

CREATIVE RESPONSES TO GROWING DIVIDES

The 2019 Innovators Forum

November 2018

Concept Note

In 2019, the International Civil Society Centre's Innovators Forum will convene a different audience of **civil society innovators to explore the area of 'reframing the narrative'** in response to challenges from the global rise of populist and nationalist political agendas. Building on the success and impact of the 2017 and 2018 Forums, the Centre invites you to join its **third annual gathering of innovators on 25–26 February 2019** in Berlin. This is a proven collaborative format which brings together international civil society organisation (ICSO) peers and external topic experts on a different theme each year.

The Centre invites **innovators from across the sector to come together for a two-day meeting in Berlin** to share their experiences and develop concrete involvement in a broader strategic project on CSOs in times of populism and division in society, which the International Civil Society Centre will be developing throughout 2019. We are inviting people whose role it is to either **drive innovation in their organisations, or those planning or running innovative campaigns, responses or outreach projects** to address the issues or effects arising from reduced public engagement with, trust in and image of ICSOs due to growing social and political polarisation. The participation fee is € 750 (travel and accommodation not included).

Participant feedback from Innovators Forum 2018

- *'It opens new doors to approaches and people'*
- *'Tangible outcomes, collaborative spirit'*
- *'Well facilitated chance to test new ideas'*

The 2019 Forum will **bring together innovators and experts, communicators and advocates, to learn from successful new innovations or promising experimental approaches, and discover the potential** for new narratives, campaigns and collaborations, and technology-enabled approaches and ways of engaging both stakeholders and potentially politically-motivated 'opponents'. **Participants will learn from each other and develop common and effective responses to take forward.** Together, we will identify best practice and in-depth case studies demonstrating the most original, engaging and impactful responses – both organisational and collective – to the major political and social challenges affecting our sector, as well as the contexts where further collaborative actions are necessary and possible.

Background

Societies around the world are increasingly characterised by growing divides and antagonised public discourse. This is most notable in demonising attitudes towards refugees, minorities and foreigners ("the other") and in sharp and increasingly irrational, fact-denying debates. Several factors contribute to this development and are interlinked – nationalism and populist policies attack civic actors and rights through repression, manipulative use of media and discrediting. Even overarching common values and norms, human rights and international law and treaties are undermined or openly attacked. Established institutions are losing political support and public trust, and with them, CSOs and their legitimacies are being challenged.



Under the title *Creative Responses to Growing Divides*, the Forum will explore **the new approaches organisations can employ in the current climate to build and maintain the positive engagement and trust of supporters and communities**, when global solidarity and international justice agendas, and universal rights-based approaches are increasingly being questioned.

Content and outputs from this Forum will contribute to the International Civil Society Centre's new 'Innovation in Civil Society' Annual Publication to be launched in October 2019 at the 'Global Perspectives' international conference, on the broader overall theme of 'CSOs in times of populism and division in society'.

Framework for the Forum

This forum will look at innovative approaches and messages under the following themes:

- **Renewing empathy/solidarity and stronger storytelling:** empathy-based approaches might be less effective in an increasingly crowded messaging space based on self-interest; we want to explore initiatives which prove this wrong or tell compelling emotional stories of injustice in direct, powerful and engaging ways;
- **Conquering/championing complexity:** oversimplistic messaging is everywhere around us and robust standards of 'evidence' no longer apply as much, we should not fall into the same trap. Introspection and self-reflection is also needed on an outdated framing which shows a growing disconnect from people's realities and move away from effective citizen engagement. We want to explore initiatives which still communicate real-life complexity of the issues we work on in engaging and accessible ways, and show how strong evidence and data still have a relevant and important role to play if used in an effective way;
- **Non-nationalist narratives:** messages based on narrow nationalist political and economic self-interest proliferate. We want to explore new narratives which effectively promote linked global/universal and local agendas or issues at the same time, or look beyond borders to the future, such as around megacities, city states, or local positive place-making;
- **Countering dis/misinformation:** targeted and politically motivated and factually inaccurate information is being generated in deliberate campaigns to undermine and falsely discredit the motivations and missions of ICSOs in some countries. We want to explore innovative ways in which organisations are working individually or together to address this, and also how to 'humanise' the direct effects of these campaigns for people's rights and wellbeing;
- **New forms of civic engagement and education:** this could be one of the long-term solutions to address the effects of growing nationalist and populist self-interest. We want to explore cases of experimental engagement or other large-scale efforts of civic education which could work in delivering positive messaging or mobilisation, either with the masses or the committed few. We will also look at how technology-enabled volunteerism may also create opportunities in this space, e.g. in response to online 'trolling':

Participant profile

This forum is aimed at a mixture of ICSO heads of advocacy and/or communications, managers of public engagement and outreach, or civic education programmes/projects, and senior innovation experts and strategy leads with interest and experience, or desire to learn more, in this area. Additional invited cross-sector collaborators will include development, human rights and media-linked NGOs, publications and platforms, think tank or academic convenors working on nationalism or populism, national CSO platforms working with their members on addressing these issues, and concerned donors or foundations interested in supporting others in this space.

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Or for more information, contact Vicky Tongue, Programme Manager, vtongue@icscentre.org.