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Since its inception, UNESCO has recognized that non governmental organizations which have concerns close to its own play an important role in international cooperation in the service of peoples. For more than a half-century, UNESCO has woven a valuable tapestry of cooperative relations with a number of such organizations in its fields of competence, thereby enabling it to work with civil society in achieving its objectives and to disseminate through them its democratic and ethical ideals. This brochure, which does not seek to be exhaustive, aims at providing practical information on the various aspects of this cooperation.

A dynamic partnership

Relations between UNESCO and NGOs are essentially intellectual and moral. They take different forms:

- ▶ Exchange of information and documentation on questions of common interest. Consultations on draft programmes.
- ▶ Participation in sessions of the General Conference, in certain UNESCO meetings and in periodic conferences of non-governmental organizations.
- ▶ Different forms of moral support, on the basis of express request and authorization.
- ▶ Consultancies and detachment of programme specialists, experts or lecturers for events of interest to UNESCO.

However, cooperation with UNESCO can also have financial and material aspects:

- Contracts
- Financial contributions
- Availability of administrative office space
- Use of conference rooms and equipment
- Miscellaneous services

Apart from individual relations, UNESCO also promotes collective cooperation with NGOs through different mechanisms:

- ▶ The **NGO International Conference**, which takes place every three years and comprises all NGOs maintaining official relations with UNESCO.
- ▶ **Regional consultations**, held at regular intervals in the different regions, with a view to examining the state of cooperation with UNESCO, discussing the programmes of the Organization and regional priorities and promoting the development of regional cooperative networks.
- ▶ **Theme-specific collective consultations**, organized regularly in accordance with UNESCO programme implementation needs, sometimes in parallel with international conferences held under its auspices.

An NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee, elected by the NGO International Conference, is responsible for permanent coordination and continuity of this collective cooperation. It is based at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris.

UNESCO

and
Non-

governmental
Organizations

*A natural link
between
governments and
peoples*

Why cooperate?

As a Specialized Agency of the United Nations, UNESCO's mission is to contribute to the maintenance of peace and security throughout the world by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science, culture and communication. UNESCO collaborates with organizations representative of civil society, which are non-governmental and non profit-oriented in nature. Such organizations must adhere to the ideals of the Organization, concern themselves with matters falling within its fields of competence and have the means and the will to contribute to the realization of its objectives.

For a decade or so, the impressive vitality of non-governmental organizations, the steady growth in their number and their increasingly important role have prompted UNESCO to review its relations with them with the aim of finding new synergies and cooperative arrangements that would be more suited to the challenges of the 21st century. This reflexion led in 1995 to the definition of an appropriate statutory framework, with the adoption by Member States of new *Directives concerning UNESCO's relations with non-governmental organizations*.

The purpose of these Directives is to create the necessary conditions for a partnership that will ensure that UNESCO, in the preparation and execution of its programme, benefits from the broadest possible support from NGOs with recognized capacity for reflection and mobilization on the ground. These Directives are also designed to encourage the emergence of non-governmental organizations in areas of the world where they are weak or isolated, with the aim of better taking into account the geographical and cultural diversity of the non-governmental community.

You represent an international organization¹

Initial contacts and exchanges are on an informal basis. The establishment of an official partnership is only envisaged once productive and regular relations have been developed.

What form can relations take?

- Operational relations - flexible and dynamic in nature, established according to need, in order to contribute to the implementation of UNESCO's programmes. NGOs maintaining operational relations with UNESCO are valued partners, owing to their active presence and concrete action in the field, the expertise they represent, and their ability to channel the concerns of the people. Requests for admission to operational relations can be made to the Director-General of UNESCO at any time and will be processed as quickly as possible.
- Formal relations comply with stricter criteria – admission is granted to organizations that are recognized as having a genuinely international structure and membership. As a general rule, they should have been active in UNESCO's fields of competence and have a proven track record of sustained cooperation with the Organization. Formal relations are themselves subdivided into two types, consultative or associate, depending on the role and structure of the NGO itself. The Executive Board which is one of UNESCO's governing bodies, and more precisely its Committee on non-governmental organizations, annually decides on requests for admission to one or the other type of relations, as well as on the development of such relations, on the basis of recommendations made by the Director-General.

Foundations and similar institutions which are financially self-reliant, can also be admitted to official relations with UNESCO, according to the *Directives concerning relations between UNESCO and foundations and other similar institutions (1991)*:

Such organizations, which are also part of the non-governmental community, should nevertheless meet special criteria: as non-profit international organizations, pursuing objectives in conformity with the ideals of UNESCO, they should have the means to contribute to the implementation of its programme.

Any foundation or institution which satisfies these criteria may maintain official relations with UNESCO, provided that it has already engaged in cooperative activities with the Organization and that consultation on the part of UNESCO with national authorities where such an institution has its Headquarters, has taken place.

Who to contact?

- ▶ In the Bureau for External Relations, the **Section for international non-governmental organizations and foundations** (Division for Relations with International Organizations) has the main task of developing and intensifying relations between UNESCO and NGOs, foundations and similar institutions.
- ▶ The management of programmes undertaken by UNESCO is the responsibility of the programme sectors within the Secretariat. Questions relating to such programmes can be addressed to the NGO Section which will forward them to the relevant departments. Information may also be obtained on UNESCO's website.

1. The term *international non-governmental organizations* includes regional and interregional bodies, in the cultural and geographical sense of that term.

How to cooperate?

You represent a national organization

On the national level, non-governmental organizations (including foundations and similar institutions) wishing to collaborate with UNESCO have two main partners to which they can refer:

▶ **National Commissions** are national cooperative bodies set up by each Member State to act as a liaison body for all matters of concern to UNESCO. Their task is to involve in the work of the Organization all the different ministerial departments, services, institutions, organizations and citizens in their country working for the advancement of education, science, culture and communication.

Contact address on UNESCO web site: **National Commissions: Our partners**
<http://www.unesco.org/general/fre/partners.html>

▶ **UNESCO field units**, which are responsible for developing cooperation between the Organization and the countries which they cover and to which they act as the Organization's representatives.

Contact address on UNESCO website: **Field Offices: UNESCO in brief**
<http://www.unesco.org/general/fre/about/index.html>

National Commissions and field units are well placed to maintain close relations with organizations that are active on the ground, understand their structure, gauge their dynamism and vitality, vouch for their democratic functioning, inform them of available local possibilities for cooperation and bring their objectives and priorities more in line with those of UNESCO. In short, they are the guarantors of the quality of such cooperation, which seeks to be concrete and close to the concerns of the communities involved.

There are also a number of **networks** and **NGO coalitions** which allow these organizations to participate in international cooperation within a broader framework. These collective mechanisms can be structured around a particular theme or cover a given geographical region.

Further information on networks and national NGO coalitions can be obtained from the National Commissions, UNESCO field units or the Bureau for External Relations at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris.

A national NGO wishing to establish cooperative links with UNESCO can also seek to **affiliate to an international NGO** which already maintains official relations with UNESCO. It can thus enjoy official links with the Organization by affiliation, which helps it in its contacts on the national level.

A list of NGOs and foundations in official relations with UNESCO is available on the Internet:
<http://www.unesco.org/general/fre/partners/ong/liste.html>