



Ideas Lab 12 - Report

**Bringing the EU closer to its citizens:  
Working with the EU's decentralised agencies**

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**Recommendation:**

**Communicating Europe to citizens – involve EU agencies  
in promoting the European project**

**Lab leaders:**

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This Ideas Lab focused on the **role of decentralised EU agencies in the broader communication strategy of the EU institutions in communicating the EU to its citizens.**

There are over 40 decentralised EU agencies located all around the Member States. Although these agencies have a specific function in various areas of EU policy implementation – such as security, health, the environment or innovation – the reason for the initial executive decision to set them up in different cities around Europe was to bring the EU closer to its citizens. However, some EU agencies feel that they could play a bigger role than they do at present in promoting the European project, by getting their local and/or sectoral networks involved for greater impact.

This Ideas Lab aimed to share ideas on how to put this idea into practice.

**Opening of the Ideas Lab:**

**Warm-up question: What are you passionate about and what brings you here today?**

Brainstorming/comments:

- People working for the EU in Brussels often know little of the existence of the decentralised agencies located in their country or region.
- The EP staff in charge of the 'This time I'm voting' campaign have not yet approached the decentralised agencies to raise awareness of the upcoming European Parliament (EP) elections.
- The Commission tends to overlook decentralised agencies doing grassroots work on EU matters.
- The decentralised agencies are a testament to the benefits of free mobility for people in the EU.

The subsequent discussion was divided into two rounds:

### **Round 1: What are good ways for agencies to promote EU campaign messages locally?**

The participants were asked to reflect on the following questions: How can we better use the agencies to communicate broader EU messages to citizens (e.g. the 'This time I'm voting' campaign ahead of the 2019 EP elections)? Is there a contradiction in pursuing this strategy? Should agencies communicate on what they know most about, instead of trying to promote all EU policies?

Reflections:

- **Re-connect with centralised institutions in Brussels:** For decentralised agencies to promote EU campaigns, a stable channel of communication should be established between the Brussels institutions and agencies, so that the latter can obtain advance input from Brussels and share communication toolkits.
- **Emphasise the topic expertise of each agency:** There is an opportunity to make the most of each agency's core area of expertise, in order to give the centralised Brussels institutions more resources and credibility. In this case, a channel of communication should be established with the DGs. Also, agencies should participate more in events related to their area of expertise across the EU (being 'pan-local').
- **Focus on networking and storytelling:** Based on the 'show don't tell' strategy, agencies should focus on telling factual stories, especially those that link to the wider EU communication campaigns. They should also step up local communication, by organising face-to-face meetings and back-to-school and back-to-university visits, and raising awareness of open days and EU celebrations.
- **Get involved in local life:** To build a long-term trusting relationship with citizens, decentralised agencies should get involved in more local events and networks, working with local NGOs, civil society and local authorities. The best way of doing this is by collaborating with people who have local influence.
- **Improve internal coordination:** Training staff to be EU ambassadors and collaborating more with national and regional EU delegations (which have already built up a network with various local stakeholders) can go a long way towards conveying a positive image of the EU.
- **Invite a representative of the European Commission's DG COMM** to the next agency HCIN meeting.

### **Round 2: What is the best way to carry this forward and where would you like to be involved?**

The participants split into small groups. Each group concentrated on one of the points presented above and produced a poster with practical suggestions on developing a related communication strategy.

See overleaf for table with results.

**Wrap-up by Alastair Macphail:** The Ideas Lab has come up with some valuable ideas on how the decentralised agencies can engage more effectively with citizens and communicate the EU to them. The main idea to take away from the discussion is to network, network, network, both with civil society and with local authorities. To conclude, there needs to be structured communication between the decentralised agencies and the communication services of the EU institutions to enable them to play an effective role as intermediaries between Brussels and the local level by using more cultural diplomacy, organising pan-local events and raising awareness of their day-to-day practical tasks for the functioning of the EU.

PROPOSAL	AIM	PARTICIPANTS	OBSTACLES	NEXT STEP	TWEET
EU staff going back to schools	Put together a toolkit for proactively reaching out to schools.	Agency staff, local school networks, teachers, Europe Direct Information Centres (EDIC), EP, EC offices, etc.	Lack of staff motivation. Some schools difficult to approach. Difficult topic, complicated language.	Use what already exists. Explore interest within your own agency.	Show, tell, learn #Back2SchoolEU
Partnerships with local media and community	Establish regular contact with local media and host more joint events and press seminars.	Local media, civil society, centralised institutions, EC representations.	Lack of cooperation and resources.	Establish a network.	Be global, go local. EU is about cooperation; so is communication!
Structured joint planning and collaboration between agencies, EC and EP	Establish a communication network that meets once a year to set a couple of annual priorities for communication.	Agency Heads of Comm, DG Comm, EP Comm team.	Network could become too large to be effective.	Heads of Communication and Information Network (HCIN), EP and EC.	EU creates an interinstitutional communication network to bring EU closer to citizens #EUworkingtogether
Increase resources and funding	More resources for communication offices. The tools are already in place, they just need a boost.	Centralised institutions and agencies, local stakeholders.	Insufficient resources.	Bring people together.	Working smarter for a better Europe €€€
Video campaign 'Europe inside out'	Agencies producing videos on their area of expertise to show 'what Europe can do'.	Interview staff, citizens and beneficiaries.	Work overload and not an agency priority.	Discuss at HCIN network meeting.	#EUforYOU, your story, our story. Create your own video!
Use relevant local # and tag local stakeholders on social media	Break through the Brussels bubble. Beat the algorithms at their own game by using (relevant) local hashtags and tagging local stakeholders to get messages out.	Local actors, local EC and EP offices, local media and centralised institutions.	Language barrier. Need list of verified accounts.	Increase awareness of this practice through social media posts.	Use #localhashtags
Networking with beneficiaries locally	Agencies, EDIC and other partners could help network with beneficiaries of EU actions to share experiences and create critical mass.	Agencies, EDIC, EC and EP offices, universities, schools, EU trainees, grant holders.	Travel and other costs. Not the core business of the agency. GDPR.	Craft our messages/storytelling.	#comeandtellusastory #EUstory
Extend use of SMARP tool (staff/employee advocacy tool)	Encourage multilingualism, give access to shared content.	EC DG COMM and DG HR.	Mandate to communicate on private accounts.	Feed back to DG COMM and DG HR. Use staff tool/app to share EU campaigns on your own social media.	We are all #EUAmbassadors. Be smart in #SMARP.