

Guidelines for the Establishment of EFC Interest Groups

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EFC Mission and Rationale for Interest Groups

The European Foundation Centre is an international association of foundations and corporate funders dedicated to creating an enabling legal and fiscal environment for foundations, documenting the foundation landscape, strengthening the infrastructure of the sector, and promoting collaboration, both among foundations and between foundations and other actors, to advance the public good in Europe and beyond.

Interest Groups represent an important vehicle to engage EFC Members, increase the EFC's knowledge base, reach out to a broader constituency within Member organisations (such as programme officers and specialist staff), attract new members, and strengthen the infrastructure for philanthropy in Europe.

They differ from other types of convening as they are Member-driven, have a longer-term horizon, seek to identify a common agenda/set of goals; aim to build up a core constituency of like-minded organisations; and offer a platform for foundations to learn and engage with one another.

More specifically, interest groups may seek to:

- Foster networking, information and best practice exchange, as well as better communication and coordination among funders interested in a specific field/region
- Enhance the knowledge base and professional skills of donors in a field/region
- Facilitate cooperation, as well as the development of/act as catalyst for new initiatives/joint ventures
- Encourage new donor activity in the field/region
- Strengthen relations with European, bi- and multilateral institutions, both at the policy and co-financing levels

Members should be mindful that building an interest group is a complex and time intensive process. It requires strong leadership, ownership of and commitment to the process, development of a common vision and provision of adequate support.

As part of the strategic plan, a review of existing EFC interest groups and networks took place in 2007, under the direction of the EFC Network Building Committee, NBC. The purpose was to put forward recommendations on how to better support and resource this area of work, as well as strengthen existing interest groups.

The following guidelines, approved by the EFC NBC in spring 2008, aim to provide a framework for strategic review of existing EFC interest groups and assist Members who wish to engage in establishing new ones. They apply only to interest groups/funder networks that wish to carry the EFC brand. The EFC recognises that foundations may wish to establish similar ventures entirely independently of the EFC and without reference or any type of a formal relationship with the Centre.

Criteria for Setting up an EFC Interest Group

1. EFC interest groups are established, owned and funded by EFC Members; they are open for participation to all EFC members.
2. EFC interest groups are expected to aspire to the EFC vision and values and adhere to the EFC Principles of Good Practice
3. Interest groups that carry the EFC brand are accountable to the EFC, through the Network Building Committee (see further).

Guidelines for Setting up an Interest Group

In setting up or growing EFC Interest Groups, it is recommended that foundations address the following steps, within the first 12 to maximum 18 months, in order to establish the group on a stable and sustainable basis. It is clear, however, that the governance structure, working methods and financing strategy will differ from one group to another and will depend on the mission and goals the Group has set out to achieve.

1. Explore interest among EFC Members to get a sense of which foundations would be interested in setting up an interest group, what their priorities are and what each can contribute (identifying the key “actors”). *Setting up an interest group should be considered when at least 5-6 EFC Members are willing to commit to this endeavour.*
2. Develop a statement of purpose and objectives.
3. Establish governance and participation rules, namely:
 - Appoint a Chair and Steering Committee; define mandate, duration, selection and renewal procedure, responsibilities, and working methods. *It is recommended that the Steering Committee is composed of at least three representatives with the majority being EFC Members.*
 - Define the core constituency and participation rules. These could include:
 - who can be part of the interest group - EFC members only; other foundations/corporate donors; other types of organisations (government or non-profit). EFC Interest Groups/Fora must be open to all interested Members of the EFC.
 - how do they join – by invitation, through an application procedure; or other;
 - minimum requirements of participation (for example, meeting attendance);
 - how to discontinue involvement;
 - Decide on whether or not to have participation fees.
4. Define working methods and an operational structure: key tasks, type and frequency of interaction; secretariat – where and how it will operate (based at the EFC, housed by a member of the interest group; rotating, other).
5. Develop an annual or multi-annual work programme with budget.
6. Establish how the work and the secretariat of the group will be funded (through grants, IG participation fees, or other).
7. Define the relationship with the EFC Secretariat and develop Terms of Reference.

8. Define the relationship with potential other key stakeholders – within or outside the foundation community
9. The Network Building Committee advises on the fulfilment of the key criteria prior to the formal launch of the group.

Accountability

The EFC Secretariat is an ex-officio member of the governance structure of EFC interest groups, independently of where the Secretariat of the interest group is based.

Interest Groups report periodically to the EFC Network Building Committee by means of a short paper outlining their mission, key objectives, governance, membership, how they are supported (finances and human resources) and how they contribute to advancing the EFC vision.

Once the Interest Groups Criteria and Guidelines are introduced, existing Interest Groups have up to a maximum of three years to meet these requirements.

For an Interest Group to carry the EFC brand, it is required that it follows the criteria and guidelines above, independently of where its Secretariat is based. The endorsement of an Interest Group as an EFC IG lies with the Committee.

Role of the EFC Secretariat and Services to Interest Groups

- If requested, the EFC can provide Secretariat services for an Interest Group. A detailed overview of the specific services and the associated costs should be included in the jointly agreed Terms of Reference.
- Services can include:
 - Support to the Steering Committee
 - Organisation of interest group meetings; other types of events
 - Information searches, assistance with contacts
 - Building a knowledge base for the group: gathering and dissemination of relevant articles, reports, practices, etc.
 - Communications services: assist with the writing and publication of press releases and articles about the work of the IG; development and dissemination of promotional materials; listserves/discussion groups; website development
 - Building and maintenance of relationships with relevant stakeholders/networks – including EU institutions, other relevant government/multilateral agencies
- The EFC Secretariat can provide:
 - The equivalent of up to 5 days of staff time per year to existing interest groups with a Secretariat outside the EFC in its capacity as ex-officio member of the Steering Committee. This should be covered in the Terms of Reference
 - The equivalent of up to 10 days per year towards the incubation of interests groups over a period of maximum 2 years and prior to the signature of the Term of Reference. Services such as mappings, feasibility studies, surveys during the incubation phase can be provided against a fee, or developed as a funded project.
- The EFC Secretariat ensures links, information sharing and networking among different interest group