



**NOT JUST ANOTHER TOOLKIT
(FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES)!**

A resource for meaningful collaboration with
anti-racist activists and racialised communities

**Associazione
Alterra**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Please, just not another toolkit!	3
A transformative approach	3
A community of agents	3
Suggested reading	4
Building a core office	5
Why is a core office needed?	5
How to build a core office, and what profiles will be needed?	5
Suggested reading	6
Mapping relevant actors	7
What is your starting point?	7
What are the grey areas, and how can you explore them?	7
Suggested reading	8
Establishing meaningful relationships: the individual and collective dimension	9
Interpersonal relationships	9
Collective platforms	9
Suggested reading	10
Establishing meaningful relationships: which actors?	11
Different tools for different relationships	11
Further reading	12

INTRODUCTION: PLEASE, JUST NOT ANOTHER TOOLKIT!



When first taking these pages in your hands, you might have just thought: “*please, NOT another toolkit!*”. In fact, the last decades have seen a flourishing of toolkits and best practices compendia. Despite the variety of alternatives, the authors still hope that this particular toolkit might be helpful.

While a wide array of instruments on elaborating and drafting general anti-racist or equity plans at *political* level is available, resources for the *administrative day-to-day running* of a racial equity team or an antidiscrimination office is relatively more scarce. In an attempt to fill the gap, this toolkit’s targets are **personnel from local authorities** (directors of departments, heads of units, commissioners, officers, and other specific roles) **in charge of establishing** - but also

developing, maintaining, strengthening - **meaningful collaboration with anti-racist activists and racialised communities (ARARC)**.

A transformative approach

Often, relationships between institutions and local stakeholders are **transactional**: negotiations along existing structures that do not challenge them. They may result in short-term gains for racialised communities, but do little to ensure those gains will be lasting - or *systemic*. It is an old rule that “*the system is perfectly shaped to get the results it gets*”: to effectively change its outcomes, an institution should change its functioning rules and culture.

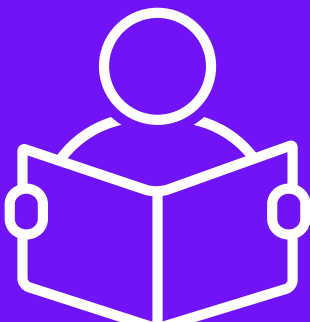
Thus, a **meaningful and inclusive collaboration** between institutions and civil society should be **transformative**: cutting across multiple departments and focusing on changing the organisational culture in order to **break and reform unequal power dynamics**.

A community of agents

An equity-driven community should seek to engage stakeholders who typically have low political capital. Establishing this sort of relationship requires time, skills, and a certain mindset. It is not (only) about specific *tools*, such as practices, projects, guidelines: in fact, as Audre Lorde has reminded us, tools forged through a particular politics might not be able to undermine that political regime and operate the required transformative reshaping.

What is needed is rather a sum of experiences, doubts and reflections: a *toolkit* that can offer new conceptual frames and help **build a horizontal community of distributed cognition**. Such a community would be based on shared values as well as shared needs and challenges, and its members would be knowledgeable and networked agents working to **disrupt unequal systems of power and excluding decision mechanisms** and to **empower communities to reach full, equal, accessible political participation**.

This kind of organisational change is difficult to reach, and institutions are resilient (and, sometimes, inertial) by definition: what we, the authors, can offer to facilitate the process is the sum of experiences collected over the years of navigating between activism and policy making. The focus will be on **building a core office, mapping and selecting relevant stakeholders**, and the **skills and practices useful to establish meaningful relationships**.



SUGGESTED READING

- [A reflection about toolkits by Shannon Mattern, 2021, *Unboxing the Toolkit*](#)
- [A Repository of City Racial Equity Policies and Decisions by the National League of Cities](#)
- [A manual on drafting a Racial Equity Action Plan by the Local and Regional Government Alliance on Racial Equity, 2016](#)

BUILDING A CORE OFFICE

Why is a core office needed?

When working to obtain transformative changes within a public institution, there are good reasons for you to set up a **core office** dedicated to working specifically with ARARC:



Especially if pre-existing relationships between civil society and the institution (or some of its specific departments) are tense, strong interpersonal relations with a **small nucleus of engaged officers** will be keystones to rebuild upon;



While policy makers' input is fundamental to start up a conversation with ARARC, setting up an administrative office will make the whole process **resilient** to changes in the government or the political leadership;



Since much of the transformative work will imply changing the institutional culture and functioning of entire departments, it will be easier to obtain through **peer-confrontation** among colleagues rather than top-down lecturing (or anything that could sound so).

How to build a core office, and what profiles will be needed?

Building a core team can take **several paths depending on the national legislation or the institutional culture**: the top management can create a brand-new office and appoint leaders and officers, department directors select officers to join the team, or voluntary applications could be considered. Whichever the process, since the goal of meaningful and inclusive collaboration is to work transformatively on the institution, a racial equity core team will mostly need to be able to **actively listen to challenging criticisms** and to **channel those inputs** upstream to colleagues from other departments.



Diversity is the key, both in terms of identities (ethnicity, gender, age, and so on) and of professional backgrounds and experience within the institutions. Members with a **strong personal network** in different departments and **expertise on a variety of topics** can help reach the needed transformative changes.



Depending on past relationships and the current level of inclusion, community leaders and activists can be very confrontative towards the institution. Members of the core office should therefore acquire and train interpersonal skills such as **active listening**, **non-violent communication**, **intercultural competences**, and a self-awareness of their own **positioning**, **prejudices** and **privilege**.

SUGGESTED READING



- [A manual on How to Improve Your Intercultural Communication Skills](#) by Valerie David, 2020
- [A paper on Racial Equity Core Teams](#) by the Local and Regional Government Alliance on Racial Equity, 2018
- [A brief paper on Intercultural competences for in local governments](#) by the Spanish Network of Intercultural Cities, 2020
- [A reflection on the hurdles and the gains of bringing communities to cross-sector tables](#) by Living Cities blog.

MAPPING RELEVANT ACTORS

What is your starting point?

Once you set up your team, the second step is to map your surroundings and the stake- and need-holders active in anti-racism and intercultural action.

Since political efforts never happen in the void, it is important to take inventory of the state of the arts, in particular of the:



political context, in terms of past and existing institutional discrimination patterns;



existing data and their nature and level of disaggregation on systemic discrimination;



previous engagement efforts, the success stories and the past mistakes;



existing connections, starting from listing your team's networks and including relationships from other branches, departments or institutions.

What are the grey areas, and how can you explore them?

The overlap between data and known actors is crucial, as it might indicate grey or dark areas in the stakeholders mapping such as, for example, foreign communities with a relevant population but scarce institutional connections. For several reasons (among them, the role of institutions in creating and maintaining racial inequities), it is not surprising that some **racialised communities** might remain (on purpose or because of lack of political capital) **off or below the radar of the public administration**. Having a clear idea of the grey zones on the map is crucial for you to start exploring them: actors and leaders from those areas might not want to join a particular initiative at first, but they should be reached out and be informed about the possibility to step in - sooner or later.

Religious events and national days are great opportunities to start discovering the unknown, since



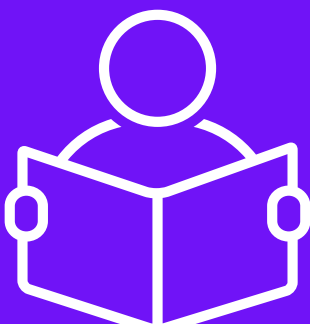
Most of the community will be involved, and the community leaders will most likely be among the organisers. Whether the celebrations are unique or split into different events is a good indicator about **possible fractures** within the community;



Participating at the event can increase the **level of trust** of community leaders towards you, your colleagues, and the institution;



Supporting the organisation of the celebrations through logistical and/or financial resources is a way to start a cooperation pattern and to increase public officers' knowledge and trust towards community leaders.



SUGGESTED READING

- [A Toolkit to develop stakeholders map and personas development](#) by NESTA UK, 2020
- [A Staff Guide to Cooperation with CSO](#) by the Asian Development Bank, 2008
- [A toolkit for CSOs mapping and strategic partnership](#) by UNDP, 2015

ESTABLISHING MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS: THE INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE DIMENSION

Interpersonal relationships

Individual meetings with specific stakeholders are a good first step to establish **trust**, especially if they are **hosted by the community or the civil society**, as this demonstrates interest and offers a chance to meet public officers outside institutional premises, yet in the formality of their role. Moreover, trust must flow in both directions and these meetings offer an opportunity for you to learn more about an organisation's reliability, representativeness and knowledge. Individual meetings and visits to communities and activists should happen regularly, but you should be careful to **spend time evenly among stakeholders** to avoid special relationships being created or suspected.

Collective platforms

While individual meeting and interpersonal relationships are the backbone of an active intercultural policy, only **collective platforms** have the legitimacy to elaborate **full, equal and accessible political changes**. There are several ways to engage civil society actors collectively: despite the formal structure, there are 3 dimensions to keep in mind: **clarity, accessibility, and transparency**.



Clarity. Nothing is worse for establishing a mutual trust relationship than being disappointed. Thus, since the first proposal of a meeting, you need to clearly indicate

- Its **objectives and the link with well-defined issues**: long-term perspectives and broad frameworks should be described as the background to the identification of specific challenges and instruments that can be activated in the short and medium term;
- The **commitment of your administration**, including to ensure follow-ups: credibility, just like trust, is a two-way path. In this sense, it is much better to start with small but reachable goals than trying - and failing - grandiose yet unreachable projects.



Accessibility.

The choice and organisation of spaces is extremely important. You need to show that you attach crucial importance to the success of the process and really care for the people involved, giving substance to your declarations

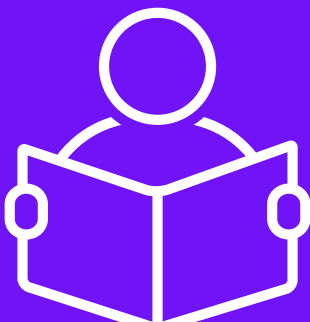
- You need **comfortable spaces**, easily reachable by anyone, accessible, avoiding physical separations or special hierarchies, offering the possibility of variable organisation; services and facilities should be available and accessible;
- You need **safe and inclusive spaces**, in which each and every participant can feel protected from the judgement of others in speaking as in silence, in interacting as in escaping. A framework of guarantees of mutual respect regarding language, behaviour and use of space should always be clearly indicated, along with immediately available remedies if needed;
- You need **inclusive time management**, since for many community leaders activism is a volunteer activity outside of office working hours. Meetings can happen in the evening or during weekends, yet respecting different religious celebrations or resting days;
- You need to **pay attention to symbols**: a coalition on homelessness might meet at a shelter, for example; one on islamophobia in a mosque. Actors involved might have previous divisions, so sometimes “neutral” spaces such as a school or a city building could be more effective in involving everyone.



Transparency.

Working openly means, mostly, treating stake- and need-holders as partners on equal level. In order to reach that, it is important that you

- share small yet frequently about the process, preferring content over form;
- agree with partners about specific concepts and keywords, and to stick to them;
- value civil society engagement, role, and help (for example with graphic or pictures).



SUGGESTED READING

- [A toolkit on coalition building by the University of Kansas](#)
- [A Playbook for Community Engagement from the City of Atlanta](#)
- [Tips for a good communication from the Open working manifesto](#)

ESTABLISHING MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS: WHICH ACTORS?

In embarking on the journey of establishing meaningful relationships with racialised communities and anti-racist actors, a public institution cannot avoid wondering whether (and if, how) selecting the actors to involve in the process. Operating a selection of partners can, and usually does, spread the suspicion that you are keen to **set up a self-convenient *quangos*** (quasi autonomous NGOs) system rather than a true and honest framework of cooperation. On the other hand, the lack of selection criteria can include in the conversation **actors assuming antiracist** stances to take advantage of the visibility of the mechanism for other purposes (including undermining the process itself); moreover, actors can express valuable inputs on one specific topic (such as racial discrimination), yet be **unrespectful of others' needs and rights on different issues** (such as religious freedom or sexual orientation).

Different tools for different relationships

Of course, there is no a *priori* golden rule to solve eventual conflicts between representation, transparency and inclusiveness: every institution should find its own way to navigate the different situations according to the national and local legal framework, past experiences, civil society composition, and other factors, **accepting mistakes and changes of strategy as a concrete possibility**. It is a learning process, really - not the application of fixed solutions! Yet one possible strategy adopted by several administrations is to differentiate dialogue mechanisms and cooperation platforms, and to strategically adopt one or the other depending on the expected outcomes.

Platforms built to **reshape institutional functioning**, i.e. with a real power to influence how an institution works, are more likely to be hijacked for political reasons, and should therefore establish (or agree among its components) justified and (as far as possible) objective criteria and standards. A tentative list of what you should look for includes:





Representativeness and responsiveness: does the CSO have a clear constituency? Is it membership based? Does it have regular and participatory links to its constituency? Are constituents informed about its activities? Is it accountable to members and stakeholders? Is it diversity sensitive, including gender?



Credibility: has the CSO valid and relevant knowledge and capacity, including a track record of effectively working with the concerned communities? Is it acceptable to other ARARCs and relevant stakeholders?

Spaces that are designed to **open a dialogue and collect needs** on a specific issue could include all subjects related to that topic. One example could be “community committees”, established as fora where the institution and all stake- and need-holders from one specific community (whether defined by religious, ethnic or nationality) participate, regardless of their internal privilege or positions on other matters. They can be twofold useful:



To disrupt **power mechanisms within communities** themselves and include in the conversation also the “internal minorities” which could be, from case to case, young people, women, lgbt+ persons, less educated or affluent members of the community;



To engage in a process of **capacity building** that could lead to conversations on sensitive topics (usually, but not only, about gender, or sexual orientation) once mutual trust and effective cooperation are established.



FURTHER READING

- An example of an international cooperation platform: [FRA, 2020, FRP Terms of Reference and FRA Cooperation – Civil Society and the Fundamental Rights Platform](#)
- An article on the role of institutions in opening spaces for community associations [“Il ruolo delle istituzioni nel garantire spazio all’associazionismo di comunità”], forthcoming su [Animazione Sociale](#)

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