



CC MANAGEMENT TIPS 2007

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INTRODUCTION

Every Cooperation Circle is unique in terms of characteristics and dynamics: the size of its membership, diversity of its projects, initiatives and events, schedule of meetings, etc. CCs have varied missions and objectives. Nonetheless, CCs share similar circumstances and common tasks. In this MANAGEMENT section, you will learn about different styles of CC management, management techniques and more about these common tasks. CCs are part of the URI network, a global organization with its own community culture and identity. The MANAGEMENT section also covers the relation between CCs and the URI (regional coordinators, global trustees and the San Francisco staff). This section offers several tips and suggestions on CC management and activities. They serve as a general guideline and are not to be taken as rules to be followed. They offer procedures that have been tested, that work. The key point is to use good judgement and adapt these guidelines to your local CC.

ORGANIZING CC MEETINGS

It seems rather easy to organise a CC meeting, it does not seem to require special skills. Still, the promotion of dialogue and interfaith cooperation rests on the quality of these meetings. It is the main opportunity for brainstorming and coming up with action plans for the CC. The meetings also offer the ideal environment for furthering relationships, for exchanging experiences and fostering solidarity among CC members. A productive CC meeting has the following characteristics: notification, venue, facilitator management style, rhythm, record-keeping, documentation and creating the ideal atmosphere among members.

Members should be notified of meetings at least two weeks ahead of time. They should receive invitations with meeting objectives and topics clearly stated, and this notification can be made by mail, fax, email or telephone. The invitation should also include the scheduled duration of the meeting so people can plan ahead. In the case the CC is new or if the CC plans to invite non-members to the meeting, the invitation should include a list of participants.

SCHEDULING MEETINGS

Ideally, CCs should schedule meetings on a regular basis at a fixed time to make it easier for members to remember. For example, a meeting could be scheduled every third Thursday of the month at 6 p.m. Everyone would therefore be aware of

the exact date of the meeting beforehand, being able to schedule future appointments in their day-books for the remainder of the year. CCs should schedule at least one meeting per month. If monthly meetings are not possible, they should be scheduled at periodic intervals, every other month or on a quarterly basis etc.

Meeting times should be suitable for all group members. Still, it is not a good idea to schedule meetings during office hours (9 a.m. to 6 p.m.), on Friday night or on Sundays. Best days and times are Monday, Thursday and Saturday, early evening. Meeting participants should fill out a form with their names, religion, spiritual and/or indigenous tradition, address, telephone number, fax and email. New member contact information can be added to a data bank so it contains updated information.

The more diverse the spiritual traditions represented at the CC, the greater the chance for promoting dialogue and interfaith cooperation. Therefore, it is important to continue inviting religious leadership that is not yet part of the CC to participate in meetings and activities. Contact information for the majority of these religious groups can be found on the internet or in a telephone directory.

VENUE

Meeting rooms should meet minimum requirements: a quiet space and chairs or seats placed in a circle can create a relaxed environment. Easily accessible locations and open spaces with good lighting are preferred. In most cases, meetings are held in a member's home, in a religious centre or in the CCs' head-office. Meetings can always take place at the same location or can change if needed, according to the type of CC and its conditions. Often different religious groups take turns hosting meetings. This is a good idea as it teaches members about the religious diversity within the membership. However, sometimes it is important to choose a neutral setting. For example, when an Evangelical Pastor is invited to participate in a CC meeting for the first time, it may not be a good idea to hold that occasion at a Spiritualist Centre. It is important to be sensitive to the personal or institutional difficulties of those we want to establish dialogue with; they may be prejudiced towards or fear interacting with people of different spiritual belief systems.



Meeting hosts should always offer water, coffee or tea and biscuits at meetings. Snacks are always a good idea! Often CC members contribute with food for snacks or a supper at the end of the meeting. It is important to be sensitive to diet restrictions of members. For many people, diet reflects their religious identity. For example: when hosting a CC meeting

for a Hindu religious group, the snack should include a vegetarian dish. No one should leave the meeting feeling hungry and no one should be placed in an awkward position.

FACILITATING THE MEETING & RECORD-KEEPING

CC meetings have several objectives: to manage and make decisions about the CC and CC activities, foster dialogue among members, reflect over significant facts, clarify doubts, welcome new members, etc. A facilitator or moderator should make sure all the items of the agenda are covered in the meeting. The role of the facilitator is a very important one because he/she is responsible for running the meeting. Many times the facilitator is also the CC coordinator or someone with experience with running meetings. Different members can take turns as the meeting facilitator. It is important to take comments in order, make sure everyone gets a chance to speak, control the time when members talk for too long, mediate opposite opinions and keep the meeting focused on the agenda.



Start the meeting by asking participants to introduce themselves. They should state their name, religion, spiritual tradition and/or indigenous tradition and profession. Starting out with a short prayer or mantra can create an atmosphere that is spiritual, that encourages mutual respect. It is also a good idea to close the meeting with a moment of silence or a brief meditation, as this serves the function of strengthening group bonds. In this case, it is very important to take turns honouring different religions, spiritual traditions and/or indigenous traditions.

The facilitator or a note-taker should prepare minutes of the meeting with the main points and final decisions. This will enable absent CC members to have access to the meeting minutes and stay up to date. Furthermore, it will be easier to follow-up the items of the agenda in the next meeting. It may also be a good idea to take group photos every so often to serve as a group memoir.

GETTING TOGETHER TIPS

People lead busy and stressful lives. No one has that much time to have fun, to do volunteer work, or work for a cause. So, CC meetings should be both enjoyable and meaningful for members. At meetings it is important to highlight key concepts, such as working towards a common goal, making a joint effort to build a Culture of Peace, and local and global cooperation efforts through URI. Meetings should leave participants feeling motivated and should also reinforce their ability to dedicate their time to interfaith work. An ideal meeting achieves a harmonious balance between productivity, informality and a happy environment. CCs should celebrate



special occasions, such as birthdays, births, weddings, etc. CCs should also offer support during times of need, such as deaths, accidents, illness and loss. CC member solidarity reflects the group's overall attitude towards the world. It is important to make time for this type of exchange and meeting of hearts and minds during meetings.

STARTING & PLANNING A COOPERATION CIRCLE

To start up a CC, members need to come up with a mission statement and main objectives. This statement can be focused but, at the same time, must be in accord with the overall URI purpose. URI offers action guidelines in its Global Agenda: working towards a culture of peace, defending human rights, ecology, social justice, interfaith dialogue, and support for the URI. Even if these guidelines are not part of the CC's mission statement, it is important to consider this overall URI action agenda.

CCs should prepare an annual or bi-annual strategic plan in alignment with their mission. This will allow the group to set up and meet realistic goals. CCs should take into consideration several factors: priorities, human resources, time allocation, financial resources and funds, infrastructure, partnerships, opportunities, etc. In general, it is best to reserve time for planning at the beginning or at the end of the year. January is a good time of year for planning as people are less busy than in December. Schedule at least one day for strategic planning meetings. The CC agenda and priorities should reflect local and domestic realities. They should consider society's main problems and needs. The URI is at the service of humanity and all living beings.



Ideally, meetings should be divided into two parts: dreams and commitment. At the beginning, brainstorming will allow the group to use their imagination so they can, as a group, conceive desired outcomes. The group should gradually reach a consensus or vote on a list of feasible top priority action plans. In the planning phase, each member should take on only those tasks he or she feels capable of handling. Many times people start out feeling very motivated and as a result may end up taking on more than they can handle. The main action plans should be in alignment with the CC's main projects.

WORKING GROUPS AND VOLUNTEER WORK

Most CCs rely exclusively on volunteers who believe in and support URI and CC proposals. For that reason it is more productive to assign tasks and efforts based on each active member's skills and abilities. For example: if one of the members is a journalist, he or she can then be responsible for writing and disseminating news releases and preparing an activities report. If one of the members has good public relations skills, then he or she can take on CC's public relations.

Often a CC may develop activities on different topics. Again, each member's individual skills and interests should be considered in creating the Topic Working Groups – TWG. For example: lawyers might work with more-activist CC members so they can cover like-minded topics.

Volunteer work management requires a lot of attention and supervision. Frequently, volunteers are very motivated but they need training in the necessary skills to get the job done. It is also important to support volunteers by showing them the impact of their work. Volunteers need to be committed to their jobs. Just because volunteers work for free does not mean that they should not follow working hours or not be dedicated workers. Generally, the more organized and serious the CC routine, the more likely the volunteer is to take his/her job seriously. CCs should thank anyone who volunteers privately and in public on a regular basis. It is a good idea to print out a certificate or diploma for volunteers/volunteer work at the end of the year.

EVENT ORGANIZING

Events can be an important part of CC activities because they offer the opportunity to bring together members and new friends, partners, sponsors and beneficiaries. Events draw the public's attention to CC topics or activities thus engaging and



fostering commitment to the cause. Events are also ideally suited to energize the group by offering people the chance to share their experiences. Events increase the group's sense of identity, bring the group together and foster communication. Events bring CCs to the forefront, and, as such, provide a great opportunity to use the media. It is rare for the press to cover a project step by step or show interest in interfaith dialogue meetings. The media looks for stories that generate good pictures and events symbolize the high point of an activity or the characters involved. The event can be: a workshop, round table, debate, conference, public demonstration or public hearing, a march, celebration, fundraising dinner, homage, a vigil, a show, a sacred music festival, book or CD launch, exhibition, film exhibition, project launch or closing, children's activities, inaugural class etc. Organizing events comprises of planning, budget allocation, outreach, logistics, communications, and, when the time comes, being ready to make decisions and react on the spur of the moment. When

faced with a challenging situation in an event, it is essential to remain calm and in control. See in this section a few tips on how to organize events.

OUTDOOR EVENTS

Activities that take place outdoors, in squares, parks, roads, and court houses, offer the opportunity to present the activities and the vision of CCs to citizens and media alike. Public hearings at court houses raise relevant issues for CCs, bringing up their cause before congresspersons. Philanthropic activities in low income neighbourhoods or for minority groups offer CCs and URI the chance to serve the community. Marketing and cultural campaigns have taken over public spaces. Public space

could also be used to foster solidarity and a cultures of peace, justice and healing. In this manner, we can raise public awareness to get everyone involved in supporting community projects. At the location of an event, it is important to follow legal requirements. For example, events should not stop traffic. It is important to remember that the event organizer must contact, notify and get authorization from appropriate legal authorities (The so called “*Nada a Opor*”) when organizing outdoor events. For events that require setting up a stage or scaffolding, it is essential to take necessary safety measures to guarantee public safety.

WORKSHOPS AND DEBATES

In interfaith work, dialogue, debates, workshops, panels and round table discussions help promote the exchange of ideas, experiences, best practices and inspiring stories. This exchange helps overcome discrimination and stereotypes and contribute towards the creation of a new vision or joint goals. Furthermore, in order to respect diversity we need to take advantage of these opportunities to get know each other better and to understand different points of views, whether they are members of CCs or representatives of other organizations or members of civil society. These activities also offer the opportunity to work alongside universities and research centers.

It is important to clearly define the event’s topics and issues and present clear rules for facilitators. CCs should also contact the panellists and trade show participants prior to the event to avoid radicalism or embarrassing attitudes. It is pointless to get into sensitive topics that may only further segregate religious groups. The study of comparative religions may be an interesting and educational subject, but participants should avoid criticizing or expressing judgmental views of other religions. CCs could offer a panel on best practices for like-minded social programs under the coordination of different religious groups. For example: an interfaith panel exhibition on “social programs for street kids.”

FUNDRAISING DINNERS

Events may also serve to raise funds and donations for the CC or a specific project. Whether it is a fundraising dinner, Bingo, an auction, a donation based bazaar, or all of the above, a fun event could reinforce the CC’s top initiatives. Sponsors for philanthropic events are essential to enable setting up an event for free or at a reduced initial cost. Retailers such as restaurants, supermarkets and retail stores usually contribute depending on the fundraising objectives and sponsorship affiliation. Sometimes a CC member may personally sponsor an activity or have a good sponsor contact.

The event organizer should create a relaxed, easy-going atmosphere. CC members should feel motivated to participate in the organization of the event, ticket sale, preparation and guest hospitality. It is a great opportunity for relatives, friends and colleagues to get to know URI and CCs. A creative interior decoration or use of signs (different types of banners) and a good sound track can help create just the right atmosphere. An MC (Master of Ceremonies) with a good sense of humour should take charge of the event, keeping order and expressing the meaning of the activity. CCs should try to have the media promote the event. Soon after the event the CC should announce the amount of funds raised to show transparency and elicit the trust of the participants.

PARTNERSHIPS

We live in an age of information where networks have taken on the role of global agents and social reform. A non-profit organization cannot launch a significant project without the support of a partner or network of similar organizations. Partnership does not necessarily mean sponsorship; instead, it means joint projects. One of URI's principles is to form partnerships with other interfaith organizations or other NGOs who are working for a Culture of Peace or URI Agenda guidelines. CCs need to set an example by strengthening social cohesion, and uniting institutes and citizens to support peace and healing. URI is a bridge-building organization, and as such, the bridge unites different social players. Bridges also represent partnerships. A CC can form partnerships with NGOs, religious groups, foundations, schools, universities, research centres, companies, communication departments, consumer agencies, municipal and state and federal boards, ministries, trade unions, lawyer associations, hospitals, walk-in clinics, and physically handicapped associations, etc.



COOPERATING WITH LIKE-MINDED ORGANIZATIONS

Several organizations in a city may share common goals while at the same time choosing to use unique methods and contacts. Frequently these organizations compete with each other for funding as sources of funding are scarce, and often the same. This leads to social disintegration. Nevertheless, project partners can implement an efficient approach with profound repercussions by taking on a common approach and sharing goals. URI promotes associations and partnerships among faith traditions, religious movements and social programs committed to building cultures of peace. Partnerships with both the private and public sectors can only foster new projects and activities for humanitarian purposes and for all living beings. The benefit of partnerships is that each organization brings into the partnership its own experience making the partnership stronger. It is important to set clear roles and tasks for each party to ensure the successful completion of activities.

Types of Partnerships:

- Human Rights: human rights organizations, lawyers association, NGOs, public ministries, journalists, trade unions.
- Outdoor events: national and city parks, government offices, ecological NGOs.
- Relationship between Science and Spirituality: universities, scientific research centers, specialized publications.
- A public school course on educating for peace: religious groups and NGOs that work in educating for peace, schools, boards of education, teachers and trade unions.
- A campaign to gather donations for poor people: super markets, stores, clubs, schools.

ASSOCIATION WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

CCs can propose agreements with government offices and ministries in order to run a specific project. The requirement is for the CC to be a registered non-profit organization. In these cases it is a good idea to be careful when dealing with civil society. Be prepared to encounter bureaucracy and delays. However, if these types of partnerships are well planned, potential agreements will make long term bigger projects feasible, including hiring staff, etc. (for example, CCs can unite to propose a domestic program before the federal government.)

Religious networks and their organizations responsible for implementing social programs have an important role in society as they constitute a religious network of social welfare, fostering values and teaching citizens about these values. URI's ability to promote dialogue and cooperation among active religious groups pro welfare should be considered of public interest. URI has an important role to fulfil given its power to unite forces and achieve social inclusion while fostering peace and healing for the community. Since the state is responsible for promoting harmony among different ethnic groups, religions, minorities and fostering personal development, URI's role should then be considered of great value to civil society.

PREPARING PROJECTS

The social/interfaith activist's main tool is the project: it defines a plan of action, and the necessary strategy and time line. Creating a project is like planning an airplane trip: first you need to plan your itinerary by choosing your departure date and time and the end destination, then study the air currents, the weather, fuel, and have the necessary flight plan to remain on course. A project is made up of a series of tasks that have the potential of making a dream come true. This dream/objective,



like the main steps to reach these goals, should be planned by the CC team, together, preferably engaging people from partner organizations in a joint effort. Goals should be based on real needs and be in sync with the community. This outreach approach reinforces the amount of participation and commitment necessary on behalf of all parties to be able to implement the project. Idealistic goals are good in that it serves to keep people motivated, but the parties involved should check if the project is feasible.

A preliminary internet search on similar projects can be very helpful to gather information and avoid reinventing the wheel. A detailed budget and a realistic schedule will help the project manager and serve as a follow-up guide for all parties involved. There are several project formats and templates, some quite similar, available for reference, and may be helpful so one does not feel it is necessary to invent everything from scratch. A detailed budget, carefully elaborated, plus a realistic schedule will guide the project coordinator and serve to help all monitor the project.

The Main Points:

- Introduction and/or background: project facts and background
- Partners- name of the organization, network and team responsible for undertaking the project

- General Objective
- Main objectives
- Purpose—the reasons behind undertaking the project
- Target audience—who will benefit from this project?
- Methodologies—how will the project be developed?
- Indicators and objectives—parameters and results of implementing tasks
- Monitoring and reports—define a follow-up mechanism and relevant documents
- Sponsorship—dissemination of project sponsorship
- Budget—cost spreadsheet (CC shared costs, other sponsors, volunteers)
- Financial schedule—budget allocation of expenses

The project should be comprehensive: use graphs, text and tables, good quality paper, and hand out bound copies of the report. The presentation of the project should be of excellent quality: objective, clear, using reliable sources. The report should highlight the aspects of the project that match the sponsoring organization. Choose a concise name for the project that conveys its spirit. The majority of the organizations and agencies that finance non-profit projects use a standardized project format. The original project should then be customized to meet the sponsor’s format. It is a good idea to highlight aspects of the project that reinforce the project’s mission statement, agenda and the sponsor’s priorities.

FUNDRAISING AND OBTAINING PROJECT SUPPORT

CCs can achieve much even with a limited budget, however, never ending projects or mega-events require raising sufficient funds to meet these goals. Furthermore, an active CC needs to have the necessary infrastructure to run a business: office space, telephone, computer on line, stationary, etc. They may also need office assistance and project managers. To guarantee the expansion of CCs and their positive impact on society, it is necessary to raise funds for the project activities and CC project management.

One solution is to obtain project financing from: foundations, foreign and domestic NGOs, companies, banks, international cooperation agencies, multi-lateral agencies (UN, UNESCO, UNDP, Inter American Development Bank, World Bank) and municipal, state and federal offices, ministries and public agencies. Each financial institution possesses its own project selection and funding requirements. CCs can search on the internet relevant information of potential financial donors or access their websites directly. A financial institution may be interested in taking on an important cause for society. They are interested in projects that have identifiable and measurable impacts. Whether the financial institution is a company or government department, there is a preoccupation with what is called the *returns for their image*, a positive corporate marketing for the project sponsor. CCs should included this item in their reports and



highlight it during the presentation of the project. Each financing agency requires candidates to meet their own bureaucracy. There is one general rule, however: the project proposal should be consistent, realistic and in alignment with the community that will benefit as well as their financial partners.

A common practice is for CCs to use several sponsor-sources of financing (which should never be competitors). Direct financing for an organization or CC is very rare, as most NGOs survive on overhead costs of projects (allocated in the budget), which averages out to the 8 to 20% range, depending on the organization and the size of the project. This item includes the organization's infrastructure expenses such as cost of office space, telephone service, office materials, etc. It is also important to find alternative



fundraising sources such as receiving donations of goods, material and services per project. For example: an underprivileged youth sports project could count on the sponsorship of the sports store brand that is sponsoring the event. Another example: a teen pregnancy prevention program could include family doctor free lectures on the subject. These alternate forms of support should be highly valued as they serve as a compensation factor for the financial donor. Once CCs are successful in obtaining sponsorship and/or project support it is essential to maintain a good relationship with the sponsor: submit regular reports, send invitations to main events, send newspaper clippings (published by the media), photos, and offer participation in events organized by the sponsor etc.

INTERFAITH COOPERATION STRATEGIES



Most religious organizations are involved in social programs in the areas of education, health, creating job opportunities, generating income, ecology, promotion of cultures of peace, etc. Humanity and societies face complex challenges today; therefore, it is a good idea to promote interfaith cooperation. Furthermore, it may be easier to unite religious groups for a proposed action plan than to engage in interfaith dialogue. Therefore, one of CC's important roles is to try to reduce the gap between different religious social programs while expanding these programs. This can be achieved by considering the following elements: common areas; geographic proximity; climate and/or environmental tragedy; and/or human rights violation. To achieve this type of cooperation it is important to become familiar with the different religious groups, organizations and departments (for example: different church social programs, Catholic Church NGO etc) and follow their social programs. It is also a good idea to do

the same for universities, schools, hospitals, clinics, community centres, cultural institutes, youth movements etc. In most cases, society does not pay much attention to religious community work either because they have not been disseminated in

the media or because of a limited vision or generally due to the media's discrimination against religions. Therefore, the solution lies in gathering as much information as possible. Every religious group has its own media: websites, magazines, newspapers, news releases, radios and TV stations. It is a good idea to subscribe to religious group's mailing list to receive news releases and emails with current news.

A URI group might assist by identifying the main religious social programs and preparing a service guide for the poorer population. This survey can serve as a data base for workshops in which different religious groups can share their best practices and come up with joint solutions for most frequent problems. For example, an interfaith round table on action plans to improve living conditions of street children. A URI group can also identify the best religious projects in their neighbourhood or community so that their team can prepare a strategic plan based on efficiency and cooperation.

INTERACTION WITH URI NETWORK

REPORTS & UPDATES

The URI CC network exists in over 67 countries world-wide. One of the greatest challenges for Cooperation Circles is finding ways to share their achievements and interact with other CCs. One of the reasons URI was created was precisely to offer CCs the opportunity to exchange ideas and share experiences. Therefore, it is essential for each CC to keep the URI network updated with their main activities. It is important for them to keep in contact with the URI network and sustain a dynamic relationship as well as send frequent reports covering CCs projects and events. The main lines of communication among CCs are list serves. There are two global list serves: uri-contacts@uriglobal.org and uri-discussion@uriglobal.org. In addition, each region has a regional list serve. Please contact the URI coordinator in your region for more information how to sign up. Every year URI publishes an annual [URI Community Directory](#) with contact information and a description of each CC's primary activities.