



Sheffield Faiths Forum

Essential background information for prospective volunteer members

Thank you for expressing interest in joining Sheffield Faiths Forum as a volunteer member.

General Information for applicants

Sheffield Faiths Forum is being established to help strengthen the voice of our city's faith communities. It will be the driving force for the faith network (a growing mailing list, currently of over 400 faith groups throughout the City) and work in close partnership with the established Sheffield Faith Leaders Group (see APPENDIX A).

The Forum aims to make a significant contribution to the regeneration of our city including improving community cohesion. It will be able to influence the Local Strategic Partnership (Sheffield First) and the Regional Faiths Forum.

Faith issues currently have a high profile in national, regional and local life and there has been a high level of interest and support from statutory agencies in Sheffield for the establishment of the Faiths Forum.

Eligibility criteria and recruitment process

Applications are invited from individuals active in established faith communities that can demonstrate engagement in the wider life of Sheffield. Seats on the Faiths Forum have been allocated across the main faith communities present in Sheffield (see APPENDIX B). Two seats have been reserved for 'other' faith traditions which are not part of the nine recognised world religions. You will need to indicate on the application form which faith tradition seat you are applying for.

Positions are filled via an open recruitment and selection process. Person specifications and role descriptions have been agreed by OFFER in consultation with the Faiths Forum Steering Group. All applications will initially be assessed in consultation with faith leaders from the applicant's stated faith tradition. Final decisions will then be made by a multi-faith selection panel.

The Forum needs committed and motivated individuals who are able to give time and expertise to this work. Involvement will give you, and faith groups, the opportunity to contribute to the economic, social and community regeneration within the city, as well as developing your own skills and experience.

The principle is to recruit members and expertise from across the whole of Sheffield. This means applications are welcome from all parts of the city and all sections of the community providing they can meet the criteria in the person specification (see separate document).

What will the Faiths Forum do?

A key principle is that the work of the Forum will be identified by consultation with local faith communities in Sheffield and will remain independent of statutory agencies and agendas. An initial task for Faiths Forum members will therefore be to agree, and prioritise future work plans.

Currently agreed aims of the Faiths Forum:

- Increase in faith involvement in the regeneration of the city.
- Co-ordinated activities from grassroots to Faith Leaders that increase community cohesion and community relations.
- Increased understanding between faith communities.
- Increased ability as a faith community to respond to emergencies and crises.
- Ability to explain the role of faith communities in contributing to benefits to wider society.
- Ability for Sheffield's faith communities to have clear, open, transparent links with the Regional Faith Forum and Sheffield First (the Local Strategic Partnership).

The Faiths Forum Steering Group in consultation with the Faith Network and statutory agencies has already begun exploring potential areas of work for the Forum including:

- Supporting multi-faith initiatives at a neighbourhood level.
- Improving awareness of different faiths in the city.
- Emergency planning – developing culturally appropriate responses.
- Health and care services – raising cultural awareness.
- Working alongside campaigns that support asylum seekers and refugees.
- Working alongside campaigns against discrimination and racism in neighbourhoods.

What contribution can faith communities make?

Faith communities have an invaluable contribution to make to the life of Sheffield. Faith communities are a significant (the 2001 census showed that 74% of Sheffield's population showed some affiliation to a faith tradition) but sometimes unheard part of society and cover an incredibly diverse range of people including a number of 'hard to reach' groups. This also means that Faith Communities have great potential in terms of resources (buildings, volunteers, etc), skills and expertise to contribute positively to the regeneration and future of the city.

What will your role be on the Faiths Forum?

We are looking for people who can link back to the whole of their faith communities rather than 'official representatives', so that the Forum can listen to and speak with local neighbourhoods.

Duties:

- To attend and actively participate in the Faiths Forum which will meet on a regular basis (initially monthly, then perhaps becoming bi-monthly, no more than 3 hours duration – currently third Thursday in the month, 6pm – 8:30pm).
- To bring the views, interests and priorities of your faith community and to use your expertise to help shape the work of the Forum.
- To progress the work of the Faiths Forum in between meetings.
- To continually develop relationships with **all elements** of your faith community in order to be aware of the views of local faith groups.
- To feedback to faith communities about the work of the Faiths Forum.

- To serve on the Faiths Forum for a period of three years unless your circumstances change substantially or these processes are reviewed.

What skills, experience and personal qualities will I need?

Please see the separate Person Specification.

Support for representatives

Induction for Faiths Forum members will be provided. Subject to funding bids, a full-time Faith Network Development Officer (employed by OFFER) will support the administration of the Forum and facilitate relationships with the Faith Leaders Group, the wider Faith Network and statutory agencies. In addition, if funding bids are successful we will be able to provide travel expenses and help with other barriers for people becoming effective members i.e. childcare, translation.

The Member's Account.

Subject to successful funding bids, OFFER may be able to reimburse organisations for the time that employed staff spend as members of the Faiths Forum, in the event of meetings being held during office hours.

Replacement

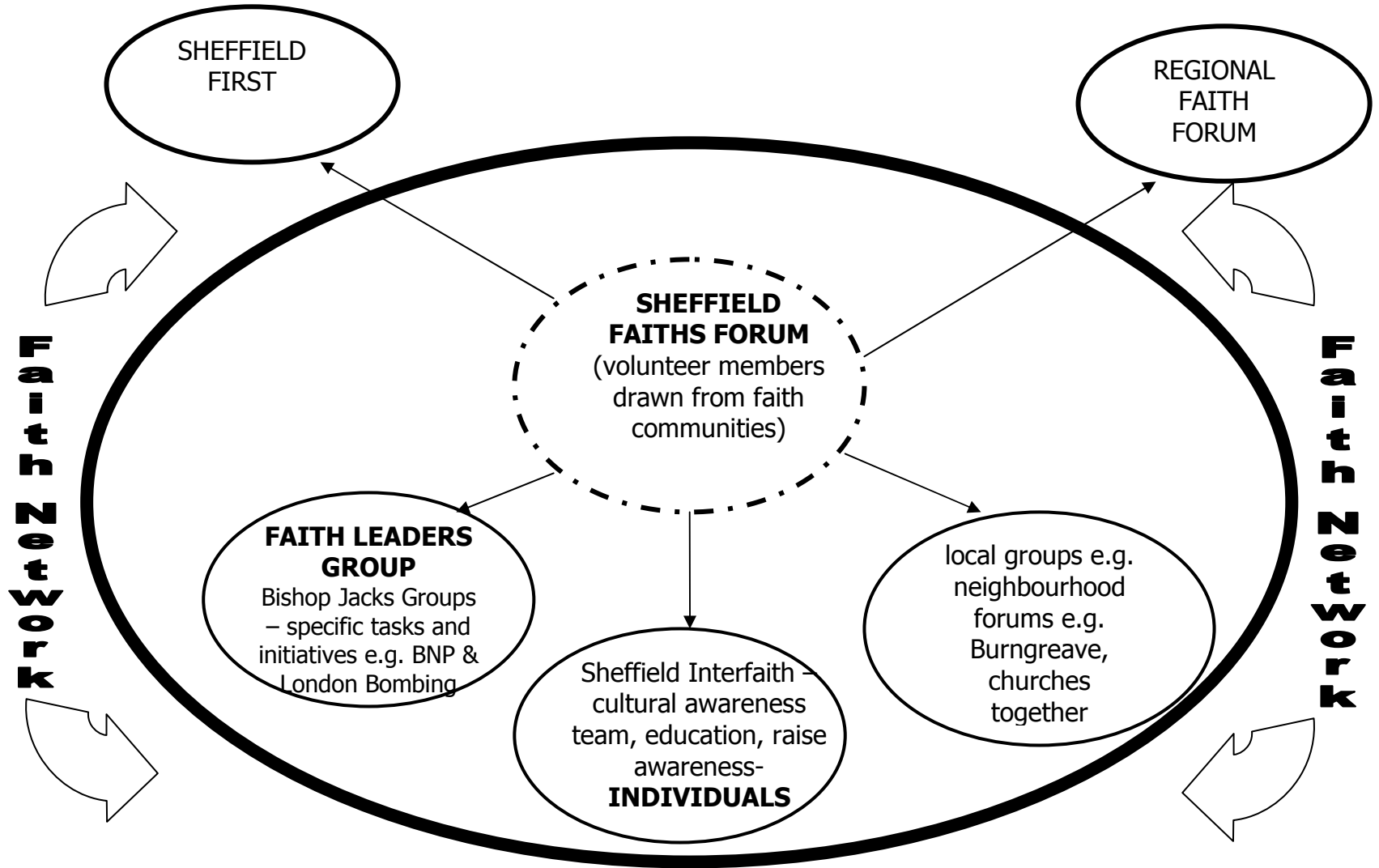
Recognising that this role is important to faith communities and the city, if a Forum member feels unable to fulfil this role, she/he must ask for help, and support will be offered. Ultimately, if the situation cannot be resolved, the member may be asked to step down to enable someone else to fulfil this vital role.

What is OFFER?

OFFER is the city-wide network for all of the voluntary, community and faith organisations in Sheffield (the VCF sector). Our main functions include:

- *strengthening the voice of the sector* on environment, health & well-being, jobs, learning & skills, services for young people and older people, and other areas of policy,
- *influencing strategies and delivery* through ensuring our sector is fairly represented on Sheffield First Boards, other city-wide and neighbourhood bodies and
- *supporting development of networks and representation* including community forums, networks for communities of interest, local partnerships and any groupings that empower our sector.

Sheffield Faith Network and the Faiths Forum



Allocation of seats on the forum

FAITH	Proposed number of seats*
Christian	4
Muslim	2
Hindu	1
Buddhist	1
Sikh	1
Jewish	1
Baha'i	1
Jain / Zoroastrian	1
Other	2
<i>Observers (non-voting)</i>	
OFFER	1
Sheffield City Council	1
Sheffield Interfaith	1
TOTAL	17

* Maximum number of seats available, based on individual candidates fully meeting criteria.