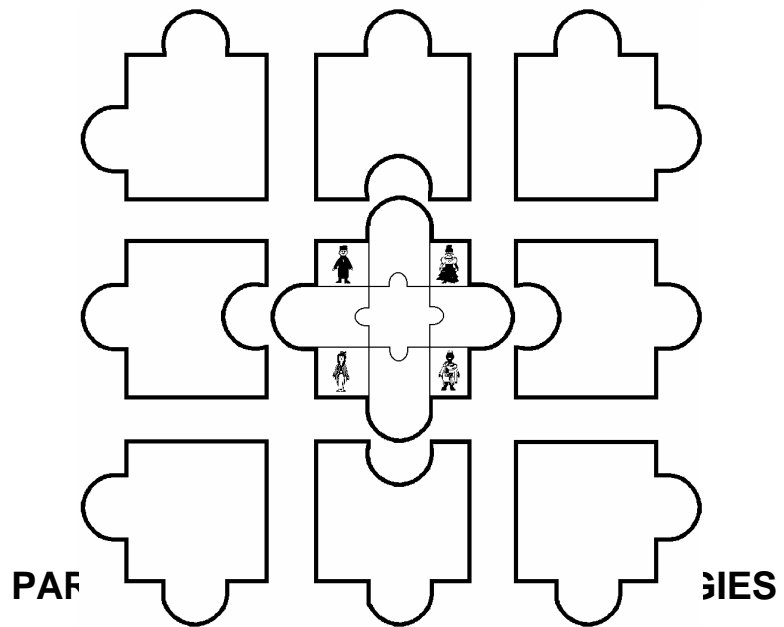




BUILDING NGO/CBO CAPACITY

For
ORGANIZATIONAL
OUTREACH



FOREWORD

This series of training manuals, designed to enhance the overall management and operational effectiveness of non-governmental and community-based organisations, coincides with the launch of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) Global Campaign on Urban Governance. The theme of “inclusiveness,” reflecting the Campaign’s vision and strategy, is deeply embedded in the concepts and learning strategies covered by these manuals. While they have been planned and written to serve the developmental needs of non-governmental and community-based organisations, their leadership, and staff, they can easily be adapted to serve the needs of smaller local governments as well.

There is growing evidence and increased recognition of several values that define and frame the urban governance agenda for the new century and millennium. The first, inclusion, has already been introduced but bears repeating. Those local governments and communities that want to be on the leading edge of social and economic change must recognise the importance of including everyone, regardless of wealth, gender, age, race or religion, in the process of forging decisions that affect their collective quality of life. This commitment must then be infused into the very heart of their operating culture.

The second recognition involves shared leadership that cuts across the spectrum of institutional and community fabric. This means, among other things, that non-governmental and community-based organisations (NGOs/CBOs) must be seen as competent and worthy partners in the sharing of leadership and responsibilities. The *Building Bridges* manuals in this series are designed to address the management of joint planning ventures as well as the management of conflicts and disagreements that cut across the spectrum of public and not-for-profit community organisations.

The final recognition is the need for organisational competencies within the NGO/CBO community—a combination of knowledge, skills, experience, and commitment that will strengthen their resolve to manage their financial and human resources and their outreach endeavours more effectively and efficiently. In order to be strong and effective partners, NGOs and CBOs must be able to demonstrate that their internal houses are also in order.

As described in the Prologue, this series of learning implementation tools has been a collaborative venture between the Open Society Institute and the Government of the Netherlands (the principal funding institutions), Partners Romania Foundation for Local Development, and UNCHS (Habitat). In addition, many others have been involved in the development of this series. They include:

1. a committed group of Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), Community Based Organisation (CBO) and local government leaders from Sub-Saharan Africa, who came together to define their learning needs during the UNCHS Capacity Building Strategy Workshop held in Nakuru, Kenya in November 1998 and who took an active part in reviewing the drafts, culminating in a validation workshop in Nyeri, Kenya, 2001; and
2. a network of institutions and trainers representing the Regional Program for Capacity Building in Governance and Local Leadership for East and Central European Countries who participated in field testing the initial drafts of the materials.

Finally, I want to thank Fred Fisher the author of this manual and principal author of the series and the superb team of writing collaborators he brought together to craft these materials. The team of UNCHS staff professionals, headed by Tomasz Sudra, brought their considerable experience and expertise to polishing the final products.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO BUILDING ORGANISATIONAL OUTREACH CAPACITY

Speak plain. Call bread, bread and wine, wine
Mexican proverb

He who would do great things should not attempt them alone
Seneca Proverb

The needle knows what it sews, and the thimble what it pushes
Colombian proverb

These proverbs highlight the three skills and processes that are central to building organisational outreach capacity: communicating, developing strategic alliances, and influencing others. The two skills, communicating and influencing, encompass many sub-topics, strategies, tactics, skills, tools, and processes even when the focus is narrowed to how NGOs and CBOs can improve their organisation's outreach by applying them. The craft of building strategic alliances is less problematic to cover as an organisational outreach process.

Communicating and influencing as skills and strategies embrace many variations of individual and collective action. They can be interpersonal, intra or inter-organisational, written, spoken, formal, informal, public, private, and more. They are resources of potentially unbounded vitality, often free to use but also very expensive to harness under certain circumstances. The challenge is to garner as much leverage as possible from the art and crafts of communicating and influencing with as little cost to your NGO or CBO as possible.

For the small CBO with few resources, it may be unrealistic to expect its leader to influence changes in policies and legislation even at the local level or to launch a major communication campaign to highlight the concerns of the community it represents. On the other hand, there is strength in numbers. NGOs and CBOs can work together to mobilise their collective voices when there is consensus about issues that call for communicating and influencing beyond their respective organisational boundaries. Building organisation outreach capacity is, by its nature, a process that involves others either as recipients of your communicating and influencing or by determining how you can create coalitions of like-minded institutions and individuals who can help in achieving common goals as NGOs and CBOs.

The Nakuru assessment workshop delegates provided some valuable guidance to this trilogy of challenges by discussing both their frustrations and expectations. They were asking in one way or another:

- How can we as NGO and CBO leaders communicate more effectively and convincingly with beneficiaries, donors, local governments, and the media? The smaller we are, the more difficult these tasks are.
- How can we learn to be better at networking, at linking ourselves together with those beyond our organisational boundaries?
- How can we have influence on legislation and policy formulation?
- How can we work more effectively with local governments on issues and problems of mutual concern?
- How can we form partnerships that will increase our abilities to communicate our concerns and increase our influence to achieve our missions and goals?

These queries span a host of potential interpersonal, organisational and inter-organisational strategies and skills. They correctly assume that *individuals* within each NGO and CBO have the potential to improve their *communication* and *influencing* skills. There is also the assumption that *individual organisations* can increase their outreach capacity through better communication and influencing strategies and actions. And finally, there is the realisation that, individually, most NGOs and CBOs simply do not have the resources and means to communicate and influence effectively on many issues

and concerns that are central to their missions and goals. They must create strategic alliances if they are to have the necessary influence to bring about essential changes in their working environments.

Roadmap: In an attempt to respond to these wide-ranging capacity-building concerns, we will focus in Chapter One on:

- How to develop an organisation communication plan and strategy.
- How to improve your listening skills, recognising that communication is a two-way process and listening more effectively to beneficiaries may be your best influencing tool.
- How to work more effectively with the media and improve your public relations.
- How to become a better “net worker”. We will even try to figure out what this term means, given its current popularity as a management and personal effectiveness strategy.

In Chapter Two, the focus will be on developing strategic alliances and will concentrate on:

- The advantages of alliances and partnerships
- Types of alliances and coalitions, and
- How to create and maintain strategic alliances.

Chapter Three, the final chapter in Part One, will focus on various kinds of influence strategies including:

- The relationships between power and influence
- A systems approach to influencing strategies
- The policy thicket and how to cut your way through it; and
- How to lobby and influence policy making.

Part Two, the *Tools* section, will provide structured learning experiences in each of these skill development arenas. While some can be self-administered for individualised learning, training designs are provided with all the tools to assist those who plan to facilitate group learning experiences. The Tools are designed to mirror the concepts and strategies covered in Part One of the manual.

CHAPTER TWO COMMUNICATING STRATEGIES AND SKILLS

To think justly we must understand what others mean;
to know the value of our thoughts,
we must try their effect on other minds
William Hazlett, 1826

Since *communications* is such a catchall term, one of the best ways to understand what you and your organisation can be doing to communicate more effectively is to develop a communication plan. This plan should be based on your organisation's vision and mission, the goals you want to accomplish, and the values and beliefs that are important to you, your staff, your beneficiaries, and other key stakeholders. Since the fine points of how you create your vision, define your mission, and establish operational goals and objectives can be found in the *Participatory Planning* manual in this series, we won't duplicate them here. However, we have included in Part 2 of this manual a form to help you and your colleagues develop a communication plan. (See Tool # 2: Developing a Communication Plan)

Develop a communication plan

Once you are clear about the foundation stones essential to organisation effectiveness and outreach, i.e., your mission, operating goals, core values, and beliefs as a service institution, you can begin to ask what you want to accomplish through communicating these and other messages to the outside world. In other words, *why* do you want to communicate? Are your communication goals to:

- Enhance your visibility in the community, city, or region?
- Generate positive attitudes and impressions of your organisation through better media coverage?
- Establish media contacts so they can be counted on in case of emergencies, either your own as an organisation or emergencies thrust upon your beneficiaries or constituents?
- Increase awareness about your programs and services in relation to a specific user group?
- Promote a change of attitude among certain members of the community?
- Generate support from the public, key policy makers, and others on such issues as policy reform?
- Generate financial support and contributions?
- Establish and maintain an interactive dialogue with your most important stakeholders?

By the way, we've used the term *stakeholders* before and just realised that it might not be familiar to all of you. A stakeholder is any person, group, or organisation that can put a claim on your organisation's attention, time, resources, and services, or is affected by your organisation's existence and contributions. Stakeholders can either be friendly or hostile to the accomplishment of your mission and goals. Given this broad definition, your communication plan may need to be broadly defined.

These are the *Why* questions that are so important to consider when developing an outreach communication plan. If you aren't clear about why you need to communicate your message beyond the boundaries of your organisation, the chances are you won't communicate them either very effectively or efficiently. The *Why* answers will help you determine *What* you need to communicate in terms of information, ideas, values, goals, etc.

Once these questions have been thoroughly pursued, you will need answers to some other basic questions:

- To *whom* do we need to get these messages?

- *How* will we do it?
- *How* will we know if we are being successful?

To whom should you communicate, and how?

When you delve into the *To Whom* category of inquiry, you will also want to think about *How* you can reach your critical partners. Let's assume that your CBO operates a day care centre next to a clothing factory in your community. As director, you need to get information to the mothers who use the centre about proposed changes in the service. The communication strategy might be as simple as letting the centre director know and having her pass the new information on to those who use the service. Or, you might want to personally be at the centre when the children are collected if you believe it is important for your clients to get the message from you directly.

If you want to communicate with your local government, it could get a bit more complicated. *What* you want to communicate to your local government and *how* you do it may depend on the procedures they have established for communicating with others. For example, the elected council might have very formal procedures about how to communicate with them. They may expect constituents to work through the clerk of council, or if it concerns management issues, the chief administrative officer. How you communicate with other organisations and their officials and staff will depend on their processes and procedures for communicating as well as your own.

If your intent is to reach a broad audience, i.e., the general public, then your strategy might involve the mass media if you have access to the resources they command, a mass mailing, or some other broad based strategy. Such communication strategies can become expensive, both in hard cash and staff resources. The final concern to address when putting together a communication plan is how much will it cost.

Since the potential audience for this manual is so diverse and their circumstances so varied, it is difficult to be specific about what your communication plan should include. If you can answer the questions just commented on, the *why, what, who, when* and *how questions* about communicating for outreach purposes, and assess the total costs involved in implementing your plan, you will be able to determine what kind of communicating strategy is best for your organisation. Finally, your plan needs to include an evaluation step that will assess how effective your communication plan has been in reaching its intended audience. Communicating the mission, services, and needs of your organisation can be expensive in money, time, and staff resources. Be strategic, and track the impact of your communication strategy.

The better world is not feasible for people who do not believe in it
Ladislav Briestensky

Listening is also a strategic communication option

Is *listening* to your constituents and other key stakeholders an important part of your communication plan? All too often we forget this critical component to the communication process when we put together our organisation's communication plan. Given this distinct possibility, we want to argue that *active listening* should be a critical part of any service-oriented institution's strategy to communicate and influence. (See *Tool # 3 in Part Two* for an active learning experience in listening.)

As we will point out later, listening has been identified as one of the most important communication skills of the manager, if not the most important. We believe it is the foundation from which all other parts of your communication program should be based.

We'll get to some of the techniques in a moment, but first we want to share some proverbs about listening from various parts of the world.

- From Peru: If I listen I have the advantage, if I speak the others have it
- Japan: The silent person is often worth listening to
- The Native American Yurok tribe: Silence has so much meaning

- The Jabu tribe of Africa: The one who listens is the one who understands
- Lithuania: Listen much and speak little

Being silent is no guarantee that we are either listening, or listening for meaning and understanding. Nevertheless, a generous dose of self-imposed silence is essential to the art of active listening. Expressions of support, empathy, and understanding are also essential. Sharpening the ability to listen effectively responds directly to the Nakuru workshop participant's top communication training priority: **how to communicate more effectively with beneficiaries of your services**. By listening to your beneficiaries and constituents, you become better prepared to communicate with other key stakeholders, i.e. governments, donors, and the media.

What is unique about active listening?

First of all, listening is one of the most important management skills we can possess. Several years ago, a research team at Loyola University in Chicago conducted a study to determine the single most important attribute of the effective manager. After involving hundreds of organisations in their research, they concluded that *listening* is a manager's most important skill. ⁽¹⁾

If listening is so important, why don't we do it better? There are several reasons. First, listening is hard work. It takes energy and concentration to listen actively. Second, we are bombarded constantly with messages, and we learn how to screen out a lot of the messages that are directed our way. Unfortunately, we screen out messages we shouldn't. Third, we often decide what the other person is about to say and jump in to respond immediately. This, of course, stops the listening routine immediately and often distorts the message we were about to hear. Finally, most of us never receive any training on how to listen effectively.

Have you ever asked yourself, "Just what do they mean by *active*, in active listening?" Well, we have also and the literature on listening is not very explicit about what is meant by *active*. To help us better understand the "active" in active listening, we turned to a fairly recent book on the role of the manager as facilitator. The authors define active listening as "a process by which we make a conscious effort to understand someone else." ⁽²⁾ This *conscious effort* to manage the listening process involves three interrelated techniques or skills.

1. *Sensing*: using all our senses to take in the information being offered.
2. *Interpreting*: assessing the meaning of what is being said.
3. *Checking*: reflecting on what has been heard in an effort to gain a mutual understanding of what the other person is saying.

So, active listening isn't just listening! It requires us to engage in a dialogue using all our senses and actually speaking, which seems on the surface to be a bit contradictory. But, the speaking is of a very different kind than we normally use when holding a conversation. What we say during active listening is directed to better understand what the other person is saying, not to impose our own thoughts, emotions, feelings, etc. It is tough to do, as we all know, but the benefits far outweigh the costs. Let's look at the three sub-skills just mentioned, the ones these authors have tucked under the larger skill umbrella of listening.

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