

2015

Handbook for Organizations of and for Persons with Disabilities to Utilize Media for Advocacy Efforts

ELECTION ACCESS WORKING GROUP

Table of Contents

Summary	2
Introduction to the Election Access Working Group	2
Issues that influence the level of support from the media	3
Objectives of this handbook	3
Strategic Activities.....	4
Potential risks.....	8
Further suggestions	9

Summary

With the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and the Kosovo Democratic Institute (KDI), the discussion meeting with organizations of and for persons with disabilities has been held in order to improve and design a strategy on the use of media, as an opportunity and tool that would improve media coverage and presentation of issues of concern to persons with disabilities.

In order to appropriately address the challenges and necessary instruments, the meeting discussed the role of media; media strategies used so far, necessary tools and increased essential organizational capacity building, which will have an impact on strengthening the issues that affect participation and presentation of persons with disabilities in public life. Drafted handbook addresses the needs that came out of this meeting and addresses them through this strategic document including problems, objectives, tactics, general tools and immediate functional actions.

All the tactics, tools and actions listed below serve to address the deficiencies and to fulfill the objectives stated through practical advice. They are structured according to the principles used usually in building media relations strategies.

Due to the needs of organizations, the handbook has been supplemented with the ways of writing Press Releases and organizing Press Conferences, which are usually covered through trainings.

This handbook implemented to its fullness guarantees full efficiency.

Introduction to the Election Access Working Group

The Election Access Working Group (EAWG) is a multi-stakeholder working group that aims to ensure full participation of persons with disabilities in the electoral processes and public life. It is composed of representatives from organizations representing four types of disability (Mr. Afrim Maliqi, HandiKOS, Ms. Rukije Gashi, Kosovo's Association of the Deaf, Mr. Daut Tishuki, Kosovo's Association of the Blind, and Ms. Sebahate Beqiri, Down Syndrome Kosova), two Members of Kosovo's National Assembly (Ms. Ganimete Musliu and Ms. Shqipe Pantina), four representatives from the Central Election Commission of Kosovo (Mr. Florian Dushi, Mr. Adnan Rrustemi, Mr. Betim Gjoshi, and Mr. Nexhmedin Hyseni), one representative of the Election Complaint and Appeals Panel (Ms. Valbona Millaku), and two representatives from state institutions (Ms. Luljeta Kabashi, Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, and Mr. Qazim Gashi, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare). The EAWG is chaired by Mr. Afrim Gashi, and has two co-chairs, Ms. Ganimete Musliu and Mr. Florian Dushi). The distribution of this handbook, which aims to facilitate the advocacy efforts of organizations of and for persons with disabilities, marks the first activity of the working group.

The group welcomes the contribution of all stakeholders in its efforts to promote equal access for persons with disabilities in electoral processes and in public life.

Issues that influence the level of support from the media

During the meeting with organizations of and for persons, the following issues were identified as barriers to more support from the media in the advocacy efforts of these organizations:

- Low level of communication with journalists and the media.
- Low interest of journalists and media in the problems of persons with disabilities.
- Low response of journalists and media to the invitations and NGO organizations on persons with disabilities.
- Low reporting and interest about the activities of organizations that protect the rights of persons with disabilities.
- Low knowledge of journalists and media in proper use of terminology referring to persons with disabilities.
- Low level of internal organization and lack of sufficient capacity to use the media effectively.

Objectives of this handbook

1. Structuring the communication with media organizations that represent persons with disabilities
2. Improving and maintaining relationships with journalists and media
3. Increase the knowledge of journalists, editors and media about organizations, terminology and needs of persons with disabilities
4. Creating media space and discussing problems and issues of concern to organizations and persons with disabilities
5. Increasing the participation of journalists and media in important activities of organizations representing persons with disabilities
6. Building capacities of organizations of and for persons with disabilities to improve knowledge and skills in writing and presentation in the media.

Strategic Activities

Strategic activities necessary to achieve the objectives are presented separately for each objective. Each objective is interconnected and each strategic activity is also related to each other.

Objective 1: Structuring the communication with media organizations that represent persons with disabilities

Strategic activities:

Activity 1: Network of organizations of and for persons with disabilities as well as individual organizations representing persons with disabilities should appoint at least one person who manages and maintains contacts with the media. This is necessary.

Activity 2: The person who manages media relations must have a decision-making position and maintains communication with the highest level of organizations such as the executive director or the board.

Activity 3: Communication should be organized and centralized. None of the members can speak to the media without being first harmonized with responsible person, who gives advice but also use his/her knowledge and resources for better presentation of organizations to the public.

Activity 4: Organizations should enable easier contact for journalists and media, and this communication must be managed and directed towards achieving the goals of the organization. For this, an email address for communication with the media should be immediately created, for example: media@handikos.com.

Activity 5: The media should be informed that all communication goes through such an e-mail address and through the appropriate person. This address must also be published on websites and in each communication with the media.

Activity 6: The website should have a special section for the media where means of communication and all press releases, as well as the activities of organizations are presented.

Activity 7: Creation and maintenance of a database with the names and contacts (phones, e-mail addresses) of journalists and media.

Objective 2: Improving and maintaining relationships with journalists and media

Strategic activities:

Activity 1: introductory meeting with editors in chief/editors of major media to present problems and activities of the organizations. Regular meetings with them.

Activity 2: Frequent communication and meetings with journalists individually at least on a weekly basis.

Activity 3: Quick response to questions and requests of media- within the day.

Objective 3: Increase the knowledge of journalists, editors and media about organizations, terminology and needs of persons with disabilities

Strategic activities:

Activity 1: Preparation of a manual explaining the right and wrong terms to be used by journalists and media for definitions related to persons with disabilities. Distribution of this material in electronic and printed form to journalists and media. This would help improving the quality and accuracy of reporting and creating a closeness with the media.

Activity 2: Publication of this material in PDF format on the websites of organizations of and for persons with disabilities and their social networks.

Activity 3: Organization of one or more round tables with journalists about reporting on persons with disabilities, based on the manual prepared, where Explanatory Handbook would be distributed and information related to the objectives and activities of the organization would be offered.

Objective 4: Creating media space and discussing problems and issues of concern to organizations and persons with disabilities

Strategic activities:

Activity 1: Press Releases to be used whenever an event of the organization and its branches would take place, with which the public should be informed about the achievements of the organization, when public attention and awareness about a particular issue is required or when there is a need to react about the issues which have been discussed or are being discussed in

public. Ways of writing and time of delivery described in Objective 6 ensure their publication in the media.

Activity 2: Preparation and distribution of at least one opinion/editorial in print and online media each month, in which an important issue for persons with disabilities is emphasized and discussed. Ensure through preliminary conversation with editors to issue such an opinion/editorial in the media, explaining that it is a social responsibility of media within their mission. The opinion/editorial should also be published on the website and social networks of organizations.

Activity 3: Letters to the Editors. At the beginning of the year and then on quarterly basis, letters to the editors should be written and sent, which are not necessarily for publication but that have the intention to inform, raise awareness and influence them about issues important to persons with disabilities. In these letters their assistance/support in advocating important issues may be requested.

Activity 4: The activities of organization branches of should be made national news through the use of the national media, through press releases or invitations to national televisions for coverage. It is also important to include local televisions.

Activity 5: Examples of persons with disabilities who are successful in life and in their line of work should be encouraged to be presented in local and national media through media space (Press Releases can be also issued) and televisions should be invited to interview them using Media contacts established and maintained earlier.

Activity 6: Once a year Kosovo Disability Forum should award journalists who have covered more stories about persons with disabilities.

Objective 5: Increasing the participation of journalists and media in important activities of organizations representing persons with disabilities

Strategic activities:

Activity 1: Press Conferences. They should be organized in cases when organizations have made public a big achievement or when opinion awareness is required about issues of great importance. For all other issues other above listed means of communication should be used. Press Conferences in a normal situation cannot exceed the number 3 in a year.

Activity 2: To send invitations to the media for each event, visit or activity of organizations of and for persons with disabilities. Ways and timing of invitations, which are explained below, result in better coverage of the stories.

Objective 6: Building capacities of organizations of and for persons with disabilities to improve knowledge and skills in writing and presentation in the media

Activity 1: Press Releases: Their preparation and effective use

Press Releases should be issued whenever the organization and its branches have an event or an achievement about which the public should be informed or when the opinion on a particular issue is needed or when there is a need for reaction in relation to one or several issues that have been discussed or are being discussed in public.

For Press Releases to be effective, organizations of and for persons with disabilities should take the following elements into consideration:

- You should try to send Press Releases at least once a month, so that the issues they treat have a consistency to the public;
- Writing press releases should be trusted to a person trained in writing or to a company that deals with public relations, in order to make the effect required;
- Press Releases should not be longer than 500 words;
- During their drafting, a language understandable to all should be used, explaining also in detail any definition that u need to use in order to make it more understandable to the reader;
- Press Releases should be sent to media before 16:00, in order that the latter have sufficient time to publish them;
- Half an hour after submission - or at the latest by 17:00 – all media should be contacted by phone to confirm whether they have received the Press Release and to be interested in whether it will be published.

Press Releases should include the following elements:

- A. Logo and address of the organization;
- B. Name of the Press Release (written with capital letters);
- C. Title;
- D. Place and date under the title formatted with Italic;
- E. The accompanying text in regular forms and with a font size of 11-12;
- F. At the end of the Press Release a contact number and e-mail address where journalists can raise their questions or requests for clarification should be placed.

Press Release should be sent via e-mail as attachment in Word format and copied into the area for writing e-mail, for those who may have problems to open it in Word format.

Activity 2: Press Releases / Media Events: Organizing and structuring them

Press Conferences should be organized only in cases when organizations have to make public an achievement or to make the public aware of important issues. For all other issues other means of communication listed above should be used.

Following are some considerations that organizations of and for persons with disabilities should make when preparing for Press Conferences:

- Press Conferences in a normal situation cannot exceed the number 3 within a year.
- They require more intensive preparation prior the event, which lasts at least several days.
- Spaces selected should be sufficient to safely fit all media invitees - in particular media which are the subject of this handbook.
- There should be sufficient space for the placement of cameras and cameramen movement and the placement of voice recorders and other tools that journalists use.
- Press Conference invitations should be sent a day earlier.
- On the morning of the day when press conferences are held, media should be contacted once again to ensure that they have accepted the invitation and to confirm that they bring their teams to cover the event.
- Invitations sent by e-mail must contain the subject of the press conference, date, time, and place as well as speakers and participants of the press conference.
- A Press Release covering the topic of the conference should be ready for distribution to journalists immediately after its end. The same PR should be sent by email to all the media afterwards, to ensure that those who were not present are well informed about the content of the conference.
- The keynote speech must also be distributed to present journalists as well as via e-mail to all the media, immediately after the end of the conference.
- If opportunities allow, a photographer should be engaged and photos from the event should be sent to all the media attached to the press release. A video footage of the press conference, - main speeches - would be good to be provided to televisions and online media.
- Such cases should be used to talk on the issues raised by interested journalists informally, after the end of the press conference.
- Organizations should distribute printed materials about the organization - brochures, manuals etc. - to present journalists at the conference in order to inform them as much as possible about their activity.

Potential risks

The suggestions in this handbook may not lead to results, if there is:

- Failure to fully implement this handbook from the beginning to the end.

- Misunderstanding the role of Public Relations by the organizations, which may mean ignoring this handbook and activities developed here.
- Failure to properly train the person/persons responsible on the practical implementation of this handbook.

Further suggestions

For better results, organizations of and for persons with disabilities should consider to:

- Train their staff to qualitatively meet actions specified in this handbook.
- Draft an Annual Public Communication Plan and Program based on their planned activities.