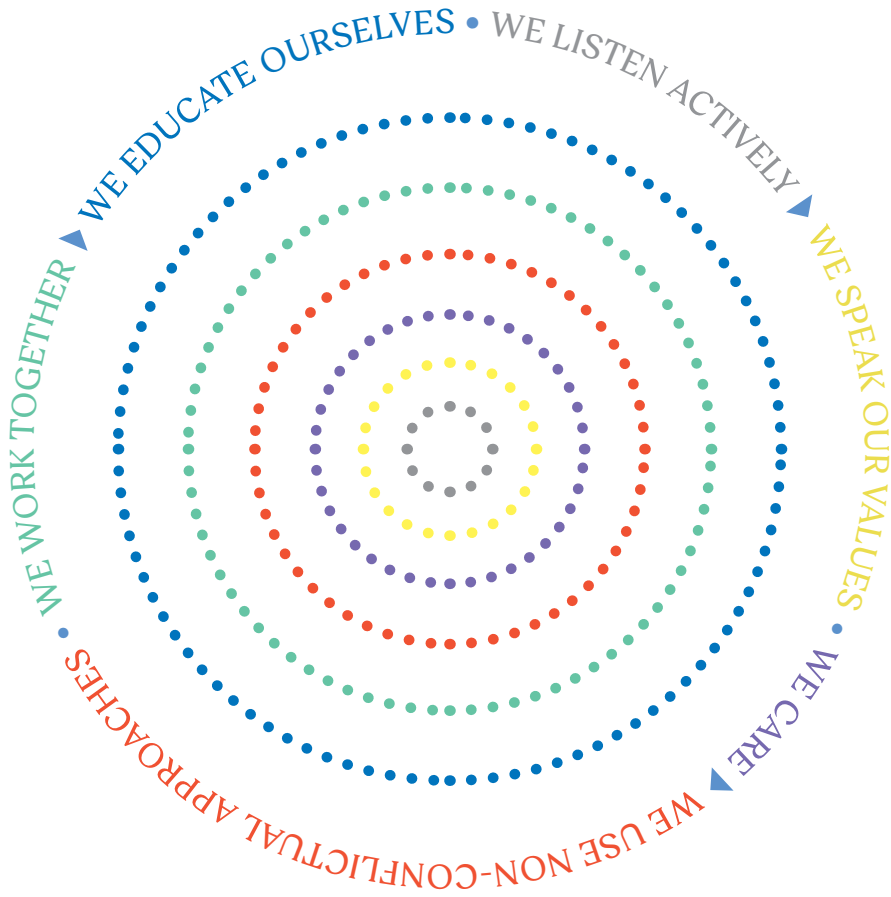




INCLUSIVE CONVERSATIONS

The National Portrait Gallery – a gallery of people, for people, this is a place for everyone.

At a time when identity, shared culture and civic values are increasingly relevant to us all, the National Portrait Gallery is uniquely placed to generate a discussion by reflecting on our common artistic, cultural and social history – in short, on what binds us together.

(NPG corporate plan 2023-27).

The National Portrait Gallery has a unique role and potential to frame, enrich and host inclusive conversations about belonging and difference in the UK today.

This tool was created by NPG staff and the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG), University of Leicester, to help build our collective expertise,

skills and confidence to hold these conversations with our visitors, partners and with one another. The tool recognises the often complex and emotive aspects of these conversations and exchanges and suggests ethical approaches we can take that draw on and bring to life the inclusive values of the Gallery.

A unique role and potential

Research tells us that cultural organisations like the National Portrait Gallery have rich potential to frame, enrich and host conversations about identity, belonging and difference.

Through everything the Gallery does – from the new displays to our learning programmes, from our interactions with visitors to the range of partners we choose to work with – we are working hard to be a Gallery of people and for people – a place for everyone. We have opportunities to share an inclusive vision of the UK, to foster empathy and understanding, to tackle misinformation, prejudice and stigma and actively foster mutual respect and understanding between different groups.

Hosting conversations

Cultural organisations are rare public spaces where people can come together and experience being part of society – to explore our shared history and our place within it, engage in discussion, encounter diverse perspectives, make new connections and celebrate difference. As a key site for exploring our national history through portraiture, the NPG has a unique role to play in hosting inclusive and deep conversations about belonging and identity.

Framing conversations

In our displays we have sought to frame these conversations by working hard to be representative of the United Kingdom today and highlight groups and individuals previously marginalised and overlooked. At the NPG we have an ambition to be a force for good in society, to continue to evolve and to be active in framing conversations rooted in mutual respect and understanding in a changing United Kingdom.

Enriching conversations

By presenting lives in ways that are respectful and ethical, nuanced and accurate, we enrich conversations about difference and belonging, foster empathy and understanding and counter harmful stereotypes, misinformation and prejudice.

How was this tool created?

The tool was created as part of the project, Inclusive Transformation at the National Portrait Gallery, through a process of bringing together the rich expertise and experience of Gallery staff with insights from RCMG's world-leading research, alongside wider scholarship in this field. Central to the process was a series of workshops with Visitor Experience colleagues who generously shared their

experiences of conversations with visitors and the knowledge, skills and strategies that help them to make these interactions inclusive and enriching. This formed the basis of the tool that was subsequently expanded, tested and refined over a 9-month period through a series of workshops and 1:1 interviews with Gallery colleagues across wide-ranging teams.

This research by RCMG revealed the potential of the tool to enrich all areas of the Gallery's work, internally and externally, and to support all of us to enact our values and vision, to be a place for rich discussions around our common artistic, cultural and social history. It also enabled us to learn more about the conditions needed to enable this work to flourish and for the tool to be most effective. Crucially, this research phase highlighted the need for ongoing care and attention by the Gallery's leadership to sustain a strong organisational culture – one where our values are manifest, felt and experienced by all staff so that they can take this work forward with confidence. It also highlighted the importance of teams making time to continually reflect on and develop their thinking and practice in this area.

Using this tool

This tool has been designed to support us all – whatever our role at the Gallery – in upholding

the values of the NPG in the conversations we have with one another, with visitors and with stakeholders. The tool can be used in conjunction with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and the Gallery's Visitor Charter.

There is, of course, no single formula that will apply to every situation. Rather, the tool describes six principles which, taken together, help us to hold inclusive conversations. These principles reflect our shared values and can be used as a collection of coordinates to guide us as we navigate sometimes complex histories and topics that can make discussion difficult and generate conflict. They can inform the way we work with people; engage with visitors, supporters and partners of all kinds; and they can help us to avoid the pitfalls that discussion surrounding British life and identity can present. Importantly, the principles set out our organisational aspirations for all of our interactions and for the relationships we build, internally and externally.

Start using the tool by reading through it, identifying the principles and approaches that feel most helpful to you. Share your experiences with your colleagues and work together to gradually build up your understanding and experience of where and how the tool can be applied.



WE LISTEN ACTIVELY

We are interested in what our visitors, colleagues and stakeholders think and listen with care and attention to what they say. We try not to make assumptions about people and to provide opportunities for everyone to participate and contribute.

We recognise that people hold a diversity of beliefs and may want to express views that run counter to our organisational values.

Through active listening – taking time to listen, resisting the temptation to interrupt and asking questions with openness and curiosity – we make space for people to share their views. As a result, we are better able to understand different perspectives and viewpoints.

Whilst we welcome different views, there is of course no place for speech that constitutes harassment or puts you or others at risk of harm. We feel empowered to politely end conversations when we are worried about our safety or the safety of others.

WE SPEAK OUR VALUES

The Gallery's values underpin the decisions we make, our behaviours and interactions with visitors, stakeholders and each other. They have guided our work to build and celebrate a more representative story of the United Kingdom today.

These inclusive values are key to facilitating conversations where a diversity of thought can be expressed.

When we are confident in speaking our values and sharing the Gallery's deep and unwavering commitment to inclusion, we are able to create experiences and ensure all our conversations are contributing to a Gallery where everyone is seen and welcome.

WE CARE

We recognise that the collections and stories that the NPG shares will hold different meanings for different people and prompt a wide variety of responses. Encountering these stories can be emotive, difficult and challenging.

This means that, in all the conversations we have, we need to:

- ensure that everyone feels able to participate, that they have the means to join in conversations and take part on an equal basis and on their own terms:
- recognise that conversations can have unintended consequences and that some participants may be adversely affected – the time we give and our supportive reactions can make a significant and positive difference in these situations:
- be alert to the potential for harm – we need to ensure that no-one is subjected to conversations that are offensive, discriminatory or which may constitute harassment.

We care for ourselves and seek out support from others. We recognise the emotional aspects of our work. We follow up after difficult conversations, and offer support where we can.

WE USE NON-CONFLICTUAL APPROACHES

Conversations about identity and belonging can sometimes be difficult, especially when engaging with people with deeply felt opinions that run counter to the Gallery's values. In these situations, we strive to use strategies that de-escalate conflict while, at the same time, upholding the Gallery's equality, diversity and inclusion principles.

- we avoid debating people's opinions, but we are confident in articulating the Gallery's commitment to challenging historic biases and oversights in our collections and interpretation and supporting under-represented communities:
- we use stories from the Collection in a positive way to shift the conversation, diffuse conflict and offer visitors a different perspective:
- we emphasise inclusivity for all and recognise that being inclusive towards one group of people does not mean excluding another;
- we draw on existing documents that outline the Gallery's EDI priorities, such as the Visitor Charter – emphasising that the Gallery is a space for inspiring conversations, but that we do not tolerate discrimination.

WE WORK TOGETHER

Teamwork and partnerships are crucial if we are to host, frame and enrich inclusive conversations about belonging and difference.

No one is ever alone in their work. We are committed to holding space for conversations and support, enabling and empowering all staff and volunteers to thrive, achieve and progress. We value everyone's contribution and acknowledge and celebrate our achievements.

We actively seek out and prioritise involvement from partners who bring diverse forms of lived and learned experience.

Through working together, we can provide meaningful, inspiring and enriching experiences that exceed expectations.

WE EDUCATE OURSELVES

Conversations linked to matters of equality and inclusion are never static. Language and terminology are always evolving; new insights arise from ongoing research into our collections; and public conversations about difference are animated by dynamic social and political factors. In what can sometimes feel like a rapidly changing context, it is vital that we:

- are committed to ongoing learning to inform our work and keep up-to-date with current approaches – we draw on and engage with leading-edge practice and scholarship;
- recognise that our individual expertise is always partial and we strive to connect with and learn from colleagues, partners, collaborators and community members;
- are open to constructive feedback, and we offer such feedback to others;
- dedicate time for reflection and deeper thinking about questions of inclusion, belonging and privilege.

