Budget & Logistics

With focus on the relationship between time, budget, and commitment in event planning the need for flexibility and periodic adjustments is emphasized. It suggests planning timelines by working backward from the event's start date. Key resources include templates for budget tracking, venue selection, local partner proposals, and memorandums of understanding.

Budget and timeline transformation

Listen to the conversation about budget and timeline transformation

Transcript

What is the relevance of having working documents, templates, MOU, work plans in a process like the CommsLabs? I would say it is critical, essential; it informs the process because this formal administrative aspect both highlights the constraints that each event has (budget constraints, time constraints), and tries to tailor the event to all the different needs a community might have. This is always a complex activity because any given event has a timeline and a duration, a start and a end, and also a budget that makes it possible.

So, having access to the documents that somehow regulate or help to formalize the different relationships of each individual and group in which they operate, but also the relationship among the Activist Advice Board and the Convener, in our case, Astraea; or between the Activist Advice Board and the Consultant as APC, responsible for the general coordination and program development. Having this highlighted in a document is always critically important. Of course, this documentation evolves.

What we have learned, when we started, is that having an event that is based on an infrastructure which requires a change of mind has implications. On-boarding actors in specific space, Mattermost, files, repository, website, all those different actions which might sound simpler or something we do, all of us do with comfort, that's not a given. Entering a space has always a learning curve. The actors that come from so many cultures have their own experience of technology, they have their own struggles, and this is what we learned in the Caribbean CommsLabs and we really didn’t have the ability to say how much time all these different actors needed to give or to be with this, within the infrastructure and use it.

In the second CommsLabs in Central Asia and South Caucasus, we considered the different tasks or activities each of the actors will have to cover, the time that they will give for the onboarding into the different spaces and learning how those spaces and the communication in these spaces work.

Whenever we work online and whenever we work mediated by technology, we need more time. What can be achieved in the space of one day in a in-person setting probably will need one and a half day online because, after three, four hours of active engagement, a person is tired, exhausted, our body cannot just transit into the digital seamless. This is important in regards to all the different MOUs, the work plans, thinking about the time necessary for people to learn, understand and practice and be with this, and then to also develop the agreement that each and every group needs to adjust, this needs to be acknowledged and "compensate".

The CommsLabs, as an event, has a responsibility of the day to day realization of the event, those are paid. But roles as the one of the Advisory Board are not paid. The notion is not to give a salary, is not to create this kind of relationship, but an acknowledgement that the time they will be given, their knowledge, their positionality, their attention, it is recognized. If we ask people to consider, on the length of six months, to invest one week, then we need to respect this one week. What we have learned in the realization of CommsLabs that were lasting generally a year, so a 12 months process, is that probably you needed to build another three to five days, depending from all the different situations, that need really to cover further time to get into the different spaces and ways of operating of an infrastructure and create this tuning.

And then we have the other layers: through which device activists, trainers, facilities or access, because it's not the same if you work on a mobile and have to work on collaborative document or thing or you have your laptop. It's not the same if you are on the mobile, there is a meeting or if you can have really a room on your own where you can think, contribute. Time zone matters, time zone influences the way in which we work. So what is important, when we think of timeline and budget, is that those two are a function of the actual event. And so ,while we can start with a forecast, it is really important that there's a periodical assessment and adjustment. An event should be started, the timeline should be planned from the end: if we imagine that the event will start, will happen online, hybrid or in person, let's say in September, then we need to go back to think, "okay, by when we need to have the list of the people, the actual people?". And then you can say, "okay, maybe I need to have two months before". For visas, for travel, but we need to know who we are going to have even before because we need to define the venue.

The CommsLabs community is well defined: it's LGBTIQ+ community already in a situated region, subregion, cluster or country. There are many other events that can happen where the profile of the participant can be different. And it is also how we are going to identify the participant. Is it word of mouth, it is people vetting or is it an open call? So all these things impacted the timeline. And in our experience, if you are thinking of a participatory process like CommsLabs, six to nine months, it's really short; 12 months, and maybe more if there is also a piece of research to create a kind of a common shared baseline of the challenges, the context, the situation. So, the relationship between time, budget, commitment, engagement, it is of essence. And having all this material ready, and those are the materials from Astraea, but also visible, accessible for others, the consultant was important.

The bigger the institution, the more steps are for the sign off for contracts, MOUs, contract with venues. So, it is important to understand that also this timeline, the timeline of from when we start an MOU, an agreement, and when we end, so when it's signed and resources are reaching out to the different actors, this is also a timeline within a timeline.

This is an issue of trust. Are we starting when this timeline is completed or are we able, and there is a relationship that can allow without exploitation, to start even before this is signed. We had also situations in which the people couldn't receive their token or compensation because of the geopolitical situation and where their bank account were located. All those things impact. And that's to say that all this operation or administration, they are part of any event, not as something that should be read as a constraint, but it is truly something that is giving access to resource and it is a function of transparency and accountability of those giving these resources to be used for a specific purpose. Whenever we enter into this formal world of words and legal words, there is always a tension between the wish of giving more freedom, autonomy, openness to the people and the necessity of also providing clear threads and thresholds because we'll be auditing financial reviews. And this world is not really sitting into the activism, transformative, political vision of the world. It sits usually into the corporate world that wants to use their own mechanism systems and workflow. And this is a tension Astraea didn't shy away from discussing about these things, answering the questions when the questions were made because all these things matter.

And so, I think, the evolution had been having a baseline, having templates. It's a good way to start. Then these templates need to be contextualized, understanding that using an infrastructure or working in hybrid or online environment extend the timeline, add a new task or a new activity that is really the learning of those spaces and planning for all this other little workflow timelines that impact the overall timeline. Having this political conversation and caring conversation, because those things are part of the texture of an event and they should not be treated alienated from the central core of the conversation and decision making of an event.

- The relationship between time, budget, commitment, engagement is essential. Any given event has a timeline and a duration, a start and a end, and also a budget that makes it possible. Baseline work documents such as templates, work plans and MoUs help formalize and regulate the different relationships of each individual and groups in which they operate.
- These documents need to be contextualized and evolve along with the process. Periodical assessment and adjustment is key.
- Whenever we work online and whenever we work mediated by technology, we need more time. When planning a process like CommsLabs, consider and acknowledge, in the timeline and budget, the time and resources needed for people to onboard, understand, learn and practice inside the different digital spaces and tools (like a website, a group chat or file repository).
- Timelines should be planned starting “from the end”: if we imagine that the event will start in September, then we need to go back to think, “okay, by when we need to have

the list of the people, the actual people?". And then you can say, "okay, maybe I need to have two months before" for visas, for travel...
- The bigger the institution, the more steps are required for administrative aspects such as contracts. Be mindful to include them in the timeline.
- Trust is a major component in the process that can enable collaboration before formal documents are signed off.
- Operative and administrative aspects of a process are part of the texture of an event and should be held with transparency and accountability.

Work templates

- CommsLabs Budget Worksheets: a template worksheet for creating a collaborative space for identifying, documenting, and tracking budget expenses throughout the planning and implementation process. The worksheets can be adapted and expanded upon as needed for designated CommsLab.
- Venue/Hotel Checklist: a template checklist for review and selection of CommsLab venue/hotel that will best meet the needs of the event and participants.
- Local Partner Request for Proposals: a template request for proposals outlining the scope of work and request for local implementer hosts/partners in CommsLab location. The request for proposals can be shared with identified potential local partners interested in submitting a proposal to Astraea.
- Local Partner Memorandum of Understanding: upon selecting the local implementer hosts/partners in CommsLab Location, establish a memorandum of understanding for outlining agreements and scope of services to be signed by all parties. The template memorandum of understanding can be adapted as needed for designated CommsLab.

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