

**EYF (Re)wind
European Youth Centre Strasbourg
1-4 March 2017**

1. Context

Following the implementation of four successful seminars EYF (Re)loaded in 2013, EYF (R)evolution in 2014, EYF (Re)generation in 2015 and EYF (Re)mix in 2015 and in view of the participants' positive feedback, the European Youth Foundation decided to host a fifth seminar, EYF (Re)wind in 2017.

The first seminars focused on the European Youth Foundation's new approach and operational regulations. As the novelty of these gradually transformed into daily practice, the purpose of the seminars also shifted towards strengthening the partnership with youth NGOs, bringing further clarity to the co-operation and communication processes and involving more youth organisations in the work of the Council of Europe's youth sector.

The last Seminar – EYF (Re)mix – focused on the interaction between international organisations and local organisations in order to strengthen the connections among them and possibly build new ones. Thanks to the success of this Seminar, the EYF team decided to renew the experience by taking, as a concrete starting point, an issue that had not previously been considered: the EYF team moved from strengthening the co-operation with the NGOs that had already submitted successful projects to the EYF to supporting NGOs that had never applied or whose projects had been rejected. This also meant that the focus shifted from the specificity of the NGOs in terms of structure (local, national and international) to their project management capacities and their understanding of the EYF's values and approach. This change represented a kind of conclusion of this long process of mutual co-operation between the EYF and NGOs.

2. EYF (Re)wind in brief

With this new point of view in mind, the organisers had the following objectives, to:

- gain awareness of the different situations that organisations address with the support of the EYF;
- improve transparency between the EYF and youth organisations and accountability;
- share best practices concerning projects, for example how to integrate a gender perspective, how to ensure a good impact, etc.

During the ideation of the Seminar, the EYF also decided to aim to *achieve open and informal networking between representatives of international, national and local NGOs*, as well as between the EYF team and the people running projects with EYF support.

After the selection of participants, this objective was modified because no international NGOs applied and only a few national ones sent participants. In view of this, the EYF team decided to work more on how NGOs can embrace the EYF's approach, regardless of their local or national structure.

- a) **Duration:** four working days, from 1-4 March 2017
- b) **Participants:** 30 participants representing 30 different local (17) and national (13) youth NGOs from 23 countries.
- c) **Resource persons:** in order to support the learning and sharing process of participants, the EYF team invited two members of the Programming Committee on Youth (CPJ): Mr Mihai Sebe, European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) Romania, Mr Patrick Hennelly, World Organisation of the Scout Movement (WOSM) who took part in the whole of the Seminar. Both of them took part in the whole process and were a big support to all of the participants.
- d) **Selection criteria and process:**

An open Call for Participants for the EYF (Re)wind seminar was disseminated through the EYF network of youth organisations and the Foundation's website. The Call requested applicants to be:

 - able to work in English;
 - aged between 18-30 (some exceptions for 30+ were possible);
 - responsible for running youth projects (writing applications, implementing, reporting) for an international, national or local NGO registered with the EYF;
 - working as multipliers in their organisation.

For the final selection, the EYF tried to ensure a gender balance and a good geographical representation of Council of Europe member States, as well as organisations dealing with a range of subjects/topics/issues. Furthermore, the EYF selected one participant per organisation in order to ensure a diverse representation of organisations. The EYF also tried to keep a balance among NGOs that had never applied for EYF support, those that had applied but were still being assessed and those that had had no approved applications. Finally, the selection process focused on the personal motivation of candidates and their organisational needs.

- e) **Rationale of mixing NGOs with different experiences in relation to the EYF:**

In the first place, it was the EYF's goal to have mixed groups in terms of organisational structure, it was felt this would help when dealing with all of the difficulties NGOs experienced when applying for the different EYF grants. As there were more local organisations than national ones and no international organisations, the general overview of the seminar changed and the programme became more focused on how NGOs could be helped to better understand how to develop non-formal educational activities at the local level.

The EYF team decided, therefore, to focus only on pilot activities and not to cover other grants, thus giving both local and national NGOs the opportunity to work on the same topic.

In this frame, the networking among NGOs dimension was developed more in the Seminar's informal spaces than during specific sessions.

This mix of national and local youth NGOs seems to have had an interesting effect on the group: those that had never applied were willing to understand how to do it and felt sometimes a bit lost in the overall dynamic of the seminar; the NGOs whose projects had been rejected expressed their frustration to the team and the group. Eventually, the two groups found a way to work together thanks to the strong will of most of them to understand the EYF context and approach, its values and principles and above all the fact that "there is no recipe" for writing good projects.

Finally, the evaluation of the seminar revealed that of the 30 participants, 16 considered working in a mixed group "Useful", eight found it "Enriching", one found it "Enlightening", nine considered it "Easy", and two thought it was "Difficult". In relation to group work, two people found it difficult to work in small groups for two main reasons: participants' different levels of understanding and motivation for the process.

f) Learning needs expressed by the participants:

From the beginning, the programme was designed with two key elements in mind:

- the objectives of the Seminar as they had been set by the Foundation, and
- the needs expressed by the participants in their application forms.

The preparatory meeting between the EYF team and the co-ordinators took place after the selection had been made. This allowed for the participants' needs to be taken into consideration when finalising the programme.

This process of taking the participants' needs into account was repeated twice at the beginning of the Seminar: during the session which focused on the learning objectives, concerns and contributions, and after the trainers had described the programme itself. At this point, the participants were invited to post their learning objectives on the relevant sessions of the programme if they felt their learning points were covered or on a sheet of paper if they felt their learning objectives were not covered by the programme. On the last day, when participants were asked to indicate which of their learning objectives had not been covered during the four days, none of them had any remarks. This means that all of the learning objectives had been covered, even those where participants had doubts at the beginning of the Seminar.

g) Team: two co-ordinators who worked closely with the EYF team.

h) Programme: the programme was built around three central elements: the objectives set by the EYF team; the learning needs expressed by the participants; and the EYF's principles and spirit – two-way communication, transparency, accountability, flexibility and respect.

With these aspects in mind, the programme included one day to get to know each other on the personal level and to better understand the EYF and its context (Day 1); one day dedicated to simulations on writing pilot activity applications, where participants were invited to put themselves in the NGOs' shoes (Day 2); one day dedicated to assessing pilot activity applications, where the participants were in the EYF's shoes (Day 3); and finally, three sessions dedicated to some elements which are fundamental to the implementation of pilot activities on the local level, i.e. the essentials of project management, non-formal education methodology/principles and including a gender perspective in youth work (Days 2 and 4). In order to increase the participants' sense of ownership of the entire process and to cover other remaining learning objectives, a specific open-space session was organised on the last day.

✓ **Day 1:** to introduce participants to the Seminar and its context and to allow them to get to know each other on a personal level, both as individuals and as a group. To achieve this goal, the team proposed a dynamic borrowed from the Theatre of the Oppressed, called "Espace Stop". It worked perfectly and helped a lot to create a very warm and nice group dimension. This first afternoon was dedicated to the EYF and its context. The participants and team were pleased to welcome Matthew Johnson, Director of Democratic Citizenship and Participation to this session. Thanks to the carousel method, the EYF team was able to explain to the participants four different aspects that define the Foundation's daily work: the approach; the different types of support available; the registration and application processes; the website and the online system. In the evening, the two trainers provided a space to continue the getting-to-know-you process on the organisational level for those who were interested.

✓ **Day 2:** the lead-in session of the day was dedicated to the creation of a common ground and understanding in relation to the essentials of project management. The exercise enabled participants to share how they usually work on project management at their local level. Each small group worked on a different topic: needs analysis and target groups, aims and objectives, output/outcome/impact, monitoring and evaluation. The entire day was then dedicated to writing pilot activity applications in small groups. The day ended with the presentation of the six pilot activity projects that had been developed by the participants and a common reflection session during which the participants shared their experiences, feelings and learning after the intense simulation exercise.

✓ **Day 3:** as in previous years, the highlight of the week was this first session during which participants wore the "EYF's shoes" and assessed the proposals prepared by each other's groups. The simulation ended with a presentation of the assessment results by each group and the two CPJ members' assessment. The EYF team also gave feedback on the participants' work. After the simulation, participants were able to share their reflections on and main learning points from the previous simulation sessions. After lunch, a session was dedicated to reporting as this is an important part of the entire process of implementing a pilot activity. This was the last session of the day. In the afternoon, the participants visited the Council of Europe and then had a free afternoon.

✓ **Day 4:** the first session was meant to provide participants with basic inputs on different educational approaches and types of learning: formal education, non-formal education, informal learning. The session concretely framed the elements the EYF expects to find when it asks that youth projects have a non-formal education dimension. The second part of the morning was dedicated to a very important element for the EYF: integrating the gender perspective into youth projects. The session started with a simulation, continued with a brainstorm on concepts, and ended with a case-study exercise that enabled the participants to recognise the gender dimension in their projects and find solutions/strategies to tackle it. The day continued with an open-space session with the aim of supporting participants to go deeper into specific concepts such as the gender perspective of a youth project, the different types of EYF support, the experience of crowd funding in youth work. The day ended with the final evaluation of the seminar and the farewell party.

i) Outcomes and highlights of the seminar

The evaluation focused on the highlights, the weaknesses, the points to be improved and steps that could be taken in the future.

Some of the highlights

With regard to the listed criteria, the participants:

- **meeting and seeing the EYF team in action**
 - *generally appreciated working with the EYF team and the CPJ members in a friendly and open atmosphere.*
- **understanding the EYF and how it works**
 - *learnt how the EYF system works and what it expects from applications, as well as discussed procedures and conditions.*
- **understanding better reporting**
 - *learnt about some common mistakes.*
- **gender perspective**
 - *had a better idea of how to integrate the gender perspective into their projects and considered this session one of the highlights.*
- **meeting, working and being with the rest of the group**
 - *appreciated the opportunity to exchange and network with young people from other countries.*
- **overall reflections**
 - *gained useful knowledge and new ideas.*

Sessions highlighted as the most useful

- **EYF and its context**
 - *how the EYF works.*
- **Simulation on writing and assessing Pilot Activities**
 - *designing a pilot activity because it helped them to understand better how the EYF/CPJ, on the one hand, and they themselves on the other see them.*
- **Gender perspective**
 - *very well planned and organised.*
- **Non-Formal Education**
 - *how to integrate NFE into their projects even though some hadn't heard of this concept before.*

Sessions highlighted as the least useful

- **Gender perspective and non-formal education**
 - *the gender and NFE sessions were less useful but only to those who had prior knowledge.*
- **Reporting**
 - *the reporting quiz was time consuming and of little use.*
- **Project Management**
 - *"Essentials of project management": level was too basic.*
- **Open space**
 - *Not necessarily useless but too short.*
- **Council of Europe visit**
 - *not too impressive.*
- **Everything was good...**
 - *Every session brought something new to learn.*

Some of the aspects to be changed

- **About the team**
 - *too many organisers, it was confusing.*
- **About the duration of the seminar**
 - *an extra day to cover more topics and "digest" new subjects.*
- **I would like to have more/less...**
 - *more frontal explanation;*

- *more free time at lunch and informal time;*
- *more small-groups work;*
- *more time for presentations of the organisations;*
- *more free time for networking;*
- *less time on non-formal learning and gender;*
- *more strict with the schedule.*

- **sometimes there was too much...**
 - *useless sitting around and discussing in groups;*
 - *too many flipcharts and reporting.*

- **gender perspective**
 - *suggestion that it should be before project writing to see if participants have understood the concept.*

- **a lot of participants did not give any further suggestions...**
 - *everything was perfect;*
 - *everything was excellent.*

Was the gender perspective session useful?

Mainly found to be useful, and presented in a tactful and sensitive way, it clarified the issue for most of the participants although some felt it to be a very complicated part of the EYF-application process. Some of the participants would have appreciated more time on this issue.

Added-value for the organisations...

Gender perspective; assessment of needs as well as the local impact; new partnerships, knowledge, skills, inspiration; the importance of a coherent project; understanding the role of the EYF, the Council of Europe and the different grants available.

...and on a personal level

Better understanding of how NGOs all over Europe function; new partnerships; examples of good practice, new motivation and perspectives; new approach to project writing; new knowledge on NFE and gender matters. And the participants loved the process and met some awesome people!

Proposals for the future

Here are some thoughts that were not mentioned in the other sections of the evaluation form:

- take some sessions outside and make use of different methods rather than just small/big group discussions;
- send more information related to the content of the course in advance (for example the quiz set prior to the event was thought to be a great tool for exploring the topics and the EYF website).

3. Co-ordinators' conclusions

Strong elements:

The involvement of the EYF team in the Seminar once again proved to be crucial. The physical presence and the interaction between the team and the group were very much appreciated by the participants. The EYF team has achieved a high level of autonomy and confidence in running sessions based on the non-formal learning approach as a result of this series of EYF seminars. Furthermore, even though the team was big and there were some newcomers who may not have felt completely comfortable with the flow of the programme, the size of the group allowed everyone to find her/his place in the group.

The preparation of the Seminar went well, it covered every element of the programme and allowed the whole team to contribute, to feel safe and confident about the sessions, the methods and the content to be delivered.

Weak elements:

Most of the weaknesses are related to the profile of the participants, especially those whose projects had been rejected many times or who had never applied before and were totally new to the EYF and the Council of Europe. Most often, these participants asked for a fixed recipe for writing projects, thus the team had to adapt the programme in such a way that sometimes it resembled more a course than a seminar. But this is probably more a cause for concern for the team than for the participants, who had the opportunity to be trained in project management and non-formal learning. An additional difficulty to tackle was that most of the participants were used to working in the Erasmus+ context and they experienced difficulties in understanding the differences between the EU and the CoE youth sector.

Major learning points:

Once again, the simulation method proved fruitful when exploring the processes to prepare and evaluate grant applications, leading to some "Aha" moments. The participation of two CPJ members in the assessment simulation added much more value. That particular group of participants stressed that it is very important to not take concepts and principles for granted: sometimes it is very useful to explain to them more than once and with very clear words. The gender perspective session seemed to work better than last year so this is a good base for implementing it.

Trainers' opinion on the methodology:

The use of non-formal learning methodology was deliberate and consistent with the work of the Council of Europe's youth sector. It was also consistent with the values of the EYF and, in this sense, was proof for the participants that the Foundation practices what it preaches.

Achievements:

Last but not least, the word cloud below speaks for itself in terms of what was achieved during this seminar.

