

How to... Look for partners

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Organised by: Daniela Vancic, Democracy International on behalf of the ECI Forum

Report

The "How to Look for Partners" workshop, organized on behalf of the ECI Forum during ECI Day on March 5, 2024, served as a crucial platform for European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) organizers to delve into the intricacies of partner search and alliance-building. Building a network of partners is the key to success across all success stories of the previous successful ECIs. Using expertise from previous, as well as current, organisers who built and mobilized their networks and partnerships, the workshop aimed to equip future organisers with the skills they need for partnership building.

The workshop was led by seasoned experts in ECI campaigning and was set in a world-café fashion which facilitated an interactive exchange of practical insights and best practices, aiming to empower participants with the tools necessary for successful ECI campaigns. The 20-minute world-café style rotation allowed for small groups which fostered peer-to-peer exchange and interaction between participants and experts.

Experts included:

- Xavier Dutoit, WeMove/Fix the Status Quo, on behalf of five European citizens' initiatives, presenting on the topic of *Mobilising Civil Society*
- Stephanie Poppe, European citizens' initiative 'Ensuring Dignified Reception of Migrants in Europe', presenting on the topic of *Public partnerships*
- Sebastian Rodriguez Perez, European campaign playbook, on behalf of European citizens' initiative 'Minority SafePack', presenting on the topic of *Media and communications partnerships*

Xavier Dutoit's session on mobilizing civil society shed light on the importance of engaging a diverse range of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in ECI campaigns. Dutoit emphasized the need to understand that an ECI is not merely a single EU-wide campaign but rather several, ideally seven, distinct national campaigns. He stressed the significance of incorporating national or regional organizations from the outset, as they play a pivotal role in mobilizing support and attracting mass organizations later in the campaign. Furthermore, Dutoit highlighted the necessity of testing different messaging strategies and involving small, specialized organizations in niche topics early on to foster community engagement and garner signatures.

Stephanie Poppe's discourse on public partnerships underscored the crucial role of city authorities and municipalities in supporting ECI initiatives. Poppe introduced the Dignity in Europe ECI, supported by the city of Rennes, France, as a prime example of leveraging public partnerships for campaign success. She emphasized the need to identify and reach out to politicians through established networks such as Eurocities and Europe affairs departments in major cities. Poppe elucidated on the various ways in which city authorities can contribute to ECI campaigns, including offering venues and infrastructure for events, mobilizing the local academic community, providing communication support, and assisting in building networks to connect ECIs with communities and citizens. Despite the receptiveness of Rennes city authorities to ECI initiatives, Poppe highlighted the challenges associated with limited human resources and conflicting agendas, urging organizers to navigate these hurdles strategically.

Sebastian Rodriguez Perez's segment on media and communications partnerships provided valuable insights into effectively engaging with media outlets and communication professionals. Rodriguez Perez emphasized the importance of distinguishing between journalists and media outlets when communicating ECI initiatives to the media. He stressed the need for personalized communication approaches, such as pitching stories via phone calls or one-to-one meetings, to maximize media coverage. Rodriguez Perez outlined key factors to consider in crafting compelling ECI narratives, including proximity, timeliness, impact, and novelty. Moreover, he emphasized the significance of providing ready-to-use content and reliable sources to journalists to spark interest and ensure accurate coverage of ECIs in the media.

To conclude, a Slido poll with three questions to reflect on the workshop was presented by the moderator, Daniela Vancic of Democracy International. Based on the responses to the Slido poll questions:

1. Participants expressed a range of emotions following the workshop, including feeling inspired, supported, confident, ambitious, ready, prepared, excited, empowered, and, even, deflated. These varied sentiments indicate the impact of the workshop on participants' attitudes towards the ECI, highlighting both positive and the real-life challenging aspects of the campaign process.
2. In addition to CSOs, media, and public partnerships, participants identified several other potential partners for ECI campaigns. These included CSO networks, public authorities, family and friends, private companies/corporations, and online communities. The diversity of suggested

partners reflects the broad spectrum of stakeholders that can contribute to the success of an ECI initiative, demonstrating the importance of building alliances across various sectors.

3. Participants expressed a desire to learn more about different aspects of partner search and alliance-building in ECIs. Some of the topics highlighted included success stories from previous campaigns, funding opportunities, the development of digital platforms for campaign coordination, publications on best practices, strategies for maintaining partner relations, approaches for initiating partnerships, and issues related to financial support and data protection. These responses underscore the need for continued education and resources to support ECI organizers in effectively engaging partners and building successful campaigns.

The ECI Forum was presented by Vancic who shared how the Forum functions as an online collaborative platform and support center for current or prospective ECI organizers, providing a space for knowledge exchange and resource sharing. It offers best practices and allows users to seek guidance on various aspects of organizing an ECI campaigns, ranging from partner search to legal requirements.

In conclusion, the "How to Look for Partners" workshop served as a valuable platform for ECI organizers to gain practical insights and strategies for navigating the complexities of partner search and alliance-building. The comprehensive discussions led by the experts provided participants with actionable steps to mobilize civil society, secure public partnerships, and foster media and communications partnerships, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and impact of future ECI campaigns.