**Social Action – Section 6**

**Preamble**

Why is social action important?

1. Because we live and work in places we associate with as ‘communities’ and with a a diverse range of people within them; some we identify with directly others we may only associate with indirectly. Nonetheless action is socially constructed around the concept of ‘community’ and however its understood.
2. Because social action is seen as a method for creating ‘positive change’ for the benefit of individuals and collectives.

The social action tools at your disposal include:

My Religious Community; Issues Maps; Spheres of Influence; Solutions-focused Questions; Identifying Stakeholders; Power/Interest Matrix; SMART Action Planning; and Personal Action Planning Worksheet.

*These exercises do not need to be followed sequentially, but can be used in a variety of combinations dependent on the goal or potential outcome being sort.*

**My Religious Community**  - helps participants define the term ‘community’ and to think about their religious or spiritual community belonging (if any) and to identify the religious diversity in the area where they live. The purpose of this is to come to a better understanding of the role of community, what helps it to work together, and what can divide it. Even for those with little or sense o f a religious or spiritual community there will be other forms of community connection, which reflects the rationale outlined here.

**Issues Maps** – help us explore relationships between issues. These can be presented as a direct consequence of other activities in the manual (that is using scenarios already examined in this exercise) or as a direct result of participant’s narratives/stories. The issues can often be complex and competing, often conflicting, they may be overtly apparent or covertly hidden, they are possibly symptomatic of a given set of circumstances or causal, they may even be tangential (seemingly irrelevant to some) but someone may hold strong views that need unpacking. Try not to walk into issues mapping cold, anticipate the potential for real life scenarios where feelings may be quite raw. This method can help gauge community feelings.

**Spheres of Influence** - Participants often find their sense of awareness has increased as a consequence of the training. It can be both empowering and inspiring, opening doors towards a course of action, but at the same time overwhelming and creating a sense of ‘how does one person actually make a difference and take on such responsibility’ ? This action planning exercise helps identify areas in their lives where they already have influence, and where they could potentially integrate their new/increased awareness of religious diversity issues – without adding too much burden to their already busy lives.

**Solutions-focused Questions** – In order to help gain a better understanding of issues and to find potential solutions, this method seeks to assist by using the right kind of questions. This activity seeks to transform the usual approach to problem solving. Rather than posing questions that focus on the problem it is likely that better results will be achieved by posing questions focused on the solution. It aims to introduce the difference between problem and solution focused approaches, and is instantly measurable based on the results of the exercise.

**Identifying Stakeholders** - all the activities thus far help ground our sense of community, establish methods to examine relationships between issues, examine our potential influences to deal with these issues and provide a method of solutions-focused questions in support. Having established at the outset what the issues are and methods to examine them, it is undoubtedly the case that they will involve people whether those planning and enabling the action, those affected by it or others who may be opposed to it in some way. This activity aims to establish who could or should be involved (stakeholders), those people who will have an impact on the actions and outcomes.

This activity is in two parts – the first helps identify and group the stakeholders, whilst the second – the Power/Interest Matrix – crucially helps make the most of scarce resources and capacity.

**Stakeholders**: People who are concerned with the situation, who are affected by its current state, its potential resolution, or in carrying out, making, or obstructing any decisions regarding it.

Do not forget the media as a powerful stakeholder, which should be harnessed where possible to deliver your message. Also, story telling, especially digitally by use of short DVD (1 or 2 mins max) can help groups involved in social action to make their case.

**Power/Interest Matrix** – This exercise should be used with Identifying Stakeholders as part two , but if not and is used as a stand alone exercise explain the concept of stakeholders, ask participants to brainstorm a list of potential stakeholders and divide into small groups for the task.

Often there are so many interested stakeholders it is overwhelming to think of ways to manage them all in any given situation. This exercise/activity helps prioritize how those taking the initiative spend their valuable time and energy on the various people/organisations with interests (stakeholders) in the action. Knowing who has the greatest power and interest is crucial to making optimum use of resources available so here we are identifying key people/organisations according to their power and interest.

**SMART Action Planning** - we have now identified issues, stakeholders and resources that need to be addressed in the action initiative. The next stage is to turn ideas into practical actions and outcomes. Using the SMART criteria select a goal or initiative you want to get concrete about. Having used SMART to create the goal/initiative, use the ‘W’ questions as a guide to establish next steps. In addition participants may consider the traffic light system – Red – ‘stop doing’; Amber – ‘change actions’; Green – ‘start doing’.

**Personal Action Planning Worksheet** – is designed as a personal aide-memoire based on the impact the training has had on you as an individual, it can however be adapted for use by you as feedback from your participants.

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