

**A SELF-ASSESSMENT
TOOLKIT
FOR REFUGEE FORUMS**

**YORKSHIRE AND
HUMBERSIDE REGION**

BY

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Introduction

This Toolkit offers a range of tools and ideas to guide Refugee Forums in developing strategic aims and objectives, establishing good practices, prioritising their activities, and continually improving and developing their work. Tools 1-6 will help you develop a process of continuous monitoring, evaluation, and objective-setting.

Tools 7-12 provide further ways of improving the quality of the Forum, and consider: the Forum's own institutional structures; its networking and partnership arrangements; its capacity to lobby and campaign for change; fundraising and financial matters; arrangements for peer support and learning.

The Toolkit has been designed following consultations with Refugee Forums in the Yorkshire and Humberside region and aims to respond to the specific regional needs identified during the consultation. These Forums are at different stages of development: some are just beginning, and have just now established preliminary meetings of some RCOs; others have become formally constituted and are looking to expand and further structure their activities. The experience of Forums in other regions has been helpful and I am particularly grateful to the Regional Refugee Forum North East; Renewal SRB Programme, London; and Leeds and Sheffield Refugee Forum members for their inputs and support in developing this Toolkit.

What are we aiming for?

Experience of UK Refugee Forums suggests that the most successful ones have:

- Clear aims and objectives
- A well worked out and strategic implementation plan
- Strong partnerships among RCOs themselves
- A collaborative and inclusive, democratic way of working
- Strong and shared commitment to bringing about change
- Strong institutional structures and clear roles
- Well established networking and partnership practices
- Capacity to research and reflect on practice, and to use these findings for policy advocacy
- A paid worker who co-ordinates and takes day to day responsibility for the Forum

Tool 1 Bringing people together

The first step towards establishing a Forum is to identify who will be involved and who should be represented. Make a list of all the RCOs in the area. This list will give you an idea of how many RCOs there are, how many are on the Forum and how actively they participate in the Forum at present. Use the following format, rating activity on a scale of 1-5 where 1 is no very active and 5 is very active:

Name of RCO	Community / communities it represents	Is it a Forum member?	Is it active on the Forum?

Once you have completed this list, you can:

- Visit RCOs who are not Forum members and try to find out why they haven't joined the Forum. Encourage them to join the Forum and explain the benefits of membership.
- Consider how you can increase the active participation of the members who are currently less active.
- Consider how you need to sustain the interest and commitment of the active members.
- You may also consider whether your Forum will benefit from inviting membership from organisations other than RCOs (such as local support agencies, Refugee Council, Refugee Action).

Tool 2 From RCOs to Refugee Forum: the bigger picture

You have probably seen a need for RCOs to influence local, regional or national decision-making about issues that impact on refugees. But you recognise that RCOs individually may find it difficult to do this; and this is why you wish to develop your Refugee Forum.

It may also be useful to consider why the Refugee Forum you propose is different from other refugee organisations, such as RCOs. What will be unique about it, so that it plays a role that no other organisation is playing? Defining exactly what is unique about the Forum will help you to focus on designing objectives and actions that respond to this unique role and it will also help prevent overlap and duplication of other actions.

A Refugee Forum often beings as a platform for information exchange among RCOs. This is a valuable role, and starts to build a collective identity. A longer term aim, however, will be to shape and influence policies and services that improve the lives of refugee and asylum-seeking communities in the UK. To achieve this aim, a Forum needs to develop a strategic vision that draws on the collective strengths of its RCO members.

Tool 3 Creating objectives for the Forum

Objectives are smaller steps that, if completed, will help you reach the larger aim and achieve your vision. The process of developing objectives for the Forum flows from the above information about its overall vision. The ideas you put into the petals of the flower are probably already close to becoming your objectives. For example, if you decided that one thing the Forum should be able to do is develop a collective voice, then ‘to develop a collective voice representing refugee issues’ could become one of your objectives.

The process of setting the vision and objectives is itself part of building a Forum that reflects the views of its membership and develops their commitment. It is important that this process is collaborative and involves a representative range of members – even if it takes longer this way.

Mission statement
We will achieve this by:
Objective 1
Objective 2
Objective 3
Objective 4
Objective 5

If you have already done this, it is useful to reflect on whether your objectives are widely shared and understood by your constituent members – particularly if this was not done as a participatory activity at the beginning. If you find they are not widely shared or understood, you need to plan for follow up from this analysis.

Tool 4 From objectives to action

Once you have the vision and objectives in place, an action plan can be developed. This involves identifying resources, thinking about the time it will take to do something and when you want it achieved by, and how you will monitor progress.

In the Tool below, fill in the information you need to guide you towards developing your action plan. Each objective will involve several different activities or steps, so list each one under the relevant objective. You may also find that one activity helps to achieve more than one objective.

Objective	Who will be involved?	What are the resource implications (human, financial)?	What is the time frame?	How will we know how we are progressing?
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

Tool 5 Monitoring progress

Regular monitoring of the progress you are making is important for several reasons. Firstly, it allows you to assess how well you are doing in achieving your objectives. Secondly, if progress has slowed, it allows you to identify why this is, and to take corrective action. It is useful to monitor progress every three months.

Judge how you are progressing against the aims the Forum has set itself with the following Tool. Where do you stand today? Put an X in the box for each statement:

	Fully met	Nearly there	On the way	On paper only	No evidence / don't know
We have set out to achieve:					
Objective 1					
Objective 2					
Objective 3					
Objective 4					
and so on					
We collect information that helps us know how we are doing					

Tool 6 Developing an action plan

Once you have reviewed your progress, you will probably have found some areas where your Forum is achieving well, and other areas that need focused action.

Consider the following questions with respect to each objective you have identified.

Why do we think we have not been able to meet this objective at a level beyond where we are now?

What do we need to do to move from the position we are in to fully meeting this objective?

Use Tool 4 above to work out the details of developing the necessary action steps.

Tool 7 Using participatory processes to develop a constitution

Experience shows that to become more effective, a Refugee Forum needs a document that brings together various different aspects of structure and organisation – its constitution. There are good reasons to have a constitution for your Forum, but taking this step involves a lot more work for volunteers. A Constitution helps the Forum in ways that include:

- Providing for structures that help the Forum work more effectively and efficiently
- Allowing the Forum to seek funding, acquire premises, employ staff
- Improving its credibility and transparency.

You can work without a Constitution, but formally constituting the organisation makes a difference both for the Forum itself, as well as for its collaborating partners. How you do this is important. Developing the constitution is itself a good opportunity to engage Forum members in a participatory process that generates enthusiasm, commitment and new leadership roles and responsibilities. This process helps members to feel empowered and positive about the Forum’s potential and capacity to work for change. Use the final column to make a note of any action points arising, which you will need to include in a revised action plan.

Aspect of the constitution	Questions to consider	Yes	No	Action Point
Aims and objectives	Are they clear? (e.g. purpose of the Forum, beneficiaries) Have they been developed in a participatory way so everyone in the Forum has a shared understanding?			
Geographical area of functioning	Have we decided where we want to have impact: Local Regional National			
Officers	Have we defined: which officers are needed; what are their roles; how long do their terms of office last; how are they to be chosen?			
Membership	Have we defined: who is eligible to be a member what rights members have membership termination procedures			

Powers	What the Forum can and cannot do – e.g. fund raising, acquire property, employ staff			
Frequency of meetings	Are we clear about: How many times will members / executive / management committee members meet? Rules about notice period for meetings How many members need to attend a meeting to make it quorate Procedure for emergency meetings			
Record keeping	How will we record: minutes of meetings? Records of accounts?			
Rules of conduct at elections	Is everyone clear how the voting system works? Will members be elected or appointed? How many committee members? For how long will they hold office?			
Finance	Do we have clear rules and restriction of financial and other benefits to minimise conflicts of interest? Do we have clear control in dealing with bank accounts?			
Amendment / dissolution clause	Do we have clear procedures for: Amendment of governing documents? Dissolving the Forum?			

Tool 8 Developing networking capacity

Networking helps develop a strategic approach to services, organisation and policy development by creating links, sharing best practices, and profiling the Forum.

This Tool helps you analyse your current networking and identify areas where you might be able to network more. Rate your answers to the following questions on a scale of 1-5 where 1 is a little and 5 is a lot.

Networking capacity	Rating 1-5	Action Point
How well do we keep others informed about our services and activities?		
How well do we publicise our organisation?		
Have we got a wide range of activities in place to publicise our Forum in many different places?		
How regularly do we have contact with key organisations / bodies / individuals?		
How often do we attend local and regional meetings?		
How much have we thought through the role of support groups?		
How much do we network internally, among our own RCOs?		
How much do we network with other regional and national fora, to share experiences and good practices?		

Tool 9 Partnerships for progress

Partnerships between organisations are important because they facilitate sharing skills, knowledge and other resources for an agreed and common purpose. It is important to be clear about the nature of each partnership – what each partner brings to it, and what each one expects to get from it. You can assess the quality of your partnerships with the following Tool.

	Yes	No	Action point
Is our list of partnership organisations up to date?			
From this list, have we identified how each partnership mutually beneficial?			
From this list, have we identified any partnerships that do not seem to be particularly effective?			
From this list, are there any missing links,			

Can we add to the list any new potential partnership organisations to try and develop links with?			
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Tool 10 Arrangements for peer support and learning with other Refugee Forums.

Another important aspect of improving the quality and effectiveness of the Forum is to learn from the experience of others. Those who have been in similar situations will be familiar with many of the challenges and have identified ways forward that can inform your choices and actions.

Use the following Tool to develop a list of possible sources of peer support and learning from other Refugee Forums.

	Yes	No	Action point
Do we know all the Refugee Forums in the UK and what they do?			
From this list, have we identified what we think we might learn from them?			
What kind of ongoing relationship would we like to develop with each Forum?			

You may find this list a useful starting point for making contact with other Forums and sharing experiences. All the Forums listed here show different examples of structures, development and vision.

Name of Forum	Contact details	What does it do?	How can we learn from one another?
Leeds Refugee Forum	leedsrefugees@yahoo.com		
Regional Refugee Forum North East	www.refugee.org.uk		
Renewal SRB	www.renewalsrb.org.uk		
Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum	www.nottsrefugeeforum.org.uk		
REFUGEES ASYLUM-SEEKERS & MEDIA (RAM) PROJECT	www.ramproject.org.uk		
Scottish Refugee Integration Forum	www.scotland.gov.uk		

Tool 11 Influencing policies affecting refugees and asylum seekers

One of the major reasons for establishing a strong Forum is its capacity to lobby and advocate for policy change. Rate your responses using the following Tool, where 1 is a little and 5 is a lot.

Ways of influencing policy	Rating 1-5	Action point
How well informed are we about existing and future policies, and their effects on our constituents?		
How effective are our dialogues with regional bodies (such as the Refugee Council, Refugee Action, NASS, regional government bodies, etc.) and the Home Office in influencing policy in the region?		
Do our networking and partnerships contribute effectively to lobbying and policy advocacy? Could improvements be made?		
Is our evidence base sufficient to be able to demonstrate impact? Could it be strengthened?		

Tool 12 Fundraising

If your Forum wishes to raise funds, this Tool will help you consider how to do this effectively. Put your responses to the questions in the information column and note any action points in the final column. Don't forget that you need to plan for success! If you are successful in fundraising, this has implications for financial management and budgeting.

Questions	Response	Action point
Why do we need new / extra funding? (e.g. for staff; activities; rent; networking; ...)		
Who is going to be responsible for fundraising?		
Does anyone have fundraising experience?		
Who has previous experience of budgeting and financial management?		
What is special about the Forum – what unique message do we want a funder to understand?		
What funding opportunities can we think of?		
How might funder view the Forum? What are the implications of their view?		
What feedback have we had from previous successful / unsuccessful funding applications? What have we learned from this feedback?		