

# HOW TO RUN INCLUSIVE EVENTS

## A COMMUNITY RESILIENCE GUIDE





**PUT TOGETHER WITH SUPPORT FROM...**



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# WHY EVENTS MATTER

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Public events are vital in creating a strong and inclusive sense of place. They can provide a space for communities to come together organically – be it around Remembrance Sunday, Eid or the success of a local football team. They are an opportunity to build bridges and find common cause.

But resilience building events are also hard to get right, requiring courage and judgement. To fulfil their goals they need to be genuinely inclusive, bringing together different groups in a way which is not tokenistic or forced, but which would not otherwise happen. They need to reach into different parts of the community, beyond traditional inter-faith networks or highly engaged community figures.

The best role for the council in a resilience-building event is usually to ‘drive from behind’. The local authority can endorse, promote and match-fund, as well as lending credibility and support in other ways. Their involvement will often help to bring in other agencies.

But there is often a point where the local authority needs to ‘get out of the way’. Their job is usually to encourage and enable ideas, not to be the creative lead in developing the content. Likewise, personnel from the council should be there on the day, without being the main public face. For an event to work well, the initiative usually comes from a local group

## Who this guide is for

*This guide is primarily for local authorities, but is also relevant for partner organisations and other groups looking to run successful community events.*

*It has been compiled by HOPE not hate, as part of the Hopeful Towns project, with help from local and national partner organisations.*

or creative partner, who have conceived the idea for the festival, parade or exhibition.


The council can stimulate these ideas, through commissions and funding opportunities, and can provide support in other ways. This can range from the provision of a bouncy castle to support with health and safety or public liability insurance.

This guide looks at simple steps which can help a public celebration to succeed in bringing people together. And it asks how the local authority can support and cultivate ideas which do this.


# INCLUSIVE EVENTS CHECKLIST

Every celebration or commemoration is different. But a number of guiding principles apply, regardless of circumstance. These are listed below, in the form of a simple checklist.

- Identify at the start your objective, your audiences, and any gaps or disagreements you want to bridge
- Pick moments that mean something to people in the area already, so that you start with an event which has existing community support
- Likewise, choose topics people are interested in, like sport, music or food – so that social resilience is a by-product rather than the explicit reason for the event
- Find shared spaces, Where everyone will feel comfortable and welcome; the aim is to create meaningful contact on equal terms **(see BOX 1 for more guidance here)**
- Know your area and get your networks in place early on; identify an individual or group to act as the local champion



- Publicise before, during and after: win the ‘air war’ (how the event appears in the media) as well as the ‘ground war’ (what happens on the day)
- Include majority group interests (e.g. St George’s day) as well as the interests of marginalised or minority groups (e.g. Vaisakhi); as long as your event is genuinely inclusive this will increase the likelihood of positive outcomes
- Look for unexpected juxtapositions and overlaps – between new and old, between alternative and mainstream or between diversity and tradition
- Think about your abiding narrative or theme – e.g. ‘We belong together, bad people will not divide us’ or ‘Our town is entering a new chapter, we will embrace it together’
- Be confident in what you can pull off, and don’t be afraid to take risks



**BOX 1) Ideal criteria for your venue or space**

- Geographically convenient
- Familiar and unintimidating
- Neutral – not on one group’s ‘patch’
- Visible to passers by
- Easy to access, no bureaucracy
- Well-known to locals – near to local landmarks
- Allied with local and civic pride



# WHERE TO START

## AUDIENCE

For many events, the underlying aim of your event will be to strengthen ties between a large, longstanding community and a newer, smaller one.

There are different versions of this dynamic. Sometimes there are several newcomer communities or a diverse community of different ethnic and faith groups ethnic and faith groups. And sometimes there will be two established communities which are similar in size.

With this in mind there are two questions to ask early on:

**1. Who do you want to attend?** Are you trying to create a space where an established white British community can come together with a newer East European minority, for example?

**2. What is the format that will bring different parts of the community together?** Is the celebration of a local sporting success likely to bridge the gap between different groups? Or would another hook work better?

These questions will determine the sort of event you put together. And the decisions you make about messengers, format and venue will flow directly from your answers.

## BOX 2) KEY DATES IN THE CALENDAR

### WINTER



### SUMMER



### SPRING



### AUTUMN



## TYPES OF EVENT

A community event can be a means of breaking down hostilities among a longstanding 'majority' community. This may mean starting with events which these groups are likely to attend or support, but framing them in explicitly 'civic' terms, which actively involve others. For example, you could run a Jubilee street party, but work very hard with faith leaders among newer communities to make the event welcoming for a diverse audience.

This can be a helpful starting point, for example where some local residents feel that the town is changing in ways they find disconcerting. Holding an event based on an occasion that these people recognise can help to ensure their participation, and make it more likely that they will welcome newer groups.

The key thing is to get the balance right, so that you start with something which a critical mass of people want to be part of, but ensure that it is genuinely open to all. Example events might include a St George's Day parade, a Christmas lights switch-on or the celebration of a Royal Wedding. **(See BOX 2 for a calendar of national dates to look out for, across majority and minority communities).**

These dates in the calendar can be celebrated with pride and do not need to be 'watered down'. But the essential thing is that proactive efforts have been made to guarantee that it is genuinely inclusive to everyone across all communities to attend, participate and lead – whether through a local faith leader speaking or an arts organisation providing the music.

The hook you choose can also be local. You might want to celebrate the anniversary of the town's creation or another aspect of its heritage. This will work best if the sense of civic pride is already there. If the area does not have a strong story of itself then nationally-focused events might be an easier place to start.

If you do choose to focus on local events then a good idea is to do some simple market research – even if you know the

### BOX 3)

#### Questions for the community

*Below are some preliminary, unprompted questions, to ask residents prior to planning events. There are no trick answers to these. The aim is just to understand where people are starting from.*

- 1. Thinking about this area, what are the elements of its history which you think stand out most strongly?*
- 2. What are the landmarks and buildings you're most proud of about our town?*
- 3. Where in the town would you feel most comfortable meeting for a big community event?*
- 4. Which local figures, past or present, would you want to see involved in a celebration of the area?*
- 5. And what are the organisations and institutions which you'd be especially keen to see included in an event for the community?*
- 6. Who would you most trust to spread the word about a festival of community event?*
- 7. Are there dates in the calendar when you feel particularly proud of our town, or when you think people see the town 'at its best'?*

area well. This can take the form of a small-sample poll or of 4-5 questions on the end of a council survey. It should seek to identify, unprompted, what people



really feel proud of about the town. **(BOX 3 provides some starting questions and BOX 4 offers a mind-map for planning out more locally focussed events).**

Other places to start could include to start might include an LGBT pride celebration or a Black History Month exhibition, which the wider community actively participates in.

Your event must be accessible and interesting to everyone, and must already have a strong constituency of local support. Running a Diwali event, for example, will be easier to get off the ground if there is a large enough Hindu population to help the celebration gain critical mass in terms of interest. And it will need to include elements which clearly and proactively attract non-Hindu audiences.

The central question, which must run through your event like a stick of rock, is that all different communities are included, on terms which are true equal. The easy option is sometimes to retreat from this as if tricky questions arise. The result will be that budgets are wasted on smaller events

which cater to single communities and do not create genuine connections. So be confident that, through a mix of boldness and creativity, you can enable a genuine mix of people and backgrounds.





# GENERATING INTEREST AND TELLING THE STORY

## MESSENGERS

How will you tell the story of your festival, commemoration or celebration?

Community leaders are important here, and will often be on your authority's radar already. Make sure you have understood all of the different parts of a community, and that community spokespeople are genuinely representative. These leaders might hold ceremonial positions, but they may also just be energetic local figures.

Who you ultimately team up with is dependent on the character and tone of the event. If you are honouring or remembering something, then consider a longstanding local figure with a ceremonial office. If you are celebrating or rallying the community then a less formal figure might work better.

Those with official, paid jobs, such as the Leader of the Council, have a key role to play in lending weight and seriousness – not to mention in spreading the word. But an overly municipal or political feel will often mean an event struggles to 'land'. Whether it is a public procession or a memorial day you are planning, it will gather momentum more easily if it is clearly and authentically led by non-council stakeholders.

## PROMOTION AND NARRATIVE

Getting the messenger question right will help you to win the 'ground war' of what happens on the day. But it is also important to focus on the 'air war', in terms of how the story is told.

When it comes to this element, try to think about how you tell the story *afterwards* as well as how you promote the event before. This will determine factors like how the

### Box 5) Engaging local media

Below are some simple tips for maximising publicity around your event:

- Clarify the local news hook – e.g. 100 years since the first settlers from [X] came to [Y]
- Put your event champion front and centre, and emphasise their story – this can tie into the wider narrative
- Consider other ways of bringing in ordinary residents – e.g. 'local heroes'
- Use quotes from local politicians to show that the council supports the initiative
- Consider hiring your own photographer to make it easier for papers to cover it
- Think about campaigns which the media can get behind before or after – e.g. every public flagpole to fly a rainbow flag for LGBT pride
- Flag opportunities which are free and are suitable for families, such as screenings or sports days

local paper writes up the event. **(BOX 5 has some simple tips for getting local media involved in the event).**

Contrasts are really important here – whether in the form of veterans getting involved in a Sikh Vaisakhi parade, or a newer migrant group celebrating St George's Day. These juxtapositions can offer a powerful metaphor for how an area is able to change while retaining its roots and sense of self.

Think early on about who the key stakeholders are locally, in terms of media and promotion. Getting positive broadcast media along on the day will be a big win. Likewise, the local paper are vital, especially if they bring a photographer.

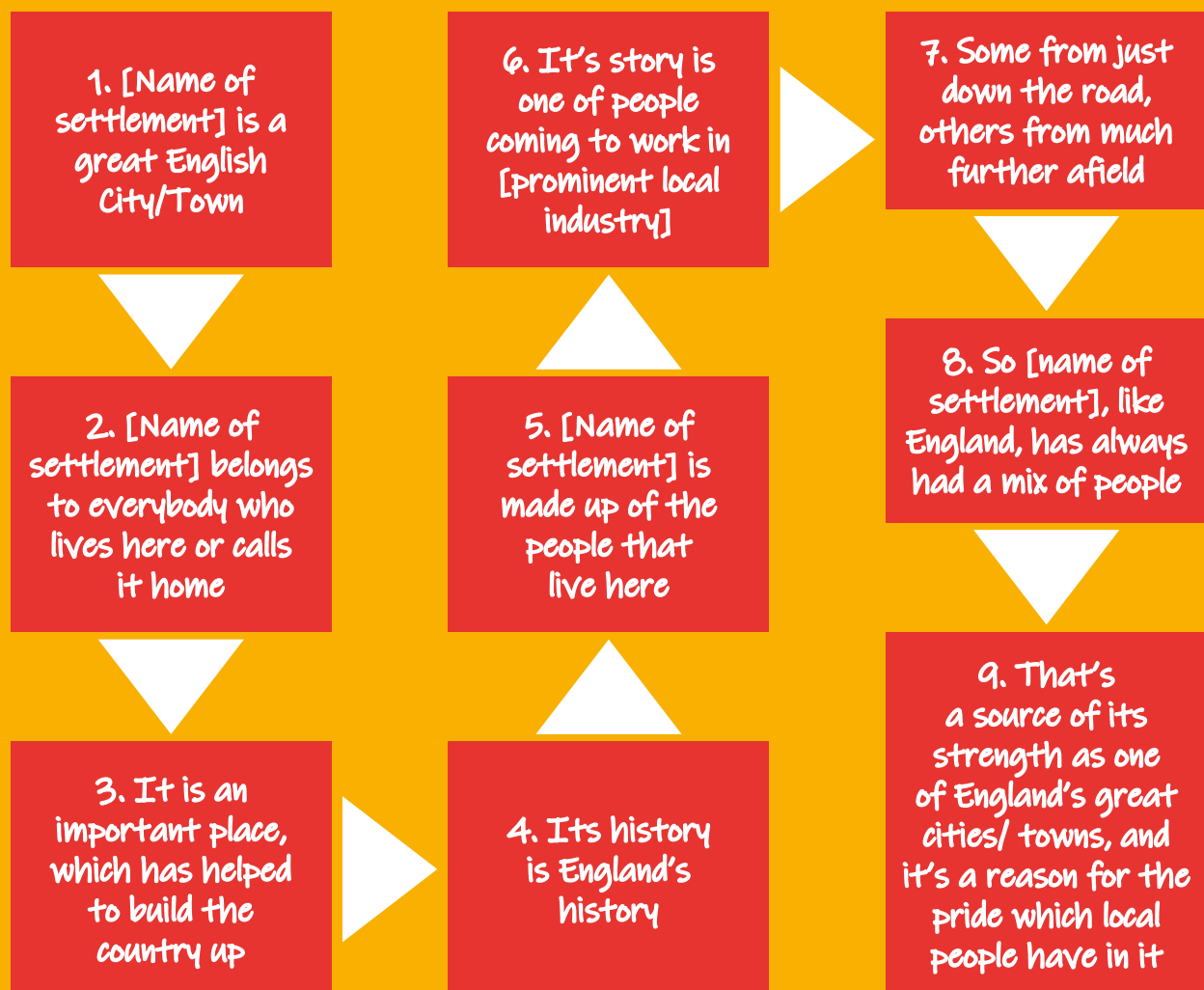


## BOX 6) Englishness and narrative

English identity plays a role in many events. It's not always the right option, but events that promote a diverse, civic idea of Englishness can help to neuter grievances and include the communities least positive about change.

These events mark an identity that matters to many groups, in a way that makes it clear that everybody is invited to take part in celebrating.

Decision-makers can sometimes be anxious about this, due to historic associations with English nationalism. But by building a strong inclusive narrative you can ensure the tone is right. Below are some of the building blocks for a narrative of this kind.



Shifting and softening attitudes to English identity, among both majority and minority groups, are creating more space for this. The vast majority of the white British population do not see English identity as ethnically exclusive, for example. And this is reflected in growing ethnic minority view that Englishness is open to those who choose to identify with it. Where events themed around Englishness have been done well, they have often been successful. continued over ➞

The above narrative template is just a start-point, and will obviously need to be amended on the basis of the town's size and history. Below are some simple **DOs** and **DON'Ts** on how to work it up.

**DO** emphasise at all times that there was no 'year zero' when it came to migration into the town – if necessary do some research into this.

- Be clear that from Day 1 people have moved to the area and been welcomed.
- Depending on your area, this might involve people from other areas moving to an industrial hub, outsiders visiting for tourism or new residents relocating to a New Town upon its formation.

**DON'T** let your town's English identity *OR* its diversity become detached from the place itself and the local story.

**DO** talk about the story of the town but **DON'T** focus explicitly on defining its values; allow narratives of growth, continuity and renewal to speak for themselves.

**DON'T** sugar-coat: focus on a story of the area which is authentic, and which places it as a site of national, historical significance.

**DO** remember that everywhere has a story, and seek to bring out on the elements which combine longevity and change.

**DON'T** just talk about the narrative of the place, but of the individual people who live there. **DO** look at the personal stories of residents - especially if they connect to that of the town - and tell them in different and creative ways.

There will often be media interest in smaller and more personal events as well as larger ones. Even if you're running a small Jubilee tea-party with different groups there's a good chance that news outlets will take an interest if there are strong personal stories or an interesting concept.

The final point is about the narrative for your event. You don't necessarily need

to plaster this everywhere, or even to explicitly publicise it at all if you don't want to. But if the key organisers are agreed on the narrative and have written it down then this will filter through into the wider story you tell. **(BOX 6 looks at how you can build a positive, inclusive narrative around an event focused on English identity. And BOX 7 offers an example from the Buttershaw estate, in Bradford.)**

## BOX 7) 'Buttershaw by the Beach' – a case study



'Buttershaw by the Beach' was organised August 2021, on the Buttershaw estate in Bradford. It was delivered by HOPE not hate, in partnership with the Sandale Trust – which runs a community centre on the estate. Attended by over 500 people in heavy rain, the fun day was the latest initiative HOPE not hate have held in the area.

As the name suggests, 'Buttershaw by the Beach' was an opportunity to bring the seaside to a deprived estate in south Bradford – during a time when COVID restrictions limited how far people could travel. There were events for all ages, with Jamaican, Tunisian and Syrian cuisine.

Buttershaw has long been a focus of HOPE not hate's community work. An area with serious deprivation, it has been targeted by the far right in the past.

"Residents really enjoyed the fun day and were happy that there was lots of free stuff for the children," says Paul Meszaros, the HOPE not hate organiser who helped arrange the event.

"The point of our interventions is to help make people's lives better, as well as continuing to promote a consistent anti-racist message. People will rightly tell us where to go if we just turn up at election time and lecture them. We have to prove we are on their side."

In the run up to the fun day, HOPE not hate produced 10,000 copies of an 8-page tabloid newspaper. The paper not only promoted the event, but also profiled local projects that people could get involved in, and highlighted good community projects and stories.

"The newspaper went down really well," reflects Paul. "People particularly liked the localised content." Plans are already underway to bring out a second edition of the community newspaper, alongside a follow-up community event at Christmas.



# BUDGETS AND PRACTICALITIES

## THE COUNCIL ROLE

In terms of money, the authority has a central role. But the relationship sometimes works best when the council provides significant up-front capital, without bankrolling a project outright. Resources can stretch further, this way, with additional pots of money identified elsewhere.

The fact that the council have provided financial backing should help with this, showing that the idea is serious and opening the door to additional revenue streams. These might come from organisations like the Arts Council or Sports England, or from private sector bodies with a footprint in the area. An initial contribution of £3,000-£5,000 from the authority can frequently be doubled or trebled by looking at other opportunities.

Meanwhile, additional support from the council can be provided in kind. This may sometimes occur through offering free use of council buildings and facilities. It may also take the form promotion via council social media, or of administrative support (for example, help with risk assessments or managing budgets).

## GETTING THE RIGHT MODEL

With resources tight across local government, it is important that funding for community events goes as far as possible.

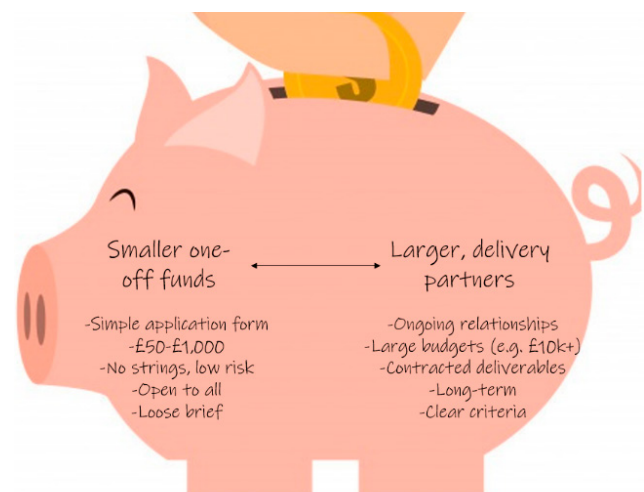
Obviously every council's financial situation is different. But a strong model, as illustrated in the infographic to the right, is to think about events in terms of a spectrum, from large to small.

With larger events, you might want to identify 2-3 reliable partners, who you

trust to deliver. These trusted partners should have a proven track record, both of running events well and of generating revenue from sources outside the council. They don't need to be huge organisations. The priority remains that they are locally rooted, and it is invariably a mistake to commission partners with no local knowledge. But the more you are able to cultivate relationships with trusted long-term partners, the better.

With smaller events, meanwhile, councils might want to consider a different approach. Small amounts of money can go a long way – helping, for instance, to throw together an inter-generational tea party, pay for a band at a small public event or act as a prize in a community-focused competition. A council fund, offering pots of money as small as £50 or £100, can enable small groups with limited experience to take a risk. And many of these risks will pay off.

The tick here is to make these smaller pots as easy as possible to bid for, with simple application forms advertised widely on council networks. Clearly, the authority



cannot take a complete ‘no strings attached’ approach to public money. But by keeping the brief relatively loose, new and exciting community initiatives can be stimulated.

Through a sliding scale approach, between larger events with trusted partners and smaller, grass roots funding streams, councils can be open and innovative to new ideas while guaranteeing the quality of their larger events.

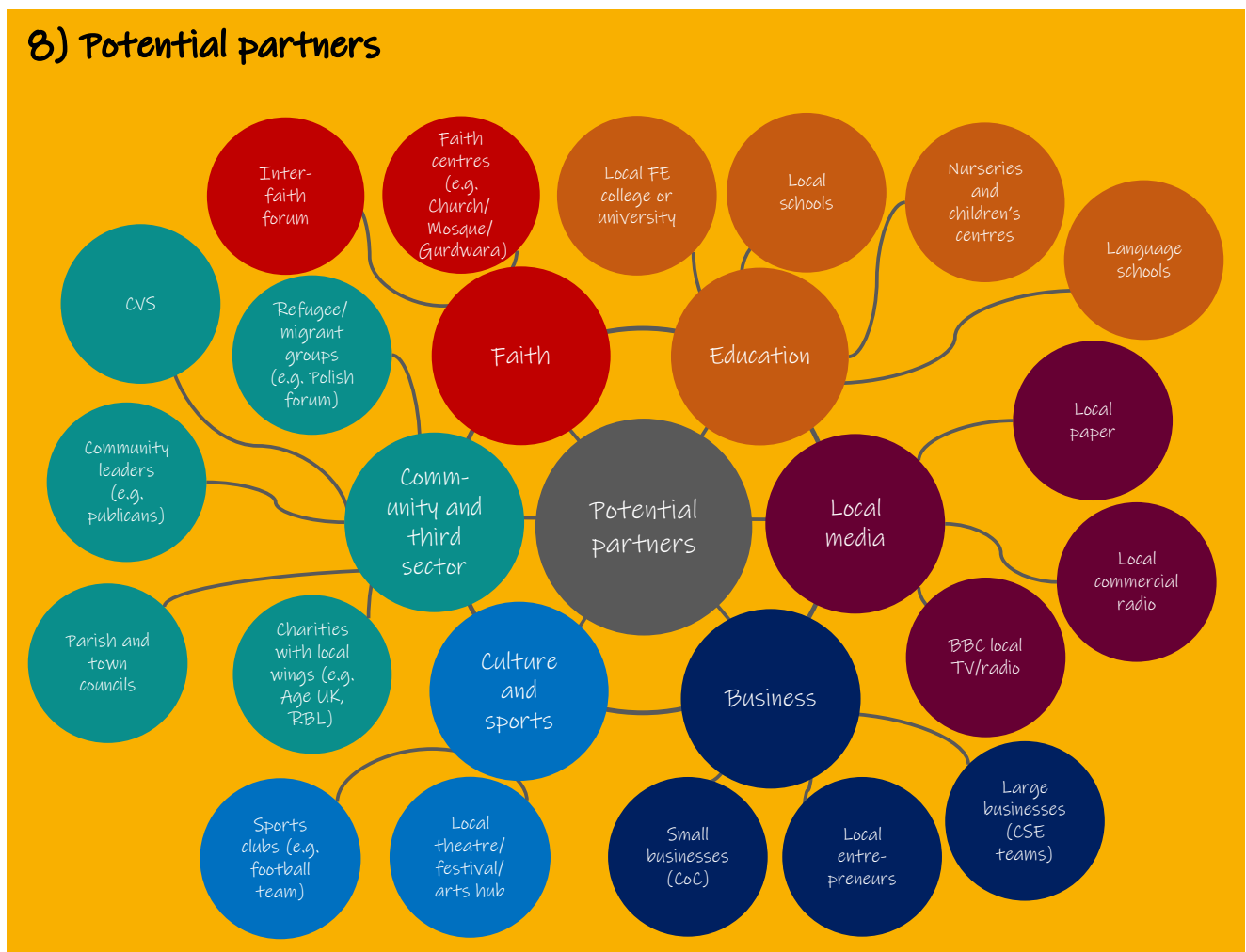
## PARTNERS

The local authority will inevitably be the hub for events – particularly larger ones. It is difficult for these to happen without the backing of the council. But, as we’ve said, partner organisations are absolutely central in delivering any festival, parade or memorial. **(BOX 8 visualises some of the key potential partners to factor in when**

**you’re starting to think about a wider programme of events).**

Community and faith groups in particular drive these events forwards and make them happen. Even in parts of the community which are not actively religious, faith organisations are often widely respected and are really important to involve. These partners are often the best connected to key audiences, and their input is essential. Think of opportunities for unusual collaborations within these sectors. For example, you could consider a collaboration around Remembrance between the Polish Forum and the local wing of the British Legion.

Young people and children are also vital in generating interest – especially if you are putting on a festivity which is a good day out for families. The education sector have a major role to play here, especially if there are learning opportunities at the event.





Cultural and sports organisations, meanwhile, can often provide facilities and expertise when it comes to the activities taking place. The same goes for universities and colleges. These sorts of organisations might be able to offer pro-bono support with designing floats for a procession, or with developing content for an exhibition. A local catering college might offer up their kitchens for a culinary event, or a cricket club might donate their pitch for an interfaith match.

The role of local media, meanwhile, is mainly about promotion – although opportunities for more formal partnerships may occasionally arise. And businesses will also be able to help with promotion, as well as with smaller elements of resourcing – the donation of a building, for example. **(BOX 9 looks at the example of Gravesend, where inclusive events are an important aspect of community resilience).**



## **BOX 9) The 'Gravesham Model'**

Gravesend is a town in north Kent. Located on the southern shore of the Thames, just outside London, it is home to a range of river-related industries – as well as being a historic market town and resort. It has had fairly high inward migration throughout its existence – as one of the earliest stop-offs coming into London – and has a large Sikh population.

Gravesham Borough Council has made inclusive events a central part of its approach to cohesion and resilience. As well as the local authority's Communities directorate, there are several key local organisations who have supported this. These include third sector partners Cohesion Plus and the Kent Equality Cohesion Council – who have driven forward the events programme and acted as senior partners – as well as faith groups, Gravesham Arts Salon and the Woodville Theatre.

The focus on inclusive events stemmed from a realisation, a number of years ago, that interfaith funding was often, in reality, catering to multiple different communities in isolation, without properly bringing them together. The decision was made to look at ways of uniting newer and more settled communities, via public events and celebrations of the town. It took around three years from this point, senior decision-makers say, to get the right partnerships and processes in place.

Many of the most successful projects have been celebrations of music, arts and food, which emphasise that gradual change is part of the Gravesend story and identity. These include the Vaisakhi procession and St George's events, as well as 'Big Day Out', the Riverside Festival and windrush Day. There are also smaller events and rituals, such as the lighting of the clock tower, to mark key dates in the faith calendar.

The success of the programme in Gravesend has come from a 'sliding scale approach', combining long-term partners for set piece events and smaller pots of seed-funding for smaller initiatives. The presence of Kent Equality Cohesion Council and its sister organisation Cohesion Plus has been particularly important in supporting the first element of this, offering an experienced and trusted delivery partner for bigger projects.

Political decisions have played a key role, with the authority sustaining funding levels in the face of early 2010s budget reductions, and taking what some have described as a 'Dragon's Den' approach to smaller initiatives. Pots of money, typically in the region of £500-£2,000, are dispensed via a simple application process. The more a group is given, the more conditions are put in place – an approach which stimulates ideas from minority groups and facilitates grass roots community enterprises.

Supported and enabled by the council but led by Kent Equality Cohesion Council and other partners, local events have focused on a 'civic' identity rooted in local pride. By not shying away from conventional English and British such as St George's Day, sporting events and Royal occasions, the 'Gravesham Model' makes it hard for far right voices to fan grievances. And the approach more generally has helped to strike a balance between change and continuity, in the face of demographic and cultural shifts.

## WITH THANKS TO...

**Melanie Norris,**

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**Gurvinder Sandher,**

Artistic Director of Cohesion Plus and CEO of the  
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**John Denham,**

former Minister for Communities and Director of the Centre  
for English Identity and Politics at Southampton University

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**Sunder Katwala,**

Director of British Future

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