

Applying Positive Peace

A Practitioner Toolkit



Pillars of Positive Peace™

● Adapted for the Northern Ireland context



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Quantifying Peace and its Benefits

The Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit think tank dedicated to shifting the world's focus to peace as a positive, achievable, and tangible measure of human well-being and progress. IEP achieves its goals by developing new conceptual frameworks to define peacefulness; providing metrics for measuring peace; and uncovering the relationships between business, peace and prosperity as well as promoting a better understanding of the cultural, economic and political factors that create peace.

IEP is headquartered in Sydney, with offices in New York, The Hague, Abuja, Nairobi and Manila. It works with a wide range of partners internationally and collaborates with intergovernmental organisations on measuring and communicating the economic value of peace.

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First Edition, September 2026

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This Toolkit was developed as part of the collaboration between the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and Queen's University Belfast (QUB) that produced the Northern Ireland Peace Index. It brings together IEP's training and programme materials, drawn from Positive Peace work in more than 75 countries, and QUB's research expertise on peace and conflict in Northern Ireland.

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This is a practitioner document and an introduction to the Positive Peace framework for those working in Northern Ireland. It sets out the framework and the activities for applying it to projects, drawing on IEP's established training and programme practice. The authors welcome feedback from practitioners who use the activities in their own settings; comments can be sent to the contacts listed at the end of the document and will inform later editions.

The Toolkit in One Page

What Positive Peace is. The attitudes, institutions, and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies, as distinct from negative peace, the absence of violence or fear of violence. IEP's statistical analysis identifies eight Pillars consistently found in the most peaceful societies.

Why it matters here. Positive Peace provides an alternative framework for action that is evidence-based, forward-focused and systems-oriented. Positive Peace asks which conditions sustain a peaceful society, and where a practitioner can act on them. Progress on institutions and structures does not have to wait for attitudes to shift.

What this Toolkit provides. Part 1 sets out the framework, evidence, and systems thinking behind Positive Peace, and six illustrative case studies. Part 2 provides four activities, a set of standing questions, sector templates, and facilitation guidance.

The four activities. Activity 1 builds a shared, rated picture of a place across the eight Pillars. Activity 2 starts from a problem that is not shifting and reframes it to locate where a different kind of intervention would work. Activity 3 starts from a project you already run and maps it against the Pillars to find low-cost enhancements. The difference is the starting point: Activity 2 begins with an issue, Activity 3 with an existing piece of work. Activity 4 designs new work from the system rather than from a funding call.

Where to start. There are two routes. The full sequence runs Activities 1 to 4 in order: understand the system, reframe the issue to find where to act, extend what you already run, then design what does not yet exist. The quick test is Activity 3 on its own, applied to a project already running. It takes about 75 minutes, needs no new material, and is the fastest way to see what the framework adds before committing a group to the full sequence.

What it is not. A measurement instrument. The Pillars derive from country-level data used here as a structured set of questions; ratings recorded in a session are the judgement of the people in the room, not index scores.

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Part 1: The Positive Peace Framework

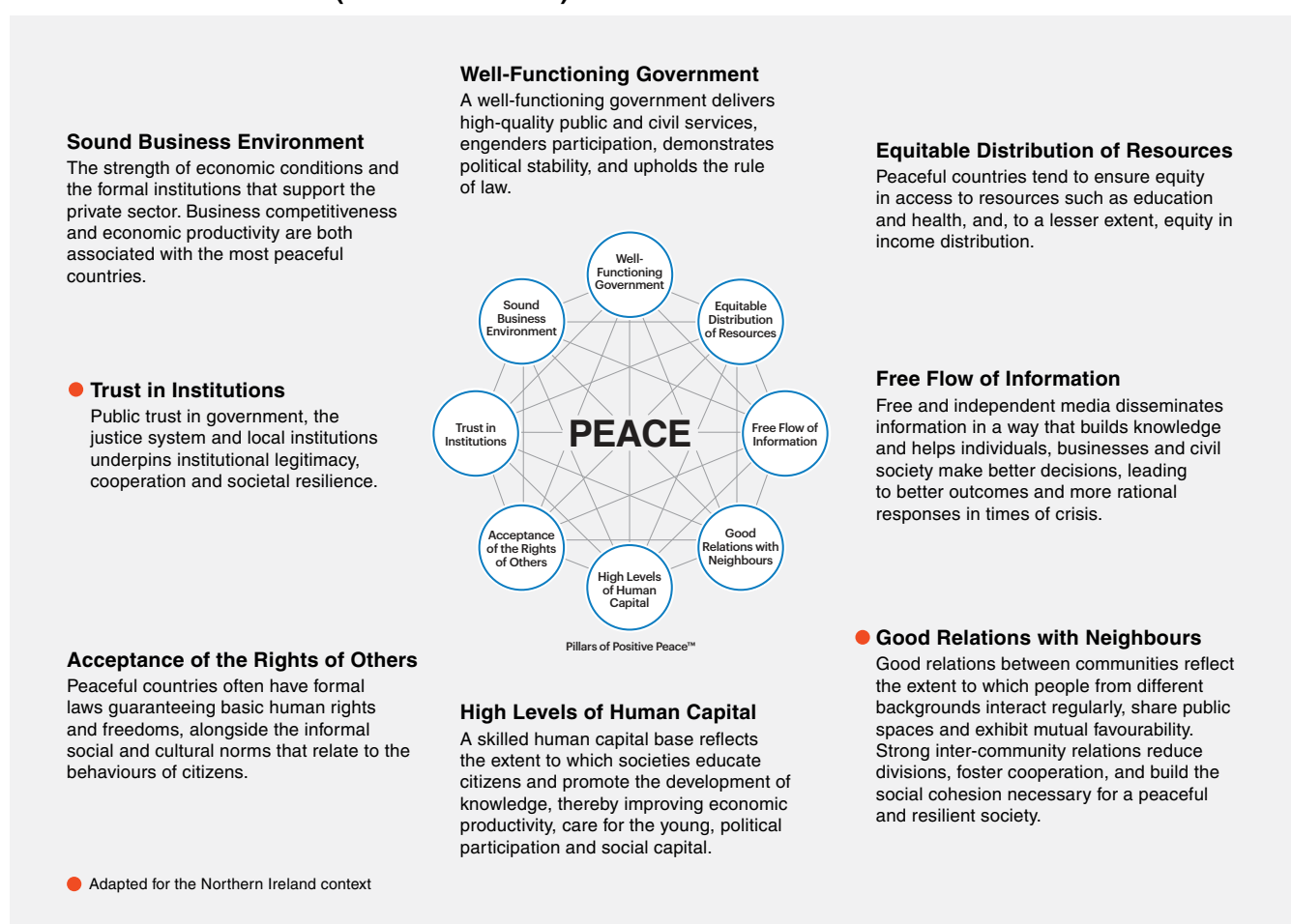
Theory and Pillars

Positive Peace describes the *attitudes, institutions, and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies*, as distinct from negative peace, which is the mere absence of violence. *Attitudes* are social views, tensions, and perceptions; *institutions* are the formal and informal bodies that shape peacefulness, social wellbeing, and the economy; and *structures* are the underpinnings of the socio-economic system, from poverty and equality to infrastructure and development. The concept was introduced by Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung in the 1960s and is often described with an analogy: just as good health extends beyond the absence of disease to encompass

physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing, Positive Peace focuses not simply on preventing violence but on strengthening the conditions that enable peaceful societies to thrive (Galtung 1964, 1969). Through statistical analysis and modelling, IEP has developed a data-driven framework, identifying the structural factors most consistently found in the world's most peaceful societies. These are expressed as eight Pillars: *Acceptance of the Rights of Others*, *Equitable Distribution of Resources*, *Free Flow of Information*, *Good Relations with Neighbours*, *High Levels of Human Capital*, *Sound Business Environment*, *Trust in Institutions*, and *Well-Functioning Government*. A one-line description of each Pillar is set out in Table 3 in Section A.

FIGURE 1

Pillars of Positive Peace (Northern Ireland)



Source: IEP (2026c).

The Pillars are deeply interconnected: improvement in one tends to support progress across others (IEP 2024a). Peace projects benefit from assessing their contribution to the full set of Pillars and working through targeted interventions instead of wholesale reform. The framework also extends beyond *Do No Harm* approaches (Anderson 1999): development work in any sector can be structured to embed peacefulness intentionally, enabling a broader range of practitioners to contribute to peacebuilding.

The same factors that create lasting peace also lead to many other positive outcomes. Between 2009 and 2022, countries that improved in Positive Peace, as measured through IEP's Positive Peace Index, recorded a 2.1 per cent median annual growth rate in GDP per capita, more than twice the rate in countries where it worsened. Inflation was twice as volatile where Positive Peace deteriorated, and household consumption grew twice as fast where it improved. FDI inflows rose at 2.2 per cent annually in improving countries, compared to a decline of over 0.5 per cent in those where it deteriorated (IEP 2024a).

Value of the Framework

The framework contributes to peacebuilding practice in three ways, which are set out below: as an evidence-based framework for assessing and measuring a project's contribution to peace; as a forward-focused approach that complements work on legacy and reconciliation; and as a whole-of-systems approach that shows how separate efforts interact. The Northern Ireland Peace Index applies the framework to Northern Ireland specifically, and the analysis of local conditions is set out there without being repeated here (IEP 2026c).

Evidence Base

Because it was derived from thousands of data series, indices, and attitudinal survey variables rather than from moral or normative reasoning, the Positive Peace framework differs from earlier peace concepts in being empirically grounded (IEP 2024a). It provides an evidence-based model for understanding the nature of peace rather than treating peace primarily as the absence of violence or as a condition defined by particular political values.

This evidence base can then be used to inform practical efforts to build and sustain peace. Development projects can use it as a reference for designing concrete strategies for improving societal resilience, identifying trends and potential tipping

points in national peace processes, assessing existing projects' contribution to peace, and measuring progress over time.

Focus on the Future

In deeply divided societies recovering from high levels of violence, institutional peace architecture commonly concentrates on dealing with the past and creating transitional justice mechanisms, while peacebuilding practice is often informed by reconciliation and by contact theory as a route to overcoming community division. Positive Peace provides a complementary, explicitly forward-looking framework. Rather than focusing on resolving the legacies of past conflict, it asks what conditions need to be strengthened to create a peaceful, resilient, and prosperous society in the future. This shifts attention towards building the institutions, relationships, social conditions, and capacities that can sustain peace over the long term. Alongside this, it also provides a new shared language and reference point for thinking about what peace is, how to work towards it, and how to monitor progress.

Whole of Systems

Peacebuilding is often siloed, with organisations understandably focused on their own objectives and areas of expertise. Positive Peace provides a framework for understanding how these different elements interact and collectively shape the conditions for peace. Its eight Pillars highlight that peaceful societies depend not on any single intervention, institution, or relationship, but on the interaction of multiple social, political, and economic factors. This encourages a more systemic approach to peacebuilding, in which government, civil society, communities, and other actors can identify how their activities contribute to, or interact with, wider conditions for peace. It can also help identify connections and potential gaps between policy areas that might otherwise be considered separately, encouraging greater coordination towards a whole-of-government or whole-of-society approach. Similarly, the Positive Peace framework's emphasis on peace as a systemic condition can help mainstream peace across policy areas, challenging the common treatment of peace as the responsibility of a particular set of institutions or programmes.

Levels of Application

Positive Peace strategies apply at every level of a system. Collaboration across levels is necessary to embed Positive Peace into a society's structures and

ensure lasting impact. The cases set out later in this section show the framework being used to understand a long-running division, to redesign public services in a Philippine city, to coordinate a national government, to build state-level capacity across Mexico, and to

structure private investment. Because the Pillars are interdependent, work at any level ultimately touches all eight; Table 1 sets out the Pillars each level is typically best placed to influence directly. It does not divide the framework between actors.

TABLE 1

Applying Positive Peace Across Levels of a System

Level	How Positive Peace Applies	Most Common Entry-Point Pillars	Northern Ireland Relevance
Government	The primary entry point is through policy and programmes that address the root causes of tension, not its symptoms. National and regional governments can invest in infrastructure and public services in ways that strengthen the system as a whole. Positive Peace can be applied as an evidence-based model to develop a 'whole-of-government' and 'whole-of-system' approach to peacebuilding.	– Well-Functioning Government – Good Relations with Neighbours – Trust in Institutions	Positive Peace offers a model and approach to strengthening government coordination and mainstreaming of peace, to understanding how departments' activities interact with other Pillars, and to gaining insight into how their activities contribute to systems change.
Civil Society	Civil society organisations occupy a pivotal position between government and community. By applying systems thinking to reframe issues, they can identify root causes and design programmes that address multiple Pillars at once.	– Acceptance of the Rights of Others – Equitable Distribution of Resources – High Levels of Human Capital – Free Flow of Information	By applying Positive Peace and systems thinking, civil society organisations can examine the wider structures, dynamics, and relationships that underpin challenges within communities, helping practitioners identify potential areas of leverage where interventions can contribute to long-term systems change.
Community	Local facilitators can shape projects to specific community norms, strengths, and weaknesses, enabling participants to connect lived experience to larger systems. Grassroots work supports top-down approaches and can be equally effective on its own. Community-led workshops bring together residents, local organisations, and public bodies to address Pillars at the neighbourhood level. Lasting change requires meaningful local ownership and involvement.	– Free Flow of Information – Acceptance of the Rights of Others – Equitable Distribution of Resources	Rather than primarily concentrating on cross-community contact, Positive Peace asks community members to focus on the systems that shape people's daily experiences. This process can encourage participants to appreciate diverse lived experiences and develop a common understanding of the systemic changes needed to strengthen peace.

Source: IEP.

The Positive Peace framework can be applied in a variety of ways depending on the context, objectives, and needs of practitioners and communities. The processes outlined below are illustrative rather than exhaustive: they provide two examples of how the framework can be applied, but other approaches are possible. Part 2 provides practical resources and guidance to support practitioners in implementing these approaches.

Example 1: Positive Peace Analysis and Project Design.

The process below illustrates how the Positive Peace framework might be integrated throughout a project cycle. Part 2 of this document provides additional resources, tools, and guidance to support practitioners in applying these stages in practice through the

Structured Stakeholder Conversations using IEP's Eight Pillars. In outline, the cycle runs from conflict analysis, through systems assessment across all eight Pillars, to co-design with communities holding real decision rights, then programme design stress-tested against the Pillar profile, and monitoring that claims contribution rather than attribution.

Example 2: Existing Projects and Specific Issues.

The process below provides one example of how practitioners can use the eight Pillars to map existing projects or understand specific issues within the framework and identify potential opportunities for intervention. Part 2 of this document provides additional resources and practical guidance to

support mapping existing projects against the Pillars, including tools for systems mapping, stakeholder engagement, and project assessment. In outline, pick an issue you already work on, map the system around it across the Pillars, choose an entry Pillar where you have leverage, design activities that target the drivers instead of the symptoms, and review as conditions change.

Case Studies

The Positive Peace framework has been applied at city, national, organisation, and project level. Each case addresses the arrangements that produce the problem, and each shows a different application of the framework: coordinating a government, reading a long-running division, localising a national index, designing a project, embedding the approach in an organisation, and measuring impact.

Case 1: Philippines – Peace 911 in Davao City

Paquibato district, on the edge of Davao City, experienced insurgency-related violence for decades. Security-led responses contained the violence without resolving its causes (IEP 2022).

In 2018 the city government established the Davao City Advisory Committee on Peace and Development and consulted across the 14 barangays the programme covered (Arguillas 2018; Schultz 2019). The response was spread across Pillars instead of being concentrated in one. Training in container gardening enabled women to grow vegetables for their families and sell the surplus to neighbours (*Sound Business Environment, High Levels of Human Capital*). City agencies ran a twice-monthly caravan of services into each barangay, bringing health, agriculture, legal services, education, civil registry and land transport together in a single visit (*Equitable Distribution of Resources*). An information hotline was established (*Free Flow of Information*). The eight Pillars were translated into Cebuano as the Walo Ka Haligi sa Kalinaw for display in barangay halls (IEP 2022).

Within nine months the military declared Paquibato clear of insurgent activity, and the mayor announced an expansion to a further 18 barangays (Estremera 2019; IEP 2022). Two qualifications matter. The clearance was a declaration by the security forces during an active counter-insurgency campaign rather than an independent verification, and three army battalions were operating in the district over the same period, so the framework's contribution cannot be isolated from the security operation (Davao Today 2022). IEP supplied the framework, which the city adopted, translated and applied itself (DILG XI 2020). At national level, IEP delivered executive training with the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict in September 2024 and signed a memorandum of understanding with the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity in April 2025 (NTF-ELCAC 2024; OPAPRU 2025). Positive Peace is now integrated into the National Action Plan for Peace, Unity and Development 2025–2028 (IEP 2025b).

For this government, the framework's main value was a shared language for what peace requires. It allowed departments to see where effort was concentrated and where it was absent, which is the practical difficulty in treating peace as a cross-cutting commitment.

Case 2: Cyprus – reading a long-running division through attitudes, institutions and structures

Positive Peace is used here as a diagnostic lens on a social division that has lasted more than fifty years, rather than to describe a programme delivered by IEP (IEP 2024a). Turkish military intervention in 1974 divided the island, and a UN-patrolled buffer zone was established along a ceasefire line running some 180 kilometres across Cyprus, including through Nicosia, which had already been divided by a Green Line since 1963–64 (UNFICYP 2025). The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus was declared in 1983 and is recognised only by Turkey (UN Security Council 1983). The Republic of Cyprus joined the EU in 2004: the whole island is EU territory and all Cypriots are entitled to EU citizenship, but under Protocol 10 to the Act of Accession, the body of EU law (the *acquis*) is suspended in the areas not under government control (European Union 2003; European Commission n.d.). Formal negotiations have not taken place since the Crans-Montana talks collapsed in July 2017 (Security Council Report 2026; UN News 2026).

Attitudes remain marked by intercommunal mistrust. Polling in March 2026 found 78.5 per cent of Turkish Cypriots supporting a bizonal, bicomunal federation, alongside high levels of concern about renewed tension and about Turkey's influence in the north; Greek Cypriot opinion has historically been markedly more sceptical, and no comparable recent figure is available (CMIRS 2026). University of Cyprus research, reported in 2026, found younger respondents more positive about a federal solution, attributed to a generation that has grown up with open crossings (University of Cyprus 2026). A bi-communal civil society is growing, and the two leaders agreed a framework for a consultative civil society body in May 2026 (Security Council Report 2026).

Institutions differ on either side of the line. The south has EU member-state institutions; the north has parallel institutions that are internationally unrecognised, though internally competitive. The election of October 2025 unseated the incumbent by 26 points and returned the process to a federation-based framework. Structures reflect the same division. GDP per capita in the Republic is roughly three times the north's in nominal terms, though the north's constraints include exposure to the Turkish lira and dependence on transfers from Turkey as well as trade restrictions (PRIO Cyprus Centre n.d.). The first crossing point opened in 2003 after nearly thirty years and nine now operate, none since 2018. Hydrocarbons and property remain flashpoints, and the property dispute escalated in 2025 into arrest warrants and prosecutions on both sides (UNFICYP 2025.; Council of Europe 2026).

Structures and institutions can advance even while attitudes lag behind. Durable peace requires all three to reinforce each other, which is why an assessment covers all eight Pillars, not only those where progress is easiest to show. The framework locates where movement is available now, in technical cooperation between the two sides, in crossing points, and in engagement with younger people, without waiting on a political settlement. This is the transferable point for Northern Ireland: these dimensions move at different paces, meaning that progress on institutions and structures does not have to wait for attitudes to shift.

Case 3: Mexico – thirteen years of the Peace Index

IEP published the first Mexico Peace Index in 2013, the seventh year of the country's war on drugs and following its earlier US and UK national indices (IEP 2012, 2013a, 2013b). Thirteen editions have appeared since, with no edition in 2014, making it IEP's longest-running national index (IEP 2025a, 2026a). The index turns violence data into a single comparable score and state ranking, and the annual release generates media coverage and public debate that puts pressure on state and federal government to respond.

The 2026 edition recorded a 5.1 per cent improvement in peacefulness for 2025, the largest single-year gain in the index's history, driven by a 22.7 per cent fall in the homicide rate and nearly seven thousand fewer deaths than in 2024 (IEP 2026a). At her press conference on 20 May 2026, President Claudia Sheinbaum cited the index as evidence that the government's security strategy was producing results, describing the most significant improvement in peace in at least a decade and a sixth consecutive year of progress (Presidencia de la República 2026; Excelsior 2026).

The report itself is more guarded. Violence remains elevated relative to historical levels, the national score is still 9.9 per cent worse than in 2015, and disappearances, extortion, domestic abuse and firearms offences continued to rise even as homicide fell (IEP 2026a). The index has become a national reference point that government itself reaches for, which is precisely why its caveats have to travel with its headline. The lasting result is the capacity built around the index rather than the index itself: Positive Peace has been integrated into peacebuilding work in several Mexican states, with training delivered to public servants, police officers and young people across the country.

An index secures attention and access, but the peacebuilding work is done by what follows it. The same applies to the Northern Ireland Peace Index: the Index identifies where conditions are weakest, and the Pillars structure the response.

Case 4: Rotary – the Pillars as a design method

IEP and Rotary International formed a peace partnership in 2017. It runs through the Positive Peace Academy, a free self-guided course, and a network of Positive Peace Activators trained to support clubs and districts in applying the framework in their own communities (IEP 2017; Rotary International and IEP 2025).

IEP's Positive Peace Implementation Guide sets out the method in six steps: identify the project; identify and include the actors; identify an impartial facilitator; develop actions considering each Pillar; implement; and establish monitoring systems (IEP 2021). The mapping stage is deliberately strength-based. It asks what a community already has to build on, not only where it is weakest, which changes both what participants are willing to say and what the resulting design looks like.

In Nateete, Kampala, a Rotaract member and teacher built the eight Pillars into a secondary-school literacy programme, planting fruit trees on the school grounds and providing lunchtime porridge to ease tensions with neighbouring residents. Scholastic performance moved from the bottom half of the district to the top third and attendance rose by 40 per cent (Rotary International n.d.). Elsewhere, clubs have taken the framework into existing education, literacy and water and sanitation projects in Charlotte, North Carolina, and worked through one Pillar a month over eight months in Blount County, Tennessee, producing a guide for future community planning (IEP 2020).

This shows the framework used as a design method as well as an assessment. Measurement is the stage practitioners most often omit. Incident counts record short-term fluctuation; tracking the underlying conditions records whether the system itself is changing.

Case 5: World Vision – two routes into adoption for an organisation

One route to applying Positive Peace is to build peace into a single programme as an outcome rather than adding it as a side activity. World Vision runs the GREAN programme in South Sudan, short for Greater Resilience through Enhanced Agriculture and Nutrition. It is funded by Australian Aid through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program and delivered in Rajaf Payam, Juba County. The programme makes Positive Peace an explicit component running through agriculture, water and sanitation, nutrition and market work, not as a parallel activity (World Vision International 2025a, 2025b).

Staff were trained first, with a training of trainers preparing staff from food security, livelihoods and education to facilitate sessions. Delivery used stakeholder mapping, a connectors-and-dividers analysis drawn from *Do No Harm* methodology, and IEP's Community Strength Barometer to establish a baseline across the eight Pillars, beginning with pilot community dialogues, school peace clubs and government dialogues (IEP 2026d; Anderson 1999).

The second route is organisation-wide adoption. World Vision's Integrating Peacebuilding and Conflict Sensitivity manual combines conflict analysis and conflict sensitivity in a single tool and incorporates the eight Pillars, which World Vision describes as inspired by IEP's work (World Vision International 2016). A learning pathway runs from introductory training through to a facilitator guide, cascading from a trained core group out to a wider stakeholder group and supported by a community of practice. Adoption was then built into job descriptions, performance reviews and onboarding.

World Vision's experience shows two routes to adoption: embedding Positive Peace in a single programme first to demonstrate that the approach works, and, separately, building it into organisation-wide strategy, staffing, and measurement. Activity 3 supports the first of these, working with a project already run, rather than redesigning it or restructuring the organisation around a new framework.

Case 6: Energy Peace Partners – the Pillars as a measurement standard

Peace Renewable Energy Certificates are impact-labelled renewable-energy certificates issued from clean-energy projects in fragile, climate-vulnerable and energy-poor countries. Each certificate represents one megawatt-hour of clean electricity, certified as also delivering social benefit. Energy Peace Partners, a US non-profit, is the accredited issuer under the I-REC(E) Standard in seven countries, and certificates have been issued from projects in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Chad and Nigeria (Energy Peace Partners n.d.; I-TRACK Foundation 2023).

Revenue funds community infrastructure that improves safety and opportunity. In Goma, Microsoft's purchase, the first P-REC transaction, pre-financed 35 solar streetlights in the Ndosho neighbourhood. In Nigeria, a purchase by Oriflame funded a productive-use hub. In Chad, revenue funded streetlights at Mongo's hospital and polytechnic university (Energy Peace Partners n.d.).

Energy Peace Partners measures the peace impact of these projects against the eight Pillars, localising national-level indicators to project scale (Energy Peace Partners 2023). In Goma, *Good Relations with Neighbours* was measured through whether residents felt safe walking alone at night, together with Afrobarometer trust questions; a survey of 194 households found overall Positive Peace around 9 per cent higher in the lit neighbourhood, with 39 per cent feeling safe at night against 13 per cent in the unlit comparison area (Energy Peace Partners 2024). A 2024 baseline in Mongo, Chad, surveyed 250 households against the same eight-Pillar structure (Energy Peace Partners 2025). The evidence base remains thin. There are two published project-level studies, one of them cross-sectional, and Energy Peace Partners describes its own findings as cautious optimism.

The framework here operates as a monitoring standard rather than a programme theme, and the certificates are sold on their social benefit as well as their electricity. For practitioners in Northern Ireland, the transferable point is that the Pillars can be applied at the scale of a single project without losing their structure.

Systems Thinking

Positive Peace is underpinned by systems thinking, which analyses societies through the relationships and patterns that constitute them, instead of breaking them into isolated parts. It accounts for societal complexity and challenges assumptions of linear causality. Systems have momentum and direction, moving in virtuous or vicious cycles altered by

stimuli, shocks, and feedback loops. Recognising these dynamics enables practitioners to redirect systems through targeted nudges or broader reforms.

According to CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (CDA 2016), the best way to articulate the principles of systems thinking is by comparing it with conventional 'reductionist' and 'linear' approaches, as is done in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Conventional and Systems Thinking Approaches Compared

Conventional Approach	Systems Thinking Approach
The world is full of problems. Adopt a problem-solving approach and fix them.	The world is full of systems. Adopt a learning approach. Understanding informs action.
Problems should be broken down into parts. Each part should be addressed individually.	Issues exist within complex contexts. Change requires understanding this interconnectedness.
Following a series of pre-determined actions, executed in order, solves problems.	Influencing complex systems requires careful planning but also adaptive action: monitor the system for its feedback (response), adjust actions accordingly. Support positive change nascent in the system.
Work is assessed based on its intentions. Unintended consequences are no one's fault and cannot be anticipated.	Work is assessed based on its effects. Practitioners are responsible for all results, including unintended consequences, which can and should be anticipated and mitigated.
Events and issues should be monitored and addressed as they arise.	Underlying social structures and dynamics produce discrete events. Change requires addressing underlying issues that drive events.

Outsiders can affect, but are not part of, the problems being addressed.	If you interact with a system, you become a part of it.
With the proper understanding, outsiders are just as capable of creating change as insiders.	Insiders intuitively understand social systems in ways few outsiders can master.

Source: CDA (2016)

Systems thinking asks practitioners above all to 'see in systems', which means to:

- Identify how issues are embedded within a complex Positive Peace system, not as isolated phenomena.
- Define the parameters and components of that complex system, acknowledging its interconnectedness with other social, political, economic, and cultural systems.
- Analyse the interrelationships and flows within that complex system.
- Pay attention to change over time, not to a static snapshot, so that emergent patterns and unintended consequences become visible.
- Analyse how previous policies have influenced the system, and with what result.

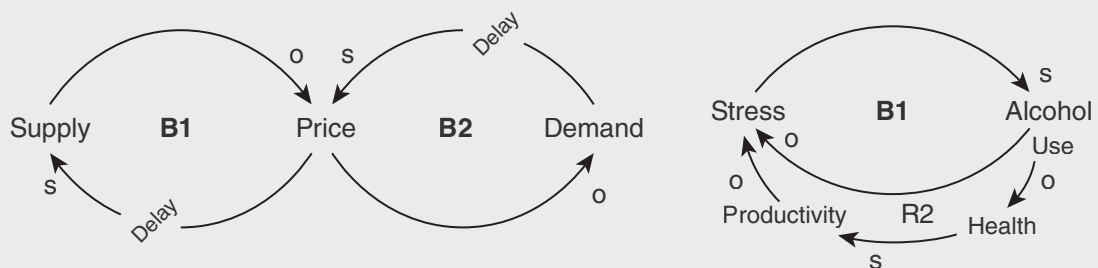
- Identify 'leverage points' in the system and develop innovative ways of shifting system dynamics.

Systems thinking also draws on qualitative analytical tools that help practitioners to 'see in systems'. Qualitative tools each serve a distinct purpose:

Causal Loop Diagrams map variables and feedback loops in a system. They distinguish reinforcing loops that accelerate change from balancing loops that hold it steady, making circular causality visible where a linear reading would miss it. (Sterman 2000; Meadows 2008). In practice, a diagram of any real issue grows dense very quickly, and a map that tries to include everything explains nothing. Keep it to the variables the group can name and plausibly influence: the purpose is to make feedback visible, not to model the system exhaustively.

FIGURE 2

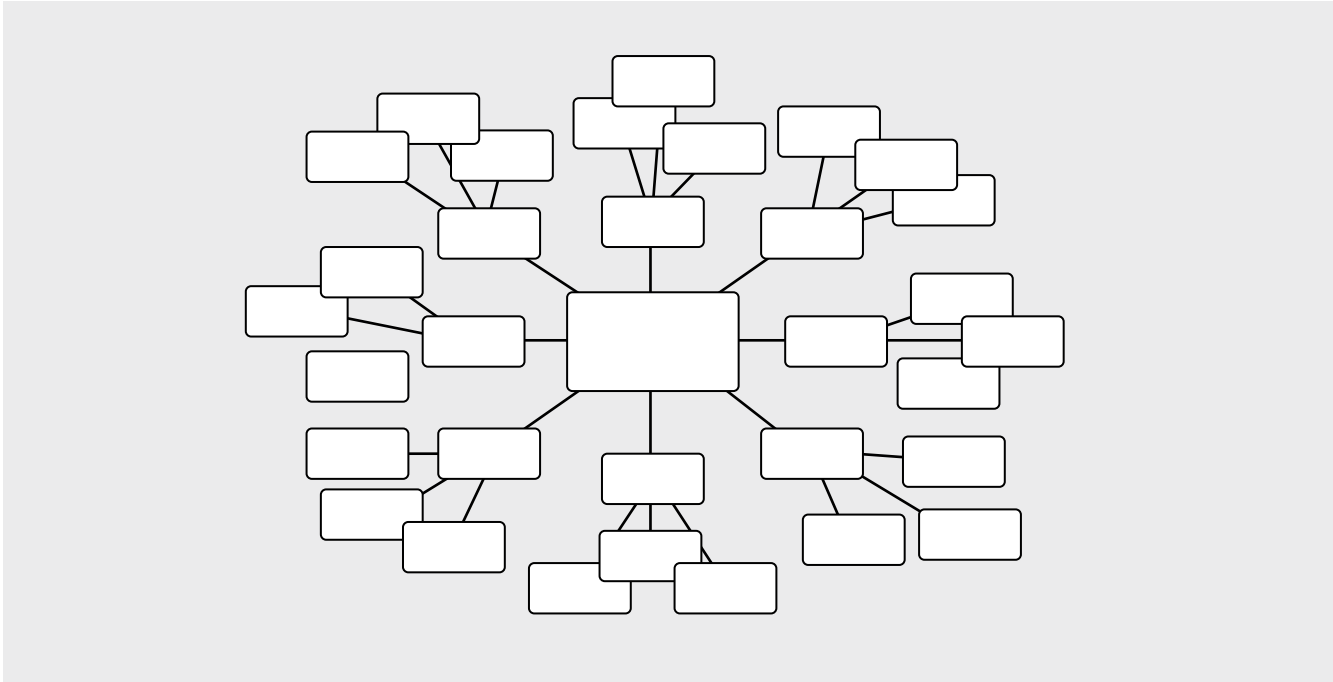
Examples of Causal Loop Diagrams



Source: Adapted from Kim (1992)

Mind Maps organise the components of a problem around a central theme, giving a quick visual inventory of what belongs in the system and how those elements cluster before causal links are traced (Buzan and Buzan 1996).

FIGURE 3
Example of a Mind Map

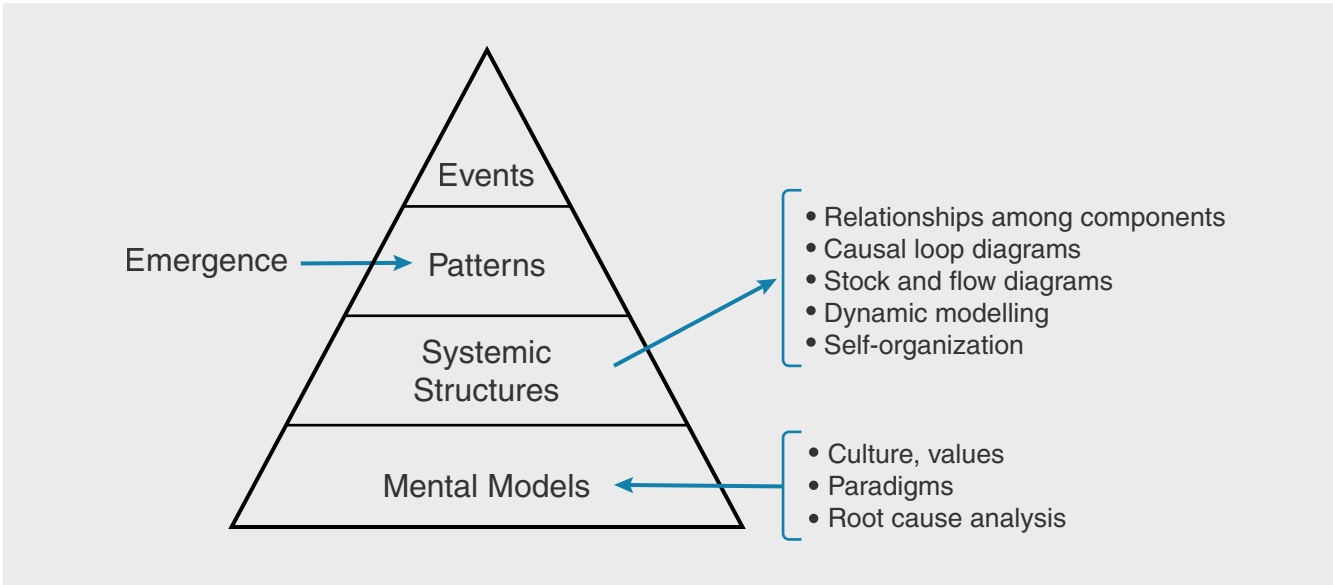


Source: Adapted from Buzan and Buzan (1996)

Iceberg Models sort what is observed into four levels: visible events, patterns of behaviour over time, the systemic structures producing those patterns, and the

mental models that sustain them, prompting analysis beneath the level of isolated incidents (Maani and Cavana 2007).

FIGURE 4
Example of an Iceberg Model

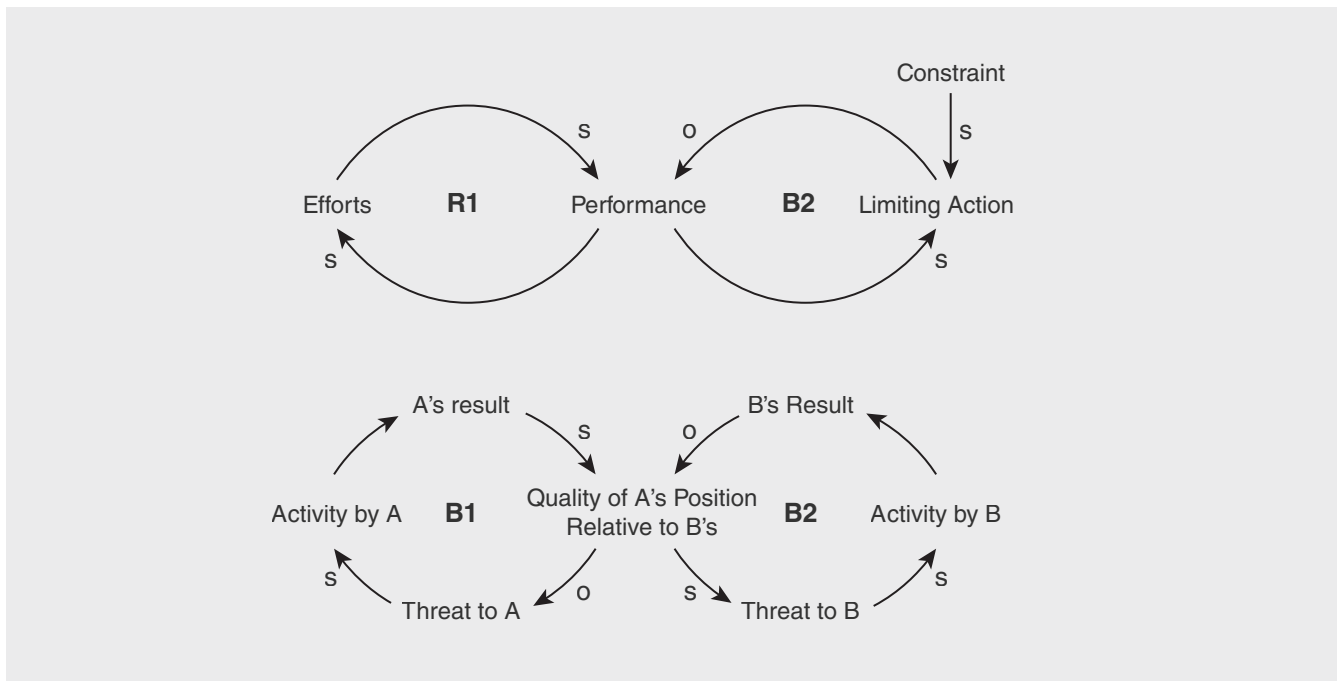


Source: Adapted from Monat and Gannon (2015)

System Archetypes are recurring combinations of feedback loops that generate familiar patterns of behaviour across very different systems; ‘Limits to Growth’ describes growth that stalls as it runs into a constraint, and ‘Escalation’ describes two parties

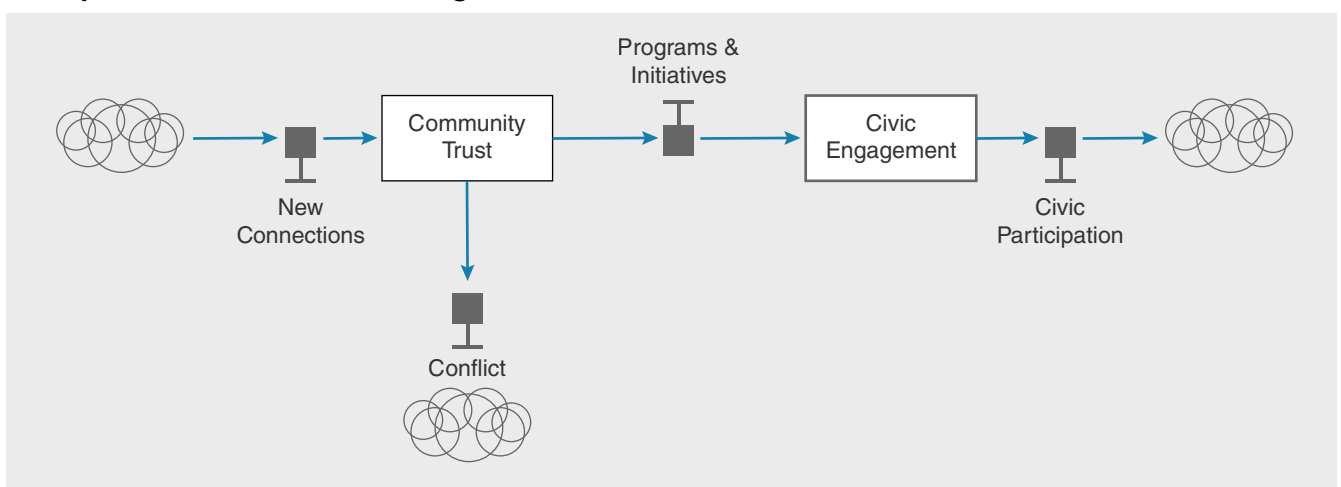
each responding to the other's actions in a cycle of intensifying competition. Recognising an archetype helps practitioners anticipate how a situation is likely to unfold and identify where intervention is most likely to hold (Senge 1990; Kim 1992).

FIGURE 5

Causal Loop Diagrams of System Archetypes: Limits to Growth and Escalation

Source: Adapted from Kim (1992)

FIGURE 6

Example of a Stock and Flow Diagram

Source: Adapted from Monat and Gannon (2015)

Stock and Flow Diagrams model the accumulations and flows of a resource within a system, supporting quantitative analysis of how dynamics unfold over time (Monat and Gannon 2015).

Applied to Northern Ireland, these tools can change what a practitioner sees. An iceberg analysis of a recurring interface disturbance treats the incident as the visible event, seasonal tension around contested commemoration as the pattern of behaviour, segregated housing and schooling as the systemic structures producing that pattern, and inherited

narratives of threat as the mental models sustaining it. Read at that depth, the leverage sits in shifting these systems rather than in the policing of any single incident or sustained cross-community contact.

The three domains and the four levels of Positive Peace describe the same system from different angles, and it is worth holding both. Positive Peace sorts what sustains peace into attitudes, the values, beliefs, and social norms that shape how people relate to each other and to the state; *institutions*, the formal and informal rules of the game, from governance and law to civil society and the media; and *structures*,

the underlying economic and social conditions that determine who has access to opportunity. Set against the iceberg, *institutions* and *structures* are what an analysis finds at the level of systemic structures, and attitudes are the mental models sitting beneath them. A sound analysis touches all three. An issue explained entirely by attitudes tends to produce awareness work; an issue explained entirely by institutions tends to produce a call for better procedure or governance; an issue explained entirely by structures tends to produce a funding bid. Durable change usually requires all three.

Systems thinking works through sustained, collaborative action. Because systems are defined by their connections, small changes made across several Pillars achieve broader and more durable impact than isolated interventions.

Caveats

Practitioners applying the Positive Peace framework should anticipate six common challenges.

- **Long-term nature.** The framework targets systemic root causes, not immediate symptoms; results are not visible quickly, and practitioners should plan for long-term engagement.
- **Scale of the evidence.** The eight Pillars were derived from statistical analysis of country-level data, and the relationships they describe are correlational rather than causal. This Toolkit helps practitioners apply them at neighbourhood and project level, a scale at which the underlying indicators were never measured. The Pillars are therefore used here as a structured set of questions rather than as a measurement instrument, and ratings recorded in a session are the judgement of the people in the room, not an index score.
- **No transferable template.** There is no single solution that transfers across societies; every project must be designed for its specific context, which requires in-depth community knowledge.
- **Facilitation demands.** Concepts such as systems thinking and Pillar mapping are not self-explanatory; effective facilitation requires some prior orientation to the terminology.
- **Boundary judgement.** Because social systems are nested and overlapping, deciding where to draw analytical boundaries is a judgement call that requires care and revisiting as projects develop.
- **Breadth of participation.** Peacebuilding is most effective when action is distributed across government, civil society, and community simultaneously. Securing that breadth of participation is demanding.

Part 2 turns that picture into project design. It sets out four activities, a sector template, and facilitation guidance for use across any setting. Further resources on Positive Peace and the wider work of IEP are listed at the end of the document (IEP 2026b).

Part 2: Activities and Templates

Section A: The Quick Start Guide

Purpose and Audience

Practitioners who already run community projects can use the Positive Peace framework to extend the reach and measurability of what they do; those starting new projects can use it to ground design decisions in what the evidence shows works. The assessment questions and mapping templates in this Toolkit apply to any sector, including community development, education, youth work, health, economic development, and the arts. Section B works one sector through in full and provides a template for adapting the questions to any other.

How to read this Toolkit: read Section A, then run one activity. Nothing else is required on a first pass. Part 1 gives the evidence and the case studies, and it is there for when the framework must be explained to a board, a funder, or a partner. Section B is a reference section: turn to the applicable sector when adapting the questions. The eight standing questions and the reference card in Section A are the only material needed to run a first session.

Time needed: Section A takes about an hour to read, and Part 1 approximately the same. Section B is a reference section: read only the sector that applies. Activity 1 takes 90 minutes to two and a half hours with a group; Activity 2 takes about 110 minutes; Activity 3 takes about 75 minutes; and Activity 4 takes about 90 minutes.

Responsible Practice

These exercises ask people to talk about how their community works, who holds influence in it, and where provision falls short. A few practical points apply to any session.

Say at the start what the session is for, what will be written down, and who will see it. Record ratings and patterns, not named accounts of individuals. Participation is voluntary and people can decline any question.

If a participant discloses a legacy matter, a threat, a criminal matter, or a safeguarding concern, stop the exercise and follow your own organisation's safeguarding policy. Do not pursue the disclosure in the room and do not record names against it.

Agree referral routes before the session, not after a disclosure. Fuller guidance is in 'Facilitating in a Real Community' in Section B.

The session is a structured conversation about conditions, not a mediation or a substitute for professional support. When a conversation moves beyond that, close it and follow up outside the room.

Activities

Activities 1 to 4 form one sequence: understand the system, reframe the issue to find where to act, extend what you already run, then design what does not yet exist. Each also works on its own, so the numbering is the order of the full sequence, not an order you have to follow. Activity 1 suits a group in the room scoping new work. Activity 2 suits an issue that is not shifting despite sustained activity. Activity 3 suits a project already running, and needs no new material, which makes it the quickest way to test the framework. Activity 4 follows Activity 3 for work that does not yet exist.

1. Structured Stakeholder Conversations.

Purpose: to build a shared picture of how peace is holding in a place and to identify which systemic issues are worth working on. This is the diagnostic stage. Use it at the start of a planning cycle or when scoping new work. **Output:** a rated assessment across the eight Pillars, with points of disagreement recorded. Allow 60 to 90 minutes for the assessment and a further 30 to 60 minutes to read the patterns.

2. Reframing an Issue and Identifying Leverage Points.

Purpose: to take an issue you already work on, describe it as a system rather than as a series of events, and identify the points where a different kind of intervention would shift it. Use it when existing approaches are producing activity but not change. **Output:** a systemic description of the issue, two or three leverage points, and an alternative approach sketched against the strongest one. Allow 110 minutes.

3. Mapping Existing Projects against the Eight Pillars.

Purpose: to see where a project you already run affects Pillars beyond the one it was designed for, and where low-cost adjustments would extend that reach. Use it when a project is running and you want more from it inside current funding. Output: a completed Pillar map and two or three selected enhancements. Allow about 75 minutes.

4. Building a New Project from the Pillars.

Purpose: to design a new piece of work from the system rather than from an available funding call. Use it when there is no existing project to adapt, or when repeated attempts on an issue have not shifted it. Output: an entry Pillar with a stated reason, a stakeholder list, and a one-page project outline. Allow about 90 minutes.

The activities are drawn from IEP's full Positive Peace training programme, which covers peace data, conflict simulation, systems thinking, and project design in more depth. See www.positivepeace.org. That training is not a prerequisite: the activities below can be run as they stand by anyone already working in community settings.

All four activities rest on the systems perspective set out in Part 1: a problem visible in one place is usually produced elsewhere, and change accumulates through

modest adjustments across several Pillars, not through any single large intervention. Participants do not need to master the underlying systems methods, which inform the design of the exercises, not the running of them. The facilitator guides the group through the assessment; the community provides the content.

The Eight Pillars in One Line Each

Table 3 is the reference card for the eight Pillars: a one-line description of each, enough to run a session from. Every other Pillar list in the Toolkit builds on it. The three indicators behind each Pillar, each classified as an attitude, an institution, or a structure, are set out in the Northern Ireland Peace Index (IEP 2026c), together with the full definitions for the Northern Ireland context and the supporting evidence.

Warm-up: The Pillar Card Game

Before a first session, print the eight one-line descriptions, cut them up, and remove the Pillar names. In small groups, have participants match each description to a Pillar and defend their choices. This takes 15 to 20 minutes, surfaces disagreements early, and means that the assessment starts with a shared understanding of what each Pillar covers, so that no definitional argument breaks out mid-exercise.

TABLE 3
The Eight Pillars in One Line Each

Pillar	What the Pillar Covers
Acceptance of the Rights of Others	Whether formal law and informal norms protect differences and equal treatment
Equitable Distribution of Resources	Whether access to education, health, and other resources is fair across groups
Free Flow of Information	Whether people can get reliable information and whether institutions are transparent about decisions
Good Relations with Neighbours	Whether relationships across community, regional, and national boundaries are positive and cooperative
High Levels of Human Capital	Whether education, skills, and knowledge are being built and renewed
Sound Business Environment	Whether economic conditions and institutions let people work, trade, and start a business
Trust in Institutions	Whether institutions operate transparently and without corruption, and whether people believe they do
Well-Functioning Government	Whether public services are delivered and government decisions are accountable

Source: IEP

Activity 1: Structured Stakeholder Conversations

Purpose: to build a shared picture of how peace is holding in a place and to identify which systemic issues are worth working on. This is the diagnostic stage. It produces a rated picture across the eight Pillars and a record of where participants disagree, which together show where additional effort would count for most, whether that points to designing new work (Activity 4) or to reconsidering something you already run (Activities 2 and 3).

The Process: 60 to 90 Minute Guided Exercise (Activity 1)

The exercise works best in groups of four to 12 with enough diversity of experience to surface different perspectives. Invite colleagues, community members, and other stakeholders relevant to the Pillars being assessed.

1. Step 1: Choose your area of focus. Do you want to assess your local community or a partner community? Choose an area you are familiar with.
2. Step 2: Community Assessment Questions (60 to 90 minutes)

Note: These questions are written for a community context and can be adapted for any sector. Section B provides a worked example and a template. When answering questions, be sure to discuss both strengths and weaknesses across all Pillars. It may be easy to talk about what is wrong but be sure to emphasise what is working well too.

Rating scale: 1 Strongly disagree · 2 Disagree · 3 Neither · 4 Agree · 5 Strongly agree.

Agree on each rating as a group and record where you disagree. The disagreement is data, and the patterns section below is built to read it.

1. Acceptance of the Rights of Others

How is difference handled here?

- What can people not say here, and what happens when they say it?
- Name the contested sites, dates, and symbols here. Who manages each one?
- How are residents of ethnic minorities, migrant workers, Travellers, and people seeking asylum treated here?
- When a hate incident happens here, is it reported? What follows if it is?

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed:

2. Equitable Distribution of Resources

Do all community members have fair access to what they need?

- Which services do people here feel they lose out on, and does the evidence bear that out?
- Where does provision stop? Is there a street, an estate, or an age group that falls outside it?
- Who decides how local funding is split? Can anyone outside that decision see it being made?
- Does provision reach the most deprived parts of this community, or the parts that are best organised at asking for it?

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed:

3. Free Flow of Information

How well can people access and share information?

- When an incident happens, how quickly does an account of it spread, and do all parts of the community hear the same account?
- Can residents find out what is being decided about this area, on funding, planning, policing, and development, before those decisions are taken?
- Who gets treated as the community spokesperson, and who chose them?

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed:

4. Good Relations with Neighbours

How connected are the different communities here?

- Where are the boundaries between communities, marked or unmarked? Who avoids crossing them, and what follows when they are crossed?
- Is contact happening between residents, or only between the community organisations that convene them and their paid staff?
- When something goes wrong between areas, who steps in? What do they actually do?
- What happens to contact between participants once the funded activity ends, and how would you know either way?

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed:

5. High Levels of Human Capital

How well does this community develop people's skills and knowledge?

- Who facilitates the difficult conversations here about the past, contested space, and sectarianism? Where were they trained, and is that skill held locally or brought in each time?
- Do young people have the skills to navigate the divided geography they have inherited? Do they know which areas they can move through, and how to do so safely?
- Is local knowledge about the history, the sensitivities, and who holds influence written down anywhere, or does it exist only in the memories of long-standing staff and volunteers?
- What do people keep after a project here ends, such as skills, relationships, premises, equipment, or a constituted group?

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed:

6. Sound Business Environment

How easy is it for people to earn a living here?

- Where do people here actually work, and how far do they travel to get there? Long journeys leave less time and energy for anything local, including this work.
- What stops someone starting a business here? Money, premises, confidence, or something else?
- When new investment arrives, who gets the jobs?
- Is there economic activity that people across the community have a stake in protecting?

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed:

7. Trust in Institutions

How fairly and honestly do institutions operate?

- Who must give permission, formally or informally, before institutional processes can happen here?
- Does funding reach the community? Can anyone here see the route it takes, or change it?
- Would your own selection of participants and partners withstand scrutiny if the list were published?

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed:

8. Well-Functioning Government

How well does governance here deliver, and who does it deliver for?

- Which services work well here, and who benefits most from them?
- When did someone in this room last influence a local decision? What happened?
- Are rules applied the same way across communities? Where do the differences show, and who do they affect?
- Who do people go to when the official route fails?

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed:

Identify Patterns and Priorities (30 to 60 minutes)

After assessing all Pillars:

- Which Pillars are the strongest?
- How can they be protected?
- Which Pillars need the most attention?
- How do the Pillars connect to each other?
- What would the community most like to see improved?
- What assets and strengths can be built upon?

Space for synthesis:

Common Patterns and What They Mean

Two patterns are especially common across sectors. When Pillar 4 (*Good Relations with Neighbours*) scores high while Pillars 6 and 2 (*Sound Business Environment*, *Equitable Distribution of Resources*) score low, relationships are being maintained against the structural conditions underneath them; the work is harder than it needs to be and more fragile than it appears. When there is wide disagreement on a Pillar rating, the room contains people with genuinely different experiences of the same place. Record the disagreement; it is itself a finding, not a problem to resolve before continuing. Where participants cannot settle on a single rating, record the range instead of forcing a number: the spread is the result.

TABLE 4

Common Patterns in Pillar Ratings and What They Mean

Pattern	Possible Meaning	Response
All Pillars rated low	Serious challenges or a group not seeing the positives	Look for hidden strengths, start with small wins, bring in other perspectives
Wide disagreement between participants	Different groups experiencing the same place differently	Run the exercise again with a different group and compare the results, but do not average the ratings
Strong governance, weak economic Pillars	Capable leadership, limited opportunity	Work on jobs, enterprise, and skills, using the existing strength in governance as the route in: the institutions that already function are the ones most able to deliver change in the weaker Pillars
Strong economic, weak social Pillars	Growth not reaching everyone	Work on inclusion and equity and find where the gap is on a map

Source: IEP

A Completed Assessment: Activity 1

The following is a composite illustration drawn from typical sessions, not a record of a specific project. It shows what a completed assessment can look like and how the ratings are read.

The group agreed ratings of Pillar 1: 3, Pillar 2: 2, Pillar 3: 3, Pillar 4: 4, Pillar 5: 3, Pillar 6: 2, and Pillar 8: 3. Pillar 7 (Trust in Institutions) produced the widest disagreement in the room, with residents rating it 1 and the two staff members rating it 4; rather than force a single number, the group recorded the range, and a second session with a different group confirmed the residents' rating as the more accurate reading. Reading the result, the group had a high score on

Pillar 4 (*Good Relations with Neighbours*) sitting above low scores on Pillars 2 and 6 (*Equitable Distribution of Resources*, *Sound Business Environment*), the first pattern in the table above: relationships holding despite the weakness of the economic and distributional conditions underneath them.

The priorities the group set were Pillar 2 and Pillar 7 (*Equitable Distribution of Resources* and Trust in Institutions), on the grounds that both were low and both were within reach of work already funded. The organisation published a breakdown of how it allocated a selection of small grants, and invited a resident representative onto the panel that helped decide it.

Activity 2: Reframing an Issue and Identifying Leverage Points

Purpose: to take an issue you are already working on and describe it as a system rather than as a series of events, so that different points of intervention become visible. This is the reframing stage, sitting between the assessment in Activity 1 and the delivery work in Activity 3. It is the activity most likely to change what you decide to do.

Most practitioners can describe the issue they work on in detail. The difficulty is that the description usually sits at the level of events: what happened, to whom, and how often. A systems description asks what produces those events repeatedly, and the answer often lies outside the area where current activity is concentrated.

The Process: 110-Minute Guided Exercise (Activity 2)

This activity can be done by an individual or a small team. Choose one issue you are currently working on and stay with it throughout.

Step 1: State the issue as it is usually described (10 minutes)

Write the issue in one sentence, as a specific symptom in a specific place. Write 'young people from this estate are leaving school at 16 with no route into work', not 'disadvantage' or 'community division'. An issue stated in general terms cannot be mapped. Note what your current approach does about it, and what it measures.

Step 2: Read the issue at four depths (25 minutes)

Using the iceberg model set out in the Systems Thinking section of Part 1, work down through four levels. Events: what is visible and reported. Patterns: what recurs and on what cycle. Structures: the arrangements producing the pattern, such as housing, schooling, funding routes, transport, service boundaries, and employment. Mental models: the assumptions held on all sides that sustain those structures. Then test the description against the three domains of Positive Peace, which are attitudes, institutions, and structures. If one of the three is missing from your account of the issue, the analysis is probably not finished.

Space for the four depths:

Step 3: Locate the issue across the Pillars (20 minutes)

Ask which Pillars the structures and mental models you have just named belong to. An issue that presents as a *Good Relations with Neighbours* problem commonly rests on two or three other Pillars. Record which and note where the Northern Ireland Peace Index carries evidence on them. Score each Pillar for strengths as well as weaknesses: the strengths are what an alternative approach gets built on, and they are the route to early traction. Then list the people and organisations already active on this issue, marking each as a connector who holds relationships across a boundary, or as a divider who has an interest in the current arrangement continuing. Leverage frequently sits with a connector nobody has thought to ask.

Pause Before Step 4

Stop here and step back before choosing where to act, for ten minutes at a minimum, or even overnight if the schedule allows. Groups that move straight from Step 3 to Step 4 tend to select the leverage point they had in mind before the exercise began. The pause is what allows the analysis to change the answer.

Step 4: Identify leverage points (25 minutes)

A leverage point is a place where a modest, sustained change alters how the system behaves, rather than treating what the system produces. Candidates usually sit at the structure and mental model levels: who is in the room when a decision is made, how is a service boundary drawn, what information is published and to whom, which route funding takes, who holds a skill locally? Test each candidate with the three following questions: if this changed, what else would change? Can you, or a partner you could bring in, reach it? Would you know within a year whether it had moved?

Record two or three leverage points:

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
-

Step 5: Sketch an alternative approach (10 minutes)

For the strongest leverage point, describe what a project addressing it would do differently from your current approach. It may be a variation on what you already run, a change in who you work with, or a different activity altogether. If the alternative looks like the current approach under a new name, return to Step 4, because the chosen leverage point was probably still at the level of events.

Step 6: Turn the leverage point into a project (20 minutes)

Choose one Pillar as your entry point: one you can realistically reach, where the leverage is real, and where an already working project gives you a start. Write a theory of change in a single sentence: if the group does this, then this shifts, because of this. Then draft two plans: a stakeholder engagement plan naming who is involved and what decisions they hold, and a programme plan setting out activities, the indicators you will watch, and a baseline you can review each quarter.

Worked Example: Recurring Interface Disturbance

Described as an event, the issue is disorder at an interface, the boundary between two communities living side by side, recurring at the same point each year. The standard response is stewarding, diversionary activity, and contact work for young people. Read at four depths, the pattern is seasonal tension around contested commemoration; the structures are segregated housing and schooling, a service boundary splitting the area between two providers, and youth provision funded in 12-week blocks; and the mental models are inherited narratives of threat. Located across the Pillars, the issue rests substantially on *Well-Functioning Government* and *Equitable Distribution of Resources*, not only on *Good Relations with Neighbours*. The leverage points identified were the service boundary itself, and the funding cycle that prevents anyone holding a relationship for longer than a term. The alternative approach was not more contact activity but a joint submission by the two youth providers whose service boundary splits the area, to align those boundaries and fund a single continuing post across both. This is a smaller and less visible intervention than the existing programme, aimed at the arrangement producing the pattern.

The exercise has succeeded if the description of the issue at Step 6 differs substantially from the description given at Step 1.

Activity 3: Mapping an Existing Project Against the Eight Pillars

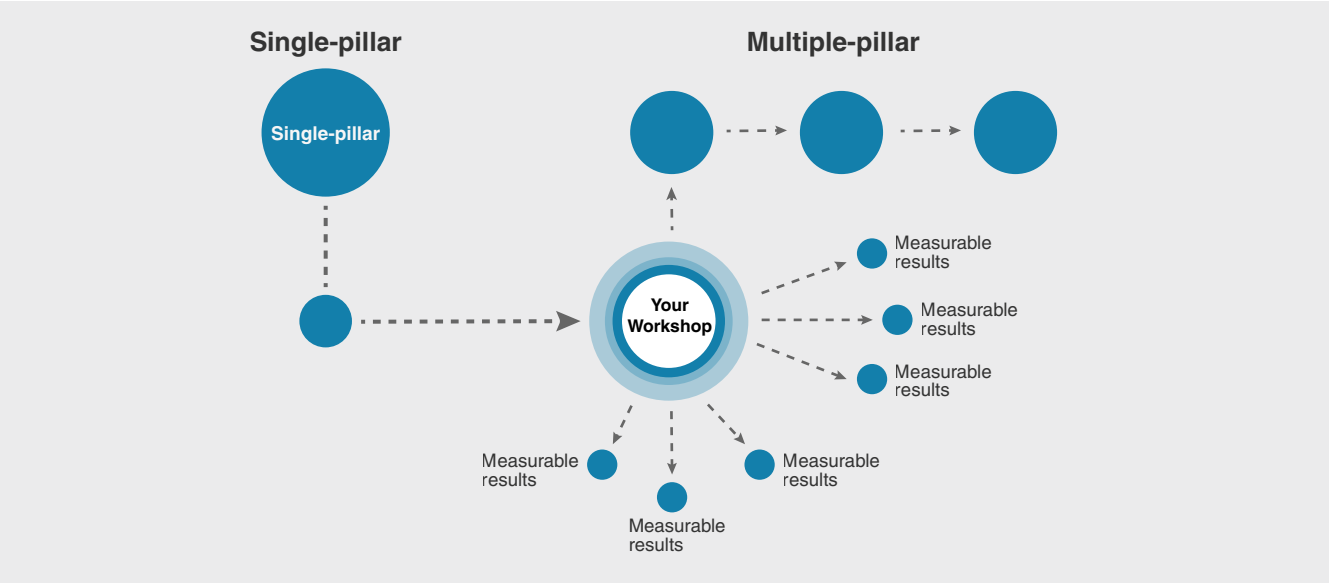
Purpose: to identify where a project you already run affects Pillars beyond the one it was designed for, and where low-cost adjustments would extend that reach and make those effects measurable. This is the delivery stage: it works on a project as it stands, not on its design.

Most practitioners already have projects running. Adapting an existing project is faster, cheaper, and lower risk than designing a new one, because it builds on established delivery. The adaptations that count are usually small and specific. A skills course that adds a session on how local public money is allocated, and who decides, strengthens *Trust in Institutions* at no additional cost. Approaching local employers on the same course for traineeship places strengthens *Sound Business Environment*. Neither requires a new project or a new funder, and neither depends on cross-community contact.

FIGURE 7

From Single-Pillar to Multi-Pillar Impact

One project, adapted across several Pillars, produces results that can be measured in more than one place.



Source: IEP

The Process: 75-Minute Guided Exercise (Activity 3)

1. Step 1: Analyse Your Current Project (15 minutes)

- What is the main goal of your current project?
- Who benefits directly and who might benefit indirectly?
- What resources (money, materials, skills) are involved?
- Who are your current partners?
- How do you currently measure success?

Space for analysis:

2. Step 2: Map Your Current Project onto Positive Peace (30 minutes)

For each of the eight Pillars, ask: 'How could this project strengthen [Pillar name] in the community?'

Use Table 5 for each Pillar, recording what the project currently does, one realistic enhancement, and one priority. Priority rates the enhancement, not the Pillar. High: achievable inside your current funding, partners, and timescale. Medium: needs a new partner, a small budget line, or a longer run-time. Low: worth recording, but not this cycle. In Step 3, you will select from the High and Medium entries.

TABLE 5

Mapping an Existing Project Against the Eight Pillars

Pillar	Current Connection	Enhancement Opportunity	Priority (High/ Medium/Low)
Acceptance of the Rights of Others			
Equitable Distribution of Resources			
Free Flow of Information			
Good Relations with Neighbours			
High Levels of Human Capital			
Sound Business Environment			
Trust in Institutions			
Well-Functioning Government			

Source: IEP

3. Step 3: Select Enhancement Opportunities (30 minutes)

Choose two or three that combine low additional cost, high potential impact, strong fit with what your project can already do, and support from community partners. If nothing meets all four, select on impact and fit first; cost and partner support are the two you can usually negotiate.

Selected enhancements:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Real Example of Project Enhancement**Shared Employability Programme, North Belfast**

A community development organisation runs a 12-week employability programme of CV workshops, interview preparation, and job placement support for unemployed adults aged 18 to 25, delivered across two community centres: one serving a predominantly Protestant area, one predominantly Catholic. The project was originally assessed by counting how many participants were in work after three and six months.

Mapping identified three low-cost enhancements. Under *Good Relations with Neighbours*: practitioners can design one joint employer visit per cohort to make cross-community contact explicit instead of incidental. Under *Acceptance of the Rights of Others*, they can add a single structured discussion session to surface attitudes to differences among participants early in the programme. Under *Free Flow of Information*, they can publish a single programme report covering both centres, creating a shared reference accessible to both communities and to statutory funders.

Result: the same programme now generates evidence across three Pillars, strengthens its case for Good Relations funding, which is a funding stream distinct from the *Good Relations with Neighbours* Pillar, and makes its cross-community work intentional rather than incidental.

Activity 4: Building a New Project from the Pillars

Purpose: to design a new piece of work from the system rather than from an available funding call. Use it when there is no existing project to adapt, or when repeated attempts on an issue have not shifted it. Output: an entry Pillar with a stated reason, a stakeholder list, and a one-page project outline. Allow about 90 minutes.

The Process: 90-Minute Guided Exercise (Activity 4)

The process has four steps. Step 1: pick one real, local problem, stated plainly and small enough to work on. Step 2: map the system around it, naming the conditions that produce the problem and the Pillars they belong to. Step 3: choose an entry Pillar you can realistically reach, where you hold relationships or delivery capacity, and clarify why it was chosen. Step 4: design the work against that Pillar, listing who must be involved, what you will do, and what would count as movement. Steps 1 and 2 use the mapping approach from Activity 2, and Steps 3 and 4 use the enhancement logic from Activity 3. Take a break between Steps 2 and 3.

Next Steps

Two or three enhancements to one existing project will produce more usable evidence than a new project designed from scratch, and will do so within your current funding.

What to Do with the Result

Keep the rating sheet. It is your baseline. Date it, note who was in the room, and file it with the project record. A single set of ratings has limited value; its value comes from comparison with the same exercise repeated a year later.

Re-run the assessment after nine to 12 months, with as many of the original participants as you can. A change in a Pillar's rating may reflect a genuine shift in conditions, but it can also reflect a different group in the room or a different mood on the day; treat it as a prompt to ask why, not as a finding on its own. The absence of change is informative in the same way: it invites the question of whether nothing has shifted, or whether the enhancement has not yet had time to show.

For a funder, report three things: the Pillars your project already produces evidence against, the enhancement you made and its reasoning, and the ratings before and after. This is a stronger case than activity counts, meaning the numbers reached, sessions held, and events run that most reporting relies on, because it demonstrates an understanding of the conditions on which the project depends.

Survey the Room Before and After

A short survey at the start and end of a session, with three or four questions on confidence in describing what builds peace locally and in using the Pillars of Positive Peace, gives you a measure of what the session changed, separate from any movement in the Pillar ratings themselves. It also gives a funder something to report from a single session.

Section B: The Customisation Guide

Common Elements

Section B includes one fully worked example for community relations (B1), followed by a blank sector template for adapting the same approach to any other area of work. B1 follows the structure the template reproduces: Overview, Connection to Peace, Before You Begin, tailored Pillar questions, Patterns and Priorities, Common Pitfalls, and a completed assessment.

Which Route to Use

Community relations work is covered in full in B1. Every other area of work uses the sector template, which reproduces B1's structure for any sector. That includes education, youth work, health and wellbeing, economic development, arts and culture, housing and regeneration, and statutory, policing, and community safety. In all cases, ask the eight standing questions in Common Elements first, then the questions written for the sector.

Working across two sectors? Adapt the template to the delivery method, not the funding stream. A mental health service delivered through a youth club is youth work with a look at health, not the reverse.

None of these fit? Use Section A as written. The generic questions work; you will simply do more of the translation yourself.

The Eight Standing Questions

Eight questions run through every sector in Section B, one per Pillar. They apply regardless of sector and are set out in Table 6 instead of being repeated in each section. Ask all eight in any session, then move to the questions written for your sector.

The Toolkit contains three question sets that nest. Section A's questions are the general set: use them when no sector fits, or when you want a broad read of a community. The eight standing questions below are the short form, one per Pillar, asked in every session, no matter the sector. The tailored questions in Sector Example and Template sit on top of the standing questions for a particular sector. In a sector session, ask the standing question first, then the tailored ones; you do not need Section A's set as well. Either route takes 60 to 90 minutes.

TABLE 6

The Eight Standing Questions

Pillar	Standing Question
1. Acceptance of the Rights of Others	Who is not here, and what would it cost them to come?
2. Equitable Distribution of Resources	Does funding here follow need, or does it follow the organisations with the strongest capacity to bid for it?
3. Free Flow of Information	Do people find out about decisions affecting this area before they are made, or only once they have been taken?
4. Good Relations with Neighbours	What contact actually happens across the boundary, and does any of it survive without a funded project?
5. High Levels of Human Capital	Who is being brought on to succeed the people currently doing this work?
6. Sound Business Environment	Where an informal economy operates here, what does it offer, such as income, status, or protection, that the legitimate economy does not?
7. Trust in Institutions	Before work can happen here, whose agreement is needed? Include the informal permissions as well as the formal ones.
8. Well-Functioning Government	When political decision-making is disrupted, what in your delivery stops?

Source: IEP

Essential Context Knowledge

Why Context Matters

Every community has a specific history, active tensions, and informal power structures that shape what participants will and will not say in a room. Research and consider these before beginning. A facilitator who does not know the local context risks misreading silence as agreement, or pressing on a live issue in a way that inflames rather than maps it. Figure 8 sets out the layers of context worth establishing before a session: regional history, national context, local culture, and global trends.

FIGURE 8
The Context Surrounding Your Workshop

Regional history, national context, local culture, and global trends all shape what participants will and will not say in the room.



Source: IEP

What to Research	• Major conflicts or tensions (both historical and recent) • Peace processes or reconciliation efforts that have occurred • Historical relationships between different community groups • Significant events that shaped current social dynamics • Traditional approaches to conflict resolution in the culture • Contested commemorations and anniversaries • Local history of how interfaces and community boundaries have shifted over time
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Facilitating in a Real Community

For experienced facilitators, this section is intended as a pre-session checklist, not an introduction to community practice. Facilitators newer to contested settings can treat it as guidance. The session will not resolve live tensions and should not inflame them. Five points carry most of the weight:

- Do no harm and stay neutral in local disputes. Establish ground rules that protect everyone in the room.
- Divisions are best handled at the level of systems and services, not individuals.

- Acknowledge the disagreement, reframe toward shared interests, and take severe conflict into a private conversation rather than the room.
- Learning styles vary, so offer visual, oral, and hands-on ways in.
- Regarding who is in the room: a homogeneous group produces homogeneous ratings. Mix sectors, ages, and levels of seniority, and get people from more than one area when the questions relate to boundaries. Where the exercise assesses an institution, do not include that institution's staff in the first session, because their presence tends to suppress honest ratings of Trust in Institutions.

Sector Example and Template

B1. Community Relations and Reconciliation

Overview of Sector

Community relations work is the sector most often tied to peacebuilding, and for that reason it is the sector least often examined through systems thinking.

The eight Pillars give you a method to test it. They ask what relationship-building work is resting on, whether that is the housing, the economy, the information environment, or the governance that supports or strains it. Most practitioners in this sector have already identified or sensed the cause of the strain. This section gives you a structured way to name it, and to show a funder why a relationships-based project needs an economic or informational aspect to it.

Typical work in this sector:

- Interface and boundary work
- Shared space and cross-community contact programmes
- Legacy, storytelling, and commemoration work
- Mediation and community dialogue

Connection to Peace

Community relations operate predominantly on the attitudes domain: trust, tolerance, and the willingness to cooperate. Attitudinal gains move fastest and are the most fragile. A cross-community friendship formed in a shared project survives only if the two people can live, work, learn, and move through the same spaces afterwards. If they cannot, the relationship becomes an expectation maintained against structural conditions that undermine it.

The mechanism runs in both directions. Community relations work shifts attitudes, and the structural Pillars determine whether those shifts hold.

Before You Begin

Invite people from at least two distinct communities or interest groups. Brief participants on the purpose before the session: to map the system, not to assign blame. Prepare the eight Pillar cards and rating sheets. Avoid running the first session with a statutory funder or community leader whose presence may suppress honest ratings. See Table 7 for more details on invitations to and preparations for your session.

The Pillar questions in this section ask directly about interfaces, contested sites, and who holds informal control. Re-read 'Facilitating in a Real Community' in Common Elements before running it and confirm your referral routes are in place.

TABLE 7

Who to Invite and How to Prepare

Who to invite	Practitioners from more than one area · someone doing single-identity work as well as cross-community · a council Good Relations officer · someone who was doing this work 20 years ago
Do not	Assume the room shares a vocabulary. Agree the working terms, including the name of the place, in the first 10 minutes, or agree explicitly not to
Prepare	Note which flashpoints and contentious sites fall inside the area you are assessing, and who currently manages each

Source: IEP

The Eight Pillars, Tailored to Community Relations

For each Pillar: discuss the questions, then agree a rating as a group and record where you disagree.

Each Pillar below opens with the standing question for that Pillar, followed by questions specific to community relations.

The standing questions are also set out together in Common Elements; the general set in Activity 1 can be used alongside them where a broader read of the community is wanted.

Rating scale: 1 Strongly disagree · 2 Disagree · 3 Neither · 4 Agree · 5 Strongly agree. Agree on each rating as a group and record where you disagree.

1. Acceptance of the Rights of Others

- How is difference handled between communities and within them, in terms of tolerance, human rights, and equality across groups?
- Which flashpoints exist here, such as a bonfire site, a parade, a mural, or a memorial, and who currently manages each one?
- What has changed at those sites in the last five years? Did that change come through community action, local agreement, or enforcement?
- Can people here express cultural, gender, and national identity without that expression being treated by others as a threat?
- Does your work acknowledge more than one community?

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed:

2. Equitable Distribution of Resources

- Do communities believe they are treated fairly on access to education, healthcare, and other resources, and what is the reality?
- How is funding split between single-identity and cross-community work here, and who decides? Are single-identity groups treated as a route into cross-community work, or as an alternative to it?

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed:

3. Free Flow of Information

- How does information move here when it matters most? Can people get reliable information, and is there independent media covering this area?
- Which closed groups and platforms shape the local narrative and does anyone credible have contact with them? Would someone with no connection to your organisation understand what it does?
- Is there active inclusion of diverse community representation in local decision-making, and can those representatives find out what is being decided on funding, planning, and policing before decisions are taken?

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed:

4. Good Relations with Neighbours

- What is the actual state of contact between different communities? Do peaceful relations exist within and between communities?
- Where do people from different communities meet without a project bringing them together? Are those spaces shared by design, or shared by accident?
- Name three relationships here that are holding with no funding behind them.

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed:

5. High Levels of Human Capital

- Is the capacity for this work being renewed, and are education, skills, and knowledge available to everyone here?
- Are there difficult cross-community conversations and public forums here? What is the background of the facilitators leading them? Who decides which facilitators are used?

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed:

6. Sound Business Environment

- Do economic life and status encourage community interaction, or prevent it?
- Where do people from each community work, and does anyone work alongside the other community?
- Do people cross the interface to shop, trade, or take a job? If not, what stops them?
- What is the condition and ownership of land and property along contentious boundaries, such as derelict sites, peace walls, and disputed frontages, and who benefits from it staying as it is?
- Does your project touch anyone's livelihood, or only their spare time?

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed:

7. Trust in Institutions

- Who controls access, resources, and permission here, and what is the climate of transparency and accountability within institutions?
- Are there groups that exercise coercive control over residents, and does that shape who attends your activities? Does it also shape who feels able to speak once they are in the room?

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed:

8. Well-Functioning Government

- How well does governance deliver quality services, and build and uphold trust? How does it support relationship-building?
- Think of the last time tension was rising here. Did the statutory bodies responsible for good relations appear before the incident, or after it?
- Do regional government, the local authority, or the Community Relations Council (CRC) hold a plan that covers this area, and can you see any sign of that plan in what actually happens on the ground?
- Are decisions about shared space and contentious space made through a process people can see and challenge?
- Does governance in your own organisation and network reflect the communities' concerns and priorities?

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed:

Patterns and Priorities

- Now return to Common Patterns and What They Mean in Section A and read your ratings against it. In this sector, disagreement most often surfaces on Pillars 2 and 7, where different experiences of the allocation of local resources produce sharply different scores.
 - Then answer:
 - Which two Pillars, if strengthened, would make your existing relationship work more durable?
 - Which strength are you relying on without protecting?
-
-

Common Pitfalls in This Sector

Table 8 sets out the pitfalls that recur in this work, what each looks like in a session, and what to do instead. The first four concern how the framework is read, the next three are about running a session, and the last three are about what happens to the assessment once the session ends.

TABLE 8

Common Facilitation Pitfalls in Community Relations Work

Pitfall	What It Looks Like	Do This Instead
Contact as the outcome	Counting attendance and cross-community encounters as the primary project result	Ask what remains six months after the activity ends
The symmetry trap	Assuming every issue has an equal and opposite version on each side	Test each claim separately against evidence
Assumed shared vocabulary	Terms, including the name of the place itself, used as if agreed upon	Agree on working terms in the first 10 minutes, or explicitly agree not to
The articulate proxy	One confident participant's account taken as the community perspective	Cross-check with a second group before acting on it
One-group room	Ratings reflect the view of a single group, and relations Pillars are scored above what the structural evidence supports	Use a mixed group or run separate sessions and compare the ratings
Power in the room	A statutory funder or another community leader with power over participants is present	Run that group separately; <i>Trust in Institutions</i> ratings may not otherwise be honest
Extractive assessment	Ratings collected and never returned to the participants who gave them	Agree before the session on how and when the findings will go back to the room
Expectations raised	Participants read the exercise as the start of a funded programme	State at the outset what will and will not follow from the session
Ratings without evidence	Scores recorded on impression, with nothing behind them	Note one observed example or data point against each Pillar
The one-off baseline	A single set of ratings treated as a finding in itself	Fix the date for the repeat exercise before the group leaves the room

Source: IEP

A Completed Assessment: Community Relations

The following is a composite illustration drawn from typical sessions, not a record of a specific project. It shows what a completed set of ratings can look like and how to read it.

A council Good Relations team ran the exercise with 11 participants: residents and workers from two estates either side of a boundary road, plus two council officers. Ratings agreed by the group were Pillar 1: 3, Pillar 2: 2, Pillar 3: 2, Pillar 4: 4, Pillar 5: 3, Pillar 6: 2, Pillar 7: 2, and Pillar 8: 3. Pillar 3 produced the widest disagreement in the room.

Reading the result: Pillar 4 at 4 against Pillars 6 and 2 at 2 is the first pattern described in Section A, where relationships are being maintained against the structural conditions underneath them. The disagreement on Pillar 2 was split by estate rather than by role, with each group believing the other received more. The team ran a second session with a different group to test it.

What changed: the team kept its shared-space programme and added an employability strand delivered jointly across both estates and published a single spending breakdown covering both. The project now reports against Pillars 2, 4, and 6, not Pillar 4 alone.

Adapting the Toolkit for Other Sectors

B1 (Community Relations and Reconciliation) shows the toolkit adapted for one sector in full. The template below provides the same structure for any other sector. Work through B1 first to see how the questions are adapted in practice, then complete the template for your own area before facilitating in it.

Three judgements shape a sector adaptation, and B1 illustrates each. The first is which Pillars carry most of the weight in that sector, and which of them is politically contested: in community relations, the weight sits on Pillars 4 and 1, while Pillar 2 is contested. The second is the structural condition specific to the sector in Northern Ireland, such as the segregation of housing or schooling, which determines whether attitudinal gains hold. The third is who cannot be assessed in the same room. Statutory staff sitting alongside the communities they serve will not produce honest ratings, and neither will a single-community group rating relations across communities.

Sector Template

Name of sector: _____

Overview

What this sector contributes to peace that no other sector does:

Connection to Peace

The main mechanism through which this sector's work affects the Pillar system:

Before You Begin

Who to invite: _____

What to prepare: _____

What to avoid: _____

The Eight Pillars, Tailored

For each Pillar, add one or two questions in sector-specific language alongside the eight standing questions provided in Common Elements.

1. Acceptance of the Rights of Others

Tailored question(s): _____

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed: _____

2. Equitable Distribution of Resources

Tailored question(s): _____

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed: _____

3. Free Flow of Information

Tailored question(s): _____

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed: _____

4. Good Relations with Neighbours

Tailored question(s): _____

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed: _____

5. High Levels of Human Capital

Tailored question(s): _____

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed: _____

6. Sound Business Environment

Tailored question(s): _____

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed: _____

7. Trust in Institutions

Tailored question(s): _____

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed: _____

8. Well-Functioning Government

Tailored question(s): _____

Rating: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Notes, and where the group disagreed: _____

Patterns and Priorities

Two rating patterns typical in this sector, and what they signal:

Common Pitfalls

A Completed Assessment

After your first session, record the eight ratings, the patterns they showed, and what you changed as a result:

Further Resources

Northern Ireland Peace Index (2026):

<https://nipi.economicsandpeace.org/>

Positive Peace Report (2024):

<https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/PPR-2024-web.pdf>

Global Peace Index (2026):

<https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Global-Peace-Index-2026-Report.pdf>

Halo, Positive Peace, and Systems Thinking (2024):

<https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Halo-PP-Systems-Thinking-web.pdf>

Global Terrorism Index (2026):

<https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2026-Report.pdf>

United Kingdom Peace Index (2024):

<https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/uk-peace-index/#/>

Positive Peace in Action Guide (2021):

<https://rotaryclubofworldpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Positive-Peace-in-Action-Guide-ENG.pdf>

All publications at

<https://www.economicsandpeace.org/> and

<https://www.visionofhumanity.org/>

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IEP Ambassador Programme: <https://www.positivepeace.academy/ambassadors>

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