

Summary Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit

A short, plain English toolkit with tips to help parent carer forums reach out and create a welcoming and inclusive culture



Summary

To work well in your local area, it's important that parent carer forums (PCFs) reach out and include parent carers from the wide range of families living there.

Making any events, meetings, or training you put on welcoming to all will help improve attendance and increase your forum's membership.

It will also mean that the views of families of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) that you share with local services will be a true reflection of the experiences of all families and communities.

This short guide is a summary of our full [Diversity and Inclusion toolkit](#). It will help your forum:

- Know where to look and find different community groups in your area and think about their different needs
- Put on inclusive events
- Take action now and in the future to become more inclusive

You can use this summary on its own, or alongside the full [Diversity and Inclusion toolkit](#).



Why do parent carer forums need to be welcoming and open to all?

For lots of different reasons there are communities within your local authority that services might not reach and whose voices are not heard. These families are sometimes referred to as 'seldom heard' or 'under-served.'

Because they remain unheard, the experiences and challenges these families face are left out when PCFs and other groups tell services what families need.

This means that services will not meet the needs of all families.

We want to help forums reach families from all backgrounds so that more voices are heard and listened to, and so that services are better for everyone.

Seldom heard groups might include:

- Families from different ethnic groups
- Families with different religious views or faiths
- Families with unsettled ways of life such as asylum seekers, refugees, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, or service families
- Families experiencing financial hardship, or working parents
- Families with literacy, language, or digital skills barriers
- Parents with disabilities, mental ill health, or those at risk of abuse
- Families with different structures such as younger or older parents, male carers, foster carers, grandparents, adoptive parents or kinship carers, bereaved parents, single parents, or divorced parents. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender parents, or those with transgender children
- Families new to a caring role, short-term carers, parent carers of children with rare conditions, low incidence disabilities, or with a terminally ill child
- Isolated families perhaps due to where they live or if they are home educating, or have a child in Alternative Provision

Forum publicity and promotion

When promoting the forum generally, or publicising the forum's events, training or meetings, here are some tips to bear in mind:

- Keep brief and to the point and use plain English, large print, or easy read
- Consider the top community languages in your area
- Could you use simple but effective animations to help publicise your forum?
- Can you use podcasts or films in community languages?
- Translate key materials and use website buttons
- Think about the images that you use – are they inclusive?
- Keep surveys simple and if there are language barriers think about other ways of gathering the information e.g., face to face with interpreters.

Things to keep in mind:

- Keep biases in check
- Language is vital to how the forum is perceived
- Keep an open mind
- Be creative
- Be welcoming

Language

The language your forum uses says a lot about its culture. You want parent carers from all backgrounds to feel welcome and to have a positive first impression of your forum. That's why it's better to try to be as inclusive as possible.

There are lots of words and phrases that are OK to use to describe different communities. Try to learn these so that you can be as inclusive as possible. For example, there are many terms used for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Questioning community – see pages 61 – 64 of the [full toolkit](#) for further details.

And there are phrases to avoid. For example, the acronym 'BAME' which stands for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic. Communities that this term is often used to describe feel that it is a lazy and arrogant term to use.

Try not to worry about making a genuine error or mistake - it's better than not trying at all. And if you do get something wrong, a sincere apology can go a long way.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a term used to describe the effects of lots of different forms of discrimination like racism, sexism, poverty and ageism that people and communities can experience at the same time.

It is important for forums to recognise how a person might be part of several overlapping communities that experience discrimination. You can find out more about intersectionality and its impact in [this short film](#).

Membership

Collecting anonymous details from your members and comparing it with local population data can tell you more about the makeup of your forum and which communities you're reaching – and those that you're not.

You can find more information on how to do this safely and securely in the [full toolkit](#) (pages 18-22; pages 59-61).

It's important to remember that forums must follow General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), keeping any information on their members secure and only sharing it with their permission.

There is a template membership form and further information about GDPR in the [full toolkit](#) (page 56).

Legal duties of the Equality Act 2010

Parent carer forums need to know the legal duties of [the Equality Act 2010](#) which is there to support people with 9 protected characteristics.

It is against the law to discriminate against anyone for any of the following:

- Age – how old someone is
- Disability – including hidden disabilities
- Gender reassignment – where someone identifies as a different sex than they were assigned at birth
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity – including having just had a baby
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

See page 55 of the [full toolkit](#) for further information.

Contact has some recorded workshops on our [PCF YouTube channel](#) that explain protected characteristics and the difference between discrimination, prejudice, equity, and equality and [building inclusive cultures](#). The Diversity and Inclusion toolkit will help PCFs to create [welcoming and inclusive forums](#) using the Diversity & Inclusion toolkit.

Ask yourself:

How diverse is your forum's membership?

Does your forum have a diverse (many and different) mix of parents on your steering group or committee, your parent representative pool, your wider membership, and your social media channels?

Are there any communities that you're not reaching? Section 5, pages 30-32 of the [toolkit](#) will help the forum to think about this.



Creating a welcoming and inclusive culture

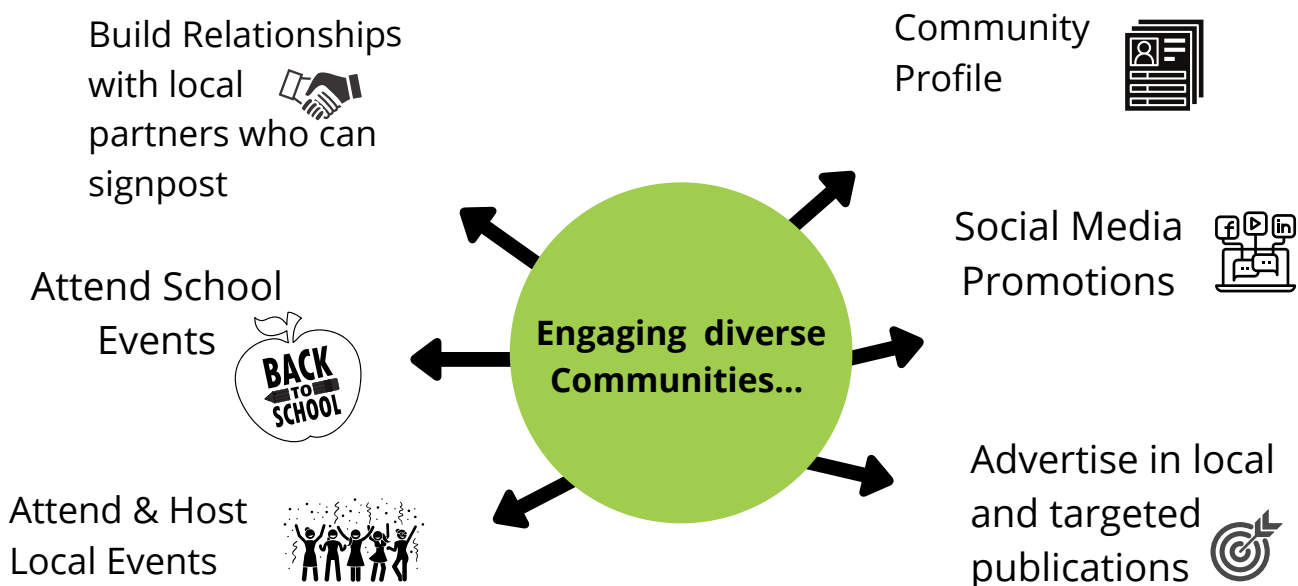
It is important to see people that reflect your community involved with the forum. It can help to reduce any awkwardness and anxiety of some parents if they see others from their community at forum events and meetings.

Because there are so many communities in each area, there is no standard approach to reaching out into your local community.

It can help to find out more about your area and the communities living there. There are some tips in the [full toolkit](#) (pages 25 – 29) to help you do this including who to ask to help you to reach different communities.

How to start reaching out

- 1. Quick start:** Take a local map to a forum meeting and ask parents to tell you the groups and services they are aware of in the area. Look for gaps and ways to connect and reach out to your target communities.
- 2. Longer-term Action:** Make flyers or posters to target groups and or services working with the communities you want to reach.
- 3. Longer-term Action:** Do some mapping, starting with the diagram below. Think about who is aware of the forum and might be able to tell families they work with about the forum to 'sell' it. Section 4 of the full toolkit (page 25) might help you to think about who to ask.



Ultimately Build Trust

Keep in touch with groups you're in contact with by:

- Sharing information with them
- See who else they can link the forum with and who else can help to share information about the forum
- Ask if you can add questions about children and young people with SEND to surveys or consultations they are sending out

Reaching out further:

Identify organisations you're not yet in contact with and:

- Send a brief email or flyer to tell them about the forum
- Ask them to share information about the forum through their networks
- Ask if they'll put a poster or newsletter in their waiting rooms/premises/or post on their social media
- Ask if the forum can join their community events
- Find out if they have key contacts in other community groups that they can share the forum's information with
- Share information about their services on your forum's Facebook page

You could also:

- Ask for help from the local authority or other local organisations, parent groups, or support groups
- Promote your forum in the most common local languages - website, flyers, consider animations

There might be barriers to some parent carers joining the forum. You will need to listen to families to know what they need to be included.

There are things that forums can do to be as inclusive as possible.

Take a look at Contact's online session about [Positive Communications to help](#).

Events



You can make parent events, meetings, coffee mornings, conferences, or training more inclusive by:

- ➔ Being approachable and asking early about needs so that people tell you what they require in advance, and you can respond to requests for adjustments in good time
- ➔ Making virtual events as accessible as possible – consider slides, large fonts, language interpreters, British Sign Language signers, captioning, chat management
- ➔ Making face to face events accessible – look at locations, venues, whether your event is culturally appropriate, do you need interpreters or BSL signers?
- ➔ Attend various Community, faith festivals, and cultural events
- ➔ Consider dietary needs, allergies, intolerances and fasting for religious reasons when catering for events – always ask in advance and cater for all, or none
- ➔ Think about what resources you might need

Tips

Remember, you can use the DfE grant to help to make your forum events accessible.

You could share ideas with other forums and find out what they do to reach different groups or communities.

Ask members of the forum or leaders from diverse communities that you need to reach how best to engage families from their community. Use their knowledge to help the forum to reach out with cultural sensitivity and confidence.

Online events

Online events might be more accessible for some parents, but not for others. Not everyone has access to digital media, smartphones, computers, or a broadband connection.

Other things to consider with online events include:

- Slides - keep them simple, don't use too many animations, use a large font, not too many different colours, use alt-text to describe any images
- Chat functions might work for some, but not for others
- People talking over each other will not be good for anyone
- Manage sessions well and encourage turn-taking or the hand-up function
- Do you need BSL interpreters?
- Should you use captioning?
- Lighting and background - not too bright or too dark
- Can you record the event so it can be watched later, or from a place with computer access, e.g., a library

Hybrid events

You can have a face-to-face event for those who can make it and either record or live stream it so that people can watch live online as it takes place, or from the recording later.

Watch Contact's recorded learning session for forums, [Let's Get Digitally Inclusive](#) for further help and tips for online and hybrid events.

Face-to-face events

These can be more difficult to arrange and account for everyone's needs so you need to think about your primary audience's requirements.

- Send out information about your face-to-face event in plenty of time. Perhaps send a 'save the date' email initially to potential attendees
 - Consider meeting times and locations - is the venue near bus routes, or train station? Is car parking available. Is the venue accessible?
 - Will the meeting take place during or outside school hours, evenings, or weekends for working parents?
 - Do you need translators or BSL interpreters?
 - Think about the suitability of the venue religious or faith venues, or if the venue serves alcohol for instance, private or sensory space
 - Consider childcare either on-site, or for individuals
- Section 6 of the [full toolkit](#) has many more ideas and suggestions to help with forum

events and to make inclusion 'business as usual', see page 33 onwards.

Embracing some of the suggestions above will help to bring in new members to the forum and their positive experience it will help make sure that they stay involved.

Your forum might want to have a formal Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion policy that sets out how the forum aims to have an inclusive and welcoming culture and reassures members that the forum is committed to working with all members of its community.

The policy can be reviewed each year to make sure that it is still right for the forum.

Contact has some example policies on our website for forums to adapt and use.

[EDI policy for new PCFs](#)

[EDI policy for larger or established PCFs](#)

[ACAS EDI template](#)

Having a communications policy might also help the forum with outreach.

There are some useful links and signposting to organisations, trainers and sources of support at the end of the [full toolkit](#) (page 68).

Try out some activities that your forum steering group can do together to explore diversity and race, in Section 7 of the [full toolkit](#) from page 41.

We have covered only a fraction of the content of the full toolkit in this summary version as it is designed to give forums a helping hand and starting point towards engaging with all communities that make up their local population. For further more detailed information and tips, suggestions, and good practice, please visit the [full toolkit](#), our [resources for forums page](#), or contact your [parent carer participation adviser](#) for support, guidance and signposting.



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the charity for
families with
disabled children.

We support
families, bring
families together
and help families
take action
for others.

Dedicated to the memory of our
friend and colleague Julie Singleton,
a champion for equality and diversity.



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