

Frequently asked questions about working with Contact Associates.

This document describes the role of a Contact Associate, what they can help with, and how they can be funded. This information is primarily for parent carer forums, but it may be useful for others interested in, or working with, parent carer forums.

What is an Associate?

An Associate is a freelance consultant with a range of skills and understanding of parent carer participation and/or parent carer forum (PCF) development. Our Associates have wide ranging experience – some are, or have been, forum members, are experienced in community development, have worked in local authorities or health agencies, or are experienced trainers. Associates can provide targeted support beyond the remit or capacity of the Parent Carer Participation (PCP) Adviser and [Contact's core offer](#) of support. View the [Pen Portraits of our Associates](#) to find out more.

What can an Associate help with?

Examples could be, but are not limited to:

- Support with the development of the committee e.g., forum governance, policies, and procedures.
- Setting up a new forum when the former forum has folded.
- Developing the capacity of the forum, e.g., building membership, recruiting new and active forum members/volunteers/staff, reaching out further into your community, and induction and training of new active members.
- Support to work through conflict situations e.g., complaints, challenging situations with local strategic partners, etc.

You can discuss your forum's needs with your [PCP Adviser](#), or directly with an Associate.

How is Associate support funded?

Associate support can be paid for in the following ways:

Contact paid Associate support

We are only able to fund support provided by a Contact Associate in agreed circumstances.

Contact has a small budget to commission some limited Associate support for forums that are struggling, at risk of folding, and/or where there are concerns that without help the forum may not be able to meet the conditions of the Department for Education (DfE) grant. This would usually cover 2 days of support. If your forum is offered this support, your PCP Adviser will involve the forum in the referral process to ensure that the priority issues and desired outcomes are accurately captured, are realistic, and achievable. The Adviser can also support the forum to choose an Associate with the right skills and experience.

Paid direct by the forum

You may want to talk to your PCP Adviser about the kind of support you need. However, forums can pay for support from an organisation or consultant of their choice. The consultant you choose may happen to be a Contact Associate, however, in this instance, this would be a direct arrangement between the forum and the Associate.

Forums can approach any Contact Associate to make direct arrangements, your Adviser can provide you with their contact details. You'll need to talk to the Associate (or other consultant) about the work you want to be done, the cost, and the timescales. It is good practice to have a basic agreement confirming the details, timescales, payment arrangements and desired outcomes in writing. We don't oversee or facilitate any direct arrangements that forums make, and the forum would be responsible for paying the Associate or Consultant and making sure that the support meets their needs. Any feedback about the work would need to go directly to the Associate or Consultant.

By other organisations

Another organisation (such as a local authority or clinical commissioning group) might offer to fund a new piece of work, alternative training, or support in an area. More information on Contact's [training and consultancy](#) offer is available on our website.

With a DfE grant when Contact holds a grant on behalf of an area

If there is no PCF in a local area, Contact may apply to hold the DfE grant. This would be used to cover the costs of developing a new forum and include budget items including Associate support, meeting and event costs, and parent carer expenses.

Are there circumstances where Contact would recommend Associate support?

- We may recommend Contact Associate support to help a forum with a piece of work, to strengthen the forum's governance, or to overcome a challenge. However, there is no obligation for the forum to follow our recommendation.
- We may identify that a forum is not making sufficient progress or is not meeting the conditions of the DfE grant. In this situation we would write to the forum to outline the necessary improvements that the forum needs to make during that grant year. The forum can assess whether they require support to make these changes. Contact may recommend an Associate with the right skills to help, however, the forum can choose to seek support from another provider of their choice. In some, but not all circumstances, Contact may be able to fund some Associate support. It is, however, important that the forum acts on the recommendations made to ensure they meet the conditions of grant.

How is Contact Associate support evaluated?

When Contact pays for Associate support, once it has concluded we will send out an online survey to gather feedback on the support from those involved. We use this feedback to develop how we work with and support Associates. You can also provide feedback or ideas about Contact Associate support at any stage of the process through your PCP Adviser. If you have any queries or concerns about Associate support that Contact is paying for, please let us know at your earliest opportunity.

If your forum is paying for Associate support directly, or paying for support from another consultant or provider, it is good practice to include how this support will be evaluated in any agreement you have with them. If you pay for this support from the DfE grant it is important to keep some information about how this support helped so that you can note this in your grant monitoring.

We're always happy to answer questions about Associate support. Please don't hesitate to contact your PCP adviser, or email us at parent.participation@contact.org.uk