

THE ART OF CONVERSATION -

HOW REGIONAL / COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS SUCCESSFULLY REACH DIVERSE AUDIENCES

ECFI Thematic meeting 3-5 April 2019, Kortrijk, Belgium



Summary

This report provides a summary of key learning points from a 2 day meeting hosted and co-designed by Streekfonds, (Community Foundation for West Flanders). The meeting involved external expert input (annex 1) and sharing of knowledge and experience among 16 communications specialists (annex 2) from community foundation and community foundation support organisations. Trends, opportunities and challenges, and practical tips were noted, ensuring that participants benefited from individual learning but also to contribute to consolidating knowledge for sharing more widely in the community foundation field.

Objectives

To learn from experts in the communications field

To share knowledge and experience among community foundation practitioners

To inform and inspire

Topics covered

1. The role of a national community foundation support organisation
2. Trends in communications and marketing
3. Media partnerships
4. Going viral
5. Communications as a tool for capacity building - MediaLab Quindo
6. Preparing a communications strategy

1. The role of a national community foundation support organisation

Telling the story of community foundations in the UK - case study from UKCF

“Our network of 46 community foundations funds some amazing groups who are at the forefront of tackling some of the most pressing issues in society.”

This is how in one sentence UKCF, the network of 46 community foundations describes the work of its members.

UKCF has a role in communicating on behalf of the network (‘to shine light on the network’) and in developing communication skills within the network. It aims to:

- Build a collective voice
- Demonstrate impact
- Share best practice
- Upskill members
- Build better relationships
- Improve planning

For example, in the use of social media UKCF helps provide a consistent, positive messaging and content about Community Foundations that everyone can share, with relevant hashtags. Channels are selected according to purpose with Twitter being used more for ‘through leadership’ and Facebook for community engagement. Local radio and TV are considered vital channels to demonstrate the scope of the work and value added of a community foundation, to build a story around issues and highlight specific causes, and to make connections between relevant stakeholders (notably donors and local groups).

Challenges identified by UKCF that exist within the network and in respect of external communications were presented.

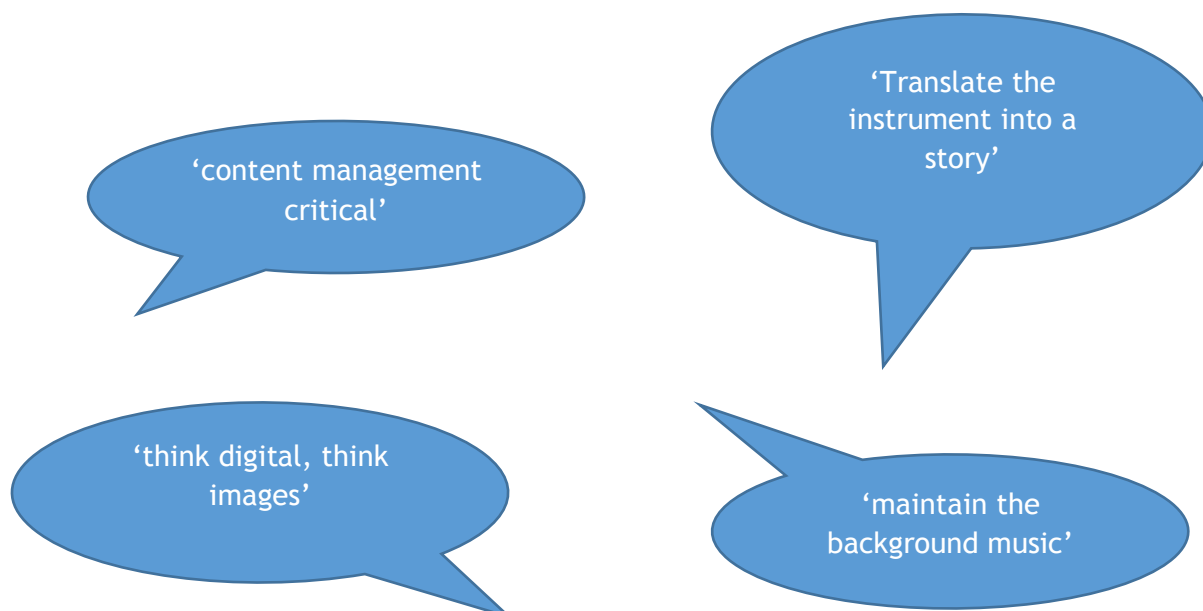
Network	External
Varying skills, expertise and resources	Low profile of Community Foundations
Cover different and overlapping areas	Public perception of philanthropy
Variety and volume of activity	Capacity of grant-holders
Working with grassroots groups	Competition from charities and funders
Topical v political	Changing local media landscape
Responsive, not proactive	
Network v movement	

2. Trends in communications and marketing

5 global trends were highlighted by Tom Delmott:

1. More visual
2. Shift to digital
3. Data driven
4. Collaborative
5. Telling the story (Simple, Unexpected, Concrete, Credible, Emotional, Stories)

Participants added the following from their practical experience:



3. Media partnerships

The value of a mutually beneficial long term relationship was highlighted through the example of Streekfonds and a Flemish regional TV station (Focus-w TV). The relationship goes deeper than a media partnership, Bart Coopman, Chief Editor Focus-w TV is also a board member of Streekfonds. The channel also has a significant on-line / on demand and social media presence. Streekfonds helps Focus-wTV demonstrate a genuine ‘feel for the region’ and can identify stories behind news items that can inspire journalists. It offers a trusted, credible and known voice. The partnership also allows for technical skills to be utilised for the benefit of local communities e.g. assisting in video production.

In discussion challenges and opportunities associated with a media partnership were identified.

Challenges	Opportunities
<p>Seeing the bigger picture</p> <p>Technical expertise (without looking overly slick / professional)</p> <p>Balancing between good news and bad news</p> <p>Controlling the message</p> <p>Aligning agendas between the CF and the media partner</p> <p>Resources (time to develop and maintain the relationship}</p> <p>Avoiding politicisation</p> <p>Showing the added value of a community foundation (e.g. when focus is on a project or where a project is multi-funded)</p> <p>Getting beyond simple issues to complex problems and not avoiding unpopular causes</p>	<p>Community foundations are good content providers for media channels</p> <p>Quality video content can be used in multiple channels</p> <p>Media channels can open new contacts and networks, acts as a connector, helps find new ambassadors</p> <p>A relationship with a third party / established media channel demonstrates how the community foundation is invested in the community</p> <p>Opportunities can arise for national coverage, reaching a broader audience</p> <p>Can start a deeper and wider debate on issues</p> <p>Releases the creativity and potential within the community</p> <p>Validates the work of the community foundation</p>

4. Going viral

Wendy Richardson from Global Fund for Community Development described the origin and success of the #shiftthepower campaign.

A good hashtag should:

- have less than 15 characters
- have a call to action
- have a verb in it, and
- not be time limited or related to a single event.

It was noted that effort needed to be put in to encourage use and helping it 'trend' as appropriate at different times in different countries. A sign of success is widespread adoption and recognition that it is more than a hashtag but a call to action - applicable in different contexts.

5. Communications as a tool for capacity building - Quindo

The Quindo project offers media as a tool for empowerment of young people. Originating as a pirate radio station it has evolved into a 'new media incubator' which provides information with and for young people; acts as a social programme targeting vulnerable young people; and offers training and skills development. More information on Quindo can be found here <https://www.quindo.be/>

6. Preparing a communications strategy

Building on learning and through a practical exercise the following key elements were identified for an effective communications strategy.

Purpose(s) - can be multiple but should be prioritised

Audiences - segmented (and as specific as possible) related to purposes

Geographical reach - of the community foundation / support organisation and its stakeholders (for example while the primary focus may be on the area covered by the foundation donors could reside much further afield)

Background music - maintain the consistent ongoing message relative to the context

Messaging - develop inspiring messages related to purposes and respective audiences, and consider how the message will evolve over time (e.g. before, during and after a specific event).

Branding - think how the branding supports the message and which brand should come to the fore (the support organisation, the community foundation, donors, local groups / projects)

Actions and tools - think about which are most appropriate in the short, medium and long term, and the complementarity of various tools.

For a community foundation - consider the value of a media partnership (and collaborate with other community foundations if geographic coverage of media partner covers more than one community foundation), gather relevant images, consider how communications actions can be enhanced by engaging with people in the community (volunteers, project beneficiaries, donors) and / or how this engagement can in itself contribute to achieving the purpose (e.g. raising awareness, building capacity, demonstrating impact) prepare video clips / vlogs, stories (with credible evidence / data), prepare a systematic approach to use of social media in relevant channels (Twitter , FB, Instagram, LinkedIn), consider printed material such as post cards (e.g. with pics of staff / volunteers for personal distribution), press releases, radio / TV interviews, identify who will deliver messages / stories, ensure everyone within the community foundation is 'on message' and familiar with the stories.

For a support organisation - build capacity in community foundations (direct support and communications skills training), develop core messages, prepare templates (press releases, twitter feeds, FB messages etc), create a taskforce committee of community foundations to better integrate the message, assign a #, align national and local community foundation driven communications actions (timing, messaging, targeting).

Who is the voice and / or the image - identify who can deliver and add value to the message, cultivate 'ambassadors' appropriate for respective audiences and support them as required.

Resources required - identify what is required in terms of people, time and money to implement the communications strategy.

Annex 1

External expert input

Bart Coopman, Chief Editor Focus-w TV

Alexander Deweppe, coordinator MediaLab Quindo

Tom Delmott Content Marketeer, spokesman and storyteller with Mex United, HOWEST University of Applied Science

Annex 2

Participants

Stefanie Albers - Streekmotor23, Belgium

Andreea Alexandrov - Galati Community Foundation, Romania

Anja Boelhoff - ECFI, Germany

Ariela Cataloluk - Duisburg Community Foundation, Germany

Sally Catmull - UK Community Foundations, United Kingdom

Jan Despiegelaere - Streekfonds, West Flanders Community Foundation, Belgium

Mihaela Giurgiu - ECFI, Netherlands

George Gurescu - Association for Community Relations, Romania

Deckers Kristie - Community Foundation Limburg, Belgium

James Magowan - ECFI, Northern Ireland

Georgiana Mihailovici - Galati Community Foundation, Romania

Vincenzo Porzio - San Gennaro Community Foundation, Italy

Wendy Richardson - Global Fund for Community Foundations, Belgium

Natascha Trutzenberg - Alliance of German Community Foundations, Germany

David Utley-Williams - UK Community Foundations, United Kingdom

Patrik Vesan - Community Foundation of Aosta Valley, Italy