



Hard to reach:

Easy to ignore

Summary of a report of the George Equality and Diversity workshop:
Engaging and Working with BME and Faith Groups
Wednesday 18 March 2009, East Reach House, East Reach, Taunton TA1 3EN.
Report writer: Mary Edwards

Background and Introduction

Hard to reach: Easy to ignore is a report covering an interactive workshop held by George and hosted by Creating Excellence. George is a regional forum, the voice of Funding Advisers Networks (FANs) throughout South West England. FANs give funding advice, free at the point of delivery, to voluntary and community organisations. George members had identified the need for a workshop focusing on overcoming barriers to communication with Black and Minority Ethnic (BME)* groups. South West Strategic Infrastructure Partnership funded a facilitated workshop.

*the term BME also encompasses Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups.

Susan Price-Rajah was the external facilitator. Four speakers kindly gave presentations: Muhammad Ali, Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations (CEMVO); Colette Bennett, Equality South West (ESW); Jordan Mullard, Black South West Network (BSWN); Angelique Palombo, The Robert Barton Trust. Informal, shared experiences from speakers and supporters (8) and participants (17) were an integral part of a dynamic day.

Objectives

The workshop objectives were: To gain wider understanding of cultural differences when working with BME groups; To overcome barriers to communication between BME groups and funding advisers; To benefit from funding advisers' experiences and assist funding advisers on best practice when giving funding advice to BME groups; To provide a short report.

Participants

Participants came from each county in the South West region and Bristol. Several speakers and supporters worked regionally. Participants represented organisations from both the statutory (public) and the voluntary and community (third) sectors. There was a balanced mix of ages, genders, ethnic origins and faith groups.



Raising barriers: finding solutions

The workshop focused on identifying barriers to communication and exploring potential solutions. Speakers, supporters and participants shared experiences, challenges and posed questions. The main barriers were as follows:

Barrier 1: Finding or making initial contact with BME groups
Shared experience: *"Anyone for tennis?"* (experience with travellers)

Potential Solutions

- Word of mouth contact
- Find the community leaders (the gatekeepers)
- Via local businesses
- Attend and speak at Annual General Meetings (AGMs)
- Events, community fairs, street parties, festivals etc
- Direct action

Barrier 2: Overcoming inertia, lack of confidence, fear and anxiety

Shared experience: *"put your shoes on, get your car keys and just go!"*

Potential Solutions

- Genuine approach: genuine desire to communicate
- Direct action
- Go ahead without preconceived opinions
- Learn from your mistakes
- Talk with people and find out more about cultural difference and taboos
- Read books and articles
- Opening doors: working with one BME group will open doors to others

Barrier 3: Open door policy

Shared experience: *"Never say 'no' to an unexpected visitor (from a BME group) as they may never come back"*

Potential Solutions

- Be flexible and adaptable
- Outreach work: go out to visit BME group frequently
- Establish communication methods

Barrier 4: Understanding cultural differences

Shared experience: *"If you cook food, anyone that smells it has a right to eat it"*

Potential solutions

- Sharing food, observing hospitality rules
- Allowing time to build up trust
- Go with the flow, accept cultural differences
- Understanding through experience

Barrier 5: Effective Communication methods with BME groups

Shared challenge: *"Forget the emails"*

Potential solutions

- Face-to-face meetings
- New media, social networking sites, mobile phones, text messages etc

Barrier 6: Languages and literacy

Shared experience: “Are the English included?”

Potential solutions:

- Translation services
- Explaining funders’ jargon
- Scribing

Barrier 7: Definitions of ethnicity and ‘black’ in a socio-political context

Shared question: “What do you mean by Black?”

Potential solutions:

- Increased understanding of the historical context
- Increased understanding of the term “ethnicity”
- Strive for equality
- Training sessions for funding advisers

Barrier 8: Respecting travellers’ rights and choices

Shared experience: “Chased by a dog and a man with a stick” (travellers)

Potential solutions:

- Work with a third party agency
- Respect travellers’ rights and choices
- Tread carefully
- Acknowledge travellers may have multiple problems
- Understand travellers’ lifestyle and modify your expectations

Barrier 9: Engaging with travellers: a genuine hard to reach group

Shared experience: “Where do you put your horse in a hospital car park?”

Potential solutions:

- Approach travellers with caution
- Research their cultural beliefs
- Think about their educational outlook
- Be aware of their intrinsic skills
- Acknowledge their rights
- Respect tribal groupings

Barrier 10: Factions within ethnic and faith groups

Shared experience: “Do you believe in God?”

Potential solutions:

- Acceptance of a white person or someone outside the culture/ethnic group
- Innocence – if you do not know about rivalries, you may avoid them
- Respect any known traditions

Lifting a barrier: Acceptance from BME communities
Shared experience: “Can we call you Mummy?”

Potential pathway:

- Be persistent and patient

3.0 Underlying messages and themes

Underlying messages and themes which arose during the workshop included: perception (perceived barriers); small differences count; generational issues; limitations on volume of work; lack of access to legal services for BME groups; funding for Racial Equalities Councils (RECs) and grassroots BME groups; the need for statistical evidence.

4.0 Conclusions and recommendations

The workshop objectives were fulfilled overall. The atmosphere was welcoming, lively and interactive. Participants appeared engaged and enthusiastic and a vast amount of information was shared between speakers, supporters and participants. Barriers were discussed holistically, rather than systematically. The travellers’ session provided clear guidance for anyone who had never worked with travellers before.

BME groups have an overwhelming need for funding advice. Funding advisers who belong to FANs, provide funding advice, free at the point of delivery. Therefore, BME groups and funding advisers should meet and work together.

Practical suggestions for BME groups and FANs working together include: training sessions; mentoring scheme; developing a protocol for funding advisers working with BME groups.

This workshop was a starting point for further co-operative work. It provided excellent networking opportunities, which is highly appropriate for George - a forum that is the voice of county networks.



The full report 'Hard to reach: Easy to ignore', of which this is a summary, can be downloaded from the Creating Excellence website at this link: <http://tinyurl.com/plpkdr>

For more information about George, and networks of funding advisers in the South West of England, contact the Chair:

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Or visit the Funding pages on the Creating Excellence website:
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