government was again encouraged to engage in more joint projects with the sector. Some faith-based organisations highlighted that they were doing the same work as other voluntary and community organisations.
- Finally, interviews allowed for insight into how some local or regional bodies were addressing these challenges. Many had worked on simplifying the engagement process, either through creating a specific position to engage with the faith sector, or

through improving signposting, issuing contact lists and sharing knowledge of the faith sector amongst statutory bodies themselves.

Looking forward

- Both faith-based organisations and local and regional government acknowledged the important role of faith forums and LSPs as simpler and more direct methods of engagement. These platforms were seen as particularly helpful for small faith organisations that lacked the resources to represent themselves effectively, as well as to help ensure faith representation. Both LSPs and faith forums were backed by policymakers and were seen as ways forward in improving the relationship between the faith sector and government.
- However, a number of faith-based organisations and statutory bodies highlighted the need to continue to engage directly with smaller groups. The use of LSPs and forums as means of engagement should facilitate and enable representation but should complement, not replace, direct contact with the diverse communities.



Introduction

The Community Development Foundation (CDF) has administered the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF) on behalf of the Cohesion and Faiths Division of Communities and Local Government (CLG) (former Department for Communities and Local Government) since 2006.

The FCCBF consisted of two annual rounds of funding, during 2006/07 and 2007/08. Both rounds aimed to help faith-based organisations promote understanding and dialogue between and within faith communities, the wider voluntary sector, government at all levels and the general population. The funding assisted faith and inter faith organisations in strengthening their capacity (capacity building) in order for them to play a fuller part in civil society and community cohesion. It also supported inter faith activities which brought together people from different faith groups to talk, network, develop joint projects and learn from one another.

Faith-based organisations, inter faith organisations and voluntary and community organisations carrying out inter faith activities or working with faith communities in England and Wales were eligible to apply. A total of 573 organisations were funded in Round 1, and 350 organisations received funding in Round 2. A number of groups received funding in both rounds. Over £12 million was made available through FCCBF over the two years. CDF has published an evaluation report of the initial round of FCCBF (James, 2007) and an evaluation of the overall fund is underway.

At the time of writing this report, no third round was planned, but the role that faith-based organisations are playing in society and the kind of relationships they should have with government at all levels continues to contribute to policy.

The purpose of this report

There has been a strong and widely expressed commitment from central government, partly through CLG, to develop and strengthen

relationships between the faith communities and government at every level as part of the larger cohesion and regeneration agenda.

Engagement with faith groups at the local level is also the focus of research by the Local Government Association in partnership with the Inter Faith Network for the UK, with the support of CLG.

As Round 2 of FCCBF draws to an end, CDF is taking this opportunity to reflect on the experiences of the funded faith-based organisations in building relationships with government.

The report analyses the strength of these relationships and takes a closer look at the experiences of FCCBF funded groups, specifically faith-based organisations and faith forums, in dealing with local and regional government. It evaluates the barriers faced by the faith-based organisations that participated in the research when attempting to liaise with government, whether these challenges are being overcome and, if so, how.

This relationship is also examined from a local and regional government perspective by including the feedback of statutory bodies such as local authorities (both city and county councils), government offices for the regions, regional assemblies and regional development agencies. Their experience of building relationships with faith-based organisations is discussed and explored in light of existing and perceived challenges.

The report endeavours to provide insights into current relationships and to help improve understanding of how to deal with the barriers to relationship building. It also reflects on the benefits of collaboration and looks at what successful partnerships can accomplish locally.

A number of practical recommendations are presented with the aim of facilitating future interactions where they are difficult and to help ensure the continuing progress of existing relationships.

The report structure

The first chapter outlines the research methodology on which this report is based and how data was collected from the faith sector and from government.

A summary of the policy framework leading to and beyond FCCBF funding, including recent developments and imminent policy announcements, is presented in chapter two.

The third chapter reflects on the drivers, history and past experiences of building relationships between faith-based organisations and government, and reviews findings from the evaluation of the first FCCBF round.

Chapter four identifies and explores the nature of the relationships between faith groups and government, including the motivations behind relationship building, while chapter five reflects on how this process was experienced by FCCBF funded groups.

Chapter six examines the benefits that both parties expect from their relationships and how this affects local communities. Chapter seven explores both the faith-based and government-based challenges involved in relationship building.

Chapter eight looks at ways to improve this relationship from both a faith-based and government perspectives. It reflects on how challenges have been successfully addressed and outlines recommendations from both parties. Chapter nine focuses on two structures aimed at improving the engagement process: local strategic partnerships and faith forums.

The concluding chapter summarises the report and gives specific recommendations to support the continuing development of successful relationships between faith organisations and government.

In this report we use the term ‘faith’ because that is the language used by the Fund from the outset. We recognise that the term is considered narrow by some; we acknowledge, for instance, that ‘belief groups’ as well as religious and faith-based groups contribute much to community life in the UK. Our use of the term ‘faith’ in this publication, therefore, is a portmanteau term to embrace ‘faith, religion and belief’.

Methods

Background research

A review of relevant governmental and non-governmental publications, consultation papers, guidance, and reports was conducted. Studies into faith communities, faith-based organisations and voluntary and community sector organisations were also examined and are outlined in the References, p. 80 below.

Sample selection

All Faith Community Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF) funded projects were reviewed from their synopsis submitted in support of their funding applications. Community Development Foundation (CDF) also contributed additional case studies and reports of projects which were pertinent to the research.

An initial sample of 120 groups funded by FCCBF was selected on the basis of their stated expectations to engage with government, or because of the potential relevance of their work to government.

The faith forums were extracted and split into a second list, combining a number of local and regional forums funded by FCCBF. This was to allow for forums to be studied independently of other faith-based organisations since they have a distinct purpose within the faith sector. There were thus two samples: faith-based organisations (80 groups) and faith forums (40 groups).

Both samples were selected as follows:

- The samples were distributed geographically in line with FCCBF funding across England and Wales. All regions were represented.
- The samples reflected FCCBF funded groups from different faith or belief communities (including Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu,

Jain, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh), inter faith and multi faith organisations.¹

- The samples included organisations that received small and large grants.

Questionnaires

Two self-completion questionnaires combining multiple choice and direct questions were devised: one for faith groups and faith-based organisations and another one for faith forums. The questionnaires were cognitively tested and piloted with a sample of faith-based organisations. Revisions were made as a result of this testing.

Response rate

The two survey questionnaires were mailed out to all selected groups in the 'faith groups' and 'forums' samples. Respondents also had the possibility of receiving and returning the questionnaire electronically. Forty-four questionnaires were received in time to be included in the report: responses were received from 20 faith forums (50%) and 24 other faith-based organisations (30%).

All respondents had been informed about the purpose of the research and were able to return their questionnaire anonymously. Although the sample drawn was representative of the organisations funded by FCCBF, findings cannot be generalised to organisations outside this study, due to the small numbers of organisations that responded.

Semi-structured interviews

A number of organisations from the initial sample, which were representative of the diversity of organisations funded by FCCBF, were contacted by phone in order to collect further qualitative data. Ten faith forums and ten other faith-based organisations (from Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh communities) were interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured, open and exploratory. Respondents were encouraged to discuss their background, local needs and involvement in the wider voluntary sector.

1. The sample did not include any responses from Zoroastrians.

Chapter 1: Methods

Twelve semi-structured interviews with government bodies across England and Wales were also carried out concurrently. These included nine local authorities (city and county councils in the east of England, East Midlands, London, the South East, Yorkshire and Humber and Wales) and three regional government bodies across England and Wales (two regional development agencies and one government office for the regions) to uncover their perspective and learn about their relationship building with faith-based organisations.

Researchers also interviewed these government bodies in light of feedback received from their local faith-based organisations.

The report presents the statistics from the questionnaire responses, as well as comments made by faith-based organisations and government bodies during interviews.

2 Policy context before and after FCCBF

This chapter starts by outlining the policy and evidence base leading to the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF). It then presents the policy context and the most recent developments affecting engagement between the faith sector and government at national, regional and local levels.

The rationale behind FCCBF

The need for faith-based organisations to improve their engagement with government was highlighted in the Government's strategy on race equality and community cohesion: *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society* (Home Office, 2005). This document recognised the need for faith-based organisations to improve their links with government (p. 10) and made reference to a fund that was designed to provide some of the finance to meet this objective (pp.12, 46).² This fund, administered by the Community Development Foundation (CDF), was launched in 2005 as the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund.

This need for faith groups and government to improve their links was also supported by background needs analysis research undertaken by CDF before the fund's launch. The research picked up on issues surrounding partnership working and a need for greater understanding and engagement between the government and faith-based organisations.

Findings from the evaluation of Round 1 (James, 2007) also drew attention to some of the importance and challenges and successes of the working and funding relationship between the faith sector and

2. 'We will help faith and ethnic communities promote understanding and dialogue, such as through a new £3 million programme to help faith-based groups develop their capacity for such work and by better government engagement with faith groups in developing and delivering policies.' (Home Office, 2005, p. 12)

government. For example, the evaluation report highlighted the perception commonly held in the faith sector that it was engaged with in a tokenistic and top-down way by government (p. 71) and the perceived problems that local government had in working with the faith sector around equalities issues.

The report also acknowledged significant overlaps between the faith sector and government in areas of key values, including shared commitment to community participation, empowerment and community service (ibid.).

At a national level

In *Working Together: Co-operation between government and faith communities* (Home Office Faith Communities Unit, 2004), the Government looked at what could be done centrally to 'support departments and faith communities in achieving a mutually beneficial relationship', admitting a 'sea-change in the consultation of faith communities'. Government's attitude to the contribution and input of faith communities was changing but, at the time, the report qualified developments as 'piecemeal' (p. 8).

Central government has since been encouraging a constructive approach towards dialogue with faith communities at all levels of government, particularly in specific policy areas such as urban regeneration, tackling exclusion and encouraging community cohesion and integration.

In 2005, the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, outlined his vision for a strong civil society, where 'the voluntary sector, including the churches and faith communities, has a critical role to play in meeting community and individual needs' (NCVO, 2007, p. 18). He also suggested that the faith sector should play a bigger role in the future.

At a regional level

At a regional level, the Home Office report *Working Together* (Home Office Faith Communities Unit, 2004) made specific recommendations to regional government structures, asking them 'to recognise that faith-based bodies are a distinctive part of civil society and of the rest of the voluntary sector, and can make a significant

contribution to social cohesion, and to be willing to open dialogue with them' (p. 69).

The review of the *Evidence Base on Faith Communities* (Mercia Group et al, 2006), acknowledged that 'it is not easy for minority faith community groups to relate to the bodies concerned with regional governance due to the lack of regional infrastructure among the majority of these groups' (p. 76). It also referred to ongoing 'mapping' of faith community organisations at a regional level, looking at their capacities and involvement in the delivery of services and acknowledging that 'inter faith infrastructures are gradually emerging to relate to governance structures bodies at both local (more strongly) and regional levels (less so)' (ibid).

More recently, the Communities and Local Government (CLG) consultation *'Face-to-Face' and 'Side-by-Side': A framework for inter faith dialogue and social action* (CLG, 2007) discussed the contributions of regional faith forums, which aim to provide different faith communities with the opportunity to contribute to decision-making at the regional level. It alluded to ongoing research into the relationship between these forums and other regional bodies, and how these relationships might be strengthened.

At local level

Locally, policy directed at the relationship between the faith sector and local government has tended to focus on service delivery, neighbourhood renewal and active citizenship.

Since 1997, there has been continued recognition of the value of the faith sector in contributing to regeneration, civil and neighbourhood renewal. *Our Towns and Cities* (DCLG, 2000) recognised the participation of faith communities in neighbourhood renewal. Other reports have highlighted the variety of important local services provided by local faith-based organisations (for example, Commission on Urban Life and Faith, 2006).

Faith and Community (Local Government Association et al, 2002) looked at ways that local authorities can work with faith groups, and *Partnership for the Common Good: Inter faith structures and local government*

(Inter Faith Network, 2003) encouraged local government to develop effective patterns of engagement and consultation through local inter faith structures.

Recently, the Government has been keen to promote the role of the sector in delivering public services through capacity building (Grieve et al, 2007, p. 6). The faith sector has also been championed for its role in developing active citizens (Blunkett, 2003, p. 22). These principles of active citizenship and service provision were enshrined in *Community Groups: Compact code of good practice* (Compact Working Group, 2003, p. 8), which establishes the relationship between the government and the voluntary and community sector.

The latest policy developments

In 2007, the CLG consultation, *Face-to-Face and Side by Side* (CLG, 2007) acknowledged that the contributions that faith communities can make to community life are increasingly recognised at all levels of government. The report reiterated that faith communities and faith-based organisations must be part of any response that public authorities develop to address the challenges communities are facing. The consultation stated that although the role of faith communities is also increasingly recognised, 'there is still work to be done to build confidence in the benefits of partnership and develop a greater understanding of the contributions that faith communities can make' (p. 6).

In *Our Shared Future* (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007) the Commission on Integration and Cohesion argued that 'there is a case to be made for a review of some aspects of the way government, both central and local, supports, consults and engages with faith-based bodies. These might include: grant giving (and appropriate guidelines for this); issues linked to contracts for the delivery of public services; and forms of engagement with non-religious belief groups.' (p. 86)

In early 2008, CLG published its consultation *Cohesion Guidance for Funders* (CLG, 2008), which sought views on producing guidance on both the funding of mainstream activities and the funding of activities which are targeted towards particular groups within society. The

consultation closed at the end of May and will have particular relevance for community and faith-based organisations, particularly how and whether individual faith groups and single faith projects are funded.

Inter faith work

The consultation *'Face-to-Face' and 'Side by Side': A framework for inter faith dialogue and social action* (CLG, 2007) specifically looked at the role of inter faith organisations, underlining that the Government was 'keen to capture and build upon the momentum generated by [local inter faith] partners and to use the learning from existing approaches to build a framework for partnership which will increase inter faith dialogue and social action' (p. 15).

Strong and Prosperous Communities – The Local Government White Paper (CLG, 2006) also supported the development of faith forums in every local authority as a means to improve cohesion and tackle extremism.

At the time of writing, the publication of responses and the final framework for inter faith dialogue and social action was set for July 2008.

3 History, drivers and past experiences

This chapter looks at the history of relations between the faith groups and government. It also reflects on past experiences of building these relationships and summarises findings from the initial evaluation of FCCBF (James, 2007). This forms the background against which the current state of relationship between government and the faith bodies will be evaluated (see chapter 4).

Different drivers

James (2007) highlighted that faith groups felt they have ‘different drivers’ to non-faith organisations. Different drivers were described as the different motivations that groups have for the work they do. In contrast to non-faith organisations, respondents felt that their commitment was eternal. This was seen to create tensions with policymakers’ short to medium-term commitments (p. 55).

Faith groups acknowledged significant overlaps in values (and beliefs) with other local service providers (p. 56). Their commitment to faith-in-action through community work was seen to be compatible with non-faith organisations’ commitment to empowerment and participation (ibid.).

James’ report pointed to historical sticking points between the faith sector and government around funding issues. These included some cynicism in the faith sector of government funding and cynicism in government about funding the faith sector (pp.56–61).

Past experiences and findings – faith organisations

Many faith groups interviewed in the initial evaluation of FCCBF had negative experiences of working with local government. Like others in the voluntary sector, respondents from faith groups felt frustrated at the lack of meaningful engagement by local government. Gestures of

partnership working were often considered to be tokenistic and part of a 'tick box' exercise (James 2007, p. 56). Respondents also pointed out that being on the local strategic partnership (LSP) did not equate to real engagement.

Respondents also felt alienated from the decision-making processes of national government. They felt that national government agendas were set 'in corridors of power', away from the people they affected. Faith groups working on national programmes that had tried to bridge this gulf expressed frustration at locating, and keeping in contact with, the right civil servants and advisors. This was put down to the constant restructuring of central government departments. Respondents from funded organisations also recognised that literacy was not a one-way process and that they too had a duty to understand the workings of the local authority and the values of non-faith organisations.

Some, though by no means all, respondents had such negative images of local authorities that they did not want to be associated with them at all.

However, other respondents highlighted their very positive working relationships with their councils and pointed to examples of local government assistance in securing funding, good relationships with specific councillors or positive experiences of partnership working. Some stated that they found it easier to build relationships with statutory organisations than they did with other organisations in the faith sector.

Past experiences and findings – government

Local authorities varied in the way, and enthusiasm with which, they engaged with the faith sector. Some had historically worked in partnership with the faith sector, whereas others had not. In some councils, faith diversity was embodied in the councillors themselves; in others this was not the case.

One particular sticking point for local government were equalities issues, particularly gender and sexuality. Some officials believed that faith groups were reluctant to respect equalities duties. In contrast, some representatives of the faith sector felt that there was a desire for

faith groups to drop their faith base for the convenience of government.

The majority of local authorities interviewed recognised the need to be faith literate and could point to programmes and initiatives that had been undertaken to pursue this agenda. This is not to say that faith groups could not identify areas where councils should improve their knowledge of faith groups. They stressed that engaging with faith-based organisations was not the same as engaging with black and minority ethnic communities. They felt that faith and ethnicity should not be confused. Individuals working in the council who had good knowledge of, and established relationships with, faith communities were considered to be an asset.

With regard to regional government, officials were very positive about the strategic role of the faith sector and highlighted the importance of regional faith forums. Some regional government officials had set up strategic groups so that the faith communities and their organisations could act as a ‘critical friend’ to government.

The next chapter gives an updated perspective on the ongoing relationships building between government and faith-based organisations, and reflects on the challenges highlighted in the initial evaluation.

4 Defining and exploring current relationships between local and regional government and faith-based organisations

This chapter starts by explaining what is meant by the term ‘relationship’ between the faith sector and local and regional government. It then explores the contact process and the motivations behind it and reviews the current state of relationships as perceived by the Faith Community Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF) funded groups and by the statutory bodies interviewed.

Defining the relationship

It must firstly be acknowledged that the ‘relationship’ between faith organisations and government is a complex one. Government at a local and regional level and the faith sector are both inherently intricate entities constituted of multiple organisations. Members of the faith sector and government connect and interact with each other both individually and jointly, in relation to government and faith initiatives, funding streams and local/regional/national policies and agendas.

The level of diversity both at regional and local levels of government and within the faith sector suggests a complex web of interactions with different levels of formality and more or less apparent engagement processes. There is no typical relationship between government and faith-based organisations.

The ‘relationship’ that is referred to in this report thus embodies the network of multi-layered, multi-dimensional relationships between government bodies and faith-based organisations.

About faith-based organisations

‘Faith’ is seen as cutting across many different sectors of society – including men and women, people of all ages, ethnicities, religions and

beliefs and nationalities – while faith-based organisations have many different areas of operations, such as education, health, environment, employment, community support, citizenship and the arts.

There is a large number and a great variety of faith communities and faith-based organisations operating in England and Wales. These groups differ in size, levels of paid employment, structure and purpose, and cover a diversity of ethnic and religious backgrounds.

The faith-based organisations funded by FCCBF that participated in the research for this report often worked within and beyond specific local and regional authorities. The role they played in the community varied greatly and included a range of functions, from running places of worship to providing services for the whole community. Some organisations operated essentially as voluntary and community organisations, although their values and motivations were faith-based.

There was a degree of overlap between the work of different faith groups within some communities. The lack of precise geographical or operational boundaries was also evident when observing the remit of faith forums; organisations developed relationships with government both individually and as part of wider associations. Some faith forums operated mostly within a single faith community within an area; others were working with groups of different faiths on inter faith activity. The membership and management of the forums also varied greatly, from representative faith councils to less formal associations open to all.

Faith-based organisations adapted to the changing needs of their communities and often developed their projects and services in partnership with each other, the rest of the voluntary sector and government bodies.

Levels of engagement at government level

Within government, there are multiple statutory bodies with which faith organisations can engage at regional, sub-regional and local levels. This report is particularly concerned with local and sub-regional government, due to their strong levels of interactions with

faith communities. For simplicity, the term 'local authority' will be used as the collective term for county, city and borough councils. Regional organisations were also contacted, including regional assemblies and regional development agencies (RDAs), particularly with regards to the work of faith forums operating at regional levels.

At the local and sub-regional government levels, modes of engagement with faith organisations varied to a large extent. No two authorities operated in exactly the same way. There is evidence that engagement, in some cases, involved both city councils and county or sub-regional councils.

Relationships were created in one or more of the following ways:

- through a central office or contact, such as a dedicated faith coordination officer, the policy office or the mayor's office
- through devolved operational units such as drug action teams, youth offending teams, social services or even through primary care trusts and the police
- through local strategic partnerships, which are widely used as vehicles for the local authority to engage with the faith sector
- through personal contacts with local councillors, officers or staff members of statutory services.

Although a small number of other links were identified at regional government level, the main point of contact was through the equalities and diversity unit of the RDAs. These are small, dedicated teams that are often overstretched due to the wide scope of their work, which includes age, gender, sexual orientation and disability issues in addition to faith.

The existence of a multi-dimensional network of relationships and the variety of possibilities for engagement are likely to contribute to the disparity of experiences within the faith sector. Although each relationship could be defined and evaluated independently, this report attempts to look at the bigger picture in so far as organisations funded by FCCBF and their respective government bodies are concerned.

Initiating contact

This section looks at the direction of the relationships. To what extent are faith communities trying to reach government? Is government attempting to gain access to faith-based organisations? Research suggests that this is very much a two-way process. Both parties are initiating relationships, although the contact sometimes stems from different rationales.

All the faith-based organisations³ surveyed and interviewed confirmed that they had contacted, or attempted to contact, their local or regional government. There was little evidence of a 'go-it-alone', inward-looking attitude or reluctance to engage. This may or may not have been affected by the fact that they have already been funded by Communities and Local Government, through FCCBF.

The most popular reason for initiating contact with government was for funding, given by 33 faith organisations (75%).

The same number of organisations contacted government specifically to invite a councillor, mayor or other officer to participate in an event, or to have a dignitary present at a function (75%).

Twenty-eight organisations wanted to discuss or ask for support to promote their projects and activities (64%), 13 wanted access to government premises or council space (30%) and 11 were looking for direct assistance from government staff (such as help with administrative duties) (25%).

A few groups also mentioned that they contacted government simply to present their organisations and to be acknowledged.

'The primary driver for the forum contacting the local council was just to put ourselves on the map.'

Faith forum, interview

The opposite is also true. Local and regional government often initiated contact with the faith sector, which it perceives as a key

3. Including groups that returned our survey questionnaires and those interviewed directly.

resource in developing an understanding of faith groups and identifying their needs. This is evidenced by the fact that more than a half (52%) of faith-based organisations indicated in the questionnaire that they had been contacted by local or regional government regarding consultation or advice on faith issues.

Interviews also revealed that representative faith organisations played a formal role in advising government bodies on issues such as policing, hospital patient care, education, civic events and community projects. Government authorities, therefore, had initiated contact with those faith organisations that were seen to be representative of the community.

‘It is important that we listen to the community; consultation is an important ingredient in improving services. The faith organisations, if they are properly representative, are a good sounding board.’

Local authority, interview

More specifically, discussions with local government bodies indicated that they had initiated contact as a means of reaching a community where they might otherwise be seen as the ‘faceless bureaucrat’. Statutory bodies at local and regional levels added that faith-based organisations were a means of engaging with sections of the population that were hard to reach or felt excluded.

There were also common motivations for relationship building. Nearly half of faith-based organisations stated that their contact with government involved discussing the delivery of public services and responding to local needs.

Both government and faith-based organisations referred to emergency planning meetings. It appears that the faith sector is seen as an important part of getting messages and support across to people in the case of environmental or human-made crises.

‘We needed to get a message of support to the grassroots of the community following the ’07 flooding and the best way was through the faith forum.’

Local authority, interview

Current state of the relationships

This section provides a snapshot of the relationship at the time of contact between faith-based organisations and local and regional government bodies interviewed. The process of how they got to this stage was also investigated and is presented in the next chapter, which looks at the experiences of relationship building.

Feedback from the majority of organisations describing their current relationship with government bodies was generally positive. However, these findings should not be generalised to the rest of the faith sector and only represent a small sample of organisations funded by FCCBF.

Indeed, 84% of respondents rated the state of their relationship with local or regional government as ‘good’ (18 respondents; 41%) or ‘very good’ (19 respondents; 43%). For faith forums, the level of ‘very good’ relationships attained 60%, suggesting that the forums were able to interact more satisfactorily with government at various levels, and perhaps that some statutory bodies are more responsive and increasingly want to work with forums.

However, these findings need to be contextualised, as many questionnaire responders and interviewees described mixed experiences despite positive answers. Recent policy directives or increased means and reasons for engagement following the award of FCCBF funding may also have affected the feedback.

Finally, three organisations described their current relationships as ‘fair’ and two stated that it was ‘poor’. No organisations stated the relationship was non-existent.

These comments from faith-based organisations reflect the disparity of the answers received:

‘The local authority is 100% behind us and are in it for meaningful dialogue. They see us as a key way to access various communities.’

Faith forum, interview

‘If you had asked me a month ago I would have given you a very different answer ... but the council has been in touch about a joint project, and they have been extremely supportive since then.’

Faith-based organisation, interview

‘We found the relevant committees antagonistic to faith groups and our relationship with the mayor’s office has been mixed.’

Faith-based organisation, questionnaire

‘There is currently no real process regarding how to go about relationship building; there needs to be a form of commitment and clear indications of what the expected outcome is. We must cover our running duties and there is rarely time or capacity to attend events or develop government contacts without a clear engagement process.’

Faith-based organisation, interview

5 Experiences of building relationships

This chapter starts by presenting the findings of research into the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF) funded groups' experience of building a relationship with local and regional government, looking specifically at non-financial assistance. It then presents the perspective of government bodies and discusses relationship building over funding issues.

The experience of FCCBF funded groups

When asked about their relationship with local and regional government besides funding issues, 28 faith-based organisations funded by FCCBF (64% of questionnaire responses) affirmed that the process of building a relationship was 'mostly positive'. They also specified that local/regional government had been supportive (26 organisations (59% of questionnaire responses)), understood and recognised their work (24 organisations (55%)), and that working together had been beneficial locally (19 organisations (43%)).

'We have a contact officer, and some of our members are councillors. We help each other with projects or engage in joint projects. The local authority also circulates our newsletter.'

Faith-based organisation, questionnaire

'The setting up of [the forum] was a collaborative effort between the local authority and a group of representatives of locally active faith groups.'

Faith forum, questionnaire

Although a small number of faith-based organisations were concerned about their relationship being a box-ticking exercise, no respondents stated that their experiences had been 'mostly negative'.

However 36% of the organisations surveyed indicated that their experiences had varied, that it depended on the people they dealt with (16 respondents (36%)) and on the projects and activities with which they were involved (ten respondents (23%)). A number of the organisations that agreed their experience was mostly positive mentioned that it had also depended on people and/or projects.

‘We have been getting consistent support from our city council, but not major benefits from the county council.’

Faith forum, interview

Some organisations hinted or stated that government departments and individual contacts within statutory bodies were responding with varying degrees of enthusiasm and openness, and were sending mixed messages to the faith sector on behalf of government. However, the ability of different faith organisations to engage effectively may also be a cause.

‘The mayor’s office seems to deal with different people at different times. This may be lack of coordination on their part but [we think] it can be deliberate intention to sideline or ignore [our type of organisation]. We feel they are sometimes interested only when we can serve their agenda.’

Faith-based organisation, questionnaire

The experience at government level

Local and regional government responses to this line of investigation also reflected diverse experiences. Again, these cannot be generalised as they reflect only the experiences of those interviewed. Some agreed that partnerships with the faith sector helped achieve local agendas and served the best interests of the community. Some even described their relationships as excellent.

In certain areas, relationships with the faith sector predated any policy from higher levels of government and evolved organically as a way to reach certain communities. This relationship was seen as particularly useful in initiatives aiming to tackle exclusion or to contribute to

regeneration, where the involvement of local communities was seen as a factor of success and an efficient use of resources.

‘Our council has built very good links with faith groups and forums over the years ... some excellent work is being done by faith groups and it is saving the council money.’

Local authority, interview

In other boroughs or regions, central government guidelines encouraged this engagement or the initiation of discussions with the faith sector, and in most cases it had been a rewarding experience.

‘We have had a very new realisation that local authority engagement with the faith sector is not only a requirement from government but could also play an effective part in helping [our borough] achieve its aims.’

Local authority, interview

In general, the local and regional government bodies interviewed described their relationship with the faith sector as significantly more cordial and advanced in terms of activity than initially expected. This may be due to the fact that a number of discussions involved officers working specifically with faith communities.

In other regions, however, local and regional government staff had been frustrated by a lack of unity within the faith sector: they felt that disagreements within faith communities and faith organisations were sometimes hard to overcome. Some statutory bodies said they had experienced difficulties developing a relationship, as faith organisations were too busy with their own particular issues to be interested in the wider picture.

‘We’ve tried to build a relationship but really some of the groups are totally focused on their own organisational issues. They haven’t the time or the inclination to collaborate with us.’

Local authority, interview

‘I’m not sure some faith organisations understand the complexities of running large organisations. Some have this knack, though, and they’re the ones going places.’

Local authority, interview

Where friction did exist it tended to be people related. This would not normally be an issue with institutionalised relationships between most organisations but, within the context of the highly personalised relationships between faith groups and their local or regional authority, this is disproportionately important.

The dynamics between elected public servants and faith leaders could be uneasy and susceptible to local political environments. Some government officials also suggested that the political figures holding an electoral mandate were perhaps better placed than faith representatives to deliver services to the community. This does not imply that there should not be any engagement, but that it needs a level of monitoring to ensure that organisations are truly representative and reporting back to various levels of their communities.

‘Representation of the faith organisations is not simple. It is important to understand who the representatives are representing, whether their viewpoints are really representative and to what extent they are accountable to the community.’

Regional council, interview

‘Some (stress some) officers within the local council see the sector as decidedly unrepresentative of the faith communities generally.’

Local authority, interview

Looking at the funding relationship

Past experiences, previous research and initial discussions with FCCBF funded groups evidenced the need to study the relationship and its

funding counterpart separately. The scarcity of resources and the complexity of funding processes support a clear delineation between ongoing relationships and those addressing funding only. This approach was reflected in the survey questions and the interviews; the following section summarises these findings.

The funding experience – faith-based organisations’ perspective

Most respondents reported relatively positive experiences when liaising with local or regional government about getting funding, however it appears that relationship building is more problematic. The level of ‘mostly positive’ answers was at 52% (23 organisations), but the large amount of feedback suggests there is room for improvement in many regions and localities.

Just over a third of respondents (16 organisations) had succeeded in getting funding from their local or regional government for their own projects, and six had been funded specifically to deliver public services. A number of statutory bodies, particularly local authorities, also offered or provided faith groups further support regarding funding: eight groups stated they had received support with the application process and six had received support in looking at funding options and funding criteria, regardless of whether these were successful. This shows that some government bodies value the work carried out by faith organisations enough to support them in attracting external funding.

‘The borough annually funds us and guides us to sources of additional funding for projects.’

Faith-based organisation, questionnaire

‘We have recently received funding for an outreach and education project from [our regional authority].’

Faith forum, interview

The funding relationship also tended to be more constructive for faith-based organisations that engaged with the statutory sector as voluntary

and community organisations developing and delivering community projects.

‘We have worked alongside local government as a faith forum in a deprived area. We all have the community’s best interests at heart. It’s much easier for us to unite and to receive funding when we’re seen as “secular” and working for the community good.’

Faith forum, interview

Sometimes respondents specified that they had a good ongoing relationship with some government bodies, but a disappointing one with others: 30% (13 organisations) agreed the funding relationship very much depended on the people they dealt with at government level and 25% (11 organisations) said it depended on the activities they were involved with.

The issue of cash flow and the need for funding to arrive promptly when delivering projects was also problematic for faith-based organisations receiving funding from statutory bodies to deliver public services.

‘Sometimes the response to start projects is slow. Local government needs to understand the cash flow situation of small organisations.’

Faith-based organisation, questionnaire

More specifically, certain groups or projects appeared to fit government criteria better, or to be welcome by certain departments more than others at particular times.

‘Our organisation just got a grant for our outreach and education project from the local authority, yet nothing for the community centre, which is very much needed. Research was even carried out that supported this need.’

Faith forum, interview

The relationship was perceived as being dependent on whether the decision-makers allocating funds were open to funding faith-based organisations. Although negative decisions may have resulted from other criteria, this is a feeling reported by numerous organisations.

‘It depends on individuals. Some relationships are very good with certain individuals but not so good with others ... some have a deep mistrust of faith communities and [are] very nervous about funding them.’

Forum (non faith-based), interview

Only three organisations reported a ‘mostly negative’ experience due to a feeling that their funding application had been rejected unfairly or because they had been put off by a complex and demanding application process.

‘Local government seems to want partnership for what we offer – but whilst recognising the work we do, do not back that partnership with real support – often the faith sector seems and feels excluded.’

Faith group, questionnaire

However, it must be kept in mind that faith-based organisations’ ability to look for suitable funding and apply effectively varies greatly between organisations. Many do not have adequate resources or the capacity to research and apply for funding. Others can be at a disadvantage because of language barriers or lack of previous government funding experience.

Although a number of organisations, generally the forums, had successfully contacted to regional government, most groups contacted their county or city councils.

‘We are involved in projects receiving funding from two different local authorities; our faith training has been commissioned by the council. Until March 07 we also

received funding from our RDA [regional development agency]; although it is finished we are still involved with the RDA and try to influence them.'

Faith forum, questionnaire

'We receive regular funding information from our local regeneration team, and have been funded by [our sub-regional] government association. There was no money forthcoming from regional government.'

Faith-based organisation, questionnaire

Generally, faith groups were eligible for funding that the rest of the voluntary sector could access. 'Officials should be aware that faith community organisations are fully eligible to apply for support from funding programmes designed to support voluntary and community sector infrastructure and projects, though with the usual stipulation that a government grant must not be used to fund religious or proselytising activity.' (Home Office Faith Communities Unit, 2004, p.16).

However, two faith-based organisations surveyed had been told by government that they were not eligible for funding. One interviewee from a faith forum suspected that this was willingly overlooked by some government officials.

The funding experience – government perspective

'Relations between faith communities and public bodies at all levels have become more routine since the late 1990s' (Mercia Group et al, 2006, p.79). Local and regional government have been funding the faith sector with greater ease: this was evidenced by the fact that a third of respondents were successful in attracting funding for their projects.

Local and regional government has also increasingly supported the work of faith-based organisations when commissioning public services. Interviewees acknowledged a move away from grant funding for third sector and faith organisations to providing services under

contract for the statutory sector. The voluntary sector derives 38% of its income from statutory sources (Wiling et al, 2006, p.3), many of which are moving towards commissioning and contracting rather than funding through grants. Six of the faith-based organisations surveyed reported having been commissioned to deliver public services. Government interviewees generally supported this type of funding.

Whilst this requires the faith sector to respond to a tendering processes rather than the usual funding streams, many local authorities interviewed were supportive of this process and felt it was an acceptable way forward to increase partnerships with the faith sector. Additionally, local authorities were aware that the use of volunteers and the commitment of the faith sector contributed to meeting outputs at a lower cost.

‘We pay the rent for our local inter faith forum, as well as the salary for a staff member ... their work actually saves us money.’

Regional authority, interview

Some regional bodies also emphasised that although they worked at regional level, they were listening to people at local level.

‘We are changing the way we fund local government and the local faith sector. There is an opportunity at the local level to influence us and how we fund at local and regional level.’

Regional authority, interview

However, the funding relationship was sometimes problematic. There are a number of key drivers that compel local authorities to support the local faith sector in their area, but they are also limited by their own funding and capacity constraints.

‘Councils don’t have spare funds just hanging around, and other types of support such as space also have a cost to the council although the faith groups don’t see the money.’

Local authority, interview

Statutory bodies would also like the faith sector to recognise that there are a variety of ways to offer support and funding, and not all involve releasing funds directly.

‘The authority has not yet committed financial resources to the sector, other than that required to provide other support ... [but] there are a lot of ways the statutory sector can support faith organisations: capacity building, help with constitutions and policies, especially the equal opportunities which seems to poses issues for faith bodies, information, publicity, etc.’

Local authority, interview

Finally, the lack of experience of some faith-based organisations with funding applications and the tendering process caused problems in some areas. When arguing for specific funding, for example for outcomes-focused funding streams, compelling arguments must be made. But councils said this did not always happen. Whilst some took the time to support these organisations with their applications, others saw it as a barrier to engagement.

Understanding the benefits of working together

This chapter investigates the benefits that the faith sector and statutory bodies expect from working together and considers whether the rationale behind government policy is acknowledged and accepted by both parties.

Faith-based organisations keen to engage with government

Interviews and questionnaire feedback from respondents suggest that faith-based organisations are well attuned to the benefits of engaging with government at different levels. There was a strong desire amongst the organisations surveyed to develop further connections and partnerships and to seize every opportunity to benefit both their members and the wider community. This is demonstrated by the variety of ways in which faith-based organisations engage with government, from involvement on neighbourhood regeneration teams and local associations to more formal settings such as local strategic partnerships and public service delivery.

Faith-based organisations liaise with government principally because it helps them achieve their own social purpose and objectives. In general, these involve meeting local needs, supporting and providing services to their communities, improving cohesion or simply making their neighbourhoods and communities better and safer.

Liaising with government also enables faith-based organisations to act as a bridge between members of their communities and others, as well as ensuring their needs and concerns are heard and addressed by the public sector and the rest of the voluntary sector.

Practical resources and other government support

The faith-based organisations surveyed have benefited in many ways from their relationship with government. One of the main benefits

has been the access to practical resources, such as funding (for ongoing costs, building costs, staff, projects and activities), marketing or networking assistance, administrative support and access to premises. This is illustrated in the reasons given for contact described in chapter 4.

The other main benefit is more intangible. It relates to faith-based organisations' desire to be acknowledged and to engage actively in civic society, to participate in decision-making and to put their organisations and their faith communities 'on the map'.

Democratic participation

Faith-based organisations are keen to contribute to decision-making and participate in consultations likely to affect their communities. The organisations interviewed felt they had an important role to play in the democratic process, particularly in voicing the concerns of their communities and of those often excluded from the process.

For example, an interviewee from a faith forum had been liaising with multiple government representatives on behalf of people in care to enable them to receive visits from faith representatives while hospitalised or cared for in NHS institutions.

In the media, this democratic participation is manifest in recent debates surrounding sensitive issues such as gay adoption or the use of hybrid embryos for medical research.

Whether or not statutory bodies or other parts of society agree with the viewpoints of different communities, faith-based organisations help gather the resources to voice their concerns, allowing them to be acknowledged and integrated into discussions.

Engaging for a wider social impact

Because of their active participation in civic society, urban regeneration and service delivery, faith-based organisations are increasingly defined as part of the voluntary and community sector (VCS), 'to the extent that some areas of the UK (such as Lancashire)

now refer to the voluntary, community and faith sectors' (NVCO, 2007, p. 3).

Although the faith groups engaged with the statutory sector as members of the VCS, a number of interviewees emphasised their distinctiveness from the rest of the sector. They argued that the distinctiveness of faith groups should be recognised, notably because their motivations and aspirations often link to their belief systems. For example, some interviewees in the faith sector explained that they have a sense of duty and spiritual motivation to support the most excluded or disadvantaged.

Faith-based organisations also play a very important role as a reference for the identities of countless individuals and communities. As such, faith communities' long-term presence and their support activities are ongoing and irrespective of government support and funding agendas.

By sharing their long-term experience and familiarity with local communities with government, faith communities feel they can contribute to improved outcomes for parts of society that government may not be familiar with or positioned to support. The faith sector's experience of local issues was also recognised and appreciated by government interviewees.

The faith-based organisations surveyed felt they benefited from engaging with government and believed that this was a mutual opinion.

'We need to improve services, we're told we need to improve services, and, thankfully, through the faith sector, we have access to people helping us to achieve that.'

Local authority, interview

'[The council] recognises the good work we do and have built up a level of trust, communication and partnership.'

Faith-based organisation, questionnaire

As a report from NCVO suggests (2007, p. 17), ‘faith is therefore seen to be a stimulus for active citizenship and as contributing to the goal of civil renewal’.

Muted enthusiasm at government level

Benefits from faith organisations are not limited to the faith sector; they reach the rest of society and help the public sector meet its own agenda. The majority of government bodies interviewed recognised the distinctive contribution of faith communities and faith-based organisations to society and expressed the need to engage with and support these organisations.

The faith sector and government bodies share a wide range of common objectives and concerns where working together can lead to considerable benefits. This is supported by a number of research studies and practical evidence. A JRF research study found that in some of the most deprived areas, religion is a key element of residents’ self-identity, and local faith communities’ long-term residence gave them a depth of local experience that usually exceeded that of, for example, regeneration professionals (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2003).

Statutory bodies appear to be increasingly aware of the benefits of engaging with the faith sector in relation to social cohesion and integration and when addressing existing tensions between groups. Indeed, some local and regional authorities have been leading the way for many years and reaping the benefits of this collaboration.

‘We realise the crucial support that the faith sector can provide government for social inclusion and regeneration initiatives.’

Regional authority, interview

‘Faith communities contributed significantly to urban regeneration in our area.’

Local authority, interview

Most government officials interviewed were appreciative of the support received from faith and inter faith groups. It was generally accepted that the relationship was one of partnership, particularly when defined in supporting community initiatives. For example, in one region the faith council had been working together with its local authority to improve a disadvantaged suburb. Both groups spoke highly of the joint initiative where the government provided the funding and the faith organisation provided the service on the ground.

‘The faith communities are a substantial part of the population and they have a superb record of not only bringing about a lot of good work but good voluntary work. We have shown our commitment by supporting and funding the [inter faith network] over the last four years.’

Local authority, interview

‘With regards to the faith sector, we see the benefits of working with them locally, and we want to continue working with them for that reason.’

Local authority, interview

However, there is evidence of substantial variations in how much and how well different departments and individual members of government engage with faith-based organisations. Although interviews carried out on both sides suggest that attitudes towards the faith sector are improving continuously, reluctance and hesitation to engage persist at government level and were voiced by a number of respondents. A number of faith-based organisations stated that the faith sector’s involvement was welcomed by some and resisted by others. This was confirmed by some interviewees within statutory bodies, who hinted that their engagement with the faith sector is a result of central government policy rather than internal initiatives.

7 Identifying the challenges and limitations to relationships

This chapter identifies the challenges faced by faith-based organisations in building relationships with government. It begins by exploring the main perceived and acknowledged challenges affecting the faith sector, including capacity and resource constraints, lack of understanding about how government works and how to get involved and competition between groups, and then examines government-based challenges.

Internal challenges affecting the faith sector

The most critical challenges often originate from within. When faith-based organisations addressed the challenges they faced in building relationships with government either through their questionnaire responses or during interviews, many reported important internal issues at organisational level and within the faith sector.

Limited capacity and resources of the faith sector

The lack of internal capacity topped the list of major challenges facing faith-based organisations and hindering the development of relationships with government. The lack of time, capacity and resources was reported by 64% of respondents (28 organisations) as a barrier to participating actively. There was evidence that some felt excluded or isolated as a result.

‘Faith groups must cover running duties before anything else and the few volunteers we usually have are very stretched. There is rarely time or capacity to attend events or develop government contacts.’

Faith-based organisation, interview

‘As [the only paid member of the forum] I find it hard with the volume of work to keep being motivated. [The forum]

could be doing so much more! I would like an admin assistant and someone to help develop our youth inter faith groups in schools. We could be much more effective.'

Faith forum, interview

Resource constraints are evidenced further by the fact that 36% of faith-based organisations (16) agreed that government had a 'lack of understanding of faith groups' limited capacity and resources'.

Understanding and keeping up with government

Faith-based organisations agreed that an understanding of how government operates, including knowing which people and departments are relevant to the work they are doing, was crucial in developing relationships. They also discussed the need to develop an awareness of the various policies and agendas in operation. In light of aforementioned resource constraints, keeping up with changes and policies at government level can present a substantial challenge.

Questionnaire responses identified some of the greatest barriers to developing a relationship with government as: a lack of experience and understanding about government funding (11 organisations (25% of questionnaire responses)), a lack of awareness about how to get involved effectively six organisations (14% of questionnaire responses), and a limited understanding about how government works (five organisations (11% of questionnaire responses)). For example, the increasing use of tendering processes for the delivery of services had been challenging for a number of organisations that were unfamiliar with it.

'Faith groups and networks have a problem evidencing their spend; they are moving from a culture of grants towards a culture of contracts and commissioning.'

Faith forum, interview

Organisations recognised a need for training on understanding and influencing policy (nine organisations (20% of questionnaire

responses)); nearly half of respondents also recommended such training to other groups.

Developing a good understanding of government and keeping up with developments is relatively achievable for well-established faith-based organisations or those affiliated to umbrella voluntary organisations. However, many reported that it was considerably time consuming and there was evidence to suggest some difficulties in achieving this at all levels. For newer, smaller or less well-established faith groups, this can be a significant obstacle to building bridges with government. In addition, many faith forums are relatively new, and must co-opt knowledgeable staff or undertake an extensive research and networking process before they can be effective.

‘It would require the equivalent of a full-time development worker, which we cannot afford.’

Faith forum, interview

‘There is far too much coming towards local authorities in terms of various plans and agendas: no one can keep up with this! Often people within the same local authority are not aware of policies in other departments.’

Faith forum, interview

Competition and rivalry within the faith sector

The growing number of faith forums is generally welcome; however they also contribute to the multiplicity of faith-based organisations looking for engagement and representation at statutory level.

Interviews suggested that the array of faith groups and faith forums in certain regions is creating a rivalry for limited government time and resources. Questionnaire responses supported this theory: a quarter of groups surveyed recognised that competition within the faith sector itself was a barrier to their relationship with government. This was particularly evident amongst more than 40% of faith forums.

Faith-based organisations are contacting local and regional government departments as part of a larger association or network but also continue to do so independently. Whilst it is important for each community to voice its specific needs, it appears that there is a level of overlapping in some cases, and monopolising of resources in others.

There lies another challenge for the faith sector which needs to organise itself in such a way as to be well represented and representative of the increasingly diverse population, without duplicating relationships unnecessarily.

Over-reliance on individuals

Perhaps the most palpable challenge facing faith-based organisations is one everyone can relate to: relationships are about people. The success or failure of the relationship often comes down to the personal contacts of individuals involved. Good relationships and trust can take years to develop, particularly across sectors, and are very vulnerable to mobility.

‘Inevitably, it depends on individual officers – whether they want to get involved with you or not. And this is quite a problem.’

Faith-based organisation, interview

Individual personalities also matter, and people come and go. Many people in the faith sector learned this the hard way when their contact at the local authority was replaced, for example after elections. Not only are the relationships back to the drawing board, but the successor is sometimes not as receptive as the person in post before.

‘The relationship between our forum and the local authorities depends on personalities.’

Faith forum, interview

Essential members of faith-based organisations also move on, often taking their links with government and personal relationships along. Interviews have suggested that faith-based organisations are

considerably dependent on particular staff members or trustees when dealing with government, which poses significant risks when people move on.

‘Without my personal contacts it would have been a hard or near impossible sell to the council.’

Faith group, interview

Government-based challenges

The government-based challenges examined in this section were initially reported by faith-based organisations and subsequently discussed with statutory bodies in order to get their perspective. There was a general agreement that the following difficulties accurately reflected, albeit to various degrees, ongoing issues within government: the lack of faith literacy, limited understanding of faith-based organisations’ work, contributions and stretched resources, complex engagement processes and apprehension to working with the faith sector.

Before launching into the challenges at government level, it is worth mentioning that many local and regional authorities interviewed pointed out that they too were limited by resource constraints. Many were aware that they could achieve more, and perhaps help address some of the faith-based challenges, if they had adequate resources to support them.

‘We currently fund a part-time salary for the faith council; it would cost us about three times as much if we tried to achieve as much as that person does. If only we had more funding to pay for a full-time role!’

Local authority, interview

Faith literacy

From the faith groups’ perspectives, it appears that government bodies need to spend significant resources improving their awareness of faith(s) and on understanding the work of faith-based organisations.

Nearly half of groups (43% of questionnaire responses or 19 organisations) reported the lack of faith literacy or awareness about faith as a problem plaguing their relationship with government bodies. For example, the appropriateness of funding options available varies amongst faith communities, as do holy days and times during which people of faith may not wish to be contacted.

‘There are still misunderstandings about the options available to us. We are not able to apply to Lottery funding, for example.’

Faith-based organisation, interview

‘Diversity awareness is good, but faith literacy is very poor. There is an appalling level of ignorance concerning [our] faith and its practices.’

Faith-based organisation, questionnaire

Interviews with some individuals within government suggested that they had experienced difficulties with their knowledge of faith communities but that the issue was being addressed. However, how this was done tended to depend on actions taken by different departments and on the personal faiths and interests of individuals within government.

‘Yes, we have had issues with a lack of understanding on our part. We now appreciate not to call certain faiths during prayer times!’

Local authority, interview

‘Developing an understanding of faiths is a two-way process where personal relationships are very much a factor. There are always some councillors who are personally interested and others who aren’t.’

Local authority, interview

Training staff around faith was not always seen as a necessity; the existence of training programmes varied between councils. Government personnel have also acknowledged that a lack of faith literacy, combined with little experience of working with faith-based organisations, can make it difficult to relate secular values to those of faith groups.

‘It took a while but [as we work together] faith literacy and understanding about our work [is] improving all the time.’

Faith-based organisation, questionnaire

The majority of faith-based organisations believed that government departments should run faith and diversity training for staff. However there were also concerns that their beliefs would merely be addressed within the diversity training, or be amalgamated with guidance for working with black and minority ethnic communities. Organisations highlighted that there were differences amongst faith communities themselves that were rarely acknowledged by local and regional government.

A few people also felt that government staff sometimes participated in a box-ticking exercise with no real desire to improve their understanding of the faiths around them.

‘During our inter faith training project, heads of government departments were very interested and keen to learn more about diverse faith groups and to forge links with them, but on some isolated incidents we felt that some individuals were there just to tick boxes.’

Faith-based organisation, questionnaire

Understanding the work of faith-based organisations

The lack of understanding at government level about faith-based organisations’ work and their contribution to civil society were highlighted by over a quarter of questionnaire respondents (30%; 13 organisations) as problematic to their relationship.

Interviews within statutory bodies also confirmed that individuals had difficulty in distinguishing the religious aspect from the community aspect of faith-based organisations' work. This posed significant problems when these organisations applied for funding or wanted to get involved in consultations and public service delivery.

Faith literacy and an appreciation for the work of the various faith-based organisations within a specific borough or region can be quite demanding, particularly for a newly appointed government staff member, yet it is increasingly expected from the faith sector and government bodies themselves.

'There must be a real effort to increase understanding of the faith agenda and perspectives ... communication issues are dynamic and one-off solutions don't work. The onus is on the local authority.'

Faith forum, interview

Resistance to engagement

A quarter of faith-based organisations also cited government apprehension or lack of interest in engaging with faith groups as one of the main barriers to the relationship. The aforementioned lack of faith literacy at government level was also perceived by some as deliberate resistance to work with the faith sector.

'Local and regional government often had their own agenda, and no real desire to develop an understanding for our work.'

Faith-based organisation, interview

A number of faith organisations have reported that, although they were contacted by government and invited to contribute to consultations, they felt they were not engaged with appropriately and were present only to 'tick the boxes'. One organisation mentioned that presence at meetings and engagement with statutory bodies only addressed their own agenda and how the faith sector can help in

achieving it, rather than looking at how to address the needs of local communities.

‘Faith groups are tired of being used by government and having their organisations named in the media without having had a real opportunity to contribute and without having any influence at the end of the day.’

Faith group, interview

‘The government is willing to engage with us – if we are meeting their agenda – but not willing to engage to help us fulfil ours on behalf of the whole community – the relationship is lopsided.’

Faith forum, questionnaire

A few interviewees within government mentioned that policy directives encouraging further engagement had been received with mitigated enthusiasm and a degree of cynicism. They also confirmed that there was a degree of reluctance from some individuals to see a real involvement from faith communities in the public realm.

Indeed, when questioned more deeply, government interviewees suggested that there were members of their organisations who continued to mistrust faith organisations as they believed they put their own agendas ahead of the needs of civic society. There was also a fear that this support would be used for proselytising.

This reticence was also observed in *Our Shared Future* (Commission on Cohesion and Integration, 2007, p. 86).

‘Our consultation has highlighted a certain reluctance on the part of some local authorities to engage with faith-based bodies over the resources they can offer – due we think in part to the lack of understanding about faith groups, but also to a squeamishness about the possibility of their proselytising.’(p. 86)

Both sides felt that some people did not really appreciate why government should support, let alone fund, faith-based organisations.

It is clear, therefore, that a major challenge rests in breaking down the wariness and distrust that exists between some individuals within government and the faith sector.

Lack of signposting and a complex engagement process

Engaging with government can be a daunting and challenging process even with much good will. The lack of signposting and lack of clarity about who to speak to at government level was a major concern for 9 organisations (20% of responding faith-based organisations), particularly within faith forums, where the level reached 30% (6 of the 20 faith forums). Very diverse, unclear and lengthy engagement processes for getting in touch with government staff acted as a barrier to this relationship. This was worsened by a reported lack of communication and connectedness amongst government staff members.

‘Sometimes we just get passed around from one department to another.’

Faith-based organisation, questionnaire

‘Councillors attend our events and are generally very supportive. But it has been difficult to understand how local government works and how we can best connect and make links in the process.’

Faith forum, interview

Faith-based organisations have complained about the heavy bureaucratic nature of statutory bodies, the use of jargon and unnecessarily complex processes. Some organisations also felt that there was no clear engagement process and that involvement with government could become meaningless unless objectives were set early on.

‘There needs to be a form of commitment and clear indications of what the expected outcome of the

consultations, where the meetings are leading to, and what the intentions behind them are.’

Faith-based organisation, interview

Statutory bodies reported that they experienced the same problem when engaging with faith groups and referred to overlap or ambiguity in their work, especially those that did not have a clear sphere of activity or did not clearly communicate their purpose. Given the large number of faith-based organisations, government could also find it difficult to engage with everyone and had to make choices when engaging with the faith sector.

‘Our council works with a number of faith groups but we often find it difficult because the organisations don’t have a clear remit; and often organisations don’t talk to each other so there is no unified voice within communities.’

Regional authority, interview

‘How do you engage effectively with such a large number of very different organisations? Even amongst the same faith communities, there is so much diversity.’

Faith forum, interview

Local needs are not understood

Finally, eight organisations (18%) felt strongly that government was not familiar enough with local issues and saw this as a problematic aspect of the relationship. Local and regional government were seen as implementing policies without understanding how this affected people at a local level. Individuals within faith communities also had to challenge their local government to address issues not initially on their agenda and draw support from other faith and voluntary sector organisations before being heard.

‘Meeting needs is not just about faith. It’s about humanity. If you see local needs you have to address them if you can. I have been going around to other faith-based organisations to

discuss how we can all use our premises to deliver services for the people that need them, no matter where they come from. Once we have a proposal ready, we will go to the council and see if they will support us.'

Faith-based organisation, interview

The timeframes imposed by government initiatives to deal with local needs were also problematic. Faith groups believe in long-term interventions and sustained support; this approach clashed with the use of deadlines and limited time to complete projects and spend funding. Faith-based organisations highlighted the fact that they often continued to provide services well after the funding had ceased by drawing resources from within and using volunteers extensively.

'We get involved on a human, one-to-one level and for the long term. We don't close shop and move on to another problem after three months.'

Faith-based organisation, interview

8 Improving relationships between government and the faith sector

Despite generally positive relationships being reported between faith-based organisations and government, a number of important challenges were pointed out. This chapter explores whether the faith sector has a desire for better links with government and what steps government bodies, faith-based organisations and the wider faith sector ought to take to address effectively and constructively the difficulties they are facing and are posing to each other.

Developing better links

Regardless of the current state of their relationship with government and their experience in building relationships, the faith-based organisations surveyed demonstrated a real desire to improve their relationship or develop better links (38 organisations (86% of questionnaire respondents)). Twenty-eight organisations (64%) were currently working on improving this.

‘We plan to make a concerted effort to build better relationships – we may even make a new start with the mayor’s office.’

Faith-based organisation, questionnaire

These findings reflect the importance of this relationship to faith-based organisations. There is a realisation or acknowledgement that further engagement is likely to be beneficial. Although it was an option on the questionnaire, no organisation indicated that it would not want to improve its relationship with government because it found it too complicated or bureaucratic, or because it did not know how to go about it.

A few organisations highlighted specific difficulties affecting their ability to develop better links at government level effectively, including

lack of time and resources (13 organisations), uncertainty regarding who to contact (three) and feelings of reluctance from government (two). However, these did not seem to stop the responding organisations from trying to develop better links.

Four faith forums and two faith groups claimed that they did not really need to improve their relationships with government because they were happy with the current situation.

Addressing challenges within the faith sector

Faith-based organisations addressed their challenges and limitations in many ways. This section presents the most successful strategies when building relationships with local and regional government: strengthening the organisation internally, improving communication, creating relationships outside government and directly engaging with statutory bodies. It concludes with four case studies demonstrating how faith-based organisations can address these challenges.

Strengthening the organisation from within

Internally, faith-based organisations face barriers similar to those experienced by other grassroots voluntary organisations with regards to management and planning.

Organisations working in partnership with government often needed to improve or strengthen their management processes by actively developing and implementing organisational strategies and putting in place tools for monitoring and evaluating projects and services. Faith-based organisations also acknowledged the need to develop and demonstrate their own track record effectively: 43% of responding organisations felt this helped improve access and relationships with government.

‘Faith-based organisations have to learn to demonstrate their work. So many lack monitoring and evaluation systems, ways to measure success and track record, and simple planning systems. Of course they cannot go to [the government] and complain that they are not getting support and money.’

Faith forum, interview

Although this practice is commonplace in many faith-based organisations, for others it may initially require a change of culture. However, having formal policies, procedures and processes in place was a recommendation supported by both government and the faith sector. It is also particularly important when applying for financial support or to deliver public services.

‘What helped the most was demonstrating our good track record and having a professional approach to meetings, with quality paperwork, presentation, etc.’

Faith-based organisation, interview

Many individuals at government level also hinted they could provide some support in updating and improving management processes and policies.

The crucial role of communication

As well as having strong systems in place, organisations must also excel at communicating and networking. Faith-based organisations must take the time to define, or redefine, and communicate their own purpose and objectives, as well as identify where they fit in the changing faith sector and the wider voluntary community. This can be part of the planning process discussed above. As faith organisations and faith forums grow and develop, faith communities and government must be able to understand the role that relevant organisations play and how different groups can and ought to relate to each other.

A number of faith-based organisations commented, either in their questionnaire response or during interviews, that they did not talk to each other enough, either within or across faiths. This made it difficult to have a unified, cohesive voice when it mattered or was appropriate. Faith forums, where there is conversation across faith groupings, are therefore important contributors to achieving a sense of cohesiveness within the sector.

All successful relationships with government had involved individuals putting considerable efforts into networking, meeting people,

engaging with other groups and continuously developing links. Those interviewed during the course of the research leading to this report had in common their passion for people and a very well practised ability to talk about their work.

This was demonstrated by the fact that staff or trustees of faith-based organisations were often involved in various boards and associations, faith and non-faith related, and seized every opportunity to talk about their organisations. Many had been in the sector for years, and some had even previously worked for local government.

The faith sector's ability to liaise with government and to attract funding thus depends on the same qualities as those being promoted by other voluntary and community organisations and even businesses. An organisation's success in involving government and mobilising communities rests largely on good communication, networking and people skills.

'The situation is not black and white: it very much depends on the project, the individual officer and your own ability to network and connect with people.'

Faith forum, interview

Creating relationships outside of government

A constructive way to build bridges amongst different organisations and with government bodies is to create and develop links outside the statutory sector. Indeed, when asked how barriers to improve relationships with government were overcome, a majority of faith-based organisations (50% of questionnaire respondents (22 organisations)) stated that they got involved in local or regional events or projects, including projects with other voluntary and community organisations (48% (20)), and with faith forums or joint initiatives (50% (22)).

Organisations found that they were able to improve engagement with government fruitfully through indirect participation and involvement in a variety of other networks, events or projects. This also allowed government to develop relationships and support multiple

organisations through individual initiatives; these created platforms for personal contacts and exchanges to take place organically.

‘A conference was organised for public and voluntary sectors and local business to discuss how to make diversity work. This project enabled our community to establish working relationships with the public sector, inform the local authorities on the needs of our community and improve public services to faith groups.’

Community Development Foundation case study

‘Without personal contacts [in the voluntary sector], engaging in a meaningful dialogue with the LA [local authority] would have been almost impossible with the resources available.’

Faith-based organisation, interview

This was further evidenced by the fact that many respondents wore multiple hats, each with the advantage of complementing their work within the faith sector. Examples include involvement with specific associations (such as youth, arts, business and environment) or with faith forums, as well as through specific partnerships and advisory groups (such as diversity, equality, black and minority ethnic and refugee).

‘Through my chairing of a multi faith forum, I have represented faith on the district and county council’s equalities groups, leading to our involvement in the local strategy partnership.’

Faith forum, interview

Addressing the barriers to the relationship with government through increased participation, joint working and networking also helped equip faith organisations to tackle other obstacles, such as the lack of capacity and resources, the perceived competition amongst organisations within the faith sector and the lack of awareness about government operations and policy.

Direct engagement with statutory bodies

A large number of organisations had developed better relationships through direct engagement with one or multiple governmental units. This involved improved networking and contacts with government (61% of questionnaire respondents (27 organisations)), developing long-term relationships based on mutual trust and support (41% (18)) and involvement in local strategic partnerships (LSPs) or other local consultative bodies (43% (19)).

Some of the organisations surveyed also mentioned specific statutory bodies such as hospitals, the police and primary care trusts as well as local schools. A number of faith-based organisations also took advantage of the opportunities available in their regions, for example by participating in the discussions leading to the 2012 Olympics or developing a solution to address specific local issues.

‘We are partners in the local community safety forum, hate crime/domestic violence crime strategy, and participate in the involvement of local communities and business with the 2012 Olympics.’

Faith-based organisation, questionnaire

‘It’s a two-way process. This isn’t just about us handing out money. Sometimes [faith-based organisations] approach us for funding after having identified a need. This is what they’re good at, and we like this approach.’

Regional development agency (RDA), interview

Just under a quarter of the groups surveyed (24%(10 organisations)) said that they overcame challenges when building relationships with government bodies by ‘improving our understanding of each other and our roles’. One-to-one engagement was recommended as a great way to find common grounds and initiate relationships, specifically when liaising with statutory bodies that had similar or complementary objectives.

‘We had face-to-face meetings to discuss issues with direct input to officers and councillors on committees, and worked

with inter faith groups to address issues with local government.’

Faith-based organisation, questionnaire

It was also suggested on several occasions that the most effective way to develop better links was an open and transparent approach to communicating with the local and regional authorities.

‘Organisations should be open and transparent when talking about their motivations for working together and the relationship will work much better.’

Local authority, interview

Successful engagement also involved discussing ways to work together and focusing on benefits, often beyond the faith labels.

‘The dialogue with the faith sector is around inclusion and participation aspects of economic development. The fact that [faith-based organisations] have access to hard to reach groups is of more interest to RDAs than their religious beliefs.’

RDA, interview

Approaching local authorities with the results of a study or mapping of faiths, or with relevant initiatives to address local issues or concerns, is another constructive way to initiate or renew the engagement process and strengthen relationship building. These are opportunities to liaise directly with local government and share expertise or local knowledge.

Finally, some specific recommendations addressed the fact that faith groups should also stay true to their missions and their projects and not try to engage with government at all costs.

‘Be clear what you want, not be led into compromise to suit their needs. Don’t be shy about what things cost – don’t try to do things on the cheap.’

Faith-based organisation, questionnaire

CASE STUDY: Mapping of faiths by a local forum



Background

A group of local people organised informal meetings to address various issues affecting their faith communities. The meetings discussed subjects such as where to buy ethnic foods, the lack of parking spaces around places of worship, the provision of culturally appropriate funeral services and burial rights.

As the number of participants grew, the discussions generated interest locally. The group devised a regular newsletter for its members to summarise the last meeting and present the agenda for the next. It became apparent that a more cohesive structure would enable the group to address the common concerns that had emerged during discussions more effectively and present those to local government.

An inter faith forum was created by the group in 2003 with the aim of addressing the needs of the local faith communities and informing strategy and policies at the local level.

The project

The forum received a grant from FCCBF, which funded a mapping of faiths in the borough and a number of consultation events. The forum's aims were to:

- get together, engage in dialogue and build trust
- engage in the local strategic partnership (LSP) and inform local government policies
- address any social issues the local community is facing.

'The CDF grant enabled us to run two consultation events and carry out a mapping of faiths in our borough. We surveyed about 250 different faith groups.'

The relationship with government

The local authority supported the creation of the forum and helped the forum with networking, facilities, events, etc.

‘The local authority have been 100% behind us in the process [of setting up the forum] and are in it for meaningful dialogue. They see us as a key way to access various communities. We also challenge them on certain points and policies when we feel they do not represent the diverse concerns that we have.’

Challenges and addressing them

‘We weren’t sure how to set ourselves up, what sort of constitution to have and that was a problem.’

‘The diversity of groups is such that it is sometimes difficult to agree, set priorities. But we have developed an action plan and a charter for faith groups which they can sign up to in order to support our work.’

Because the forum took some time to get going, it began to lose the goodwill of the faith groups and the local authority contacts. But now that there is more cohesion amongst the faith communities, is easier to liaise with the local authority.

Success factors

‘We have managed to find some common grounds amongst the faith groups and we have shown the local government that we are really serious.’

The knowledge produced from the mapping of faiths and the consultations was well received by the local authority. The forum is now in the process of healthy negotiations with the council for funding. It was also encouraged to elect a representative to the LSP, where it can voice its members’ concerns and contribute to developing solutions.

CASE STUDY:

Creating a mutual understanding between faiths and government



This faith forum aims to promote dialogue and increase understanding between people of all faiths in and around the city. The forum has 25–30 members; membership is open to interested individuals and organisations of all faiths.

The forum regularly organises social events with guest speakers to share discussions on issues of faith and actively helps to develop mutual respect amongst the city's faith communities.

Project aims

The forum received FCCBF funding to help build its capacity and organisational capabilities, including buying equipment, hiring venues for its meetings and providing publicity for its events. Part of the funding was allocated to organising a local faith walk calling at places of worship.

The forum's relationship with government

The forum sees relationship building with government and public accountability as fundamental to its work.

It is funded by regional government, via the faith, race and cohesion agenda of the government office for the regions. These funds have been used to help develop a coalition of faith forums in order to help share best practice, build relationships and influence decisions across the region.

The forum operates within two levels of local government, within the jurisdiction of the city council and county council. Because of the forum's size and representative nature, and the resources (mainly time) it has spent in building and strengthening relationships with budget holders and key local government contacts, it has developed a good working relationship with the statutory sector.

Barriers and challenges

The single biggest barrier for the forum is the resources needed for effective long-term relationship building. It is aware that relationships with government and faith communities must be dynamic and vibrant and are a constant work in progress. However, this can be challenging at times, as the forum has no paid employees.

Success factors

The forum has been able to engage with government effectively, in order to represent the interests of its individual members, and to help create a mutual understanding and improve cohesion amongst local faith communities.

This has been achieved by keeping in mind that ongoing communication and personal contacts are key, both within the faith sector and statutory bodies. Even though the organisation has a representative position on a number of partnership boards, connections between individuals, rather than only between organisations, are vital.

A practical and successful approach has been to invite members of the local strategic partnership (LSP) to speak to forum members, which helps share the relationship. As well as one forum representative being exposed to the LSP, a number of LSP members are also exposed to the forum. This has helped to raise awareness and understanding for all parties and has enabled better participation in the LSP and involvement from all members.

CASE STUDY: A centre of community interactions



Background

The city-located church owns large premises which serve as a community centre. It offers a nursery and rooms for hire, which

are available to members of the public, other faith communities and voluntary organisations.

The project

The church received funding from FCCBF to develop its community centre in an aim to provide a welcoming, safe and friendly area where users can meet and interact informally. A formal programme for users, incorporating social, cultural and diverse religious groups is also being developed. This will enable people to *'appreciate various groups and the unique contributions to the community and society they make.'*

Relationship with government

The organisation's presence in the community has led to the development of good relationships with local government.

'We are used as a polling centre, blood donation centre etc – we are part of the make-up of the community, and about 15-20 groups use our building, many from other faiths and cultures.'

The church has particularly good relationships with the local MP and councillors, who were described as being very supportive and quite accessible.

'Local councillors have also been using our premises for their surgery – but they also attend our events, and have written letters of support for our funding applications.'

Challenges

For some time, apart from a meeting with the local authority that indirectly led to the church opening a community nursery, the organisation did not get much financial support from local government. The church felt that relationships did not often translate into actual support. Recently, however, they were asked by the local authority to manage a children's centre and, since then, the local authority has been extremely supportive.

'For years, we didn't make a lot of progress and all of a sudden we are. We cannot believe it!'

Success factors

Being a beacon for the community over the years has attracted many people to the church, and it has made the most of its large space to strengthen ties between communities. It provides a safe space for people of all communities to interact.

‘It almost like we are starting to reap the benefit of our networking over the years.’

Continuous effort, openness and building local partnerships over the years have been the key to successful engagement with local communities and local government.

The organisation now also receives funding from the local youth opportunities fund and the local police, and is hoping to expand its activities to reach more and more local people.

CASE STUDY: Developing a strong reputation with government



Background

An inter faith forum was founded over 20 years ago to advance trust and understanding between the different faith communities in their region. The forum aims to promote good relationships between people of different faiths and to create a harmonious, cohesive society.

Project

The inter faith forum received FCCBF funding to run listening groups involving a large range of people of all ages, all cultures and all faiths and beliefs (including those with no faith). This has recently led to a publication which helped raise the profile and public awareness of faith issues within the communities and allowed for a large diversity of local people to get involved in the forum’s blueprint for the future of their inter faith strategy.

Relationship with government

The inter faith forum evolved in the 1980s from an initiative by the then Lord Mayor who invited members of different faith communities to a meeting. The forum initially received a grant from the city council ten years ago and has continued to maintain a good relationship with it. The grant paid for rent and office expenses, a small salary for a part-time post and for some small additional activities.

Challenges

The main barrier for development of the forum is their dependency on the city council grant. It is 'totally dependent on this grant and (we) wouldn't exist if we didn't have it.'

'Every year we are anxious when we have to re-apply for the grant and feel that the result is very much dependent on who's in the council at the time.'

Additionally, the forum has a limited capacity because it is small. It has a mainly networking role acting as an umbrella organisation to provide links to the local faith communities.

'If we had more funds, we could do so much more!'

The diversity and number of faith groups operating in the area is seen as a challenge in itself. The forum tries to connect with all these groups, each of which is busy carrying out its own work.

Success factors

Despite being small, the forum has been able to maintain positive long-term relationships with the city council and local communities. Its success rests on its ability to engage and collaborate with a number of agencies and continually initiate, support and publicise projects to promote a greater understanding amongst the city's faith communities.

The forum hosts a reference library of inter faith literature and offers conference facilities for the voluntary and faith sector. It also co-organises a number of faith and inter faith events and seminars for local faith communities and statutory bodies.

Although benefiting from a historical relationship with the city council, the inter faith forum maintains a strong reputation with government by actively contributing to mutual understanding amongst different faiths and by leading the way on inter faith strategy.

Addressing challenges at government level

This section outlines potential ways to address the government-based challenges identified earlier. It examines strategies reportedly used within government and provides additional recommendations, including suggestions from faith groups, to increase faith literacy, appreciate the contributions that faith-based organisations can make and simplify the engagement process.

Faith literacy

In their questionnaire feedback, 52% of faith-based organisations (23 organisations) stated that running faith and diversity training would help improve relationships between the faith sector and government. This was also acknowledged by a number of interviewees within government.

‘There is a lack of well-structured training programme, which should be ongoing, sustainable, and monitored to provide training to local authorities and governmental staff about the diverse local faith groups in each region.’

Faith-based organisation, questionnaire

Many government departments and local authorities did deliver faith literacy training to their staff. Some statutory bodies had commissioned local faith or inter faith groups to run the sessions. This approach seemed to be successful in addressing the concerns of faith groups and was beneficial to government staff, as it ensured that the training was representative of the diverse belief systems at work locally or regionally.

‘We have experienced no barriers. We actually have run a number of staff faith awareness training sessions for the LA.’

Faith forum, questionnaire

In addition to training sessions, a large number of local government bodies had a specific staff member assigned to faith communities who acted as a liaison officer. When such positions existed they were often used as a resource about local faith communities and helped ensure ‘faith correctness’.

Some local authorities took advantage of the diversity within their teams by referring to staff members’ experiences and knowledge of faiths, either because they were known to be people of a specific faith or because they had a good understanding of faith customs and beliefs. However, interviewees warned about ensuring that these people stepped forward to take on this role and share their expertise. People’s faiths and their availability or desire to act as a resource or as a representative for their faith community should not be assumed.

Developing guides to local or regional faith communities and their work and circulating them within government departments can also be a practical and accessible resource; the guides are independent of individual staff members’ presence and are a useful complement to training sessions. They can help answer staff members’ essential questions, particularly those that they would not feel comfortable asking.

Finally, there are numerous ways to improve faith literacy and develop broader knowledge about faiths, including accessing online resources, contacting faith forums and, naturally, by engaging directly with faith communities.

‘Faith literacy is an issue, but this could be addressed by all parties simply through meeting and talking about the issues. It would make for greater sensitivity both amongst inter faith meetings and with government.’

Faith forum, interview

Resistance to engaging with the faith sector

Amongst the organisations surveyed, 24 (55%) recommended that government should have more openness towards faith groups and their work. Interviewees from the faith sector argued that developing joint projects and examining their achievements in meeting local needs helped government understand their role better.

Statutory bodies reported sometimes finding themselves in delicate positions. On the one hand, they ought to engage with faith-based organisations and see them as part of the voluntary and community sector, and appreciate the scale of their contributions to society. On the other hand, 'there is also some evidence of a concern that engaging with faith groups might undermine the inclusiveness of the local authority's wider strategies' (Commission on Cohesion and Integration, 2007, p. 86), and that the aims of some organisations are not aligned or compatible with government's liberal values.

The legitimacy of faith groups' engagement, and their ability to effectively and adequately be involved in public sector funded projects or consultations, varies substantially between organisations. However, denying involvement to all on this basis would be unsubstantiated.

Local and regional government interviewees reported working with organisations they already knew well or felt were representative of a faith community. When they had no previous experience of joint working, they used organisations' track records and looked at their proposed projects and how these met local needs or fitted with their own agendas.

The issues of representation and equality posed specific difficulties to some government interviewees, which tended to be addressed with the organisations whenever possible. In the case of consultations or advice about faith, it was suggested that government could specifically contact under-represented groups, such as women-led or youth-focused organisations, to ensure that their perspectives were included.

Finally, it is also important that initiatives come from within and build on previous positive experiences of working with faith communities.

Following central government policies without a genuine effort or desire to engage with faith groups is likely to lead to a tokenistic effort and build meaningless relationships with the faith sector.

Simpler engagement processes and clearer signposting

The majority of organisations stated that a less bureaucratic approach, with simpler processes would be helpful (26 organisations (59%)). Respondents also called for more transparent and clearer processes for funding (28 organisations (64%)). Whilst it may be difficult to change certain processes within government, much can be done to support faith and voluntary organisations during the engagement process and throughout the relationship.

It was recommended that additional guidance about how government works and what should be done when applying for funding should be available and easily accessible. If specific terminology must be used, it should be explained clearly. Where paperwork or applications forms required are lengthy and complex, assistance could be offered.

Clearer signposting at regional and local levels was seen as an important part of simplifying a very complex engagement process. Half of the surveyed faith-based organisations stated that recruiting and clearly signposting a key contact person for faith communities would enable improved relationships with statutory bodies and would help those less familiar with government processes and policies to understand them.

A number of the local authorities interviewed did have a contact person specifically in place for faith communities, and this proved very helpful from the faith sector's perspective. People knew who they should contact and who was responsible for their queries; however there was a high dependency on a single individual.

A few local authorities had a 'community liaison officer', thereby linking up faith communities with other departments. Although this allowed for information to be easily centralised and dispersed, it was a very demanding role and organisations could find it difficult to contact such post holders.

Another approach was to outsource the liaison post to a third party, for example a local council for voluntary service or a representative faith-based organisation, which engaged with the faith sector on behalf of the statutory body. This method simplifies the process of communicating with the faith sector because there is one contact point for both parties and can result in increased synergies and efficiency for government departments. However there can be a degree of dependence on the third party if a contract comes to an end and neither the faith sector contacts nor engagement skills are familiar to the statutory body.

At regional level, a departmental approach was most common, and contact was generally with the larger players and the regional faith forums.

Each engagement process had its strengths and weaknesses and depended on government bodies' own budget and staff constraints.

What did make a difference was how accessible the individual(s) were. A common suggestion was to devise and maintain a contact list with names, titles and contact details so that government switchboards could direct people effectively and rapidly. Contact information and preferred methods of engagement should also be easily accessible on relevant websites.

Although no interviewee at government level stated they did not have a contact person for the faith sector, many faith-based organisations argued that this was the case. A number of local authorities contacted for the purpose of this report had difficulty in identifying the right person to speak to or avoided or postponed interviews. Perhaps they would have been more forthcoming if they had someone accountable for faith-related matters.

Addressing the vulnerability of individual relationships

Personal contacts are crucial, but there was concern amongst a number of faith-based organisations that relationships could be lost when the people in post moved on, or political parties changed.

‘We feel we may lose contacts if government officials change as a result of the local elections and this is a concern. We have spent so long building these relationships.’

Faith-based organisation, interview

One interviewee in the faith sector suggested that government should inform faith-based organisations about changes in the relevant posts and organise an introduction session with the new staff member(s).

Developing effective liaisons also means improving communication on an institutional basis so that others within government can develop relationships or access faith-based organisations with ease. Internal contact lists already exist and are shared by a number of statutory bodies; however these tend to be limited to emergency planning and consultative purposes. These could be extended to include names of people who have been engaged with before and information about their expertise.

For many authorities contacted, a formal process of embedded relationships between organisations was an aspiration rather than reality due to the resource constraints. However, the LSPs were seen as a practical way to achieve this effectively.

Looking forward

A large number of the organisations interviewed, both within government and the faith sector, referred to their involvement in local strategic partnerships (LSPs) and faith forums with enthusiasm. Indeed, LSPs and faith forums have been increasingly supported in governmental policy in recent years. Both have been very active in facilitating relationship building and redefining the engagement process at local and regional levels.

From the comments collected from faith-based organisations, it appears that involvement in LSPs and faith forums can help address many of the aforementioned challenges that have limited the development of successful relationships between government and the faith sector. This chapter looks at how both engagement processes are contributing to improved relationships.

Local strategic partnerships

LSPs are non-statutory, multi-agency partnerships, which match local authority boundaries. They bring together at a local level the different parts of the public, private, community and voluntary sectors, enabling different initiatives and services to support one another and so work together more effectively.

LSPs aim to get the public, private and voluntary sectors and the local community together to improve public services and work on issues that meet local community needs. All partners work together to fulfil the outputs and outcomes listed in the local area agreement, which defines the local authority area's local and national priorities.

Faith-based organisations also saw LSPs as one of the ways to overcome barriers to their relationship with government; this was confirmed by 19 respondents (43% of the groups surveyed).

‘Links with the LSP enabled me to meet and know the ‘right people’ to contact and build relationships with.’

Faith-based organisation, questionnaire

All the local authorities interviewed had been using their LSP as one of the primary channels of engagement with the faith sector, using it for consultation, outreach and representation as well as for the commissioning and funding agendas. More and more authorities are operating in this manner. From their perspective it is an efficient use of resources and gives a highly visible and accessible channel for engagement.

Statutory bodies interviewed reported that one of the most effective ways for small faith organisations to be involved in the commissioning agenda was through participation in or representation on LSPs.

‘Our local authority and the local statutory sector generally, interacts with the faith sector principally through the LSP. The initial driver for this was the release of NRF [Neighbourhood Renewal Fund] funding and the requirement that CENs [community empowerment networks] be represented on the LSPs.’

Local authority and LSP member, interview

There is also evidence to support the effectiveness of LSPs and CENs, where faith communities have worked alongside the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)⁴ and the Inner Cities Religious Council in community regeneration projects, in targeting ‘hard to reach’ sectors of society and opening a forum for consultations (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2006).

However, while there is potentially an opportunity for faith organisations to sit at the decision-making table, there is also a range of conflicting drivers that may mitigate against a truly effective engagement between local authorities and the faith sector. Electing a

4. What was known as ODPM is now part of Communities and Local Government

voice to stand for the various faith communities has its own challenges, and poses the risk of alienating those not represented through that person. Therefore the LSP should be one, but not the only, way to engage with the faith sector.

Inter faith organisations

The other route increasingly used for engagement between the faith sector and government is through faith forums. There are now over 260 local, regional and national inter faith organisations, and each government region in England has, or is developing, its own faith forum. Wales already has its own inter faith council.

Inter Faith Organisations in the UK: A directory (Inter Faith Network for the UK, 2007, p. 9), explains that some forums ‘have been set up as formal representative faith councils with nominated representation from local faith communities. Others are open to any interested individual. Yet others have meetings and general membership open to all but have steering or executive committees which reflect in their membership the main faith communities in their area.’

Forums are seen as an important part of the faith sector, particularly in relation to linking to government. Over 60% of faith-based organisations (28 organisations) responding to the questionnaire recommended involvement with faith forums as a way of improving their relationship with government. It was also increasingly important for the smaller faith groups to seek representation within wider organisations. Forums were seen as being better resourced and more able to enable participation from diverse communities and speak on their behalf.

‘As an organisation, the forum is more recognised and “respected” [and so is] therefore taken more seriously.’

Faith forum, questionnaire

‘We act as an umbrella organisation; individual faith communities do not have the capacity, time or knowledge to represent themselves effectively.’

Faith forum, questionnaire

In their questionnaire responses, the forums described their own role mainly as getting involved in local structures and the civic process in general (65% (13 organisations)), helping to raise awareness of faiths at government level (55% (11 organisations)), and acting as the voice of faith groups in their locality/region (55% (11 organisations)). A large number also viewed their purpose as bridging the gap between faith groups and government (50% (10 organisations)) and, to a lesser extent, influencing government policy (35% (7 organisations)).

Government policy is already very supportive of faith forums. The Government's *'Face to-Face' and 'Side-by-Side': A framework for inter faith dialogue and social action* consultation document stated: 'Our vision is that inter faith activity will build good relations and break down barriers between people from different backgrounds through "face-to-face" and "side-by-side" collaboration in shared activities, with a common purpose and a concrete outcome' (CLG, 2007, p. 5).

More recently, Communities and Local Government (CLG) also published *Cohesion Guidance for Funders – A consultation* (Communities and Local Government, 2008), which canvasses the placing of additional conditions on funding of third sector groups. The consultation sought views on 'producing guidance on both the funding of mainstream activities and the funding of activities which are targeted towards particular groups within society. Both of these provide opportunities to promote cohesion, where they provide people with opportunities to make links with other people from different backgrounds' (CLG, 2008a).

The Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF) supported the creation and development of a number of faith forums during the two rounds of funding, many of which have made important progress since their inception. For example, a number of previously informal forums have become better organised, developed websites and newsletters and acquired representation on LSPs and are now used by government as a resource for consultation and policy.

However, in light of new funding guidelines, there is an even stronger incentive for faith-based organisations to seek partnerships with forums and develop inter faith or joint projects.

Interviews with the forums highlighted that trying to represent everyone was not an easy objective to meet.

‘At some point we were losing goodwill on the part of the faith groups and our contacts at local authority level because it took a while to get the forum going. We have managed to find some common groups amongst the faith groups and we have shown local government that we are really serious.’

Faith forum, interview

Whilst there is an important place for forums, some faith-based organisations felt these should not replace direct representation and solicitation by smaller independent organisations or faith forum members. Indeed, some faith groups and single faith organisations found this focus on inter faith activity difficult.

‘Faith groups should be respected and engaged with by government as distinctive faith groups as well as multi faith groupings. In most areas [our faith community] far outnumber any other faith group and this needs to be recognised by government. An approach which seeks to lump all faiths together ... is grossly ignorant and misguided.’

Faith-based organisation, questionnaire

Some faith groups feared that the forums could be co-opted by the groups with the loudest voices. It is therefore extremely important that forums complement, not substitute, engagement with faith communities: doing so would risk further alienating organisations that have not made it to the forums or the LSPs.

Our interviews with the statutory sector raised these issues in relation to both LSPs and faith forums. These concerns were generally acknowledged and there was confirmation that, in order to get a more representative engagement with the sector, there would be a continued direct engagement with smaller groups.

Conclusions and recommendations

According to the faith-based organisations funded by the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF) that were surveyed and interviewed for this report, current relationships with local and regional government, as well as the experience of relationship building, are generally positive. All responding organisations had been in contact with government and were well aware of the advantages of engaging with statutory bodies, including funding, support with events and activities, meeting local needs and enabling democratic participation.

In some areas, recent policy developments had contributed to a renewed or revived interest in the faith sector from local and regional authorities and had encouraged further engagement and stronger relationships.

With regards to funding, the relationship observed was more problematic at times, tended to depend on the inclinations of government staff and varied depending on individual projects. According to over half of the organisations surveyed the relationship remained positive overall, but some organisations felt that lack of trust and the fear of funding faith-based organisations at government level were significant obstacles.

Most faith-based organisations reported that they were keen to improve the relationship further and develop better links with their local or regional statutory bodies.

However, despite encouraging feedback, questionnaire responses and interviews suggested that there were barriers to engagement with government which continued to hinder the development of the relationship. Nearly every organisation identified or acknowledged one or multiple significant challenges. These were either internal or government-based.

Organisations were very aware of their own weaknesses and recognised a number of key internal challenges. Organisations' lack of internal capacity was at the forefront of their concerns. 11 respondents (25%) acknowledged that their lack of experience with government funding and tendering processes and limited awareness about how government works was impeding their relationship. Many were not sure how to influence policy or how to get involved effectively. There was also evidence of competition and rivalry within the sector and some difficulties in presenting a unified voice when needed.

The main difficulties at government level included the lack of faith literacy and the limited understanding by statutory bodies of the work carried out by faith-based organisations. Respondents also highlighted government's lack of signposting, complex engagement and funding processes and limited awareness of the faith sector's tight resources and capacity. A proportion of faith-based organisations also felt that some statutory bodies were reticent or apprehensive about engaging with the faith sector and particularly in funding it. Finally, respondents often suggested there was a lack of awareness about local issues affecting communities at government level, and that the faith sector was in general much more attentive and responsive to such issues.

Against these tensions must be balanced the increasing openness with which government departments are engaging with faith organisations. Almost all statutory bodies interviewed reported being increasingly conscious and enthusiastic about the benefits of building relationships with the faith sector. Faith literacy and active engagement and consultation with the faith sector were generally seen as improving and many groups surveyed appreciated the effort made by their local or regional government.

For a few respondents however, it was very much a 'new realisation', sometimes led by central government or other pressures to engage with the faith sector. Other interviewees acknowledged levels of scepticism by some individuals within their department.

Recommendations

An overwhelming majority of the FCCBF-funded faith-based organisations involved in the research for this report demonstrated initiative and enthusiasm in the ways they overcame barriers to engage with government. Many directed continuous efforts towards building strong, long-term relationships with their local and regional authorities. A number of initiatives or strategies undertaken by faith-based organisations were seen as helpful in improving their relationships with statutory bodies.

Amongst these techniques were involvement in joint projects with other organisations in the faith and voluntary sectors, and taking advantage of the engagement opportunities presented by faith forums. Organisations also recommended improving communications, both internally and externally, and making serious efforts at improving contacts, networking and meeting people. Building and demonstrating the organisation's track record was highlighted as a way to gain legitimacy and recognition from government. Finally, direct engagement with government, either through individual contacts or formal means such as local strategic partnerships (LSPs), was seen as a crucial way to develop successful long-term relationships.

These recommendations can be summarised as follows.

For faith-based organisations (by faith-based organisations)

1. Engage more with other faith groups and develop joint initiatives.
2. Get involved in faith forums.
3. Get involved in local structures and civic processes (for example LSPs).
4. Develop better government contact and networking skills.
5. Get trained on how to engage with government and how to influence policy.

Faith-based organisations also issued a number of recommendations for government bodies. Most reiterated the need for clearer, less bureaucratic and more transparent processes in general, particularly with regards to funding. Many also reported that clear signposting

and an indication about who to speak to within government would make it much easier to develop relationships.

The reluctance to engage with the faith sector was also addressed through a recommendation that statutory bodies should have more openness towards faith-based organisations. Respondents in the faith sector felt that government would benefit from learning more about the diverse faith communities by visiting them and engaging with them on the ground. Faith literacy training for government staff was seen as an effective way forward.

Their recommendations are summarised below.

For local and regional government (by faith-based organisations)

1. Introduce a more transparent and clearer processes for funding.
2. Have a less bureaucratic approach and simpler engagement processes.
3. Be more open towards faith groups.
4. Run faith and diversity training.
5. Recruit and signpost key contacts for the faith sector.

Statutory bodies interviewed also had a number of suggestions and recommendations, based on their experiences of working with the faith sector. Interestingly, many of these relate to those mentioned by the faith sector.

For faith-based organisations (by statutory bodies)

When asking for funding or support

- Appreciate that government funding will increasingly be channelled through faith-based groups representing the widest range of the community.
- Work together with other faith and non-faith groups to look at options to share/do things in common.
- Present a united front when necessary and particularly when looking to achieve specific objectives or to get funding for a joint project.

- Be open and transparent when talking about your motivation for working together.
- Have clear terms of reference, aims and objectives.
- Clearly demonstrate accountability to your community and to the statutory sector.
- Ask for representation on LSPs.
- Appreciate that government is able to give many forms of support, not just funding.

To improve engagement with government

- Develop a reputation for solid community work.
- Build a demonstrable track record on issues such as economic regeneration, education and support of disadvantaged minorities, and communicate it widely, particularly to relevant government bodies.
- Publicise and share your successes.
- Find people in government who are sympathetic and build a relationship with them.
- Remember that time spent talking is time well spent: faith organisations and those in government do not always understand ‘where the other is coming from’.
- Appreciate that governments come and go; so political doors do not necessarily remain open (or closed). Move quickly when the opportunity presents itself.

Recommendations for government (by statutory bodies)

At local level

- Recognise, in funding streams and moral support, the value to the community of representative faith-based organisations.
- Appreciate the strength of the faith groups in building social cohesion and in liaising with ‘hard to reach’ communities.
- Have clear communication channels and communicate openly.
- Give an individual or department ownership in liaising with faith communities and make that position accessible to organisations.
- Understand where faith groups are coming from and present your perspective – be more faith literate.

- Ensure that liaison officers or those involved in working with the faith sector have a good knowledge of what is happening across different sectors of local government.
- Take a consultative approach (bottom up versus top down).
- Remember that smaller faith groups can make a valuable contribution.
- Support and develop LSPs.
- Appreciate that a major difficulty in building relationships can be shifting goalposts in terms of policy, funding frameworks and people.
- Simplify procurement and commissioning processes.
- Create a safe and supportive environment where faith organisations can freely express their concerns and are taken seriously.

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