Approach to Inclusive Networking

Developed by the Inclusivity Community of Practice

Networking

Networking is an action or process of interacting with others to exchange information and develop contacts. Members of the [Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers](#) have identified networking as one of the four approaches for effective collaboration. Members of the Network utilize networking to enhance connections with members and supporters among actors and institutions at the local, regional, and international levels. Networking is strengthened by communication and knowledge sharing between Network members and supporters through consortia and coalition-building, working groups, facilitated communication and other links between grassroots religious actors and Network members.

What is Inclusive Networking?

Networking is the action or process of interacting with others with the aim to exchange information and develop professional or social contacts and relationships. Networking can create opportunities for collaboration between civil society actors, including women, youth, faith actors and institutions, government officials, and multilateral institutions. Facilitating networking and partnerships, notably for marginalized groups, can enable individuals and organizations to be recognized to develop joint initiatives and strengthen their individual and collective action for transformative change. However, there are many notable barriers to individuals or organizations' ability to participate in networking, such as the lack of access or opportunity to engage individuals or groups, lack of access or opportunity to resources and funding, and due to lack of time or ability. For example, there are 180-220 million youth with disabilities in the world, of which 80% are living in developing countries.[1]

[1] UNDESA. "Youth With Disabilities." https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/youth-with-disabilities.html.

Despite these high numbers of youth with disabilities, many networking functions (both in-person and online) still lack the ability and capacity to address their specific needs, which could include a lack of access to reliable technology or internet, a lack of interpretation, or not having accessible physical structures to accommodate individuals with wheelchairs or other support mechanisms. These barriers continue to prevent individuals from fully engaging in networking opportunities.

Why is Inclusive Networking Important?

Inclusive networking entails inviting diverse groups of people, including women, youth and other marginalized groups, and offering spaces which accommodate everyone's needs. In order to empower and help engage those in positions of power, one must create even playing fields for those trying to access and participate in these opportunities. This is essential in helping to create opportunities to build long-term relationships with those working in peacebuilding for future partnership and funding opportunities.

Additional Resources

NGO Support Centre, International NGO Training and Research Center, and the Management Centre. "Networking and Relationship Building for CSOs: Course Toolkit." https://www.ngoconnect.net/sites/default/files/resources/Networking%20and%20Relationship%20Building%20for%20CSOs.pdf.

UNFPA, UNDP, PBSO and FBA. "Youth, Peace and Security: A Programming Handbook." 2021. https://www.unfpa.org/publications/youth-peace-and-security-programming-handbook.

USAID. "Social Networking: A Guide to Strengthening Civil Society Through Social Media." https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/SMGuide4CSO.pdf.

Checklist To Do's – Recommendations For Practicing Inclusive Networking

The Network for Religious & Traditional Peacemakers

☐ **Ask if there are accessibility, translation, or dietary needs for the networking event.** Consider the time and location of the networking event and provide participants with travel and safety maps for ease of travel. Networking organizers share a common purpose, vision, and commitment towards recognizing inclusion, equality, and diversity. The list of participants represent diverse groups, sectors, and experiences. Priority is given to community-based groups, women, youth, and other marginalized groups.

☐ **Share guidelines at the start of the event, whether in-person, online or hybrid, and if the event follows under the Chatham House Rule**, meaning participants are free to use the information received, but cannot identify the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant.

☐ **Focus on allowing time for relationship building.** Give individuals ample time and opportunity to engage and participate in conversations and do not pack too much into the event.

☐ **Encourage participants to practice active listening.** Reflect on the conversation to show that you understand what individuals are saying, summarize the most important ideas or facts, and thank them for speaking with you. Listening helps to mutually learn from one another and build the capacity of individuals and organizations.

☐ **Embolden participants to build relationships and trust.** Do not just talk about what you or your organization do. Find commonalities and things to connect on and opportunities of connecting in the future. Prioritize quality conversations over quantity.

☐ **Actively connect others to use your power to undo inequity.** Avoid thinking, what can this person or organization do for me and instead ask yourself: who is this person or organization? How can I be helpful to them? How can we work together toward a greater good? And who else can I introduce this person to in order to build stronger and more peaceful societies?

☐ **Do not compete.** Resist the idea that we must compete with each other to climb to the top of the ladder. This only reinforces hierarchies and inhibits meaningful collaboration. Instead, **advance partnerships and cooperation. There is room for all of us to flourish.**

☐ **Give back and mentor individuals or institutions.** Offering strong peer or organizational support can help to grow the capacity and confidence of individuals and organizations, while also building trust and relationships.

☐ **Think longevity and commitment.** If your networking opportunity is more than one single event, ensure you find ways to engage members frequently, constructively, and creatively. Make sure it is worth the individual's and organization's time.