

racism  
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## Communication and Networking for NGOs

Communication is necessary for every interaction. We communicate with each other all day. But, much can go wrong in the process. Communication is necessary for working together. Working together can provide us with a wider audience, more political strength and more knowledge and experience. Therefore we need communication, and we need to improve it all the time. Communication and networking go together. The meaning of the word 'networking' may not be very clear at first, but it is something we all do. Networking is making contacts, maintaining contacts and using contacts.

In this information leaflet you will find information on the general principles of communication and networking. Before using this leaflet think about your own communication. Then you can go on to study the advice in the leaflet and think about improving parts of your communication.

There are two kinds of communication mentioned in this information leaflet: communication inside NGOs (Non Governmental Organisations) or 'internal communication', and communication with other NGOs and funds or 'external communication'. For all of these forms of communication networking is important. The general ideas of networking are therefore mentioned separately.

## How to use your contacts to work more effectively

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION

### Communication has three parts: a sender, a message and a receiver

When you want to communicate you will find that all three parts change from one situation to the other. Your work will improve when you are able to analyse your communication: think every time about who the sender is, what the message is, and who the receiver is. And ask yourself WHY you communicate.

### Make sure you communicate with the right person

The person that picks up the phone may be very nice but if that is not a person with decision making power the contact will have no results.

### Different (cultural) backgrounds

Working with different (cultural) backgrounds influence your way of working and communicating. Take these backgrounds into account, do not be too quick in judging others to be rude or stupid. Think about the positive aspects of people and try to make use of those, instead of trying to put people in a corner they do not feel comfortable in.

### You should put yourself in the place of the other

Think about what are the obstacles to good communication for him/her. Answer their questions before they occur. Make it easy for the other to communicate: give them time to react, give them the right return address/telephone number, take away their fears, but be clear about what you expect and until when they have time to react (deadlines).

### Trust is the basis of any relationship

It is vital to keep your promises. If a promise is not realistic you should not make it. Observe deadlines. If you cannot comply with the deadline or you cannot keep your promise tell the other about it. It is better for them to hear 'no' than to hear nothing at all.

### It is not important to be right

It is important to reach your goal. Do not argue about small things and keep your long term objective in mind.

## EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Why do you want to work together with other NGOs? Discuss this question inside your NGO but also with the NGOs you want to work with. **Determining the goal of the co-operation is the first step.**

In general, organisations do not feel appreciated when they are only involved in the later stages of an activity. If you want to co-operate with others, you must be ready to give away some responsibility. **Doing it together** means that you will not have control over the whole process anymore.

The first step to an effective communication with outsiders such as the state, possible fund-giving institutions or another NGO is to be sure about the **receiver** of the communication. Who is the person you should talk to, what is his/her position in the organisation, what kind of an organisation is it?

Different organisations have **different organisational cultures and different political aims**. Discuss the differences with the organisations you want to cooperate with or analyse them yourself. Do they work in a formal or informal way, are the relationships in the organisation based on personal or organisational relationships, is the organisation more closed or more open, and in what way?

Be aware of the emotional differences between visiting, phoning, writing, faxing and e-mailing. A phone call is not considered as official as a letter or a fax, while e-mail is somewhere in between. Choose

consciously for a personal letter or a circular letter. In general a circular letter is not considered as important as a personal letter, addressed to a specific person in a specific organisation. Personal contact, by phone or visit, always has the highest effect. Check with any call, letter, fax or e-mail that the other person has your correct and complete return address, your phone number and your name.

If you want to work together, it is a good idea to visit each other's activities. **Be interested** in each other's work. Keep in contact, even when not that much is happening. Try to meet regularly.

The best ways of working together always involve **reciprocity**. This means that you will only succeed in fixing a deal when the other gets something out of it too. Think of the possible benefits of the co-operation to the partner. Does your project do something that the other has to do anyway, are you reaching a specific group of people that are otherwise hard to reach, etc. In the UNITED information leaflet No. 1 'Shake your Money Maker' you can find other tips for presenting your project to a fund-giving institution.

To keep people interested, you need to **inform them about your work**. Be careful to whom you send information and think about what information is useful for that person. When you send information, it is a good opportunity to call and explain details of the information. In doing so, you create a personal link between the other person and yourself.

## INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Inside an NGO you have a **common goal**. Be aware of the fact that not all people will see that goal in exactly the same way. People will work together better if they have planned together, if they are involved in the future of the organisation.

If you want to improve the communication between people it is very important to build an **atmosphere** in which people feel comfortable. They must feel that people are interested in each other and they must feel able to trust each other. One way of doing that is by reserving time for personal matters, for talking and doing social things together. But do not exaggerate, people should still be working towards a common goal and not just because they are friends.

You can organise **office meetings**, in which the work is discussed and tasks are distributed. Do not organise too many, only hold meetings when there is enough to discuss. Be sure to make an agenda beforehand and minutes or task list afterwards.

## NETWORKING

A network is a collection of contacts that are **not hierarchical**. They are not based on someone having power over someone else. Contacts and activities of persons in a network are always voluntary. This does not mean that there is not someone with responsibility, or someone 'in charge'. It only means that there is not one person that is in charge all the time. The responsibilities change, sometimes one person is responsible, sometimes another. A network does not involve much bureaucracy, its goal is to be effective, dynamic and action-oriented.

It is very important to **keep your information up-to-date**. You have to know who you want to communicate with in your network, where this person can be reached, etc. It is vital to build a **database of contacts**.

In general a network does not work if you wait for others to take action, even if they have promised to do so. You need to **take the initiative**. You will have to keep taking the initiative for a while. You will have to **GIVE** a long time before you can **RECEIVE**.

Networking functions only partially on a rational level. Part of the communication is based on **personal and emotional relationships**. While it is not totally impossible to work with people you dislike, it is much easier to build a network with people you like. Be aware of your own emotional response to people.

## FOUR STEPS TO BUILD UP A GOOD NETWORK

### 1. Giving information:

Start with giving information about your own activities, your own organisation by building a mailing list and mailing regularly, using e-mail and news groups or a web site, sending out invitations for your activities.

### 2. Showing interest:

Phone around regularly, visit activities of other people and organisations, send them a post card when you feel like it, try to remember personal interests.

### 3. Organising meeting points:

To build a good network you need to meet people personally, do not wait until you meet them accidentally but invite them to a conference, organise a seminar or a social gathering.

### 4. Common actions/activities:

The best way to get to know people is to work with them, the network links are strengthened and you are stronger as a result. You should be sure to involve people in ALL stages of the project, from planning stage to the evaluation.

## COMMUNICATION TO UNITED

As a network UNITED tries to improve its own communication on a daily basis. You can help too. As we have said before the first step to networking is being interested, and exchanging information. UNITED is very interested in your information. Keep sending it!

UNITED's basic tools for communication and networking include the European Address book Against Racism, the Calendar of Internationalism, campaign material (posters, stickers, post cards), the web site ([www.unitedagainstracism.org](http://www.unitedagainstracism.org)) and E-News (the e-mailing list)

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