

Connecting Communities

Community Engagement Dinners



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To readers of this manual:

This manual is part of the Dialogue Society's Community Dialogue Manual Series. The PDF version of this and the other manuals in the series can be downloaded from www.dialoguesociety.org/publications

If you have any comments on this, or any of the other manuals in the series, we would be very glad to have your feedback. Please email your comments to manual@dialoguesociety.org

We would like to showcase the valuable work and effort of groups that use the Community Dialogue Manuals to help inspire other groups to take part also. Please get in touch and let us know how this manual helped you and your group with any photographs and testimonials. Please email these to manual@dialoguesociety.org

If you represent a local stakeholder or public body and are interested in Dialogue Society consultancy please email consultancy@dialoguesociety.org



The Dialogue Society is a registered charity, established in London in 1999, with the aim of advancing social cohesion by connecting communities through dialogue. It operates nationwide with regional branches across the UK. Through localised community projects, discussion forums and teaching programmes it enables people to venture across boundaries of religion, culture and social class. It provides a platform where people can meet to share narratives and perspectives, discover the values they have in common and be at ease with their differences.

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**DIALOGUE
SOCIETY**

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Community Engagement Dinners

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Overview

01

Preface

The Dialogue Society is a registered charity, established in London in 1999, with the aim of advancing social cohesion by connecting communities through dialogue. It operates nation-wide with regional branches across the UK. Through localised community projects, discussion forums and teaching programmes it enables people to venture across boundaries of religion, culture and social class. It provides a platform where people can meet to share narratives and perspectives, discover the values they have in common and be at ease with their differences. It has done this through a wide range of events including community celebrations, interfaith sharing circles, and open cultural festivals as well as a broad variety of dialogue meetings and seminars.

The manual you hold in your hand is part of a series of ten Community Dialogue Manuals developed by the Dialogue Society to encourage interaction between members of different communities. The primary aim of the series is to help people to bring their communities together through a number of approaches and events that the Dialogue Society has found successful. We have always found that the most successful events have been those with clear objectives and where attention has been paid to detail. Therefore the manuals are full of advice, tips and checklists to help everything go smoothly as you plan, organise and host your own events.

This manual will help you to successfully organise a Community Engagement Dinner to bring people from all sectors of your local community together for a meal and a discussion of issues of local importance. The idea for such events grew out of the Dialogue Society's annual community fast-breaking dinners during the Islamic month of Ramadan. Whilst the fast-breaking dinners provide an excellent opportunity to bring together diverse community members in the spirit of sharing, they are confined to a specific time period. Why should this kind of event be limited to Ramadan? The Community Engagement Dinners suggested in this manual can be organised at any time of year. They also bring in discussion of local issues as a focus for the event, which becomes not only a social occasion but a chance for diverse people to exchange views and consider important social issues together. Both the friendly social interaction and the community discussion can really help to build a strong, active and cohesive local community.

Please get in touch with us to let us know if and how the manual was helpful, to give any feedback and comments about the manual's content, style and structure and with any other enquiries. Please see inside cover for contact details.

We hope that this manual and perhaps others will be helpful to you, and that you will enjoy uniting your community through the events you hold.

The Dialogue Society

Introduction

The purpose of this manual is to stimulate and motivate individuals and community groups to engage in dialogue while at the same time providing useful ideas through which effective dialogue can take place. It is designed to help you bring people from all sectors of your local community together through an event combining a friendly shared meal with an element of constructive community discussion.

Community Engagement Dinners serve three main purposes. Firstly, and most importantly, like all the events in these Community Dialogue Manuals, they bring people together. They promote interaction and friendship between different groups within the local community. Sharing food is a wonderful way to promote interaction and friendship between people regardless of faith, culture, occupation or political outlook.

Secondly, they promote discussion of important social issues, encouraging people to reflect on these together, exchange ideas, and begin to think about constructive solutions to shared difficulties. Such dialogue can itself be a valuable form of meaningful interaction between diverse participants. The relaxed, friendly atmosphere promoted by the sharing of food can encourage openness and trust. The process should also have a positive impact on people's general sense of citizenship, as well as potentially inspiring new local policy ideas or community action.

Thirdly, if local policy makers and other stakeholders are willing to engage with them, the events can bring diverse local people into contact with the people who make decisions in their local areas and those who run local services. This can encourage engagement with local democracy and a more positive, open relationship between stakeholders and the public.

In this manual you will find advice on all the key aspects of organising a Community Engagement Dinner, from choosing possible partners to help with the event to the “extras” that you might like to include (music, entertainment etc). You will also find an exhaustive checklist to help you remember all the little things you need to do at each stage to make sure that everything is ready for the event. Some top tips are included to help facilitators manage discussion effectively. The manual also includes suggestions for taking ideas and conclusions from the discussions forward to generate positive action. The appendices provide a range of sample materials which may be helpful for organising, publicising and evaluating your event.

The PDF version of this and the other Community Dialogue Manuals can be downloaded from www.dialoguesociety.org/publications; you can copy and paste materials from the appendices to adapt for your own use.

This fairly long manual is not intended to be read from cover to cover. This introduction and the manual overview should give you an idea of the advice and resources included here, so that you can refer to those sections that could be helpful to you when they are relevant.

What is a Community Engagement Dinner?

A Community Engagement Dinner consists of two components:

- an evening meal and
- community discussion of issues of relevance to the community.

Ideally, all neighbourhoods and all social/cultural/religious groups should be represented at the dinner. Stakeholders should be present to engage in the discussions and to respond to key points.

Participants should be seated on tables of 5-8 people. Printed copies of topics/scenarios for discussion should be placed on each table. Each table will include one facilitator, a guest willing to take responsibility for leading the discussion at that table and for giving feedback to the gathering. At some point after the discussions have taken place and facilitators have summed up the main points or conclusions to come from discussion on their table, a panel of stakeholders and community leaders should have an opportunity to comment briefly on issues raised.

The “Outline of a Community Engagement Dinner” given on page 10 gives an example of how the different components of the evening might be arranged.

Aims and Objectives of This Manual

1. To encourage and support individuals and groups to engage in dialogue
2. To raise awareness of local issues and encourage social responsibility
3. To help provide an organised but friendly and informal context for constructive dialogue on issues of local importance
4. To bring diverse people into contact with local stakeholders, encouraging engagement with local democracy and local services
5. To encourage the opening up of different communities to one another
6. To encourage inclusion of people who may not generally be interested in dialogue
7. To facilitate neighbourly and community interaction
8. To provide strategies, tips, advice and know-how for organising a successful event

Who is This Manual For?

- Charities, community groups and faith groups looking to promote dialogue, social cohesion and citizenship in their local area
- Public sector professionals looking for new ways to serve the same goals

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Advice for Planning and Running Community Engagement Dinners

02

Outline of a Community Engagement Dinner

The table below gives a sample programme for a Community Engagement Dinner. Community Engagement Dinners can be organised in different ways (see “Planning and Managing Community Discussion: Different Approaches” section below, page 15) and can incorporate a variety of extra features (see “Extras” section below, page 28).

6.15pm	Reception	It is always worth giving people time to meet each other and do some networking. Drinks and nibbles may be served, and a local music group may be invited to play.
6.30pm	Welcome speech by introductory speaker	This should be no longer than 10 minutes
6.40pm	Keynote addresses	Leading stakeholders in the community can be invited to address guests for no longer than 5-7 minutes each. Possible candidates include the local MP, the Mayor or a local councillor.
6.55pm	Discussion manager outlines main discussion points and objectives	Discussion manager to explain format of discussions and the role of facilitators. This is crucial in order to get the most out of discussions.
7pm	Discussion 1	Seating will already be pre-arranged so you have a good mix per table. One facilitator per table - ensure that there are people likely to be confident in this role on each table. There should be printed copies of discussion points on each table.
7.30pm	Dinner served	
8pm	Discussion 2	A shorter discussion point. This is optional and can be included or omitted according to timing.
8.20pm (/8pm - if no Discussion 2)	Facilitators give feedback on the main points discussed/agreed at their table	Facilitators will be assigned 2 minutes each for feedback. With 10 tables this will take 20 minutes.

8.40pm (8.20pm)	Panel of stakeholders respond to points raised	The panel of stakeholders/ community leaders will have 20 minutes altogether to give responses. This time will be shared equally between the stakeholders. One of the event organisers (Panel Chairperson) will indicate when each stakeholder's allocated time is almost over and they need to draw comments to a close.
9pm (8.40pm)	Desserts served while discussion continues	
9.20pm (9pm)	Short performance from local drama society	
9.35pm (9.15pm)	End	

Planning and Managing Community Discussion

Making the community discussion work is a key part of organising your event. You need to think about practicalities - when you will ask people to engage in the discussion, how large the groups will be etc- and about the content of the discussion.

It is really important that everyone knows how the discussions will proceed and understands the roles that everyone is being asked to play.

Practicalities

Discussion Manager

Before the beginning of the discussion he/she must explain what is expected of everyone involved:

- that everyone should make sure they have introduced themselves
- that the table must decide on a facilitator to lead the discussion and report back to the wider group
- that the facilitator should introduce the topic/scenario and
- that he/she should lead an open discussion in which it is hoped that everyone will participate
- that somebody should make a note of key points from the discussion
- that the facilitator should report back to the wider group on two or three key points from the discussion

The discussion manager should give some key tips to facilitators (see “Tips for Facilitators” section below, page 16). There should be a copy of these on each table.

Seating Arrangements

Seating arrangements are important. Ideally you should have a number of small tables, seating 5-8 people each. Each table should then be able to have discussions among themselves with everyone able to have a say. Seating plans should be arranged in advance so that you have a balanced mix of representatives of community, social and faith groups, local stakeholders and key service providers. A diverse range of participants on each table can lead to a stimulating range of different perspectives and contributions during the discussion(s).

Facilitators

You will need a facilitator on each table. When preparing your seating plan ensure that there are people on each table whose experience suggests that they would be confident in this role (for example, teachers or academics), but allow each table to decide upon a facilitator itself. Your discussion manager will need to explain very clearly in his/her introduction that each table needs to appoint a facilitator. He/she will also need to explain the role of this person and give a few tips on how to fulfil the role successfully. It is crucial that facilitators understand how the discussion is supposed to work and feel able to lead it.

The facilitator should take the initiative to read out discussion questions/scenarios at the start, or invite someone else to do so.

The facilitator should informally chair the discussion, inviting people to speak if their voice has not been heard and trying to manage any tensions.

Ideally another person on the table will take brief notes of points raised, especially those agreed or particularly disagreed on. The facilitator should invite somebody to do this. If no one else feels confident doing so, or if no one is willing to, the facilitator will need to do his/her best to do it him/herself.

The facilitator should sum up key points when the tables are asked to report back to the rest of the room, unless someone else is keen to do so.¹

¹ An alternative way of managing the discussions is to appoint facilitators in advance from among your event volunteers and other contacts. The advantage of this approach is that facilitators appointed in advance can be given advice on successful discussion management and can familiarise themselves with the discussion questions before the event: they can prepare relatively thoroughly. It also allows you to select people yourselves and ensure that all your facilitators are suited to the role.

However, asking each table to decide upon a facilitator at the event itself keeps the evening pleasantly informal and democratic, potentially encouraging a more relaxed and open discussion. It also reduces the amount of organisation required prior to the event.

Balance

Make sure you don't ask your guests to engage in discussion for too long without a break or refreshments. Look for the right balance between "community engagement" and "dinner"!

Programme

You could use the structure of the meal to organise the discussion. For example, you could start the evening with fruit juice and nibbles, have the first round of discussion, serve food, have a second round of discussion and feedback from stakeholders and then serve desert. (See "Outline of Community Engagement Dinner" section above, page 10.)

Plan for Prayer Times

When you are planning your programme ensure that those who observe regular prayer times will have the time to pray without missing any of the discussion.

Content

There are various ways that you could get some interesting discussion started:

1. Propose some real local issues for discussion. Participants can talk over the issues together and discuss possible ways forward.

This approach can get some constructive discussion going about real issues. In a situation where stake holders, community organisations and members of the public are all present, it can be empowering for participants and even have a place in shaping local government policy.

2. Give out some carefully chosen regional news stories. Ask participants to discuss their responses to the stories, and to consider how the stories relate to their own community. For example, they might look at a story about how some underused community leisure facilities elsewhere were going to be closed down, and the response of the local community. After giving their initial thoughts on the story they might go on to discuss what would happen if facilities in their local area were threatened; how the community could react; whether existing facilities in their area were in regular use and how the community could be encouraged to make better use of them.

You will need to provide a few discussion questions to stimulate discussion (see examples in Appendix 7).

This can be a good way of getting participants to think through the strengths, weaknesses and resources of the local community, the support networks that exist or that could be developed and the sources of help available in difficult situations.

3. Make up some local community scenarios for discussion. Ask groups to discuss what they would do if the scenario in question happened in the local community. For example: how would the community cope with severe floods? What would people do to make sure the more vulnerable members of the community were taken care of? What agencies and organisations would people go to for help and advice?

Again, this is a good way of getting participants to think through the strengths, weaknesses and resources of the local community, the support networks that exist or that could be developed and the sources of help available in difficult situations.

4. Suggest some social/political issues of national importance for discussion. The best issues to choose are those likely to be of interest and importance to a good proportion of the local community. For example, in an area particularly affected by youth riots, you could discuss the underlying causes that lead to these events and what the government, stakeholders, community groups and parents can do about this. Provide balanced, relevant information from trustworthy sources as background to the issue, so that participants have some facts to refer to. Issues could be raised in the form of questions for debate. For example, “Why did the riots occur and what should the government, stakeholders, community and parents do to prevent this happening again?”

This is a good way of sparking constructive discussion of national issues that people care about locally. It can encourage involvement in the political process as well as encouraging balanced perspectives by bringing together different people for the discussion.

In any of these cases, it is a good idea to provide several questions/issues so that people can move on to new ones if they finish the first quickly and find another more interesting. But encourage people to take their time and explore one question in more depth, if possible, rather than looking at many questions superficially.

See Appendix 7 for a range of sample discussion points.

When planning your discussion topics, consider which issues are topical and of real interest to people in the local area.

It is also worth considering the expertise and areas of interest of the stakeholders and community leaders whom you may invite to form a panel to respond to key points from the discussion.

Different Approaches

An alternative format for community discussion is *speed dialogue*. Rather than staying with the group at their table and engaging in discussion with them throughout, participants at a speed dialogue dinner have a series of short one-to-one discussions with different partners (before or after dinner, or between courses).

The drawbacks of the speed dialogue format are:

- that it is more difficult to obtain feedback from the discussions
- people are not together for so long; there is less time for insight, relationship and interesting group dynamics to develop

However it has certain advantages:

- it is fun
- it ensures that everyone has a chance to actively participate; in a group it is more difficult to ensure that the quieter participants have a say
- it gives participants the opportunity to have discussions with more people

You can find advice on planning and managing speed dialogue and in using it for a community discussion event in the Speed Dialogue Community Dialogue Manual.

Another possible format for a community discussion event is to *replace dinner with light refreshments at the beginning of the event*. This can allow more time for discussions. Two or even three discussions can be interspersed with features such as musical performances or shows, a talk, snacks and drinks or a relevant video showing. Alternatively, an event using this format could be kept quite brief (with just one discussion, or two short ones), making it less of a time commitment for participants. A daytime event held at the weekend could begin with a buffet lunch, or even just with tea and cake.

The content ideas given above and in Appendix 7 simply give starting points for discussions with a practical focus. You may wish to develop your community discussion by exploring some of the *varied approaches to dialogue developed by a range of different organisations*. St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation gives links to a number of them in its own "Spectrum" dialogue resource:

http://spectrum.stethelburgas.org/22_spectrum_approachestodialogue.html

Tips for Facilitators

The discussion manager may wish to highlight some of these in his/her introduction to the event. They may also be printed and a copy placed on each table.

- **It is the role of facilitators to stimulate and steer discussion.**
- Make sure that everyone knows each other's names at the outset.
- Ensure that everyone understands the discussion topic and what they are being asked to do.
- Try to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to voice their opinions. For example, if conversation on a particular point has been dominated by two or three people, you could give others a chance by asking, "Does anyone else want to add something on this before we move on?"
- If conversation is taking a long time to get going, or if there are long pauses, try to introduce a new aspect of the question if you can.
- Don't rush on to a new topic as soon as there is a gap in the conversation. Give people time, and invite "any more comments" before moving on.
- Remember that it is more important that everybody engages with others in an open discussion and feels valued than that the group comes up with clear answers to discussion questions.
- Recap the main points raised during the discussion with the rest of your group before presenting your answers/points to the wider group.

Working in Partnership

NB. For extensive advice on finding local partners and working in partnership please refer to the Building Partnerships Community Dialogue Manual.

Consider inviting another community group, charity or religious congregation to work with you on the planning and organisation of the project. The benefits of this go far beyond just the sharing of the workload:

- It unites your ends and your means; your goal of promoting interaction and friendship between different groups is served even at the planning stages of your event as your group and another work together on the project and get to know each other.
- It expands your range of expertise by bringing in the skills of members of another group.
- It expands your range of guests, as you can invite all your partners' contacts to your event(s).
- It can bring you new insight into the perspectives and concerns of a different cultural, social or religious group.
- It increases the credibility of your dialogue work by showing that even as

you plan your events you are practising what you preach and engaging with other groups.

- It can increase trust and interest in your organisation; some sectors of the community who are unfamiliar with your work may already know and trust your partner organisation, and be more inclined to get involved with your projects because of the connection.
- It helps keep your work genuinely rooted in dialogue. Even as you work on your project you are engaging in a form of dialogue, and probably growing in appreciation and understanding of a different group.
- It can establish a lasting, mutually beneficial relationship where each partner can sometimes benefit from the support, expertise, contacts and facilities of the other.

Tips for Working in Partnership

- Attending events run by other organisations with objectives linked to your own will give opportunities to meet possible partners.
- It is a good idea to invite prospective partners to an informal, social meeting, perhaps over lunch or tea. If they are interested in what you do and in working with you on the project you propose you can then arrange another meeting.
- Choose your prospective partners carefully. The most successful partnerships are those that serve the objectives of both/all partner organisations. You need partners who share your enthusiasm for bringing the community together through this event.
- When contacting an organisation to propose a meeting or collaboration on a particular project, emphasise the objectives that you share and show how collaboration makes sense for you both.
- Make sure that your partners have the opportunity to be involved at every level. If possible, try to get them involved in planning from the early stages, so that they are really part of the team.
- Make sure that your partners feel valued and recognised; be sure to include their names and details on any materials for a jointly organised event, and ensure that they are visible and acknowledged on the day.

Planning Your Event

Inform Your Group and Form a Planning Committee

Inform your organisation/group/congregation of your plans through announcements and perhaps posters:

- Posters in your community centre/place of worship asking for volunteers may be helpful
- In a mosque you can inform the congregation after Friday prayers and appeal for volunteers
- You can also speak to parents at a weekend school used by families in your congregation

Gather a planning committee.

Consider Partnership

Decide whether you want to work in partnership with one or more other organisations; contact them accordingly so that they join in the planning process as soon as possible (see Appendix 1).

Decide on Your Aims

Clarify what your aims are and put them in order of importance.

Decide on the Content, Size and Target Audience for Your Event

Plan the content and practicalities of your community discussion (see “Planning and Managing Community Discussion” section below, page 11).

Decide on the size of your event, and your target audience (see “Event Publicity” section below, page 20).

Set Date, Time, Duration and Venue

Set date, time and duration with your target audience in mind.

Find and book a venue, such as a town hall or large community centre.

Identify Key Guests and Panel of Stakeholders/Community Leaders

The attendance of significant local policy makers can raise the profile of your event and attract more guests, as well as bringing a diverse cross section of the community into contact with a local decision maker(s). Invite your local MP, the Mayor and other councillors and ask one or more to make a speech. It may be worth contacting these guests right at the start of the planning process, and choosing a date that works for them.

These guests can also form part of a panel of stakeholders/community leaders who will respond to key points from the evening’s discussions, and perhaps to questions from the floor. Think about who else you might invite (local police, academics, teachers, social workers, religious leaders etc) and bear this in mind when deciding upon a theme for the evening. Contact possible panellists as soon as possible so that you can mention your panel in invitations: the chance to engage with such a panel may attract more guests to the event. See also “Event Publicity” section below.

Draft Content for Promotional Literature

You will need to design/prepare posters, an event booklet for people to refer to on the day and email/printed invitations for all your potential guests. You may also want to prepare a press release.

See “Event Publicity”, page 20, “Preparing for the Community Engagement Dinner: Materials”, page 26, and appendices 2-4 below.

Plan Food

Decide how you will provide the food for the evening: volunteers? Caterers?

Plan Extras

Think about ‘extras’ that can be included in event. Possibilities which may enhance the interest and enjoyment of the event include:

- Light entertainment
- Music
- Displays – photos, information, artwork
- Speeches

For further details see “Extras” section below, page 28.

Plan Human Resources

- Assign volunteers responsibility for different areas: food, venue, design, invitations etc (see “Preparing for the Community Engagement Dinner” section below, page 23).
- It may be helpful to produce a human resources plan for the day (see below, page 24).

Plan Finances

- Work out what the event is likely to cost altogether and plan how you will meet the cost of the event.
- If you don’t have a budget for this kind of event you could ask for donations from community/faith groups to which you belong, and from partner organisations. Volunteers may be willing to provide food without charging for ingredients.
- You could hold a simple fundraising event such as a cake sale.
- You may need to charge a small price for the food, although you should try to avoid asking guests for too much or you will put off those with less disposable income.
- You could ask a local business to be a sponsor for the event (be sure to acknowledge them in your publicity materials).

- Or contact your local council or local voluntary sector support and development organisation for advice on any funding opportunities.²

Check Licensing

Find out if you need any licences for the event and arrange to obtain them (see “Extras” section below, page 28).

Event Publicity

Strategy

One of the first things you will need to consider is who to invite and how. Ideally your event will be attended by people from the whole spectrum of the community. Achieving this will require considerable planning and effort.

You will need a strategy, and a time plan. Think in your planning group about what kind of a group you would like to see sitting around a table at your community dinner, and how you are going to make that happen. You may want to make different volunteers responsible for different areas of advertising, which may include the following: general advertising through posters, fliers and/or invitations sent/delivered to people's homes; invitations to community and religious groups; invitations to local young people; invitations to policy makers; invitations to other local stakeholders.

To ensure a good mix of people in each discussion group it would be helpful to produce a seating plan. This means that you want as many of your guests as possible to register so that you can plan. Make it clear on publicity materials that registration is required, and give alternative methods of registration. Don't rely on everybody having internet access for registration; provide a telephone number and address for responses as well.

MPs, the Mayor, Councillors, Other Stakeholders and Community Leaders

Well in advance of the event (at least 2 months if possible) invite policy makers: local councillors, MPs, the Mayor and so on. It is best to send a letter in the post for a personal touch. You may like to ask 1-3 policy makers to give a short keynote address;

² Find your local support and development organisation through <http://www.navca.org.uk/membersdirectory> (England)/ http://www.voluntaryactionsotland.org.uk/third_sector_interfaces.html (Scotland)/<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/grants/voluntary/contact/?lang=en> (Wales)

Local support and development organisations are organisations that provide support to voluntary organisations and volunteers in a particular borough, district or city. They provide a range of valuable resources, from free or affordable training to networking and funding opportunities.

See also the list of possible sources of funding at <http://thebigsociety.co.uk/what-is-big-society/faq/>

if asked to speak they may be more likely to attend, and keynote addresses will add interest to the event. If a policy maker accepts your invitation this may attract others and encourage local media coverage, so make this an early priority (see Appendix 3).

Issue invitations also to the local police force, teachers, academics and health professionals (see Appendix 3). It is well worth ensuring that the event includes the perspectives of all these groups.

Invite a select group of stakeholders, including policy makers, and community leaders to join a panel to respond to key points from the evening's discussion, and perhaps to answer questions from guests. Try to secure a panel as early as possible and refer to this feature of the evening in your invitations; people may be attracted to the event by the opportunity to engage with a range of key local decision makers and service providers.

General Advertising

You may wish to bring your event to the attention of local people by displaying posters and/or fliers in local shops, schools, Post Offices, libraries, health centres, community centres or town/village halls. Make sure that your materials include contact details and a clear request for people to register for the event. Distribute your materials at least one month in advance.

You could also do some flier distribution with a group of volunteers in a public place in your local area. Again, include contact details and a clear request for people to register. Another approach is to deliver invitations to people's houses. Unfortunately these kinds of publicity efforts do not tend to bring in very many guests. If you have the time and resources they can support your more focused publicity efforts and potentially reach a few interested people who would not otherwise hear of the event. These methods are most likely to be useful if your Community Engagement Dinner is addressing a very topical local issue, such as the imminent closure of a youth centre or a sudden rise in crime in the area.

Community Groups and Religious Groups

Community groups and religious groups are key channels through which to reach a diverse range of local people.

If you are going to do this, you may want to contact the priest/rabbi/imam/president/group leader, asking him or her to pass on invitations and to include details of the event in the congregation's/group's printed notices or newsletter, if they have these. Even better, you could visit a service/meeting and invite your guests in person, leaving printed invitations for reference. Taking the trouble to visit and explaining in person what you want to achieve and why you feel the event will be worthwhile may inspire people to come along. (On visiting places of worship see the *Celebrating Festivals* Community Dialogue Manual.) Visit, or pass on the invitations, at least 2 months in advance.

Investigate what community groups exist in your area. There may be all sorts of different groups, such as:

- Faith groups and religious leaders
- Supplementary schools
- “Friends Of” groups
- Tenants and residents organisations
- Older people’s groups
- Women’s groups
- Cultural community groups
- Local charities and voluntary organisations
- Local campaign/issue-focused groups
- Sports groups
- Music/art groups

The local Council website may be helpful for finding local groups and contact details for them. For example, Islington Council’s website has a services directory: <http://www.islington.gov.uk/Directories/listsectionpagethreecol.aspx?dir=LTCS&title=Directory of Local Services>.

Local support and development organisations, which exist to support voluntary organisations and volunteers in a particular borough, district or city, often have similar directories. For example, Voluntary Action Islington has a “Find a Local Organisation” section where you can search for “tenants” or “residents”: <https://remote.vai.org.uk/db/>

Find your local support and development organisation through:

<http://www.navca.org.uk/membersdirectory> (England)/

http://www.voluntaryactionsotland.org.uk/third_sector_interfaces.html (Scotland)/

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/grants/voluntary/contact/?lang=en> (Wales)

When inviting Christian groups bear in mind the existence of different groups or denominations. Your local area might have a traditional Anglican congregation, a Baptist congregation and a Catholic congregation meeting in different sorts of buildings. The priest at one church should be able to tell you if there are other church groups nearby. Similarly, if you invite a local synagogue group you may want to ask if there are other Jewish groups in the area who may be interested.

If you want to identify more religious congregations in your area a local multi-faith/interfaith forum may help. Islington Faiths Forum, for example, has an extensive directory: <http://www.islingtonfaithsforum.org.uk/database.html>

The national interfaith network can help you find your local forum: <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/members.htm>

Young People

Inviting young people can be a great way of encouraging citizenship among those young people and interaction and dialogue across the generations. It may be worth contacting a local college to explain the event and issue invitations. If a member of your group has children at the college they might like to take on this job. (See Appendix 4 for sample email.) You will need to give at least 2 months notice, but preferably more. You could also advertise through a local youth group.

Timing

Make contact with all invited groups well in advance (2 months before the event where possible).

Media

Invite members of the press to attend and to cover the event in their publications. Contact as many local media outlets as possible two weeks in advance. Avoid sending emails with attachments. In your initial email give a brief, clear explanation of what is happening. The journalist will contact you if he/she is interested and you can then send a press release (see Appendix 2). Follow up with a call one week before the event.

Even if the press do not show interest before the event, it is worth sending them a press release immediately after the event, with photos, so that if they wish they can easily include the story in their publications at this point.

Preparing for Your Community Engagement Dinner

Human Resources

Early in the planning process, make particular people responsible for different areas of work:

- General coordination (finalising programme, chairing meetings and overseeing project in general)
- Community discussion planning
- Non-designed materials (discussion points, contact lists, feedback forms)
- Venue organisation
- Food and drink
- Publicity coordination
- Design
- Key guests, including panel of stakeholders/community leaders
- Media
- Technical management

- Records of the event: filming, photography, interviews etc
- Performers
- Displays
- HR planning for the day
- Health and safety/first aid
- Venue preparation and decoration

It may be helpful to have a *Human Resources plan* to identify roles and responsibilities on the day and the number of volunteers needed. The table below is a guideline to assist in identifying such roles. Some roles will be determined by the size and type of event that you hope to organise. Bear in mind that one person may be able to take on a number of areas of responsibility during the event.

Sample Human Resource Plan

Role	Responsibility Description	Numbers
WELCOMER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Greet guests entering and direct to registration table(s) ▪ Watch out for any security issues and act on them 	1-2
REGISTRATION TABLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Greet and register guests ▪ Direct to drinks area/seating 	2-4
INTRODUCTORY SPEAKER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Welcome people ▪ Introduce the event, explaining the timetable for the evening and how the discussion will work and including practical information such as fire procedures ▪ Introduce any other speaker(s) including policy makers ▪ Thank guests and organisers at the end, mentioning feedback forms, contact lists etc 	1
DISCUSSION MANAGER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explain in detail how the discussion will work ▪ Explain that each table needs to select a facilitator, and explain the facilitator's role ▪ Explain that someone should take notes ▪ Give a few tips for facilitators 	1
FACILITATORS (from among your guests)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Read out discussion questions/scenarios ▪ Informally chair the discussion ▪ Take notes, if there are no volunteers ▪ Report back to the rest of the room on key points from the table's discussion 	5-12

PANEL CHAIRPERSON	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce the panel response session Indicate to stakeholders/community leaders on the panel when they are nearing the end of their allotted time Thank the panel and make concluding comments 	1
EVENT SCRIBE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take notes on key note speeches Take notes on the key points from the discussion as summed up by the facilitators Take notes on feedback from the panel 	1
TECHNICAL SUPPORT PERSON	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check all IT/electrical equipment, turn music on and off etc 	1-2
FOOD MANAGER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct food distribution and volunteers 	1
FOOD AND REFRESHMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare food ready to be served- ensure hot food is properly heated, serving area is tidy etc Serve food Make sure the food stand is clean at all times Dispose of accumulating rubbish regularly 	2-5
WAITORS/WAITRESSES	<p>If you have decided to serve people at tables:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lay tables with cutlery, serviettes etc Distribute plates of food, desserts, tea and coffee Take empty plates, cutlery etc back to the kitchen 	4-15
AMENITIES INSPECTOR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check toilets for cleanliness and hygiene Ensure rubbish is cleared away 	1
PHOTOGRAPHER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take photos of your guests, people eating and talking throughout your event 	1-2
VIDEO CAMERAMAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tape scenes from the evening Interview people about their experience of the evening 	1
MEDIA LIAISON OFFICER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look after media representatives and meet their needs 	1
KEY GUEST LIAISON OFFICER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greet key guests and show them to their places Look after them and meet their needs 	1-4
EVENT COORDINATOR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaise with Food Manager, speakers and key guest liaison officers to ensure that the event runs to schedule 	1
FIRST AIDER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be on site at all times to respond to accidents and medical problems and contact appropriate support 	1

Food

- Make sure that you have signs to indicate vegetarian food and food containing ingredients to which guests may be allergic, such as nuts. If you are serving food to guests in their seats, make sure you cater for their dietary requirements. You should ideally have records of which guests require vegetarian/nut-free dishes etc.
- Make sure that you brief volunteers to maintain high standards of hygiene and safety throughout. Volunteers working with food must make sure they wash their hands regularly and where possible serve food with gloves; any food being cooked or reheated must be piping hot all the way through; cold cooked food should be kept chilled.

Materials

Aside from publicity materials, prepare the following:

- Printed discussion points. Volunteers who prepare these should ask for feedback from the rest of the group before finalising them. They may be sent to the design team and incorporated into the event booklet, or prepared and printed separately.
- Produce a little event booklet to hand out at the event, giving the programme, organisers' contact details and any forthcoming events, and perhaps including the discussion topics.
- Participants' contact list. This will enable people to follow up on new connections and continue discussions. Mention, when you confirm guests' registration, that you will be circulating a list of names, organisations and email addresses and give people the chance to opt out. Circulate with your thank you email after the event.
- Feedback forms so that you can learn from people's experience of your event (see Appendix 5 for sample form).

Event Essentials

The Venue

Make sure the venue is clean and aired and decorate it. If possible bring in some flowers or plants.

Noise Levels

Be careful that the tables are not too close together so that people on one table can hear each other.

Health and Safety

Appoint a health and safety coordinator to talk through health and safety with the volunteers and make sure that they know what to do in an emergency.

Appoint a fire warden. Check that your fire alarm is working and that fire exits are fully accessible and clearly signposted.

Make sure that you have a well-equipped first aid kit and that your volunteers know where it is.

Make sure you have a qualified First Aider on site in the event of an emergency.³

Guests

Make sure there are some volunteers whose responsibilities include simply taking time to chat to visitors. They may have another role too, but their main role during the networking/drinks reception should be to socialise with their guests.

Make sure that there are people at the door to welcome people in and to thank them for coming as they leave. Don't let people just drift out without feeling that their attendance has been appreciated.

Leave out a visitors' book/contact list and invite guests to add their details to it and leave comments. You may wish to include a column that they can tick if they wish to help at future events.

Feedback Forms

Remember to prepare and print these in advance and to make sure that guests know about them and fill them out shortly before the end of the evening.

Filming and Photography

Try to take plenty of photographs on the day so that you can use them for future articles, newsletters, website etc. If possible investing in a professional photographer can be worthwhile if you are likely to use the photos for future publications, brochures etc.

If you have or can hire a video camera, filming from the event can be a valuable resource to use later. Record interviews from participants offering reflections at the end of the event.

³ St John's Ambulance (<http://www.sja.org.uk/sja/training-courses.aspx>) and the British Red Cross (<http://www.redcrossfirstaidtraining.co.uk/>) provide a range of first aid courses.

If you know a doctor or nurse personally you could ask him/her to be present at the event and provide First Aid cover.

See <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Accidents-and-first-aid/Pages/Introduction.aspx> for a First Aid guide.

To Remember on the Day

Smile! There is no substitute. It will make people feel welcome.

Be friendly and chat to your guests. By doing this yourself you can encourage an atmosphere in which people feel comfortable and able to interact naturally.

Make sure that volunteers all know the programme and make a real effort to stick to it.

Make sure everyone knows exactly what their job is and is confident doing it.

Keep everything clean and tidy.

Extras

Light Entertainment⁴

You might like to include some sort of light entertainment at some stage in the evening to relieve the seriousness of discussions and make the event more enjoyable. Ask a local school if students could contribute some sort of sketch. Or invite a local comedian. If you do this make sure you are familiar with his/her work and feel confident that it won't cause any real offence to any of your guests.

Music⁵

A short performance from a local choir could really add to the experience of your event. You may like to invite one to sing while people are having dessert or coffee.

Invite local musicians to play in the background while people are arriving or during the meal. If no suitable musicians are available you may like to play some recorded music. Think carefully about your choice. It should be pleasant and not too obtrusive. If you choose something from a particular cultural/ethnic group within the community you might like to balance it with something from another group at another point in the programme, just to emphasise that this event “belongs” to all sectors of the community.

Displays – Photos, Information, Artwork

You may want to take the opportunity to put up some photos of previous community events, some information about local voluntary organisations or some artwork done by local children. Involve different parts of the local community as much as you can to

⁴ NB if your event will include the performance of a play, an exhibition of a film, the performance of live music or the playing of recorded music and your venue does not have a premises licence, you will need a Temporary Event Notice. Incidental (background) music is an exception and does not require a licence.

You will need to fill in a Temporary Event Notice form and send it to the Council's Licensing section, and to the local police, a minimum of ten working days before the event. The Licensing section will be able to give you the appropriate form and advise you on whom you should send the police copy to. An individual can apply for up to five TENs in a year, and a single premises can be used up to twelve times. Currently an application costs £21.

⁵ See footnote 4 above

make this a real community event. When you write to invite local community groups, charities, schools etc to the event you can also ask them if they would like to display information or contribute to the decoration.

Speeches

If you have policy makers coming you may want to invite them to make a speech, perhaps at the beginning or end of the event.

Checklist

Planning: Why, What, How, When, Where

(At least three months in advance)

- Identify your objective(s). All elements of your event should tie into the main objective(s).
- Tell your organisation, community group or religious community about the idea and see who is interested in helping to plan the event. Form a planning group to take responsibility for organising the event, but remember to keep the wider group updated regularly on how you're doing. Your planning group will need to meet regularly, perhaps once a fortnight with further discussion as necessary between meetings. You will need to discuss and clarify your objective with the planning group so that everyone has the same goal in mind.
- One of the first things that you should do in your planning group is to decide whether to invite another group(s) to work in partnership with you. Make contact with them as quickly as possible so that representatives of their group can join the planning group early on and be fully involved in the process.
- Decide what you want to include in the event.
- Set a date. Think about when you should hold your event to attract a representative group from your local community. Make sure that no other significant events fall on the same day.

Practical Priorities

(At least three months in advance)

- Find and book a venue. When doing so, make sure that the venue has all the tables and chairs you will need, or that you will be allowed to bring in additional furniture if necessary.
- Work out what the event is likely to cost altogether.

- Ensure that your organisation/group can meet the cost of the event. If you don't have a budget for this kind of event, plan how you are going to meet the costs. (See "Planning Your Event" section above, page 17.)
- Write to the Council regarding parking or similar permits well in advance.
- Find out if your venue has a premises licence; if it does not, consider whether you need to apply for a Temporary Event Notice (see "Extras" section above, page 28 and footnote 4 on the same page).

Design

(Begin three months in advance)

- Design posters
- Design event booklets
- Design A5 fliers

Marketing and Invitations

(Begin 2-3 months in advance)

- Discuss and decide on a strategy for inviting guests and make a time plan. (See "Event Publicity" section above.)
- Put up posters advertising the event in local shops, places of worship, Post Offices etc. Where possible leave piles of fliers/invitations for people to pick up. Or use posters with tear-off strips giving essential details of the event.
- Distribute fliers.
- 2-3 months in advance send letters to the Mayor, councillors, MPs and any other significant policy makers in your community inviting them to the event.
- Issue invitations to other local stakeholders (the local police force, teachers, academics and health professionals).
- Issue invitations to local charities, community groups and religious groups. If you are going to be displaying information on such groups at the event, mention this in your email and ask them to supply materials.
- Contact local colleges to explain the event and issue invitations.

(4-5 weeks in advance)

- Depending on the response to your advertising so far, post invitations to local residents, particularly in neighbourhoods from which there has been little response so far.

- Announce details of the event to your religious congregation (e.g. after Friday prayers/a service) or to your community group and give out invitations.
- Prepare a press release.

(In the last month)

- Remind local charities, community groups and religious groups to submit materials to be displayed. Ensure that none of the material submitted is offensive or divisive.
- 1-2 weeks prior to the event send reminder emails to confirmed guests.
- Contact as many media outlets as possible two weeks in advance.
- Call media outlets to follow up one week before the event.

Planning the Discussion

(At least 1-2 months before the event)

- In your planning group, or in a sub-group focused on this task, discuss the community discussion element of the evening and find stories/topics/questions for discussion. If you hand this task over to a sub-group make sure that they report back to the planning group on their work and that the whole planning group has a chance to comment on the planned topics.
- Prepare materials for the community discussion (questions, scenarios, news stories or whatever you have decided to discuss). You may want to finalise these closer to the time in case any issue of local importance comes up before the event.
- Decide who is going to introduce the event and who is going to explain how the discussion will work and the role of facilitators.
- This person/these people will need to prepare introductory material. For helpful material see the “Foreword”, “Introduction”, “What Is a Community Dinner?”, “Aims and Objectives”, “Planning and Managing Community Discussion” and “Tips for Facilitators” sections.

Preparing for Your Community Engagement Dinner

- As soon as you can, make a list in your planning group of all the jobs that need to be done and delegate responsibility for different areas of work: design, cooking, cleaning and decoration, entertainment etc.
- Make sure you put someone in charge of health and safety and that he/she knows what he/she is doing.
- Once discussion topics are decided on, find volunteers willing to coordinate follow-up discussion groups.
- Arrange a photographer for the day.

- Decide on the type and quantity of food that you will provide, bearing in mind approximate numbers suggested by the initial response to the promotional material. Buy/order the food or arrange who among your volunteers is going to contribute what to the meal.
- Prepare and print feedback forms. Appendix 5 gives a sample feedback form for guests.
- Print discussion materials.

Extras

- Contact groups who may be able to perform music or drama at least 6 weeks in advance of the event. Arrange when they will perform, for how long and whether/how much you will need to pay them.
- Prepare displays, or make sure that volunteers are doing so (children's posters, photo displays etc).
- Gather and display information on organisations represented at the event.
- Select any recorded music you want to play during the event.
- Make sure you have the necessary equipment for playing music and/or for a PowerPoint display (laptop and projector) or show (microphone(s)), as well as any microphones needed for speakers. Test all the equipment in the relevant area.
- Fix length and topic of speeches with any policy makers invited to speak.

General Practical Preparations

(In the month before the event)

- Buy plenty of pens for feedback forms, contact list etc.
- Check health and safety considerations: fire alarm; accessible, clearly signposted fire exits; first aid kit; first aider; fully informed volunteers.
- Buy pads of paper for contact lists for follow-up discussions, as well as a visitors' book for contact details and comments. In the visitors' book, include a column for people to tick if they wish to help with future events.

(In the final few days)

- Make a list of all the jobs that need to be done on the day and in the final stages of preparation and assign these to specific people.
- Buy/pick up/prepare the food!
- Have a meeting with all the volunteers a day before the event and go through checklists, making sure everyone is clear on what they are doing on the day of the event.

- Make sure the venue is thoroughly cleaned and decorated the night before the event.
- Make sure that there are enough bin bags for the rubbish.
- Air the venue out on the day.
- Put out a visitors' book and pens for people to leave contact details and brief comments. Put out other contact lists as appropriate.

During the Event

- Volunteers should arrive at least two hours in advance for a briefing and final check
- Volunteers should stick to the job assigned to them to make sure that everything is done properly
- Volunteers should engage with the visitors and NOT group with each other
- Facilitators should encourage the participation of the whole group and manage the discussions
- Volunteers and organisers should refrain from speaking any languages other than English as a courtesy to all guests
- Keep things clean and tidy, paying particular attention to the area where food is served
- Before visitors leave someone should ensure that they have signed the visitors' book/contact lists and have filled in their feedback forms and handed them in
- After the event the volunteers will need to stay to clean the venue and dispose of any rubbish left behind

Follow-up

- Write thank you letters to anyone who helped.
- Within a week, get in touch with all who came on the day and thank them for coming (Appendix 6). You can also ask for their help in finding participants for next time (see "Taking Ideas and Conclusions Forward" section below, page 34).
- Send photographs, if possible, from the day.
- Put all the photographs from the day on the website, if you have one.
- Also include any memorable comments.
- Hold a post-event debriefing meeting with the planning group and volunteers. Evaluate the event, discuss improvements for next time and coordinate follow-up action (see "Taking Ideas and Conclusions Forward" section below, page 34). Ensure that everybody's efforts are acknowledged and appreciated.

- Provide notes to stakeholders (see “Taking Ideas and Conclusions Forward” section below, page 34).
- Arrange follow-up groups (see “Taking Ideas and Conclusions Forward” below).
- Arrange stakeholder surgeries (see “Taking Ideas and Conclusions Forward” below).

Taking Ideas and Conclusions Forward

According to the enthusiasm of your participants and the cooperation of stakeholders, there are a number of ways in which you could take forward ideas and conclusions from the event.

Even without any follow-up activities, a Community Engagement Dinner can be very worthwhile. As a stand-alone event it may bring diverse people together, facilitate reflection and an exchange of ideas on local issues, promote citizenship and encourage engagement with local democracy. But if circumstances allow there are a number of ways in which you can increase the positive impact of the event.

Notes for Stakeholders (Particularly Policy Makers)

It would certainly be worth going through key points raised during the evening (using video footage, notes taken by an event scribe and any notes collected from the individual tables, with the groups’ consent) and putting together a document of key thoughts, concerns and ideas to send to local stakeholders. The document could be sent to the local MP, to the Mayor, to local councillors, to the local police chief and, if relevant, to other stakeholders, such as teachers and doctors.

Spreading the Word

You may like to appeal to participants this time to help find a full and representative group for another occasion. People who have turned up this time and had a positive experience may be able to suggest others who would potentially enjoy the next Community Engagement Dinner. Ideally, their recommendations will persuade others who might have lacked the confidence/enthusiasm to participate the first time to give it a go next time. Mention this idea in your thank you email to participants, and then when you organise another event you can send them invitations to forward to a friend, adding a personal recommendation.

Follow-up Groups

You could suggest that those participants with a particular interest in a local issue that has been raised in the discussion could meet and discuss it further. Ultimately community action could develop out of the discussion. Appointed event volunteers can coordinate follow-up groups on key topics, unless volunteers from among your

guests come forward on the night. Make sure that contact lists are circulated for these groups. Ideally, stakeholders will visit these groups, respond to conclusions of further discussion and/or support action that the group decides to take at the grassroots level.

It is worth discussing with stakeholders how ideas and conclusions from the event could be taken forward. Mention the possibility of follow-up processes in your initial invitation, and discuss over email or, if possible, at a face-to-face meeting.

Stakeholder Surgeries

One suggestion you could make is that stakeholders could hold surgeries on issues that the discussion has shown to be particularly interesting to participants. You will be able to forward the email addresses of participants to the stakeholders so that they can keep in touch about these surgeries.

Contact List

To promote continued networking and friendship, circulate a list of participants' contact details. In your initial email correspondence you can give everyone the option of opting out of this if they do not want their details to be included.



COMMUNITY
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MANUAL
S E R I E S

Appendices

You can copy materials from appendices via:

www.dialoguesociety.org/publications

03

Sample Email for Contacting a Local Community/Faith Group

Dear [Title Surname],

My name is [Name Surname] and I am writing to you on behalf of [Name of Organisation] to ask whether you or any of your contacts at [Name of their Organisation] would be interested in working with us on an exciting new project.

We are hoping to organise a Community Engagement Dinner for the local community. The idea of the event is to bring people from all sectors of our local community together for a friendly meal and for discussion of issues of local importance. We hope that the event will promote interaction and friendship between all different groups within the local community. It should also promote discussion of important social issues, encouraging people to reflect on these together, have their say, listen to others, and begin to think about constructive solutions to shared difficulties. We will be inviting a panel of local stakeholders and community leaders to respond to key points from the evening's discussions.

We feel that both the friendly social interaction promoted by a big community dinner and the opportunity for everyone to have a say and enter into a constructive dialogue can really help to build a strong, active and cohesive local community.

We hope to hold the dinner in [Month], either in [Possible Venue] or in [Possible Venue]. If you have any other suggestions I would be very glad to hear them. We hope to host around [Rough Estimate of Numbers] guests, seated at tables of no more than 8 people to make it easier for people to talk with those around them.

We would be delighted to have the input of any interested members of your group. We feel that working in partnership is the best way of organising community events; as well as broadening the range of experience and abilities contributing to the project it gives the groups involved a chance to get to know one another. If any of your members would like to join the planning group they would be most welcome, and the help of volunteers at any stage of the process would be greatly appreciated.

Would you and others from [Name of Organisation] be interested in coming to meet our planning group to discuss any possibilities? If you are free at [Suggested Times] on [Suggested Dates], please let me know and come for a discussion and a cup of tea with us at [Location].

With best wishes,

[Name Surname]

[Position]

[Organisation]

[Address]

[Telephone]

[Email]

Sample Press Release

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Community Engagement Dinner to bring Holloway together

(Islington, [Date, Year]) On [Date] a diverse group of approximately 100 people from the local area will come together at [Location] for a shared meal and a discussion of important local issues. A joint project of registered charity the Dialogue Society and St Joseph's Church, Islington, both based in the Holloway area, the event is the first of its kind to be held in Islington. Its stated aims are to enhance community spirit, social cohesion and proactive citizenship.

The group will include the Worshipful the Mayor of Islington, Cllr [Name Surname], stakeholders including representatives of the local police, community groups, religious groups and private individuals. It has been welcomed by local councillors and the organisers are considering repeating the event to involve others who could not be accommodated this time due to high levels of interest. The idea was developed from earlier Dialogue Society events which successfully brought different sectors of the community together for fast-breaking dinners during the Islamic month of Ramadan.

Ozcan Keles, Executive Director of the Dialogue Society said: "We at the Dialogue Society, along with our valued partners at St Joseph's, Islington, are delighted at the level of interest in this event. We anticipate a most enjoyable evening. It should be an opportunity for local people to socialise and to put their heads together to think about some of the challenges facing the local area."

Cllr [Name Surname] of Islington Borough Council said: "I am delighted that the Dialogue Society and St Joseph's Church are taking this initiative to bring the community together. I wish them every success and hope that the project will be repeated. This is the real Big Society in action."

#Ends#

Notes to editors

1. For further information contact Ilknur Kahraman, Co-Director of the Dialogue Society at ikahraman@dialoguesociety.org or on +44(0) 207 619 0361.
2. Founded in 1999 as a registered charity, the Dialogue Society aims to advance social cohesion by connecting communities through dialogue. It operates nation-wide with regional branches across the UK. See www.dialoguesociety.org
3. St Joseph's Anglican Church, Islington, is a diverse community of Christians with a strong history of commitment to social justice and intercultural relations. It has been collaborating with the Dialogue Society since 2007. Contact the vicar, [Name Surname] on [Email].

Sample Letter of Invitation to a Local Stakeholder

[Your Name]
[Position and Organisation]
[Address], [Postcode]
[Telephone]
[Email]
[Date]

[Title Name Surname]
[Position and Organisation]
[Address], [Post Code]

Dear [Title Surname],

RE: Invitation to a Community Engagement Dinner, [Date]

On behalf of [Your Organisation] and [Partner Organisation], I would like to invite you to a Community Engagement Dinner to be held from [Time] to [Time] on [Date] at [Venue].

The theme of the evening's discussions will be "Raising the Aspirations of Our Local Young People". After a short reception and introduction, a facilitator decided upon by the guests at each table will lead a discussion on that table and share key points with the rest of the gathering. Dinner will be followed by responses to the discussions from a select panel of stakeholders and community leaders, including [list prominent confirmed stakeholders] and, we hope, yourself. The evening will conclude with dessert and entertainment from [Name of Local Music/Drama Group]. I attach a provisional programme for the event.

The idea of the event is to bring people from all sectors of our local community together for a friendly meal and for discussion of issues of local importance. We feel that both the friendly social interaction promoted by a big community dinner and the opportunity for everyone to have a say and enter into a constructive dialogue can really help to build a strong, active and cohesive local community. We anticipate a good turnout and look forward to welcoming local people from all walks of life. We are also inviting the local media. I attach a provisional programme for the event.

[If appropriate:] If you would be prepared to say a few words at the beginning of the evening we would greatly appreciate it.

As mentioned above, we are asking a selection of local stakeholders to give brief comments in response to key points raised in the discussions. We would like to invite you to contribute to this. We hope that the event will lead to some ongoing community discussions, in issue-focused community groups and perhaps also in follow-up meetings with stakeholders such as yourself. If you would potentially be willing to be involved in this process I would be delighted to discuss this further in person at your convenience, or by email.

[In letters to the local police, health centre staff, social workers, school or university personnel, etc:] I do hope that it will be possible for [the local police force/the health centre/the school/the university] to have a presence at the event. I am writing to a number of your colleagues, and would also like to extend the invitation to your [wife/husband/partner and family]. If you would like to bring any relevant literature you are welcome to do so; there will be a table and pin board where local community groups and stakeholders will be able to place leaflets and posters. If this is of interest please drop any materials off to me by [Date] (a week before the event).

Please contact me by telephone or email to confirm your attendance, or for further information.

Yours sincerely,

[Name Surname]

[Position]

[Organisation]

Sample Email for Contacting a Local College

Dear [Title Surname],

On behalf of [Your Organisation] and [Partner Organisation], I am writing to invite you and a group of students from your college to attend a Community Engagement Dinner to be held from [Time] to [Time] on [Date] at [Venue].

The theme of the evening's discussions will be "How Safe Are Our Streets?" After a short reception and introduction, a facilitator decided upon by the guests at each table will lead a discussion on that table. Each table will then share key points with the rest of the gathering. Dinner will be followed by responses to the discussions from a select panel of stakeholders and community leaders, including [list prominent confirmed stakeholders]. The evening will conclude with dessert and entertainment from [name of local music/drama group]. I attach a provisional programme for the event.

The idea of the event is to bring people from all sectors of our local community together for a friendly meal and for discussion of issues of local importance. We feel that both the friendly social interaction promoted by a big community dinner and the opportunity for everyone to have a say and enter into a constructive dialogue can really help to build a strong, active and cohesive local community. We anticipate a good turnout and look forward to welcoming local people from all walks of life.

We would very much like local young people to be part of this event. Perhaps you or your colleagues would be able to get together a group of students who you feel would benefit from the evening. I hope that yourself and up to [Number] colleagues will also be able to attend. Spouses, partners and families will also be very welcome.

If you would like to bring any relevant literature you are welcome to do so; there will be a table and pin board where local community groups and stakeholders will be able to place leaflets and posters. If this is of interest please drop any materials off to me by [Date] (a week before the event).

Please contact me by telephone or email to confirm your attendance, or for further information.

With best wishes,

[Name Surname]

[Position]

[Organisation]

[Address]

[Telephone]

[Email]

Sample Event Feedback Form

Community Engagement Dinner Feedback

For each question please tick the box closest to what you feel.

Were you made to feel welcome?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, very <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Not very <input type="checkbox"/> No
Was the event's background explained well?	<input type="checkbox"/> Very well <input type="checkbox"/> Pretty well <input type="checkbox"/> Not very well <input type="checkbox"/> Poorly
Were the aims of the event clear?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, very <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Not very <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you feel that those aims were achieved?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, entirely <input type="checkbox"/> Largely <input type="checkbox"/> To some extent <input type="checkbox"/> No
How closely did the event follow the advertised programme?	<input type="checkbox"/> Entirely <input type="checkbox"/> Pretty well <input type="checkbox"/> Not very well <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all
How interesting did you find the discussion?	<input type="checkbox"/> Very <input type="checkbox"/> Interesting <input type="checkbox"/> Not that interesting <input type="checkbox"/> Not interesting at all
How effectively do you feel feedback from the discussions was/is being shared with stakeholders?	<input type="checkbox"/> Very effectively <input type="checkbox"/> Pretty effectively <input type="checkbox"/> Not very effectively <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all effectively
Do you want to be involved in follow-up discussions and events?	<input type="checkbox"/> Definately <input type="checkbox"/> Probably <input type="checkbox"/> Maybe <input type="checkbox"/> Probably not
How was the food?	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Ok <input type="checkbox"/> Not so good
How was the entertainment?	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Ok <input type="checkbox"/> Not so good
Would you want to come to another community event?	<input type="checkbox"/> Definately <input type="checkbox"/> Probably <input type="checkbox"/> Maybe <input type="checkbox"/> Probably not
Where do you expect to see the people you met today again? (Please tick all boxes that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> We have arranged to meet <input type="checkbox"/> Visiting a religious service <input type="checkbox"/> At another event like this <input type="checkbox"/> Nowhere
Please add any comments or suggestions:	
<hr/> <hr/>	
Thank you!	

Sample Thank You Email for Attendees

Dear [Title Surname/First Name (depending on whether you spoke on first name terms at the event)],

I am emailing on behalf of [Name of Organisation(s)] to thank you for attending our Community Engagement Dinner on [Day]. It was a pleasure to meet you and we really appreciate your support for our event. I hope that we will meet again before long.

We are planning to hold another event to bring the community together. [Briefly explain event.] If you would like to help in any way with this event, provisionally planned for [Date], I would love to hear from you. We will be having our next planning meeting on [Date].

Following the success of the Community Engagement Dinner, we hope to repeat the event, perhaps in [Number] months' time. We hope to involve a new, equally diverse group to get more people involved in community discussion. We would very much appreciate it if participants from the first dinner could think of friends and acquaintances who might enjoy a similar event even if they would not necessarily decide to participate without a friend's recommendation. Closer to the time I will be in touch to send invitations for people to forward to any friends who might fall into this category.

I will send details nearer the time and hope to see you there.

Once again, many thanks for your support.

With best wishes,

[Name Surname]

[Position]

[Organisation]

[Address]

[Telephone]

[Email]

Sample Discussion Points

As mentioned in the “Planning and Managing Community Discussion” section above, page 11, there are different ways of facilitating discussions in this setting. This appendix will give some specific examples for each of the four approaches mentioned.

1. Real Local Issues

Proposing real local issues for discussion can get some constructive discussion going about things that matter to local people. In a situation where stake holders, community organisations and members of the public are all present, this kind of dialogue can be empowering for participants and even have a place in shaping local government policy. Participants can talk over the issues together and discuss possible ways forward.

While the individual area will determine which issues are worth discussing, they may include:

■ Education Issues

How are local schools performing? How are relationships between schools and the wider community? What are the possibilities for further collaboration between schools and community groups, religious communities, stakeholders, businesses etc? If there are difficulties, such as truancy, at a local school, who responds, and how? Is the whole community concerned to respond, or only parents? To what extent, and in what way, does school life seem to be laying the foundations of a cohesive community in the next generation?

■ Crime Issues

Do people feel safe in the local area? What are the biggest concerns of local people regarding security? What would make people feel safer in the area? Who could take action to achieve this? If there are young people in the area who get into gangs and criminal activity, how could this be avoided?

■ Social Cohesion Issues

To what extent do people in your area know and interact with their neighbours of different faiths and cultures? What, if anything, limits such interaction? If the local area does feel “socially cohesive”, why is this? If there is mistrust and tension, where does this stem from? How could it be reduced?

■ Health Issues

Are all sectors of the local community aware of the range of services available and of how they work? How are relationships and communications between local NHS staff, management and the public? If there are any difficulties with awareness, communications etc, how could things be improved? What voluntary sector health services exist in the area? What role do they play?

How widely known are they? Do they have the support they need? How could the local community provide further support?

- **The Local Environment**

What is done in your area to preserve the environment? What more could be done? Do people recycle? If they are required to by the council, do they understand why? How good are the area's recycling facilities? If there is room for improvement, how could they be improved? Who would have to be consulted? How clean and tidy is the area? What could be done to make it more so?

- **Local Democracy and the Role of the Council**

How interested are local people in local politics? What would make people more engaged with local democracy? How well do people understand the role of the Council? How is communication between the Council and local people, and how could further channels of communication be opened? Would further online communication be helpful?⁶ What kind of online communication could be used, and how?

- **Services and Opportunities for Young People**

What services are there for young people in the local area? What role do they play? How valuable are they? Do they need/would they benefit from further financial support, volunteers or advertising? What kind of support is most needed/would be most valuable?

- **Key Local Services and Businesses**

Are there local services, such as a Post Office or Primary School, that are at risk of closure? What would be the effects of the closure of this service? What action could be taken to save it and how would any campaign be coordinated? How well-used by the community are key local services?

- **Leisure and Culture**

Is there a good range of leisure and culture facilities/opportunities in the area? How widely known and how accessible are they? How could access and awareness be improved? Are there activities that local people would benefit from that could be set up by volunteers? How could this be done?

⁶The Young Foundation's 2010 report on "hyperlocal" media notes how certain councils have used Twitter, Facebook and interactive sites to improve services.

It also gives examples of how local communities have run campaigns and facilitated mutual support within the area through hyperlocal media ('Internet and mobile services that connect people with the neighbourhoods they live and work in').

See "Joining the Conversation: an introduction to hyperlocal media", by Mandeep Hothi and Saffron Woodcraft, 2010: <http://www.youngfoundation.org/publications/publications>

■ Volunteering

Do many people volunteer in the local area? What do volunteers do? How well known are local volunteering opportunities? Do people know about the local support and development organisation, which can help people find volunteering opportunities (see “Event Publicity” section above, page 20)? Do people want to volunteer? What reasons do people have for wanting to volunteer, and for not wanting to? How much can volunteers be expected to do in the local community? Are there issues in the community that could be addressed through new voluntary projects?

2. Regional News Stories

Ask participants to discuss their responses to the stories, and to consider how the stories relate to their own community.

This can be a good way of getting participants to think through the strengths, weaknesses and resources of the local community, the support networks that exist or that could be developed and the sources of help available in difficult situations. Below are three examples of real stories that could start interesting discussions:

Example 1:

Haringey Independent, Education:

Northumberland Park pupil wins school speaking challenge

By Elizabeth Pears, 9th December 2010

A NORTHUMBERLAND Park School pupil stormed to victory last night in an inter-school battle and was named the borough’s best speaker.

Patrick Velastegui, 15, lit up the stage and impressed judges at the Jack Petchey Speak Out Challenge held at Forismere, in Tetherdown, on Wednesday evening with a no-holds-barred speech on knife crime.

Shocking in parts, the Year 10 pupil said he was sick and tired of out-of-touch politicians waxing lyrical on a subject they did not understand and said he was fed up with knife arches being erected in his school which only served to criminalise young people.

He said: “It may come to surprise you that Britain has one of the lowest death rates in Europe, but from my perspective I’m living on the edge. Don’t come to my school and put up a knife arch. Tell me about the effects of knife crime. Don’t threaten me with 25 years imprisonment. Let us, as young people, hear the testimonies of surgeons who stem and flow.”

....Patrick said:“I wanted to talk about something I know. My friends and I do live in an area where stabbings are a reality – a part of everyday life. When I got up there I realised I was really angry and passionate about this issue and I think that came across. I was surprised to win but I’m really happy.”

In second place was Hornsey School for Girls pupil Kimberly Thompson who was supported by her enthusiastic banner-bearing classmates who whooped and cheered throughout the ceremony, followed by Kiterie Cassell from St Thomas More RC School in third.

The Hornsey School for Girls pupil gave a rousing speech on the way young men and women interacted with each other and urged girls not to respond to boys who try to get their attention by calling them ‘oi’.

Haringey mayor, Councillor Eddie Griffith, said: “I thought all the speakers were amazing tonight. They were confident, witty and showed wisdom beyond their years.”

http://www.haringeyindependent.co.uk/news/education/8729288.Northumberland_Park_pupil_wins_school_speaking_challenge/

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION:

- What do you think is the value of public speaking for young people?
- Do young people in your area have opportunities to try it? If not, how might they be given these opportunities?
- What do you think of Patrick’s suggestions on the best way to deal with knife crime?
- Is knife crime a problem in your local area? How is it approached locally? Are young people consulted about how it is dealt with? If it was up to you, what, if anything, would you change about how knife crime is tackled?

Example 2:

Islington Gazette 24:

Community champion launches lunch club for Finsbury OAPs

By Meryem Hussein Friday, 31 December 2010

A KIND-hearted community champion is throwing open the doors of his restaurant to say a big thank you to the people who have supported him for the past four decades.

George Hussein, who has run Fish Central in King Square, Finsbury, since 1968, is launching a lunch club for the OAPs of ECI.

Mr Hussein, the businessman who is also behind the next-door King's Bakery, said: "When we first came here, the shops were all boarded up and covered with graffiti.

"This club is for the people who I love and respect and cherish. They are the people who when I was starting out, used to come into the fish and chip shop. All these people are my friends so I want to give something back to them."

The ECI Lunch Club will enable members to get a subsidised lunch at Fish Central or King's Bakery between 11.30am and 1pm. It is open to anyone aged 65 or over who lives in ECI – and is being launched on Monday, January 10, with a free lunch for anyone who joins up.

It is not the first time Mr Hussein has been behind a lunch club for OAPs.

Until April, he also ran a not-for-profit lunch club at St Luke's Community Centre in Central Street, Finsbury. The lunch club was so popular that pensioners petitioned to save it when they heard it was changing hands.

Mr Hussein said: "We used to do lunches every day. People used to queue up for them. When we were served with notice to quit, the customers mounted a petition. Since then, we have tried to think of something to do to give back to the community."

http://www.islingtongazette.co.uk/news/community_champion_launches_lunch_club_for_finsbury_oaps_1_765175

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION:

- What is your initial response to the story?
- Are there "community champions" in your community? If so, what are they doing? And what motivates them?
- Where does this kind of community spirit come from? And how can it be encouraged?
- Are there similar services for older people in your area? Is there a need for more? How could they be provided?

Example 3:

This is Leicestershire:**Rush to book in at church centre**

By Laura Elvin, 05 January 05 2011

A church centre which opened weeks ago has been inundated with bookings.

The Diocese of Leicester has transformed the former Leicester Grammar School, next to Leicester Cathedral in St Martins, into the St Martins House centre.

The money the diocese gets from hosting wedding parties, birthdays and conferences will help pay for community work.

Provisional bookings taken until June include a comedy evening, Burns night function... business lunch and wedding.

Rosi Pearse, events and operations co-ordinator for St Martins House, said she was ecstatic about the number of bookings.

She said: "It's brilliant. I'm looking forward to our first wedding. It really is a beautiful venue. The place is quite gothic and the refurbishment is lovely...."

The money brought in by the venue will be spent on outreach work with refugees, street pastors and the unemployed.

There is also space at the centre for community groups to meet.

Pete Hobson, director of St Martins House, said the community work was integral to the building.

He said: "It is very important to recognise the work we do as a church for the community of Leicester. By working with specialists, we are able to deliver the best of both worlds, bringing a top-class venue to the city and driving forward our outreach work."

Conversion of the school cost about £6.9 million. The money for the construction work included £2.6 million raised through selling diocese property. Large donations were also received from Leicestershire millionaires David Samworth and David Wilson.

<http://www.thisisleicestershire.co.uk/news/Rush-book-church-centre/article-3063851-detail/article.html>

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION:

- What is your initial response to the story?
- What do you think about religious/community organisations interacting with business in this way?
- What role do religious groups play community work in your area? What should their role be in your view?

3. Local Community Scenarios for Discussion

Ask groups to discuss what they would do if the scenario in question happened in the local community. Again, this is a good way of getting participants to think through the strengths, weaknesses and resources of the local community, the support networks that exist or that could be developed and the sources of help available in difficult situations.

Example 1: How would the local community cope with severe floods? What would people do to make sure the more vulnerable members of the community were taken care of? What agencies and organisations would people go to for help and advice?

Example 2: How would the local community react if the place of worship of a local religious congregation was vandalised? How could/would/should the following groups react:

The group itself; other religious groups and their leaders; councillors; police; teachers; community groups; individual members of the public?

Example 3: How would the local community respond to an increased incidence of knife crime among local young people? What would parents do? What would others do? Would people work together to tackle the problem?

Example 4: How would the local community respond to growing tensions between existing and newly emerging cultural communities in the area? Who would, could, or should take action to address the tensions? What would be the role of local government, different stakeholders (teachers, social workers etc), volunteers and local people belonging to the different cultural groups?

4. Social/Political Issues of National Importance

Suggest some social/political issues of national importance for discussion. The best issues to choose are those likely to be of interest and importance to a good proportion of the local community. For example, in an area where failing businesses had recently had to make people redundant, participants could discuss government and opposition policies on unemployment. Provide relevant information from trustworthy sources as background to the issue, so that participants have some facts to refer to. Issues could be raised in the form of questions for debate. For example, “Does the government’s policy on unemployment make sense?”

This is a good way of sparking constructive discussion of national issues that people care about locally. It can encourage involvement in the political process as well as encouraging balanced perspectives by bringing together different people for the discussion.

Example 1: Does 'The Big Society' make sense?

Example 2: Should British troops still be in Iraq?

Example 3: Does the media have a negative effect on social cohesion and intercultural understanding?

Example 4: Is the government doing enough to protect the environment and combat man-made climate change? Is the UK public doing enough?

Example 5: Is British healthcare improving or going downhill?



COMMUNITY
DIALOGUE
MANUAL
S E R I E S

This manual is part of the Dialogue Society's
Community Dialogue Manual Series:

1. Building Partnerships
2. Noah's Pudding
3. Celebrating Festivals
4. Community Fairs
5. Community Engagement Dinners
6. Community Centres Branching Out
7. Speed Dialogue
8. Open Mosque Day
9. Fasting Breaking Dinners
10. Media Engagement

The PDF version of this and the other
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COMMUNITY DIALOGUE MANUAL S E R I E S

Connecting Communities

