

Countering Divisive Narratives – 1st October 2025

Session outputs summary: produced from the session transcript and chat, distilled by the session facilitator, supported by NotebookLM.

Key outputs

You may not need to start from scratch – look at what is already happening on community cohesion (in the council, organisations, projects) where you are...

Build on that

Emphasise the power of food to bring people together, across communities where you are – see food as a gateway...

Celebrate that

Recognise the value of data that provides evidence of the impact of racist rhetoric, divisive narratives and racist violence on wellbeing and health...

Evidence that

Demonstrate solidarity where you are, in your food system, your communities and in your organisations – make statements to counter racism and express solidarity...

Stand up for that

1. Actions and approaches adopted by food initiatives

Food partnerships, organisations, and projects adopt several practical approaches to build cohesion and directly counter division:

- **Building community through shared food experiences:**

This includes people engaging in growing, harvesting, preparing, cooking, and most importantly, eating food together - "breaking bread together".

- **Focusing on positive engagement:**

Using celebration as a powerful tool for bringing diverse communities together. For example, a Saturday celebratory lunch in a community kitchen that was described as joyous.

- **Developing solidarity and support:**

Women's Environmental Network (WEN) in Tower Hamlets, have issued a [public statement on far-right violence and racism](#) to show solidarity. The Sustainable Food Places network (SFP) should consider creating a network-wide statement to provide solidarity for staff experiencing racist abuse.

- **Leveraging local resources:**

Explore what work is already happening around community cohesion where they are. For instance, Wales has eight Community Cohesion teams funded by the Welsh government that can advise on counter-narratives and monitoring far-right intentions, suggesting this resource can be vital for food initiatives.

- **Creating safe and inclusive spaces:**

Acknowledge that divisive narratives impact access to food support due to the threat of violence. Visible far-right activity outside hostels and food banks has led to a drop-off in refugees and asylum seekers accessing food support. As far as possible ensure that food provision places are safe and demonstrate that they are inclusive and welcoming spaces.

- **Engaging in policy and influence:**

Involving diverse, underrepresented community groups in policymaking, countering the narrative that they have no power or influence. Sustainable Food Partnerships are seen as a real solution because they aim to represent their communities and understand the structures and systems that can prevent far-right division.

- **Addressing conflict directly:**

When tensions arise, community spaces can adopt a person-centred approach to conflict, creating space for dialogue and using each incident as a learning opportunity.

2. Strong counter-narratives and messaging

Counter-narratives focus on reframing issues of identity and shifting the blame away from vulnerable communities:

- **The universality of food and belonging:**

Focus on the universality of food and use this to challenge the far right's co-option of "Britishness" or "Englishness". Meaningfully engage with and shift this narrative by creating a sense of belonging and celebrating places.

- **Myth-busting and reframing:**

Counter misinformation. This involves myth-busting claims, such as the idea that taxes are going to people of colour or asylum seekers, instead highlighting solutions that benefit all who are struggling.

- **Appropriate language:**

Learn from the experience of Good Food Lewisham [Welcoming Refugees and Asylum Seekers to our Community Food Projects](#) in using appropriate and neutralising language regarding migration and status, reducing the conflation often exploited by far-right narratives.

- **Alternative narratives:**

Example of an AI tool used by the Organization for Identity and Cultural Development (OICD) that analyses right-wing propaganda to determine the basic needs underlying far-right thinking (such as the need for belonging). Alternative narratives are then produced that address these needs using practical examples of community food projects.

- **Challenging "Left vs. Right" division:**

One important counter-narrative suggests that the core conflict is not "Left vs. Right" but rather the working classes challenging the "super rich who suck the wealth and assets out of communities".

3. Platforms and media effectiveness

- **In-person interaction is paramount:**

In-person engagement is highlighted as essential for building trust and connection.

- **Social media for discussion:**

While social media is often where issues and aggressive behaviour arise, it is also noted as a platform that can be used for creating thinking and discussion across divides.

- **Statements:**

Statements of solidarity, like the one released by WEN, are important for demonstrating standards and showing unity as a movement.

4. The need for data and evidence

The importance of collecting data and evidence about the real-world impact of divisive narratives is a strong emerging theme:

- **Evidence of impact:**

Data collection is necessary to provide evidence of the impact of racism and divisive narratives, especially concerning how they create an additional barrier to accessing food provisions.

- **Beyond food:**

Data can also monitor the impact on wider health systems, showing the effect on isolation, fear, and mental health, which are often overlooked consequences beyond immediate food insecurity.

- **Informing action:**

Collecting statistics, mapping community cohesion work, and gathering recent feedback from food groups is considered crucial for determining future actions and policy.

Ben Messer – SFP Lead on Representation and Justice. 9th Oct. 2025

Useful links shared in 'chat' during the session

[Statement on Far-right Violence and Racism](#)

Shared by **Zarina Ahmad** from Women's Environment Network

[Anti-racist Resources for Food Partnerships](#)

The Google doc set up by **Zoe Miles** from Tower hamlets

[Fix Our Food](#)

Shared by **Rebecca Wells** from the Centre for Food Policy - Food policy inclusion work with Sheffield Food Partnership (Sheffood)

[Power of Food](#)

[Reclaiming Our Narratives](#)

[Identity Based Disinformation](#)

Shared by **Nick Weir** from the Open Food Network and Stroud Food Partnership

[What Britain Really Thinks](#)

Shared by **Heloise Balme** from Bristol Food Partnership

[The Hidden Cost of Feeding a Nation](#)

Shared by **Leon Ballin** from SFP and Sheffield Food Partnership