

EYF (R)Evolution, 11-14 March 2014

A report of a commencing story

If you could read this report as a story, imagine it is about a small team of people who believe that young people in any organised form have the power to actively shape the life of their communities with a little bit of support and empowerment. In every story there are challenges to overcome and our story makes no exception. It is created in episodes, which grow from the dreams of the European Youth Foundation (EYF) team and adds on the way the contribution of its audience: the youth NGOs and hopefully a wider public.

Story-line:

As part of the EYF reform, new operational rules and a new online system were put in place, which needed feedback from its users. Reframing and strengthening the partnership with youth NGOs was also necessary, thus allowing EYF to define its specificity among other donors in Europe and implement further adjustments.

Within this new context, a first seminar “EYF Reloaded – It all starts with You(th)” was successfully organised in 2013, involving representatives from international, national/regional and local organisations. This initiative was much appreciated as an opportunity to clarify the new operational rules and unanimously complimented as a way of meeting the EYF team in person and understanding the working spirit/vision of the Foundation. It was strongly recommended to keep this activity recurrent, as it proved to respond to a significant need of youth NGOs.

In 2014, a year later, the new regulations, online system and website were in operation, with new categories (annual work plan and structural grants) available only to international youth NGOs. The new grants have posed numerous (technical) questions for both youth NGOs and EYF, a good enough reason to invite only representatives of international youth NGOs and networks to the 2014 seminar.

“EYF (R)Evolution – It all starts with You(th)” in brief:

Goals: to share insights from working with the new operational regulations of EYF, to get familiar with the new grants available, to revitalize transparency and accountability between EYF and youth NGOs, to achieve open and informal networking and to share good practices regarding projects.

Duration: 3.5 days meeting from 11 to 14 March 2014 at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg

Participants: 29 representatives from 29 different international youth NGOs and networks (see list of participants)

Team: Prepared and facilitated by the members of EYF secretariat together with a trainer and a coordinator

How it was done:

The team learned from the 2013 seminar that there had to be a balance between practical approach and space for discussions, as well as involving the EYF team as much as possible. Besides learning from the 2013 experience, the team imagined a programme that would allow participants to experience the spirit of the Foundation. A comfortable atmosphere, two-way communication, transfer of knowledge and experience, being pro-active and creating space for everyone to participate were the principles that guided the team in building a programme flow and choosing methodology.

How it worked:

Day 1: half a day was dedicated to creating a comfortable atmosphere, getting to know each other and sensing the approach of the meeting. The tempo was relaxed, yet interactive and the attention was given to informal networking.

Networking was an important dimension of the meeting, since many of the participants expressed the wish to have it in the programme. The team shared ownership with participants on this part of the programme. The evenings were left at the disposal of participants to take an active role and initiate those discussions that needed to be addressed. Everyone mingled informally in the evening discussions, according to level of interest.

Day 2: as people got to know each other individually, it was time to learn about the working context of both the EYF and NGOs, the (political) context of the Council of Europe, the state of play of EYF reform as well as how that translates in supporting the work of NGOs. Two-way communication was emphasized throughout the day, switching as much as possible between the NGOs' perspective and that of the EYF and the Council of Europe (CoE). An atmosphere of curiosity and connection was created by the end of the day.

Day 3: by now the group had an overall understanding of the political context of the CoE's youth sector, the implications of the reform, how the EYF works with its new operational rules and the impact it has on the work of NGOs. It was time to go into technical discussions about grants by experimenting. The keywords of the day were 'changing shoes'. Walking through one simulation to another, participants changed 'shoes' from NGOs to EYF secretariat, to Programming Committee and back to NGOs. This created an atmosphere of creativity, thinking out of the box and co-operation. By the end of the day, by switching groups and changing 'shoes' participants got most of their questions answered. The end of the day sealed off the technical questions, allowing everyone to share insights, new understandings and exhaust questions about grants and new rules.

Day 4: it was time to wrap-up and look forward. The aspects of visibility and impact were discussed through practical aspects. The EYF walked us through its new website and available tools and exchanged views with participants about using the existing technical possibilities.

The question of visibility is a wider one. Can EYF and its users be visible outside of the Youth Sector? What message must be given to the public outside of the Youth Sector and to the governments of the member states in order to emphasize the significance of the work done by NGOs supported by EYF? This set us off on a new adventure: creating visibility tools that would carry such a message to the wider public. Everyone was excited and a kick of adrenaline set everyone into a creative process filled with intense discussions, fun, media and digital tools.

We explored different visibility tools and the seminar was wrapped up with a discussion on follow-up and methods to stay connected and involved.

The outcomes and highlights of the meeting:

Following the spirit of the meeting, the team and participants have evaluated the results: the strong points, aspects that could have been better, suggestions for the future.

- Good synergy in the team, everyone was involved in the preparation

"Highlight: Full involvement of EYF staff in the meeting (quite coherent with the philosophy of it :)" - Participants

- There was a good team spirit and facilitation worked well

"I would like to point out that it was extremely well-organised, content-wise as well as logistically. The individual sessions made a lot of sense and fitted very well together. I have been to a million international events and this was seriously one of the best. Thanks to the whole team" – Participant

"Highlight: the information shared the methods used the spirit of the team (and trainers)" - Participant

- The programme flow worked well and methods used were diverse

"The highlight of the meeting was for me diversity of working methods, needs addressed and priorities." – Participant

- Shared ownership with participants to combine networking in an informal setting and structured sessions

"Great discussions in sessions and outside, being able to ask questions directly to the EYF secretariat, the living power point of the EYF" - Participant

"There was not only one highlight: there were so many good moments; especially the exchange with other people and the way how the EYF team worked to together with play methods"- Participant

- Adding an extra half a day for getting to know each other served the purpose of creating a safe atmosphere for people to share

"Added value: 100% the networking aspect of the event and meeting the great EYF team. Also provided the opportunity to network with other young people with different ideas and visions."- Participant

- For more than 90% of participants the amount of information was sufficient

"The most important information was explained. All the questions were carefully answered and most of the doubts we had were clarified." – Participant

- There was clarity on how to work with the available grant opportunities and the new system

"All the second day on the new spirit and system, especially the two-way communication was very useful. Assessing the work-plan. I found most useful the insights about how EYF works and the methodological principles behind (openness, dialogue etc.), rather than the technical issues. That the EYF team was with us all the time... very very very useful!" – Participant

"First half of second day was really useful, because we get to know how EYF function, how the decision process is going and who is behind it. When it comes to practical work, I can emphasis first 3 sessions on 3rd day. They really helped us to get into different shoes, to think from different perspectives and see what are our mistakes but also how other people do it"- Participant

- A common understanding of partnership was developed as alternative to donor-beneficiary.

"I got to know much more about EYF and, knowing it might sound cliché-ish, it made me think of EYF more as a partner than a donor."- Participant

"The cooperative spirit of EYF towards INGOs, and how this should be achieved in both directions (also from NGOs towards EYF).."- Participant

- A new understanding of accountability and transparency

"I understand now better what we should do when we face a problem in our activities and what matters for EYF from the point of view of our cooperation with them. Some people in my organisation already have this understanding of the situation but as I am the one directly in charge of managing technical issues that arise within projects, I believe that I can better help my colleagues in addressing properly EYF (and also the practical implementation of our projects) in the future." – Participant

- Experimented practical ways to create visibility

"Highlight: Visibility on the last day. We produce something that can be used in reality and support the EYF." - Participant

Some aspects could have been better:

- The sessions on visibility and multiplication (day 4) could have been better prepared to obtained better focused tools
- Exercises on getting to know each other could have more focus, for example learning names.

"I would have wished for more teambuilding and proper name games - I still don't know all the names."- Participant

- A balance between theory and practice in each session

"State of play as it was just the theory. There won't be many occasions to use that knowledge probably..." – Participant

Proposals for the future:

Participants:

- About 25% of participants suggest to choose visibility and impact as an important theme for NGOs and their relation with EYF and donors in general
- Judging from the suggestions of participants in the evaluation form, it appears that there is a need for a recurrent meeting of this type
- There is also a strong indication that youth NGOs need a similar event on other topics like: organisation management, what is a vision/strategy/action plan, communication strategies towards stakeholders, thinking outside of the box, working on creative, visual materials. Etc.
- Keep on inviting members of the Programming Committee on Youth and if possible also invite a CDEJ (intergovernmental committee) member to have co-management present in practice

Team:

- Organise a similar meeting annually and consider organising a second meeting to address other needs (see examples above).
- Consider having international NGOs as a target group for one meeting and invite also local organisations for the second meeting
- Further invest in developing visual materials as tools (e.g. a video on reporting)
- Strengthen co-operation with the external offices of the Council of Europe in order to better link grass-root activities with the Council of Europe and its youth sector (a possible Training of Trainers organised together with an external CoE office)
- Further develop the concept of 'intervention' for local projects
- Encourage NGOs to develop projects (interest was expressed also by participants)

EYF (R)Evolution experience in one world (by participants):

Loaded, Smart and detailed, Information, Improve, Inspiring, Learning, Dialogue, Activated, Colossal potential, Enriching, Openness, Grateful, Two-way Communication, Thankful, Cooperation, Thanks, Co-creation, Empowering, Useful.

This is the end of an episode of the story with the promise that it will be continued....

Annexes:

Updated programme

List of participants