

Workshop on  
International Cooperation  
in Non-Profit Sector:  
**Benefits and Challenges**



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Tuesday, October 15, 2019, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM, American Centre

Workshop facilitator:  
Kateřina Gabrielová, People in Need, Czech Republic

**Members from numerous non-profit organizations of the V4 Countries met to discuss the benefits and challenges they face in their practice. Individuals were divided into three teams to focus their attention on an assigned question for each group.**

**The three questions were:**

1.

What should be initial steps before starting international cooperation in terms of looking for possible partners and funding? Do you see any challenges? What are the benefits?

To start international cooperation, the organization needs to find a way how to promote itself effectively. Preparing PR materials about the organization is a crucial step when presenting to a partner. A professional website is essential, and it is advised to have it in the local and English language. Social media are just as important as the website, ideally as well in both local and English language. If it is in the organization's capacity, it is good to prepare materials such as an organization brochure, leaflet, strategy, presentation or just some fact sheet. All can be printed to be taken with on meetings or just in an online version that can be sent via email. Business cards – in two languages – are part of PR materials as well.

It is also important to think about a strategy to contact potential partners. Emails may not always be the best way, personal contact is a better option but can be more time-demanding. The way is to be involved in relevant NGO platforms (national or international) that regularly organize events, meetings, and networking activities. Through the platforms, the organization can follow relevant donors, published calls, and can connect with relevant potential partners for cooperation. The challenge might be

membership fees which are in many cases required but, very often, depend on the size and budget of the organization. Some platforms allow partial membership for free. Moreover, traveling to networking meetings in a foreign country requires time and finances. Therefore, it is important to evaluate whether such a trip might be worth to invest in. Potential partners can be also found through existing contacts. Contact your stakeholders, ask for recommendations and references and get in touch. Make a contact list and keep it updated. The challenge might be a time-consuming process.

A further challenge might be cultural context or national differences; however, it is always possible to compromise and find a mutual way of cooperation. Sometimes, it requires good diplomatic and negotiation skills. It is important to clearly discuss and state what should be the outcome of the cooperation.

Looking for donors and possible funding is a completely different exercise; it can be very challenging and frustrating. It is important to follow donors' websites, sign up for their newsletter or contact information center that will get you first-hand information about new calls for proposal.

A great challenge can be grant guidelines and requirements. They can be very vague and difficult to understand. The whole process of proposal writing can be very lengthy and time and energy-consuming with uncertain results in the end. Some donors have two step proposal writing procedures where applicants first submit a concept note and when accepted they have to prepare a full

proposal. However, the whole process can be very bureaucratic and for many organizations frustrating, especially, if they are applying as a leading organization. Being a leading organization means bearing all the coordination, looking for possible partners, communicating with a donor and carrying the responsibilities for all partners involved.

2.

## What benefits and challenges do you see on partner-donor relations?

The essential part of successful international cooperation is not only to have reliable partners to work with but as well as suitable donors who can fund activities and projects. In both cases, carefulness is very important as choosing an unsuitable partner or donor can affect the branding and position of an organization as well as future international cooperation. Therefore, it is important to invest in and nurture established relations that can bring many benefits. Benefits of cooperating with various partners (other organizations as well as donors) are supporting strength and credibility of organizations, ability to apply for bigger funding, apply for interesting joint projects, exchange valuable knowledge and experiences, get new inspiration and expand network of existing contacts. On the other hand, when the partner organization is selected poorly, the cooperation can possibly jeopardize relations with the donor when a problematic partner is not following organizational or donors' rules. It can also negatively affect relations with other project partners and possible future cooperation. Therefore, it is highly recommended to

carefully screen possible partners, find out about their history, what projects they have implemented in the past and for how much money, and what donors they have experience with. Furthermore, once the cooperation has started, it is extremely important to have well-prepared partners' contracts to avoid future problems, if the partner is not cooperating as desired. Furthermore, a carefully select number of partners in consortia, too many partners can be very difficult to manage, implementation wise as well as financially.

Exposure and visibility of projects is the most important and most significant challenge to overcome. Once successful in getting funding from various donors and delivering project objectives, there is a big chance that certain donors will remember you. It is also very important to promote donors on your websites, social media, through project activities. Do not forget that the donor's visibility is almost all the time required from them. Following this simple rule can be very beneficial and will higher your chances to be known and possibly get future funding.

There is a long way from the submission of the project proposal, through getting a contract signed, to project implementation. Sometimes even when an organization is granted the project, it can take months to sign the contract with the donor and start the implementation. That can create financial instability for some smaller organizations and can jeopardize the sustainability of some activities. Furthermore, donors' rules and requirements can be very strict and difficult to follow which can discourage some organizations from applying. It is also often not very easy to communicate with donors or to get answers to some questions. And that can be very frustrating and time-consuming

as well. However, it is always good to communicate with donors, reminding them about your existence. In most cases, there will be the contact person to communicate with and it is good to do so (sending updates about the project, outcomes of activities, invitations, if relevant).

The most challenging is always the amount of bureaucracy of administrating a project. Following rules, guidelines, writing reports and going through audits can be very exhausting. Therefore, sufficient human capacity should be dedicated to such activities.

3.

## What benefits and challenges can international cooperation bring for your organization?

The international cooperation involves creating, adapting, transferring, and sharing knowledge and experiences to improve services offered. International cooperation can foster the professionalization of the team members involved in international projects. Organizations gain new experiences and can learn from more developed/skilled organizations. Once cooperation has started and is maintained, it can bring new contacts and networks for future cooperation. The international dialogue brings new perspectives and approaches to the organization's work. International funding can help an organization to be more sustainable in the long run. Travel experience and exploring new cultures can be benefit but also challenge since it is often tiring if the project requires too much travelling.

Language training and cooperation with internationals play a vital role. To find a common topic could be challenging amongst the international community. The bigger partners consortia, the more diplomacy is needed. Many times, it is necessary to make compromises. However, it is important that the organization doesn't change its focus only on funding opportunities. It is sometimes tempting, especially when the level of frustration to find funds is high, to change the organizations' strategy or direction but this approach can jeopardize the organization's branding and credibility strongly and thus have a negative impact on future chances to get funding from various donors.

Institutional donors are not the only source of funding, there are lots of private companies, donors and foundations who might be interested in the support of various projects. Crowdfunding might be a growing opportunity in this sector too. However, companies are not always willing to support organizations and particular projects financially but many times offer training, services for free, or human resources. Additionally, there's money available for sports and culture-based organizations, but human rights advocates may still struggle to find aid. Companies are not always willing to support human rights advocates, as they want to avoid political topics.

It is good for the organization to have a contingency reserve that might be needed for times when an organization occasionally suffers significant losses (when waiting for the projects to be granted or signing the contracts is taking too long) and needs reserves to offset those losses. A contingency reserve can be retained earnings that have been set aside to guard against possible future losses. In the case of non-profit organizations, it is sometimes possible to have it as part of project proposals, administrative project money, or money from private donors.



## Recommendations:

- *Get your organization ready for promotion – update your website, social media, prepare promotion materials.*
- *Always use international language everyone can understand.*
- *Try to sign up to relevant local or international platforms.*
- *Networking – attend as many events as possible.*
- *Be careful – try to find out as many information as possible about future partners/ donors.*
- *Select your partners carefully, it can affect the whole project and your relationship with donors and other partners involved.*
- *Consider the accurate number of partners for your project.*
- *Be clear about the role of each partner.*
- *Carefully prepare partners' contracts to avoid future problems.*
- *In some cases, be prepared for the periods between submission, approval, signing the contract and receiving the funds for the implementation of the project.*
- *Make sure you understand donors' requirements and guidelines.*
- *Communicate with your donor as required.*
- *Prepare project and donor's visibility plan and promotion.*
- *Make sure to have enough human resources to work on the project proposal as well as project implementation.*
- *Carefully select your partners and be ready to do sensible compromises.*
- *Do not change your focus or strategy based on donors requirements and funding opportunities.*
- *Look for other donors than institutional ones, private donors might not support an organization financially but can offer training, people, or other services for free.*
- *Create a contingency reserve for times when an organization occasionally suffers significant losses or is waiting for funding.*

