

What can we do to begin engaging with faith and belief societies?

There are a number of fun and interesting ideas for activities you can do. The key aim is to build trust and strong personal and working relationships so that societies and students will continue to engage with the students' union and each other.

What you do will depend on your context

It is vital that whatever you choose to do, students find it accessible and interesting. Make sure you have some student consultation or buy in. For example you could:

- **Use Facebook to conduct a poll** on what type of activity students would like to attend
- **Have a survey** or poll on the student facing part of the SU/institution website
- **Elect a Faith and Belief officer** whose job it is to engage with each of the faith and belief societies and facilitate joint work
- **Speak to each of the faith and belief societies** individually and get them to offer one committee member as the official interfaith rep or liaison. Form a committee of the reps and work together to come up with a joint activity.

Creating a clear action plan

Creating an action plan is the next step in engagement so you have a clear idea of steps to take. A mismanaged attempt can isolate the very people you want to engage.

Aims

Aims must be driven by students or students' union needs.

- What are the changes you are trying to achieve?
- What are your overall aims and specific aims?
- For example, "To improve relations with and between faith societies"

Objectives

Objectives explain how you will achieve your aims.

- What are the planned activities by which you are going to achieve your aims? For example, "Run an inter faith week in the students' union"

Outputs

- What are the detailed activities, services and products your project will provide to achieve its aims? (Make sure you quantify each output)
- For example, "Run a faith fair and speaker event during inter faith week in the students' union, open to all students"

Outcomes

- What are the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that will occur as a result of your activities?
- For example, "Increased understanding of different religions amongst students, and an opportunity for students to share perspectives"

Evaluation

- How will you measure success of this event or project?

SMART

The SMART acronym is a useful tool to use when setting aims, objectives, outputs and outcomes:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Time-bound

Sample engaging activities

The following activities are simple and proven to be effective at engaging students of faith and belief:

Speed faithing

This is a fun way to allow students of faith to express what their belief means to them as well as giving students the opportunity to ask questions they might not get to otherwise.

What to do:

- Identify people who would be happy to talk about their faith to other students. Prepare them for the event and make clear that they do not have to answer questions they are uncomfortable with.
- Publicise the event through social media, posters, emails, lecture/class room shouts outs
- At the event itself make ground rules and purpose of event clear, have a timer and bell/buzzer set for every 5 minutes
- Set up chairs so they are in pairs facing each other or you may want to do this more informally in a lounge area.

Multi-faith café

This is a casual and open way to allow people to learn more about faith and the food aspect helps to get people to the event.

What to do:

- Invite faith societies/local faith representatives to man a stall and bring along items of significance to their faith as well as food items

Faith Crawl

A 'faith crawl' is another term for visits to places of worship. It is an insightful activity for students to see the different ways faiths and beliefs worship as well as giving an opportunity to look inside religious buildings which is often a new experience.

What to do:

- Contact various places of worship and organise guided tours for a set day
- Advertise this to students, perhaps including an interfaith lunch as part of it
- Have some follow up activities afterwards to keep bringing students together.

Case study

I:AM identity day, Guildford College

"The College is very large and has always felt like quite a faithless place. Very few faith societies exist, and even those that do are very small, so engaging students of faith was a real challenge – they exist, but are just not very open about their beliefs. To try and change this, we decided to organise an event focussed on different beliefs and cultures, but in the context of identity, as this is much easier for everyone to relate to – we all have an identity of some kind, and expressing our identity (whether this is our appearance, sexuality, culture or religion) is easier for students and less threatening than directly discussing faith. The idea for the event was actually student driven, and the 2 students who led it got really excited about the event even though neither practised a particular faith! They had some great ideas which were for things students could easily relate to and get involved in, such as free food (e.g. bagels and pancakes, with flags explaining their cultural relevance), interactive displays and graffiti walls, dance displays and a treasure hunt for different religious symbols around College. Because the events was student-led, many faculties were happy to get on board and help out in ways that also fitted in with the curriculum, e. g. catering students baked a huge rainbow cake (which tied in with LGBT identity) and dance students put on an African dance performance. The students also chose to put together a questionnaire asking a number of students what their identity was based on and what they believed in – the answers were fantastic and ranged from Buddhism to Jesus, from 'vegetarianism' to 'girl power'! We then turned these anonymous quotes into posters which we put up all over College, and they became a real talking point – this and the graffiti wall definitely started an open conversation and made those students who did have a particular faith feel more able to discuss and express it."

Sophie Woollen, Student Mentor and Guildford College Group Chaplain