

**Peer Learning Event  
on Communication Strategies for Grantmaker Associations  
November 15-16, 2007, Boston, USA**

**Summary Report**

Staff representatives of 15 associations from the WINGS network gathered in Boston for a two-day peer exchange on communication strategies. Specifically, the peer learning event (PLE) aimed to address questions such as:

- How can an association communicate – more effectively and more efficiently – with its members? What are examples of creative approaches to communication and knowledge management?
- How can an association take full advantage of cutting edge technology at the same time ensure that it benefits as well its members who are “not quite there yet” in terms of technology?
- How can an association use communication channels to continuously raise awareness and link its members with emerging issues in philanthropy both at the local and international levels?

With excellent hosting by Associated Grant Makers (AGM), the meeting provided a venue for the participants to tell stories, share tools and resources, generate insight, and tie the learning back to their own work. While they come from diverse contexts (in terms of the age of their associations, number of staff, types and size of membership, and geographic service area), shared practice and challenges emerged during the discussions. Everyone was very eager both to share with and learn from their colleagues from other parts of the world, and explore better ways in:

- Branding / developing and managing the brand;
- Reaching the target audience;
- Building relationships with external audiences;
- Strengthening internal communication;
- Building staff capacity and skills;
- Keeping up with the increasing pace of knowledge creation to meet knowledge consumption needs;
- Managing information overload; and
- Engaging members in broader issues in the philanthropic sector.

As one participant pointed out: *“I felt it was a real peer learning, with participants sharing not only the best practices, but also some struggles and challenges, which are even more important to talk about, as well as share and discuss various solutions.”*

For this particular peer learning event, the PLE Working Group\* and WINGS Secretariat tried to enhance the discussions by bringing into some of the sessions the experience and expertise of resource persons from communications and information technology organizations in the Boston area. The participants found the perspectives of the external resource persons a valuable aspect of the meeting. For example, the session on Knowledge Management, with Roberto Cremonini of the Barr Foundation, contributed not only towards a clearer and common understanding of the concept of knowledge management, but also made it more real and doable to the participants. It engaged them to take action by tying the discussion back to what is already being done in their

respective organizations and using the new learning and insights gained to improve their work further.

Instead of coming up with a “proceedings” of the peer learning event, the PLE participants are putting together a matrix featuring some practical tips, tools, resources, and case studies / examples which grantmaker associations can always refer to as they address their own communications issues. Other colleagues from the WINGS network who were not present at the peer learning event would also be invited to contribute their own interesting stories and tips. In addition, some of the PLE participants volunteered to help organize a webinar on specific topics and to conduct a demonstration of the communications technologies that worked for them. Our aim is to be able to share the benefits of this peer learning event in forms that are useful to participants in the WINGS network.

The peer learning event’s full Agenda and List of Participants is available on the WINGS website: <http://www.wingsweb.org/programmes/peer.cfm>

**\*PLE Working Group:**

- Natalya Kaminarskaya, Executive Secretary, Russia Donors Forum (Chair of the working group)
- Pavlína Kalousová, Executive Director, Czech Donors Forum
- Lucille DiDomenico, Executive Director, Conference of Southwest Foundations, Inc., USA
- Ron Ancrum, President, Associated Grant Makers, USA