

COVID-19: Re-thinking 2020 for activist organisations

[Blog, Covid-19](#)

In every activist organisation, previously solid plans are up in the air as we adapt to a new and never before experienced working landscape. With more questions than answers on the table, our Programmes Director, Bjorn Van Roozendaal shares some tips for rethinking 2020.

Never before have activist organisations felt as challenged in planning our work as we do now. Many of you are asking the same questions: Will we still be able to organise key meetings and events later this year? What will happen with our advocacy work or our campaigns during the rest of 2020? How will our changed work plans affect funding streams for specific areas of work that can't be done now?

We all have more questions than answers at this moment, and it's going to take some time before we have all the answers we need. In the meantime, here are some key organisational tips, based on how ILGA-Europe are adapting our work plan for 2020.

1. Don't reschedule everything

If your current thinking is that all activities that were supposed to happen over the coming couple of months can simply be organised for later in the year, you are walking straight into a trap of your own making. Remember how busy last autumn was? Add your spring plans to that and you will see that this way of thinking is setting your team up for failure and burnout. Also, remember that for everybody else, the coming autumn is going to be super busy too.

2. Understand your risks

We all have planned activities that are core to our roles as civil society organisations, which include larger gatherings, along with numerous smaller events, advocacy work and media campaigns. At ILGA-Europe, to help us assess what risks might be associated with organising activities, we're asking ourselves the following questions:

- **For physical events:** What travel restrictions could still be in place? Do we impose potential health risks on people if we bring them together? If yes, can social distancing be realised? Can we move meetings online?
- **Advocacy and campaigning:** Are our actions responding to the current needs of our communities? What does the political/public landscape currently look like, and is this the right time to further a particular agenda? Some work might simply continue, such as litigation work. Other work might need to be slightly adapted if it is to remain relevant.
- **Fundraising:** How appropriate does a fundraising campaign seem under these circumstances? Does our fundraising work legitimately respond to community needs at this moment in time?

3. Reassess your priorities

The virus is impacting on our teams and communities, and priorities are changing. Working from home, we might not be as productive as when we are in the office, so this has to be taken into account, as does the mental wellbeing of our teammates. At ILGA-Europe our priority continues to be making sure that team members are and

feel supported; only then we can focus rethinking the work at hand.

Doing new things to respond to emerging needs means that you will need to let go of some activities that you had planned. It is important to discuss this in your team and make group decisions so that you can make the changes you need to make and adapt your work plan to remain relevant to our movements and communities. When reassessing your work plan, it's important to ask the following questions:

- **What are activities that need to continue?** This is work that continues to be relevant to the community and our movement. Keep it!
- **What are the activities that we can drop?** For a variety of reasons, some activities might no longer be relevant to our work. Cancel!
- **What are emerging needs?** Our community might need us in different ways as a result of the crisis. Name those needs and discuss what you can do. Organise!

As the situation in our countries continues to change, remind yourself that it's still only April and you have time to change our annual work plan. Set a clear date when you will reassess your work plan with the team, to make sure that you keep on track.

4. Talk to funders

Some funders might have already reached out to you asking how they can help your organisation during this difficult period. Others might not have. It is important that you engage with funders at an early stage, asking them how much flexibility is possible. Tell them what work no longer make sense and what new needs /realities you need to respond to. Make them part of the thinking, so that you build support and understanding for any major shifts in your initial plans. Most funders will want to approve any changes before you can start working on them, so don't wait with getting in touch!

5. Build a future picture

The COVID-19 crisis raises big questions about the future of this world and our work. At ILGA-Europe, we have decided to first focus on the things that we can control: our work now and in the near future. The question leading our current work: *What support to activists is most urgent and can be quickly provided.* Meanwhile, we're having as many conversations as possible with activists, institutions, other civil society organisations and funders as possible, so that we slowly start building a better picture of how this work will influence our work in the longer run. We are accepting that we don't have full clarity on this yet, that this will take time, but the future of our work in a changed world is part of our overall thinking, as it should be everyone's.

There will be more space in the coming months to think about the future, but now is the right time to focus on getting clarity for yourself and your team. It is very likely that you will end up with a different work plan for this year and that you may need to adapt your plans again in a few weeks or months from now. Now is the time to create space with your team to discuss what work makes the most sense for you and your organisation right now. Check out more here: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B-hoaU8FgSY/>