

STRONGER OTS

How to Engage with Divergent Stakeholders

Experiences and Recommendations
for CSO Networks

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1/ Introduction

In the life of every civic society organisation (CSO) striving for systemic change in society, there comes a time when the CSO realizes that it needs to **talk or even collaborate with people from different sectors or backgrounds**. There may be a number of reasons: to explain a point of view, learn more about others' points of view, to find support for the cause, or seek agreement on what the change may look like. Although advocating for a particular point of view is an important part of efforts to change the system, without discussion and broader consensus, no major changes in the democratic environment will ever take place.

CSOs need to engage with the state administration, local municipalities, private companies, trade unions, churches and local communities as well as other CSOs and their networks. Whether the desired social change is a better educational system, more effective environmental protection or more people-based social services, CSOs cannot succeed in isolation.

This guide provides a theoretical and practical look at engaging with divergent stakeholders towards collaboration. It offers **practical tips and recommendations as well as real-world examples**.

Stronger Roots Program

This guide grew out of the experience of the Stronger Roots Program ("Program"), which aims to increase the effectiveness and resilience of CSOs and their networks. Its first phase was implemented in 2019-2022 by a consortium including Open Society Fund Prague, Glopolis, Open Society Foundation Bratislava and NIOK Foundation. Through the Program, a total of 9 CSO networks in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia were supported to establish or strengthen collaboration with divergent stakeholders. Their experience and learnings were crucial to the development of this guide and the concept of transversal collaboration.

Transversal collaboration is about CSOs engaging strategically with stakeholder groups of diverging interests, approaches and/or worldviews in order to provide effective solutions to societal challenges.

The Stronger Roots Program confirmed that transversal collaboration is applicable across different political, cultural and geographical contexts, various topics and types of activities.

The Program focused on **CSO networks** (i.e. platforms, coalitions, working groups, associations, umbrella and other network-like organisations working at local, regional and/or national level) because they often act as a natural bridge between individuals, local CSOs and national or even EU level collective efforts.

Despite the Program's focus on networks, most of the recommendations may also be useful for **individual CSOs** which seek to build relationships with stakeholders for different purposes such as advocacy, cooperation with local authorities or fundraising.

Case studies

To illustrate how different networks might engage with divergent stakeholders in specific thematic and national contexts, we share brief summaries of 3 projects supported by the Program.

Czech Republic, Association of Organisations Working in Penal Affaires

In order to improve the system of reintegration of ex-prisoners into society, the Association strived to initiate effective collaboration with the state Prison Service and define a shared vision for social reintegration of ex-prisoners. As the Association's ongoing interactions with the Prison Service had often been tense and strenuous in the past, the Association members had differing opinions on what approach to take: should the Association be critical and demanding of the Prison Service, or rather positive and offer constructive collaboration? A series of internal discussions led by an external facilitator helped Association members reach a consensus around adopting a constructive approach. Then, when the Covid-19 pandemic made it difficult for prisoners to communicate with their families, the Association's unified approach made it easier to start a joint project with the Prison Service setting up online communication points for prisoners and their families. This experience evolved into a more broad-reaching collaboration and the Association and Prison Service later signed an agreement on collaboration.

Slovakia, Association of Independent Producers

This platform, composed of professional associations of authors and performers as well as individual producers, broadcasters and publishers, initiated a structured dialogue between all of these parties. The aim was to agree on a model of fair remuneration for authors and performers in the audiovisual sector. The dialogue enabled the platform to discuss the needs, interests and positions of all of the parties in depth for the first time. But this process also made it clear that their opinions are much more sharply divided than expected. Misunderstandings arose between them and no collective agreement was reached. However, despite the failure of this particular effort, all of the parties are willing to continue the dialogue. The initial divergent phase was necessary because it enabled a deeper understanding of each other's needs and a search for new innovative solutions.

Hungary, Hungarian Green NGO Cooperation

The Hungarian Green NGO Cooperation is the widest informal network in the country's green sector, with a history that stretches back 30 years. The network recognized a generational gap in its membership base and also wanted to address the government's criticism that the environmental movement is a leftist phenomenon that does not represent society as a whole. The network therefore sought to engage religious and youth environmental groups in work around sustainability and climate change. It began by thoroughly mapping these groups' interests and needs. During interviews and discussions, the network and the new groups began to see ways that they could be useful to each other. Based on this knowledge, people from traditional environmental NGOs and the newly involved religious and youth groups co-organised events such as workshops and discussions.

2/ What is transversal collaboration

Definition

Collaboration may be described as a process of two or more people or organisations working together systematically to achieve a shared objective. In the case of transversal collaboration, the ambition is to overcome deeper gaps. Naturally, different people in different institutions, organisations and establishments have **different, sometimes even divergent interests, opinions and approaches to the same issue**. Transversal collaboration is about listening to and understanding the diverse spectrum of needs, views and ways of working and considering them in the joint development of a way forward or a solution.

The Association of Organisations Working in Penal Affairs, for instance, tries to improve the situation of all ex-prisoners after release. But to move forward, this CSO network needs to collaborate with the state Prison Service, as well as social work providers, to define a shared vision for integration of ex-prisoners. If all of them work together, they have a good chance of improving the current situation.

The concept of **transversal collaboration** was developed primarily to help CSO networks focus on strategic, long-term engagement with various stakeholders of diverging interests, approaches and worldviews and progress from just knowing about each other to dialogue and further to collaboration.

Crucially, transversal collaboration does not start with the aim to change the partner's perspective but with the **effort to understand a partner** and to take the partner's context and priorities into account. It means the CSO or network moves beyond its own bubble and reaches out to individual people or groups with divergent views or approaches or interests and builds relationships with them. These individuals or groups can either become new members, or partners in collaborative efforts.

Typology of projects

The networks involved in the Stronger Roots Program differed in **size and legal status, and in particular in their focus and the stakeholders** they reached out to. Their members include individuals, organisations and in some cases even networks and their size ranges from a dozen to several dozen members. Some are legally incorporated as organisations, while others are informal groupings. Some focus on advocacy or multi-stakeholder negotiations around a policy topic such as climate protection, hate crime prevention or remuneration in the audiovisual industry.

Governments or municipalities are key stakeholders of these advocacy networks. Other networks reached out to and created dialogues with other groups in society, i.e. between liberal and conservative groups, urban and rural organisations or younger and older people. Yet another type included networks that aspire to facilitate collaboration between CSOs and business. Quite a number of the networks also combined outreach to two or more of these groups.

Impact

As a CSO or network adopts a more open attitude - listens to partners more carefully and gains a better understanding of their contexts and priorities, it becomes more able to react to societal challenges. Such a CSO or network also becomes more acknowledged and accepted as a relevant stakeholder or even partner by other stakeholders, which often makes it able to engage more actors and resources for **social change**.

However, the positive effects of transversal collaboration go beyond the pragmatic aspect of finding complex and lasting solutions to societal challenges. Transversal collaboration also has the potential to **reduce fragmentation and polarisation** in society. Or, in other words, an honest commitment to longer-term, constructive engagement with divergent actors grows mutual understanding, respect and trust between people in different social bubbles.

Last, but not least, it helps **CSOs become more resilient** because they are more connected to the people and environment in which they operate and are constantly adapting to external conditions. It also implies greater legitimacy for CSOs as they represent a broader spectrum of opinions and worldviews. This means CSOs are less vulnerable to attacks from opponents.

3/ Changing the world means changing ourselves

The experience from the Stronger Roots Program has shown that before reaching out to stakeholders, a network usually needs to **consolidate internally, especially review its strategy and functioning among all members**. For example in the case of the Association of Organisations Working in Penal Affairs, the strategy on how to approach the key stakeholder had to be reconsidered because the members had different opinions about it. After they agreed on which approach to adopt, they could take steps to improve the relationship with the stakeholder.

Active outreach and more intense communication allow a network to **learn about the wider context of societal challenges** and understand the positions, thinking, limitations and needs of stakeholders. This in turn tends to lead to expansion or adjustment of network activities, or even processes and strategies. One network, for example, learned that Roma youth organisations are underrepresented in its decision-making processes and adjusted its strategy to give them more of a voice.

Internal transformation

Adjusting network processes or strategies can be quite a transformative process as it often requires that CSOs approach their goals, role and even identity in a new way that reflects the contexts, needs and priorities of their partners. This may mean that CSOs need to shift from a closed, past or inward-looking worldview to one that is more open, future- and outward-looking. In other words, CSOs increasingly **look beyond their own particular cause, approach** or interest to learn more about how other groups see and experience it, and whether there is room to incorporate these views into solutions, strategies or processes. Thus transversal collaboration typically has an impact inside the network, not just on the external environment.

In case of advocacy networks, for instance, this shift in attitude or even worldview may amount to quite a fundamental shift in not just positions and tactics, but whole strategies. Transversal collaboration is not about persuading the partner about ideological or professional opinion on the matter. It is rather an open dialogue to which both parties contribute. Collaboration does not start with the aim to change the other's perspective but with the **effort to understand the other and find a way to move forward together**. It also involves thinking about the groups you are reaching out to as partners rather than targets.

Engagement attitudes

The CSO networks in the Stronger Roots Program identified the following **attitudes** which are crucial to effective engagement with stakeholders and which, in many cases, differed from their previous approach to partners and had to be consciously developed:

being open to other people's views

Network members share the ideas, they are open to other ideas as well.

patience

We realised that the journey for deep cooperation takes time - [it is] relatively long.

creativity – to find ways of collaborating which make the partners happy

flexibility to change

We constantly take the circumstances and external conditions into consideration. And we change, if needed.

tolerance and non-confrontational approach and at the same time **assertiveness** towards the partner – it requires quite a delicate balance when approaching the partner, not to be aggressive, but on the other hand not to be insecure

authenticity

Especially when talking to people we don't know, coming across as a human being is an asset.

hopefulness - to believe that the collaboration mission is meaningful and that it can succeed, while at the same time **avoiding unrealistically high expectations** about the collaboration

empathy and appreciation

A lot of people find themselves in tough positions and often feel isolated and tired out... sometimes a connection may be built by simply listening to them and being encouraging.

partnership approach

It is necessary to give up the idea that we are selling something and that we need to convince the other person that they should agree with us.

self-reflection - to reflect on one's own stereotypes and limited experience, especially in relation to what we know or think we know about stakeholders; to avoid assuming that others think like we do or that we know how others will respond

inquisitiveness - to approach other people with a true interest in getting to know them

political neutrality - in communication or as a core value of the network if there are partnerships across different ideologies

Finally, in order for a network to manage an internal transformation as well as the engagement of stakeholders, **resources and capacities are needed**. Problem analysis, planning, coordination and learning based on evaluation and experience are necessary. In addition, acquiring or refining skills to effectively engage with stakeholders, communicate about shared issues, analyse and respond to stakeholders' needs and facilitate sustained dialogue and coordinated action is important.

4/ Levels of collaboration

Levels or stages

For simplification, the process of **building transversal collaboration may be divided into levels**.

Each level on the scale marks a more complex form of engagement, so they may also be perceived as stages on a path to increasingly intense collaboration. Yet, some of the CSOs or networks do not aspire to attain the highest forms of collaboration because their mission is to create a dialogue or the key stakeholders are so divergent that very close collaboration is not conceivable or even desirable.

For those who aim at complex, long-term kinds of collaboration, the first two levels are about laying the groundwork for collaboration and might be called “pre-collaboration”. The third through fifth level are about increasing the depth of collaboration. The CSO networks in the Stronger Roots Program aimed at moving further on the scale, but did not necessarily aspire to the ultimate level.

- 1 In the first stage, the network makes **first contact** with the stakeholder, provides information or advocates for a cause and tries to find out more about the stakeholder’s interests and needs.
- 2 In the second stage, the communication moves from one-way information sharing to a **dialogue** with the stakeholder. In this stage, more frequent, intentional communication leads to some consensus, even if only around some issues.
- 3 In the third stage, the network builds on the agreement on some of the issues, identifies common denominators and **coordinates initial joint activities** with the stakeholder.
- 4 In the fourth stage, the collaboration develops into a **partnership**. Both the network and the stakeholder contribute repeatedly or continuously in order to advance their shared interests.
- 5 In the final stage, multiple, diverse parties agree on a **joint vision and/or long-term strategy** on how to approach a complex problem collectively. Their collaboration involves not only joint planning, regular communication and coordination, but also evaluation and reflection.

Listening to the partner and trying to understand the partner’s interests and needs are crucial at each level, particularly during the first contact and dialogue, but also in subsequent levels of collaboration.

DEVELOPMENT OF COLLABORATION OUTSIDE THE NETWORK SCALE



Factors influencing collaboration

The progress of transversal collaboration depends on many factors. These include the complexity and contentiousness of the issue, the number of actors with a stake in the issue, their prior record of relationships, communication or cooperation, the capacity for facilitation, etc. It is not always easy to anticipate how the process will unfold. The degree of divergence of views is one key factor; depending on how different or opposing the views are, the collaboration may or may not be developed further.

Sometimes communication with the stakeholder reveals that the views are more divergent than they appeared at the beginning when the dialogue started, conflicts emerge and people can no longer see the light at the end of the tunnel. This is natural. With more intense and deeper dialogue, differences become more visible. But it is necessary to undergo this stage because only then can we better understand the needs of others and search for innovative solutions. Only then can diverse actors find a common solution to complex issues¹. **CSO networks which experience deeper divergence thus usually need more time** (and resources) to connect and collaborate.

1 <https://www.infoq.com/articles/facilitators-guide-book-review/>

5/ How to start engaging with divergent stakeholders

There is not just one way to initiate engagement with divergent stakeholders and progress along the scale towards collaboration - the specific approach a CSO or network chooses depends on its strategic goals, the level of engagement it hopes to achieve and the nature of both the CSO or network and the stakeholder.

For example, a network that is trying to engage with a rigid institutional partner so that they can develop a joint vision will approach targeted individuals and bear in mind the hierarchies and bureaucratic loops inherent to the institution, while a network seeking to diversify its membership by adding e.g. religious groups may canvass a broad array of groups in a more open-ended, informal engagement process.

No matter which approach a network takes, it typically undertakes several steps at the beginning of an engagement process: clarifying goals prior to engaging, learning about the stakeholder before the first contact and establishing initial contact. This chapter explores what each of those steps might look like, as well as what the experiences of 9 networks in the Stronger Roots Program can tell us about building engagement after initial contact. It also provides recommendations for making stakeholder meetings as fruitful as possible.

A. Before initial contact

1. Clarifying goals

It might seem obvious, but sometimes we are so eager to plunge into collaboration that we forget this step. Clarifying goals and planning carefully, however, are vital, especially if the CSO or network is aiming to reach out to new stakeholders. Here are some key questions to consider:

- **Why do you want to engage with this stakeholder?** Understanding how engagement of this stakeholder advances your CSO's or network's strategic goals will help set the course and serve as a reference point when you have to make decisions along the way. For example, if your network seeks to engage new members to advance its strategic goal of increasing broad public support for environmental protection, you may choose to avoid engaging with controversial partners.
- **What level of collaboration are you striving for?** Do you aim to invite the stakeholder to e.g. take part in dialogue, design joint activities or develop a shared vision? The level of collaboration you are targeting is another factor in the design of your engagement approach.

- ***Are your team members aligned regarding the approach?*** Engaging with divergent viewpoints requires openness, a willingness to listen and a sincere interest in understanding different points of view and the drivers behind them. Some of your team members may be more ready for this than others and having an honest discussion before you begin reaching out to stakeholders may help clarify whether the team is ready or whether further preparation is needed.
- ***Who will be in charge of engaging the stakeholder, when and how much time and resources will it take?*** Setting aside enough capacity for planning, carrying out the engagement process is an obvious, but sometimes overlooked, part of preventing problems later on.

2. Researching essential information about the stakeholder

It pays to do some elementary research before reaching out to a stakeholder. Knowing the essentials about the stakeholder will help you frame your approach and conversations in a way that is understandable and useful to them, and make you better prepared to answer their questions. Here are some questions to consider:

- ***Do you have a basic understanding of the interests and needs of the stakeholder?*** Knowing what drives the stakeholder makes it easier to explain how they will benefit from the collaboration - for example, it might make their work more effective or help them reach one of their goals.
- ***What do you know about the stakeholder and how they work and how they are organised?*** For example, if you are planning to engage with a highly hierarchical organisation, it is wise to leave enough time for their consultation and decision making processes.
- ***Do you need to adjust your approach according to the character and needs of the different stakeholders (even if they are part of the same sector)?*** For example, if you want to approach a grass-roots environmental movement consisting of fluctuating and decentralised young activist volunteers be prepared for a different process than would be the case with a formally and hierarchically organised NGO with paid staff.
- ***Do you have any allies who can connect you with the stakeholder group?*** If you are already in contact with individuals in the stakeholder group or institution which are open to engaging with your network, reach out to them and ask them to connect you with the relevant people in the structure of the stakeholder. One strong ally who is trusted inside the stakeholder group or institution can be a powerful connector. Even if you don't have a contact directly within the stakeholder structure, a mutual acquaintance who is trusted by the stakeholder can help create an open and positive start to the relationship. The chain of "somebody knows somebody" and recommendations by trusted individuals can do wonders in comparison to trying to initiate contact without any introduction.
- ***Are you ready to go to someone else?*** In the case of making initial contact with an institution, you may need to contact more than one person. Sometimes the first person you connect with is not the right person for initiating collaboration and it often takes time to find capable and willing people.

3. Creating a strategy

Alongside gathering essential information about the stakeholder, it is useful to think carefully about your initial contact strategy, including the choice of communication channels, differentiating approaches for various stakeholder groups, etc. Here are some points to consider:

- **Can you tailor your approach to get a better response from the stakeholder?** If you have primary contacts within the stakeholder group or institution, ask them for guidance on how the respective person(s) should be addressed, what channels are effective for reaching them, whether there is anything you should avoid in engagement, etc.
- **Do you have the capacity to tailor your approach?** If you are working with a small target audience, you may be able to tailor your approach using information gleaned from the stakeholder group, as described in the point above. But if you are planning large-scale outreach to engage as many groups or people as possible, it may not be possible or efficient to tailor your approach to each stakeholder group if you have limited capacity. In this case, your engagement strategy will need to be unified but more structured and a clear and well prepared proposal for collaboration will help make the process smooth and efficient.
- **Would a combination of engagement strategies make your efforts more effective?** For example, layering contact through formal emails or calls combined with short informal encounters at events around relevant issues can reinforce your message.
- **Can you go the extra mile?** Can you offer something beyond the purpose of the collaboration itself? Will the stakeholder benefit from contact with you through an exchange of expertise, a networking opportunity, etc.? If you have researched essentials about the stakeholder as suggested in the previous step, you will have some idea of what benefits the stakeholder may perceive as valuable. In the Stronger Roots Program, for example, Hungarian Green NGO Cooperation, a network of seasoned environmental organisations, engaged with youth groups, which learned new environmental education methods that enhanced their work.
- **Do you have an open attitude?** Being honest, respectful, inclusive, empathetic and appropriate for each partner's context during the whole communication process pays off. If the partner sees that you acknowledge its context or situation, it will pave the way for a deeper and more honest conversation.
- **Are you remaining true to your network aims?** Being authentic and transparent in expressing the goals of the engagement is helpful. One of the networks in the Stronger Roots Program adapted its language somewhat to suit different stakeholders, but always retained the core message and recognized that *"We can only describe the network and explain the process as best we can, since it is not up to us to persuade people to like it."*
- **What can you learn from the initial contact?** After the initial contact, it is useful to reflect on the reasons the group or individuals agreed to engage (or not engage) and what approach they were most receptive to (or were discouraged by). Getting feedback from the stakeholder group can guide future engagement efforts. One network in the Stronger Roots Program tested different means of communicating with applicant members, asked new members for feedback and then changed the application process to make it faster and more user friendly.

Tips on leading effective initial meetings

Initial meetings with new potential partners are intended to map the issues that the network and potential partner are concerned with and introduce the intention to collaborate. These first meetings don't have to be lengthy - even 30 minutes can be enough to elicit interest and clarify why potential partners should work with you. The networks' experience highlighted elements that can help make a meeting run smoothly and effectively:

- Have well-prepared materials on hand, as well as proposed solutions
- Be brief and matter-of-fact, straightforward yet diplomatic and avoid clichés
- Explain what you want and need while providing enough time for the partner to explain their interests and needs
- Use examples to clarify why the partner should be concerned, and describe situations where even a small change could make a difference
- Use current data, a first-hand experience or story to illustrate your points

B. After initial contact

1. Reasons for engagement

In theory, initial contact with the stakeholder should open the door to dialogue and then to collaboration, whether in the form of a joint project or shared vision. But in reality, initial contact is sometimes also the last contact if the stakeholder doesn't perceive any benefit from deepening the engagement.

Assuming initial contact is positive, what then motivates a stakeholder to move forward with you? The networks in the Stronger Roots Program discovered that stakeholders were often motivated to continue engaging after initial contact by one or more key reasons:

- **Finding a meaningful role:** When stakeholder groups saw a specific role they could play, they felt they fit in and it made sense to them to begin collaborating.
- **Not wanting to miss anything:** A stakeholder group that pursues the same agenda as a CSO or network may see engagement as a way to stay informed about what is going on in its field. Or a group may want to monitor what is happening elsewhere to prevent e.g. a potential threat or other situation from getting out of its control.
- **Branding:** Many stakeholders (not only private companies but also public institutions for example) are looking to enhance their image and partnering with another entity can bring PR benefits.
- **Attractive bait:** If the groups we want to engage are difficult to reach, it can help to bring in another actor who they may find appealing: it may be someone they already know or on the contrary, someone they do not know at all but have always wanted to get closer to.

- **Practical benefits:** When stakeholders see that collaboration will bring them practical benefits, they are much more likely to engage. This may be a long-term effort or a concrete project. For example, one network in the Stronger Roots Program involved members in creating joint media outputs, which they had to work on as part of their jobs anyway. Members were receptive to co-creation and enthusiastic about the outcomes. Another network involved new members in designing a conference, giving them space to plan some sessions around their own themes as well as opportunities to learn new things useful to their work.
- **Legal obligation:** State or local authorities may be mandated by law to engage with CSOs and may therefore be more receptive to communication. Some networks in the Stronger Roots Program found that it helped to refer to this legal obligation. But they also pointed out that this should not be the stakeholder's only motivation to collaborate, as the goal is to reach people who are really committed.

2. Building further engagement

Where engagement deepened after initial contact, it was not only because of stakeholder motivations, but also because the network acted thoughtfully, strategically and proactively to move the relationship on towards collaboration. Here are some of the key recommendations based on the networks' experience:

- **Learn more about the expectations of the stakeholder(s).** What do they expect to get from membership, participation in the proposed project, etc.? Personal interviews, questionnaires, follow-up interviews based on findings from questionnaires, focus groups or surveys can be effective tools, and the information can be used to shape collaboration to fit the partner's current needs. For example, the ethical fundraising network, which aimed to increase the number of collaborative corporate-CSO projects, learned that corporations tend to look for HR benefits and impacts from CSO projects today rather than PR.
- **Find a stronger common denominator,** such as a shared overarching theme or goal. Or if you can find something else you agree on, even if it is a minor objective or a very general solution, it can be a good way to develop the relationship. Step by step, it can gradually grow into consensus around a larger goal or a more specific solution. One network, although it was composed of divergent players, convened all members around a topic they felt strongly and urgently about: the need for a stable, efficient and transparent legal environment in their field.
- **Consider a concrete project to pilot collaboration.** Similarly, working on a concrete project that addresses a minor but specific issue can be an entry point to further collaboration. The Association of Organisations Working in Penal Affairs and its key partner Prison Service both wanted to create better options for prisoners to communicate with their families during the Covid-19 pandemic. They worked together to establish contact points for online communication. Through this concrete project which met a shared need, they built trust and knowledge of each other. In this way it became an important, tangible step in their journey towards collaboration.
- **Discuss possible roles with new partners or members.** Giving new partners or members an opportunity to create or assume their own roles gives them ownership of their involvement

and a clear message that they belong. The Hungarian Green NGO Cooperation network entrusted organisation of thematic webinars to new youth group members at their request.

- **Agree on the rules of communication** such as regular meetings, means and frequency of communication, etc. Give partners space to suggest rules.
- **Stay in touch.** Regular communication, interaction or meetings foster relationships of trust. One network commented on the value of frequent interaction: *“We found that better relationships are formed around more frequent contact, regardless of the reason. We always try to build on opportunities as they present themselves and we are proactive in identifying them. However, if they are not present naturally, or the partners simply do not wish to engage that much, we do not push it.”* If you happen to lose sight of your partners for a longer time, remind them again of the partnership or work that you did with them earlier.

If you run into hiccups...

Even if you are able to take steps to move initial contact towards collaboration, you may run into obstacles on the way. Here are a few tips if your process gets stuck:

- **Listen closely and with sincere interest.** Expressing an honest and sincere interest in the experience of your partner will pave the way to deeper conversations built on trust. Listening attentively, reflecting on what you hear and trying to shape what you do to fit the partner’s needs, interests or experience will create a richer solution and give the partner confidence in you. One network wanted to better understand the specific needs of young Roma and the needs of organisations working with Roma youth. After the network interviewed and consulted projects with these groups, it received feedback that the involved young Roma *“felt that participation can be real, that there is a genuine interest in their experience and it is not just about “reaching indicators”*
- **Choose a collaborative rather than a confrontational approach.** Be a constructive partner which brings solutions to the table. As a basis for collaboration with state institutions, the Association of Organisations Working in Penal Affairs started to actively offer help and support (even in areas outside of the Association’s primary interest) instead of highlighting shortcomings or publicly criticising the institution. A know-it-all attitude prevents deeper dialogue with organisations or people with different views.
- **Work around barriers.** If you run into a sharp dispute around topic A, don’t let it derail your efforts. It makes sense to seek agreement on topic B or C. Usually a key problem may be divided into several parts and later in the debate you can determine where there is room for agreement.
- **Consider impartial mediation.** In difficult negotiations or discussions, it can be useful to involve an external and impartial facilitator or mediator who is respected by all of the parties.
- **Remember that after all you have a common goal or theme,** even if it is difficult to work together.

7/ Useful sources



Stakeholder mapping:

tools for mapping stakeholders and entities, for their strategic and proactive involvement.

<https://www.boreal-is.com/blog/stakeholder-mapping-identify-stakeholders/>



Deep listening:

a method of hearing another person in depth. Deep listening means “hearing” more and more of what is being communicated and becoming able to respond wisely and appropriately.

<https://www.deeplistingtraining.com/>



Hope-based communication:

a positive approach to communication based on hope for promoting social change.

<https://www.hope-based.com/about>



Efficient collaboration:

resources on how to make efficient collaboration possible - creating systems for sharing information, discerning what really matters, learning from feedback, reaching decisions and distributing resources.

<http://efficientcollaboration.org/>



Collective impact:

an approach on how a group of actors from different sectors work together for the purpose of solving a complex problem or systemic change.

<https://collectiveimpactforum.org/what-is-collective-impact/>

STRONGER ROOTS

The Stronger Roots Program is jointly implemented by a consortium created by Open Society Fund Prague (CZ), Open Society Foundation Bratislava (SK), Glopolis (CZ) and the NIOK Foundation (HU). The Program aims to increase the resilience of civil society organizations and their networks in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, strengthen their social capital and embed them in the communities and societies in which they operate. Within the Program, the concept of transversal collaboration was developed and tested on 9 networks of civil society organizations.

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Glopolis is an analytical and networking center with an 18-years long outstanding think-tank experience in research, policy monitoring, advocacy and campaigning, relationship development, resource mobilization and facilitating collaboration at the Czech, CEE and EU-wide levels. Glopolis mission is to support transversal collaboration beyond the non-profit sector towards resilient civil society and sustainable democracy. Therefore, it seeks out and expands the field of shared aspirations of the CSOs, governmental and business representatives and engages them in solving common, societal challenges.



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