



Best NGO practices on alternative fundraising

work with embassies

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Dear Friends!

Our Eurasian Regional Consortium made up of community networks continues its budget advocacy work. We are pleased to present you with another methodological guide, which for the first time describes the experiences of public organizations working with foreign embassies in their countries.

From the materials of this publication, you will learn how to cost communication, what needs to be done in order to receive funding, what type of assistance can be obtained in addition to financial assistance, whether it is possible to lobby for an increase in funding for your work next year, and how to avoid mistakes when working with embassies.

We sincerely hope that our manual and the advice of experienced colleagues will be useful for those already advocating for the interests of LGBT communities before embassies, and for those who are just planning to begin this activity.

Good luck!



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List of Abbreviations

HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
EECA	Eastern Europe and Central Asia
Global Fund	Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
EHRA	Eurasian Harm Reduction Association
EWNA	Eurasian Women’s Network on AIDS
ECOM	Eurasian Coalition on Health, Rights, Gender and Sexual Diversity
LBQ	Lesbian, bisexual and queer people
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer people
MSM	men who have sex with men
NPO	Non-profit organization
NGO	Non-governmental organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Introduction

As part of the Eurasian Regional Consortium’s project “Thinking outside the box: overcoming challenges in community advocacy for sustainable and high-quality HIV services”, which unites the efforts of ECOM — the Eurasian Coalition on Health, Rights, Gender and Sexual Diversity (ECOM), the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA) and the Eurasian Women’s Network on AIDS (EWNA), one of the main objectives of ECOM is to help expand funding for national LGBT community organizations and other organizations providing services for LGBT people in EECA countries. An important component of this objective is to analyze the experience of obtaining alternative fundraising to improve the quality of life of LGBT communities in EECA countries, including through work with the embassies of other states.

Interviews with representatives of non-governmental organizations in EECA countries, as well as information from open sources, were used in the development of this report. Respondents were selected by open invitation as ECOM members. Respondents described the practices that they considered the most significant for reflecting their experiences cooperating with embassies. The experience of some countries and organizations, information about which is available in open sources, is not presented in the description of these best practices, because representatives of these organizations did not agree to be interviewed or because they considered their experience to be insignificant.

An analysis of the interview recordings showed that they not only reflect different experiences (for some organizations, such collaboration was short-term to cover one or more events, and for some, it entailed systematic work over many years), but also provide a number of significant recommendations for other representatives of the non-governmental sector, such as the need to take into account the specifics of work in different countries (including the level of tolerance towards LGBT issues). Therefore, this report includes both a collection of best practices, as well as a separate, general section with recommendations: which approaches are the most effective, which ones need to be corrected, as well as how to work with embassies in countries unfriendly to the LGBT community.

Note that this report does not aim to analyze all cases where projects to support the LGBT community were funded by embassies in EECA countries. The authors of the report are open to analyzing new information that can be provided by relevant organizations and experts.

To protect the privacy and security of activists, in some cases, we do not use real names, funding amounts, or other information that is not relevant to the purposes of this report. Our objective is to analyze general trends and experiences,

which will help NGOs to more actively use alternative fundraising methods, since interviews show that in many cases, organizations do not have sufficient experience to cooperate with embassies of other states.



Cooperation with embassies of foreign states as a form of fundraising for NGOs

General information

Grants and other financial support from the embassies of foreign states is a fairly common form of financing for the projects of non-governmental organizations in EECA countries, as well as around the world. As a rule, the main areas of support are education, healthcare, medicine, the social sphere, ecology, culture, and, of course, human rights, which is relevant for organizations representing the interests of the LGBT community.

In recent years, funding for LGBT activities through the donor programs of various countries of the world has increased significantly: compared to 2013-2014, in 2017-2018, embassy funding for LGBTI issues has more than doubled and the number of grants has increased by over 600%.¹

Why is funding from embassies important for LGBT organizations?

It is an opportunity to receive support for an activity or a specific initiative from the budget of a foreign state. As a rule, embassy employees are more aware of the situation in the country or region (if the embassy works in several countries) than people working in government structures directly in the country whose interests the embassy represents. If an organization or individual activists have paid sufficient attention to establishing contacts with embassies, they will already be known when the grant competition is announced, or the diplomatic mission staff can contact them themselves to implement a certain initiative.

Embassies often offer small grant programs, under which funding is significantly less than in large government programs. For organizations with little grant experience, like many LGBT initiatives in EECA countries, this facilitates the process of administration and reporting. Often grants and other financial support provided through embassies are more flexible; they are easier to implement in countries with homophobic policies, as embassy staff are familiar with the problems specific to these countries.

Donor funding through embassies could be the first step for further funding from large government grants or non-governmental foundations. It is not uncommon for embassy employees to turn to NGOs themselves with proposals to participate in longer-term projects with more funding after an organization has implemented a small grant.

It is not uncommon for embassies to support activities that are not a priority for large government grants, for example, the organizational development of NGOs. General support for activities through embassies often allows local or national organizations working on LGBT issues to hold individual events that are relevant to their interests or to develop the capacity of their organization.

Embassies can provide individual grants, which is especially important for countries where local LGBT organizations are underdeveloped or their existence is prohibited by law. This can range from supporting small initiatives within the country (such as exhibitions, film screenings, pride events) to participating in regional or international conferences, seminars, or exchange and training programs.

¹ URL: https://globalphilanthropyproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/DivingDeeper_embassies.pdf#page=2

Embassy support can significantly boost activism in anti-LGBT countries, which is very important for new initiatives and groups in countries with high levels of discrimination and exclusion of the LGBT community.

What can embassy support look like?

Grant programs (small and large grants under grant programs that the embassy administers as part of a large initiative (for example, the Democracy Commission Small Grants Program (Fund for Democracy, Democracy Commission) of the US Embassy, aimed at promoting democracy and developing civil society through the provision of small grants for non-profit, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and associations, as well as for independent media. Information about grants is published on the websites of embassies. As a rule, there is a set grant cycle (grant programs are announced at the same time).

In terms of support for the LGBT community, grant announcements may explicitly mention LGBTI issues. For example, one of the latest announcements of the US Embassy in Ukraine to apply for the grant program «Defending Human Rights: Preventing Politically Motivated Persecution and Hate Crimes» directly mentions the issue of «Combating violence and violation of rights, criminalization, discrimination, and stigmatization of LGBT people, and supporting the work of human rights defenders in Ukraine». In addition, an announcement of grants from the Embassy of the Netherlands in Kazakhstan, for example, directly mentions the area of “Equal rights for LGBTI people with a focus on reducing criminalization based on sexual orientation and gender identity around the world, reducing violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and increasing social acceptance of LGBTI people.” In many cases, LGBT issues may not be mentioned in grant announcements, but this does not exclude the possibility of submitting projects, for example, within the field of human rights.

Support for individual initiatives outside the grant competition, when an organization or an initiative group approaches one or more embassies to support a particular initiative (for example, as part of Pride Month, the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT), or in support of cultural events or conferences on human rights). It is also possible to obtain support to address unexpected situations, in particular, in the context of human rights violations.

Technical (expert) assistance. Sometimes, when funding is limited, it may be easier to convince an embassy to provide technical support rather than direct funding. Embassy staff are often available for community advocacy consultations, and can help identify experts who can be useful for work on LGBT rights.

Material assistance. This form of support was more common in the early stages of development of NGOs in the countries of the region (for example, providing computers or other equipment), now it is barely mentioned by respondents.

2 URL: <https://ua.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/151/DemCom-NOFO-Human-Rights-2022-Final-Ukr.docx>

3 URL: <https://www.niderlandy-i-vy.nl/ваша-страна-и-нидерланды/казахстан/и-нидерланды/программа-грантов-по-правам-человека>

Assistance in finding donors at the country level. It is not uncommon for an embassy to act as an intermediary and provide information about opportunities for grant funding from other foundations and bodies in the country. The representations, consulates and embassies of foreign states have fairly complete information about various foundations and donors, and about their priorities, projects, programs and grants. Many embassies have resource centers, such as libraries, cultural centers, reading rooms and research facilities, which can be used to obtain information about funding opportunities.

Initiation of fundraising to support initiatives of local organizations or initiative groups (an example of this is the participation of the embassies of Switzerland and the Netherlands in raising funds for the “Rainbow House”, a safe space for representatives of the LGBT community in Kyrgyzstan, during embassy receptions and other events - more in the «Kyrgyzstan» section).

Individual grants (for example, the United States Embassy’s International Visitor Leadership Program), through which, foreign leaders in various fields have the opportunity to explore various aspects of life in the United States and to build strong relationships with their American counterparts during short-term visits to the country. This program does not have an application form; participants are nominated by US Embassies in specific countries. This section also includes numerous educational programs administered by embassies.

Cases where support grants are **not issued through an embassy in a particular country** should be highlighted separately. One such example is the support program of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands aimed at supporting the development of civil society and democracy: the Human Rights Fund and the Netherlands Regional Partnership Fund - Matra (NFRP - MATRA). This program is open to applications from Belarus but is administered by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Warsaw. At the embassy office in Minsk, you can only get a consultation. Examples of topics of initiatives of the Human Rights Fund include equal rights for LGBT people.

Example of activities to support the LGBT community: Embassy of the Netherlands

Interviews with representatives of LGBT organizations in the EECA region showed that the Embassy of the Netherlands is mentioned the most often among the embassies that actively support communities. Funding from the Dutch Embassy plays an important role in providing resources to movements working for the equal rights of LGBT people in many countries around the world. For example, according to data presented in the Global Resources Report for 2017-2018, the Netherlands provided more LGBTI grants through its embassies than any other state donor. In these two years, the Dutch government awarded 158 grants in 64 countries in every region of the world. Over half of all global LGBTI funding from the Netherlands was provided through their embassies (53% or \$7.2 million). Most of the funding made available through Dutch embassies comes from the Human Rights Fund, a global funding program that promotes the priorities of the Dutch government’s human rights policy. One such priority is equal rights for LGBTI people. A portion of the overall funding of the Human Rights Fund is allocated to Dutch embassies for projects that address country-specific human rights priorities. Ensuring equal rights for LGBTI people is a priority for the Human Rights Fund.

How can LGBT organizations in the region be useful to embassies?

One of the existing mechanisms could be to focus on human rights violations in relation to LGBT people. For example, by working with US embassies, you can help to include information about violations of LGBT rights in the human rights report that each embassy is required to submit annually to the US State Department. The State Department is required to report to Congress on the human rights situation in each country towards the end of February. To ensure that the report is submitted on time, embassy staff begin preparing the country report at the beginning of September. The reports are publicly available documents and can be found in the human rights section on the State Department website. Since 2009, reports have included a special section on «Acts of Violence, Criminalization and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity», which highlights LGBT-related incidents. In preparing these reports, US embassy officials often turn to NGOs to gather information and document human rights trends. This is a good opportunity for the organization to present itself and its activities.

5 URL: <https://www.netherlandsandyou.nl/your-country-and-the-netherlands/belarus/and-the-netherlands/hrf-and-nfrp-matra>

6 URL: https://globalphilanthropyproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/DivingDeeper_embassies.pdf#page=9



Cooperation with the embassies of foreign states

experience of the EECA countries

KAZAKHSTAN: many years of experience and algorithm of work with embassies

Multi-level support

Effective algorithm of work

The public association «**Human Health Institute**» (Nur-Sultan) is a public organization whose main activity is the protection of the right to health. Programs and projects implemented by the organization are focused on health issues, human rights, as well as on the impact of the environment on public health. «Human Health Institute» has experience in implementing HIV prevention programs for MSM with the support of the Global Fund, as well as in mobilizing the LGBT community. Over the years of its work, the organization has implemented approximately forty-five projects, which were financed in one way or another by diplomatic missions and embassies. The organization is currently implementing an environmental project with the support of the US Embassy.

An example of a project implemented with the financial support of diplomatic missions is a project focused on the issue of the right to health, which the organization has been implementing since 2014. Its implementation was quite successful, in particular, a number of recommendations and tools were developed, which are currently being used by state bodies.

The activity began with the support of the US Embassy as a **three-year project focusing on the access of the LGBT community to healthcare services**. As part of the project, several platforms were established that enabled representatives of key populations, primarily the LGBT community, to interact with decision-makers, such as Ministry of Health staff members, on issues of access to medical services. Thanks to this well-established dialogue in the country, protocols on the treatment of transgender people have been amended. However, the implementation of this project demonstrated the gaps that hinder the further development of the community, primarily the lack of activists who can be the voice of the community in the country.

In 2017, a project was launched with the support of the Embassy of the Netherlands, which lasted until 2020 and was focused on increasing the capacity and activism of representatives of the LGBTIQ+ community.

Thus, with the support of various donors, including the embassies of foreign states, a platform was established that makes it possible for countries to hear from LGBT people what kind of support and services they need and how. This was developed as part of another two-year project, supported by the Embassy of the Netherlands, focusing on protecting the rights of LGBT people and developing activism. During the implementation of the project, the organization began working on the issue of **HIV infection and prevention among key populations**.

This thematic area has developed to such an extent that this activity has become a **separate activity for the organization**.

Although all the stages described have already been completed, the organization does not stop its work. It continues to search for additional funding, and established a special working group to deal with fundraising issues. The current priority issue is the **creation of a community center** in Nur-Sultan for representatives of the LGBT community, in particular LBQ women, whose needs are not covered by any of the existing projects in the country

Aydar Kapasov, Chairperson of the «Human Health Institute» shared their experience working with embassies to obtain funding and highlighted the main points that should be paid attention to:

Priorities of diplomatic missions. Each year, each diplomatic mission has its own specific priority areas under which they are willing to work, and for which there is funding in the embassy budget. By knowing their priorities, you can project them onto the activities of your organization, and determine where the points of contact are.

“Currently, the US Embassy willingly supports gender and LGBT projects, and they also prioritize environmental and social issues,” says Aydar Kapasov. “Each of the embassies of the EU countries have their own specific human rights focus. In particular, such activities in Kazakhstan are actively supported by the Embassy of the Netherlands, the German Embassy is more focused on political initiatives, such as, for example, amending legislation. The British Embassy supports projects in various areas.”

WELL-ESTABLISHED COMMUNICATION IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS IN FURTHER FUNDING OF PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS BY DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS.

Establishing contacts. Any interaction with the embassy should begin with networking and dialogue. The embassy is a complex mechanism; you need to understand which department to contact. According to Aydar Kapasov, preliminary negotiations and establishing relations with the US Embassy took about a year and a half

“Now we have an idea that we hope to implement in the future,” says Aydar Kapasov, “to organize a platform that would bring together representatives of all the diplomatic missions that work on health issues, human rights, and the environment. This could be a kind of discussion platform, where representatives of all diplomatic missions, and the heads of these departments will be invited, so that they get to know each other, and so that they can see us. Such events can take place once or twice a year. This will be a plus both for us and for the representatives of diplomatic missions themselves, as such meetings can lead to collaboration and new communications. Indeed, often one embassy does not know what the other is doing. This site can be used for checking in with each other”.

Embassy grant programs are the basic source of funding for civil society organizations. In this regard, it is also important to understand what are the

priority areas, how much funding can be expected, when a competition is announced, and how long it takes to consider an application. This step is more difficult as you need to write a competitive **project proposal**.

TO GET FUNDING, YOU NEED TO LEARN HOW TO WRITE COMPETITIVE APPLICATIONS. WE NEED TO LEARN, AND INVOLVE CONSULTANTS: THIS IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS!

Often, representatives of public organizations are afraid to apply for grant competitions through the embassy, citing the complexity of the project application. This does not need to be the case. It is possible to write a good application, but this must be learned. It may be necessary to strengthen the capacity of staff members, or to recruit consultants who will help. Most importantly, it is necessary to get information directly from beneficiaries. The project should cover their needs and be focused on reducing social tension

When applying for funding, an organization must first of all develop a general **concept**: what issue will be focused on and how will it be developed. It takes time and effort to develop such a concept. But this concept can help the organization to find funding over the next few years. As part of this concept, it is possible to apply for support for its various objectives, and obtain an overall picture embedded in the concept, based on the needs of beneficiaries.

BEFORE APPLYING FOR FUNDING, DEVELOP A GENERAL CONCEPT FOR A PROGRAM OR ACTIVITY THAT WILL COVER THE NEEDS OF BENEFICIARIES!

When an organization prepares a certain project or program and applies to an embassy for support when no grants competition has been announced, it is important **not to focus on having just one diplomatic mission finance all of its components**. It is desirable to spread the expected funding over several applications. You should not stop seeking funding if the project of the organization was supported by one embassy. Often non-governmental organizations make a big mistake when they do not seek additional funding.

In order to ensure that the application falls within the priority areas of the embassy, it is important to **constantly be in contact with the embassy**, and to propose your ideas, which may lead to the embassy supporting your application even when no grants competition has been announced.

It should not be expected that a large amount of funding will be provided immediately. It is best to start with a small project, while ensuring high-quality implementation, to build trust in the organization, and so that the embassy already sees the organization's potential. The implementation of a small project is a good opportunity to establish cooperation with the embassy.

When submitting an application aimed at solving a particular problem, it is necessary to back it up with references to international sources indicating the existence of the problem. It is not enough just to write about the problem. It is necessary to illustrate it using the country's strategic documents, and reports of the UN and other human rights organizations in order to explain the priority of such activities. It is not sufficient to say that a violation has been identified; you must show that it is being discussed at the international level.

“No one will give us money, simply because we are all so wonderful, kind, gentle, and amazing. No one will give us anything until we learn how to formulate the problem correctly and choose the right solutions”, says Aydar Kapasov.

The experience of the Human Health Institute suggests that **embassies, as a rule, do not like to support small, one-time events** [Author’s note: However, the experience of other countries shows the opposite. Obviously, both country specifics and the specifics of the concept of a particular organization are factors in this]. Such events (coinciding with Pride, or IDAHOBIT) garner greater support from international organizations. Embassies can provide support, but generally do so as part of existing projects/programs. One-time activities are not a priority for one simple reason: all diplomatic missions prefer systemic work. The project must last at least twelve months.

Reporting must always be accurate and meet embassy requirements. The issue of how to provide information about the project at the country level can always be clarified with the embassy, since there are a number of regulations and requirements on how to provide information on the project.

After completing the project, you should always ask the embassy for a letter of recommendation. It does not need to be addressed to any particular recipient, but it is worth getting. In the future, such a letter will be useful for any new grant/project, as the staff of embassies, including local staff, often changes due to rotations. Therefore, there is a real need to get feedback on how the organization has implemented the work of the project.

KYRGYZSTAN: fundraising assistance and multi-stage support

Embassy participation in fundraising campaigns

Multi-stage support

The public association «Kyrgyz Indigo» has extensive experience cooperating with embassies in various ways.

Small grants from embassies. According to Adilet Alimkulov, Executive Director of the organization, many embassies present in Central Asia issue small grants for NGOs, including Canada, the Netherlands, Finland and others (some are embassies located directly in Kyrgyzstan, some are located in other countries of Central Asia, but carry out work in the whole region).

Grants at the request of the embassy. After completing a year-long advocacy project that the organization was implementing with the support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Central Asia (in particular, the project was aimed at supporting strategic cooperation and the development of informal coalitions and promoting an agenda of non-discrimination of vulnerable groups in the country), based on the results obtained, the embassy invited the organization to apply for a four-year project to support advocacy and human rights initiatives. As part of this project, the organization prepares alternative reports for UN committees, carries out advocacy activities, and, importantly, the team's organigram is supported, which is not always typical for embassy grants, but is critical for the organizational development of the organization.

IN THE EVENT OF SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF SMALL GRANTS, EMBASSIES CAN INVITE ORGANIZATIONS FROM THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL SECTOR FOR LONG-TERM COOPERATION.



Support for initiatives that relate to the priorities of the organization. Over the past seven years, “Kyrgyz Indigo” has been raising funds for the opening of the “Rainbow House”, a safe space for LGBT+ people from Kyrgyzstan and all of Central Asia. The “Rainbow House” will become a rehabilitation center where LGBT+ people from the region in crisis can improve their mental health and learn skills that will help them to earn a living and contribute to the empowerment of the region’s queer community in the future.

Over the past seven years, the organization has managed to raise about \$56,000 for this initiative. Although fundraising has not yet ended, the support of the Embassies of Switzerland and the Netherlands was significant and non-traditional: embassy staff raised funds for the «Rainbow House» during charity events, in particular, dedicated to LGBT issues (charitable dinners, film screenings, exhibitions). Guests of the events, such as diplomats, and representatives of international organizations and other bodies, could make any financial contribution they wished, and familiarize themselves with the life of the LGBT+ community in the country. The Embassy of the Netherlands also supported the first Central Asian Indigo Ball, where it was also possible to make donations to the “Rainbow House” initiative.

EMBASSY EVENTS ARE A GOOD OPPORTUNITY TO COLLECT INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS FROM PEOPLE WHO ATTEND THESE RECEPTIONS.

Individual support. There are frequent examples where embassies do not support the projects of local NGOs working on LGBT issues, but can instead include representatives of the community in educational programs, individual internships, or individual trips. For example, community representatives with the appropriate education and language skills have studied gender and human rights issues in the United States or European countries with the support of «Kyrgyz Indigo» and relevant embassies.

Recommendations and lessons from “Kyrgyz Indigo”

Many years of experience working with embassies make it possible to identify certain rules and patterns regarding the funding of activities of LGBT organizations by diplomatic missions:

In Kyrgyzstan, embassies do not support activities related to HIV prevention or other healthcare issues, because they are well funded by the Global Fund, USAID, UNFPA and other international organizations.

When submitting a funding application to an embassy, the **context and area of support** of the embassy should always be taken into account. It is important for the organization to **study the priorities of each embassy**, and not just come in with its own initiative.

“We know that, for example, the Finnish embassy prioritizes climate change, agriculture and, in part, gender equality,” says Adilet Alimkulov. “Accordingly, they support the initiatives of organizations that work on these topics. The Embassy of the Netherlands is very active in supporting LGBT rights around the world and, accordingly, they are the most open to long-term cooperation with and support for LGBT organizations. The British Embassy is very active in supporting technical innovation. Accordingly, organizations that work in this field fall into their grant programs. The Embassy of Switzerland is very active in supporting the arts, creativity and artistic initiatives. Therefore, it is very important to get to know the priorities of each specific country and the representation of this country, and, contact them only after this.”

EMBASSIES WILL NOT FUND ISSUES THAT OTHER DONORS ARE SUCCESSFULLY WORKING ON.

It is important for LGBT organizations to know **which embassies will not support them**. For example, the French Embassy in Kyrgyzstan does not support projects aimed at LGBT people. Their general policy is friendly: they attend rainbow dinners and communicate. However, this topic is not their priority. The Embassy of Japan is very active in funding cultural initiatives, but do not support LGBT issues. It is obvious that the Russian Embassy does not support human rights activities, but rather only educational initiatives that help young people enter the universities of the Russian Federation.

When communicating with embassies, one important point should be remembered: they will always act based on the priorities and interests of their country, but will not enter into direct confrontation with the state in which they are located. For “Kyrgyz Indigo”, there was a significant case when the organization was publicly outed, and data on the location of their office was made public, which resulted in an urgent need to move, and strengthen the digital and physical security of the organization. However, requests for support from embassies that do not openly support LGBT+ issues went unanswered, since providing support to queer activists in public crisis situations does not fall into their area of interest and can adversely affect their reputation and relations with the government of the country.

“There are also positive examples of open support for LGBT+ people in Kyrgyzstan,” says Adilet Alimkulov, “The US Embassy invited the queer activist community to a reception as part of Pride Month and made a post supporting the LGBT+ community on their official Instagram page.”⁹

⁹ <https://www.instagram.com/p/Ce5e5UDIV-/>

ARMENIA: preliminary work is very important!

Funding through embassy grants

For the Humanitarian NGO “New Generation”, a non-governmental organization with extensive experience in protecting human rights, expanding access to health care, and empowering vulnerable groups in Armenia, cooperation with embassies is an important part of work.

Like most organizations in the region, “New Generation” has its own experience working with embassies:

Embassy grant programs: They have experience working with the embassies of the USA, the Netherlands, Germany, and Sweden. As a rule, various grant competitions are announced every year, which have a human rights component; 90% of the grants received by the organization relate to this particular topic. An important project that was implemented with the financial support of the US Embassy (Democracy Commission Small Grants Program) was the project “Sensitization and Empowerment for Equality”, which was aimed at promoting the rights of LGBTI people and eliminating discrimination in Armenia. As part of this grant, small sub-grants for human rights and advocacy initiatives are provided to local NGOs.

Project implementation at the invitation of the embassy. Only once did the Dutch embassy call the organization and offer funding for a small advocacy project regarding activities to advocate for legislative changes to the “gender reassignment” procedure for trans* people. The organization received funding and actively conducted activities, but examples of such support are rare, rather than systemic.

Individual grants. Individual participation in the internship and exchange programs, which are often announced by embassies, can be a good opportunity. But even in this case, it is very important to understand why such a trip is needed, and what benefits it will have for both the participant and their organization.

“I participated in the International Visitor program of the US Embassy. Our group of five visited six different states and over seventy organizations in twenty-three days. It was very interesting and informative,” says Sergey Gabrielyan, Chairperson of the Humanitarian NGO “New Generation”. “The main thing is that even before the trip there should be a real vision of what you want to «take away» from this visit for your organization. Of course, it is nice to go to America and see everything there. But the main thing is that everything you see should immediately be applied to your organization: what will be useful, what will work. In this case, such trips are very useful.”

Sergey Gabrielyan shares the «secrets» of successful work with embassies:

Meetings with embassy staff are essential. Every opportunity should be used: both specially organized meetings and general participation in various events. Employees of the organization meet regularly and discuss the problems faced by vulnerable communities in Armenia, and the tasks that the organization intends to implement.

THE KEY TO THE SUCCESS OF A GRANT IS IF THE EMBASSY KNOWS ABOUT THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ORGANIZATION AND ABOUT THE PROBLEM THE APPLICATION IS AIMED AT SOLVING.

“We always try to take advantage of meetings. This can be both in our office and at any large events. We do not openly ask for money,” says Sergey Gabrielyan. “We talk about our problems and challenges, and what can be done to reduce these problems step-by-step. This is the most important point, because when it comes time to apply for funding, it will be difficult to cover everything on one page. A limit of two hundred or even a thousand characters does not allow you to say everything about your projects. Therefore, it is better if the embassy already knows about the organization, so that they are already up-to-date before the submission of the project. Then they call and say that the program has been announced, and that you can prepare an application: this is how cooperation begins.”

Newsletter distribution. The organization regularly prepares a newsletter about its activities, problems and challenges. All embassies always receive this newsletter, regardless of whether they have a grant program open or not.

Negative experience

Of course, there are also negative examples of cooperation:

If you apply for financial support shortly before an event, there is a high risk of not receiving it. It is not uncommon for an NGO to decide to host an event, for example in conjunction with a memorial day, and approach various potential donors for a small amount of financial support. Staff of the Humanitarian NGO “New Generation” shared their experience when they wrote an open letter to embassies regarding funding for the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT), but were refused because they had requested funding too late. Embassy budgets were already set, and, as a rule, ad hoc funding is not included in the budget. As experience shows, you need to apply for funding at least a year before the planned event, because then there is still a chance.

YOU SHOULD APPLY FOR FUNDING FOR EVENTS WELL IN ADVANCE OF THE EVENT DATE.

“Often people think that the embassy just has money and the ambassador decides for himself whether to give money to a certain organization,” says Sergey Gabrielyan. “This is not the case. Advocacy and long-term work are needed. You need to know everything about the work of the embassy, the stages of financing, when the budget is drawn up, and what the priority areas are. Constant communication is necessary. Only then will the embassy know about the existence of the problem, and will there be a chance to receive financial support.”

Unfair competition. Competition among NGOs for grant funds is not uncommon. Unfortunately, «black PR» can work. This is why it is so important to cooperate with the embassy, regardless of the announcement of funding programs, so that the NGO, its activities and principles of work are known.

TAJIKISTAN: support for fundraising within the country

Funding through embassy grants

Continuation of activities at the country level with funds from other donors

Negative experience

Small grants program

According to Farishtamokh Gulova, head of the PO “Equal Opportunities”, participation in the **small grants program of the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives** (CFLI) of the Embassy of Canada in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, was a small success and a small victory for the organization she heads. Thanks to this grant, the organization was able to hold the **Republican Forum «We are donors. Partnership and coordination: guarantees for success»** for three years. Representatives of public organizations, state institutions, and international donors and organizations were invited to the forum, where everyone had the opportunity to introduce themselves and their organization, get acquainted with the work of partners and learn about the work of international representations and organizations in the country. The funding of the Embassy of Canada also made it possible to provide small grants to NGOs, so that public organizations dealing with rights and health issues could prepare their own booths at the forum and present themselves properly.

«This was a large country forum, where public organizations primarily working in social and legal fields from all over our country gathered,» says Farishtamokh Gulova. “We first focused on organizations that work with key populations: men who have sex with men, sex workers, people who inject drugs, and people living with HIV, so that they could exchange experiences and present their work during the forum, because such a platform had never existed before. In parallel, we invited donors so that they could familiarize themselves with the activities of the NGOs. We wanted this forum to be significant for the capacity development of public organizations, so that they could see that there are donor opportunities to support their activities, which are not a priority in the country, including the opportunity to contribute to the development of civil society in Tajikistan.”

According to the staff of the organization, the **positive result** of holding such a forum with embassy funding, was that a **portal for public organizations** “Online Information Portal of Community NGOs of Tajikistan” (https://tajikngo.tj/ru_RU), which unites NGO representatives in the country and establishes a discussion platform, was launched following the forum. Holding the forum and creating an opportunity to exchange information became the very impetus that relaunched an already existing, but not yet active portal, developed by the Public Organization «Center of Information-Communication Technologies» together with the branch of the Swiss Association «HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation» in Tajikistan.

Participation of embassy representatives in NGO activities. Given the environment in the country, where the activities of human rights NGOs or those that represent the interests of the LGBT community do not receive special interest or support, the simple participation of an embassy representative in an event, even in the absence of any funding, is a positive, since this raises the status of the event.

Individual grants. Although it is quite difficult to get funding from embassies for activities within the country (see below), there has been significant positive results from the participation of community activists in experience exchange programs, primarily through the US Embassy, as part of existing individual scholarships. Thanks to these programs, it is possible to place motivated community representatives in internships. Quite often, representatives of the embassy contact the organization themselves, offering to nominate participants to the experience exchange programs. Such programs provide development opportunities for leaders. This is truly a good practice, because such support is also an investment of money in the further development of organizations, knowledge and opportunities. Development of human resources allows you to strengthen the capacity of organizations and acquire new colors through the completion of the internships.

Negative experience. Unfortunately, in Tajikistan, there are not very many opportunities for organizations working with marginalized groups of the population to receive funding.

INDIVIDUAL EMBASSY GRANTS FOR INTERNSHIPS – THIS IS ALSO AN INVESTMENT IN THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORGANIZATION, KNOWLEDGE AND CAPABILITIES.

For example, every year the Embassy of the United States announces a support program of small grants from the Democracy Commission Small Grants Program. However, in the history of this small grants program, there has never been any approved projects aimed at supporting vulnerable groups, in particular representatives of LGBT communities. The only step forward was in 2022, when assistance was provided to an organization, which deals with issues related to women living with HIV. Although the embassy actively communicates with representatives of all key communities, and LGBT issues are noted in the grant description, **activities on this issue are not supported**, even though the applications did not include activities related to community visibility (for example, the organization of a pride festival).

Obviously, the embassy, realizing that this issue is not a priority for the country and that supporting LGBT issues can cause misunderstandings on the part of the state, does not want to attract too much attention and provoke possible conflicts.

“I know for sure that we wrote the grant application in accordance with the requirements and that it was written well,” says Farishtamokh Gulova. “It was aimed at supporting rights and educating target groups, in particular LGBT+ people. We did not write that someone will go to pride, or that funding is needed to leave the country.”

We simply proceeded from the fact that there are currently very few opportunities for developing the capacity of the community in the country. The organization of events related to the coverage of topics in the media and the creation of audio and video podcasts are a number of the success stories among the communities of the country. However, the Embassy is probably afraid to issue the grant, because it perhaps will not be understood why they did so. Embassies and donors are afraid of becoming persona non grata. This is a big problem for us, because we also do not feel protected. And this is saddening. But we continue to work, fight, and fundraise so that our crazy ideas get support from embassies and donor organizations”.

UKRAINE: support for Pride Month activities

Funding individual events

The public organization **KyivPride** was founded in 2016 and all of its activities are aimed at improving the visibility of LGBT people in Ukrainian society. In addition to its ongoing activities throughout the year, KyivPride organizes the annual Pride Month, which consists of a series of cultural and educational events, the purpose of which is to discuss the life and problems of the LGBT community in Ukraine. Discussions, trainings, workshops, exhibitions and film screenings are held throughout the month. In addition, one of the main activities is the Equality March, a traditional human rights march.

Funding for the organization is provided by various sources, but the cooperation and financial support of embassies has always been one of the foundations of KyivPride.



“In general, we are supported by all embassies, except, of course, those representing traditionally homophobic countries,” says Lenny Emson, Director of KyivPride. “Embassy representatives come to marches, and attend other Pride events. But in terms of our main sponsors, these would be the embassies of the Netherlands, Germany and Norway. We have worked with them in past years, and we are working with them this year as well. Other embassies support us more institutionally, and sign letters of support, but not all of them provide financial assistance.”

All the events that took place in 2021 (more than 30, including the March itself and the KyivPride Awards ceremony, which was held for the first time) were mainly funded by three embassies: Norway, Germany and the Netherlands (at least 70%), only a small part of the costs was covered by other donors.

The organization already had certain agreements regarding funding for Pride 2022, but the war changed everything: it became clear that it was impossible to hold Pride in Kyiv. A “helping hand” was extended by colleagues from WarsawPride and the Norwegian Embassy in Ukraine, thanks to which a group representing 11 Ukrainian LGBT organizations was able to travel to Poland to participate in the Pride there.

The organization’s cooperation with the Embassy of Norway began in October 2019, when an agreement on the implementation of the project “Visibility for LGBTI people: Regional Perspective of KyivPride” was signed at a meeting with the Ambassador of Norway, Ole T. Horpestad. Its goal was to create a core group of activists in key Ukrainian regions so that they could implement local pride initiatives. In addition, the goal of the project was to strengthen KyivPride as a nationwide platform. The project was selected as part of the Embassy’s priority activity «Democracy, human rights, tolerance with special attention to vulnerable groups».

Preparations for Pride 2022 began last year. Staff of the organization wrote letters to potential donors, including embassies, however, the war changed both programmatic and financial plans. When it became clear that the traditional form of Pride Week events and the march in Kyiv was not possible due to military operations in Ukraine, the financial plan and the list of donors were revised, as much less funding was required. In fact, there was only a need to cover accommodation and travel to Warsaw, everything else was provided by Polish colleagues. In this situation, the Norwegian Embassy, as one of the main sponsors of the organization, demonstrated considerable flexibility by changing the traditional funding and acting as the main sponsor.

In terms of general funding trends, the organization notes that it is essential for them to establish a close “donor-recipient” communication channel, which makes funding possible, even under force majeure circumstances. According to the head of KyivPride, the success of cooperation with embassies in Ukraine also affects funding outside the country: for example, in 2022, the Embassy of the Netherlands in Germany organized an event dedicated to Ukraine during BerlinPride.

CLOSE AND CONSTANT “DONOR-RECIPIENT” COMMUNICATION HELPS YOU TO GET SUPPORT EVEN IN FORCE MAJEURE CIRCUMSTANCES.

Embassy funding of pride events in Ukraine does not take place as part of grant programs; this is a typical example of funding for one-time events. Although the head of the organization is not aware of exactly what sources the embassies receive funding from, it is realistic to assume that, since the event is cyclical, a certain budget for holding the event is included in the annual budget of the embassy. However, according to Lenny Emson, raising funds is not a given: in 2021, there was a problem getting funding, as the costs for Pride Month were

budgeted for June, but due to quarantine restrictions, the event was postponed until September.

WORK ON OBTAINING FUNDING FOR AN EVENT BEGINS IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE END OF THE PREVIOUS EVENT.

“Although we receive funding at our request, the process still takes place like a grant application,” says Lenny Emson. “Do not forget to properly fill out the application form and complete subsequent reporting. One more point: even if Pride lasts one month, work on finding support should be carried out regularly without waiting until the last moment. We know that next year we will have a parade, and we start writing applications and requests as soon as the previous event ends.”

It was difficult to obtain information about cooperation with embassies in Uzbekistan, since the issue of LGBT rights remains completely taboo in the media and public discussions in the country, and consensual sexual relations between adult men are a criminal offense and punishable by up to three years of imprisonment (Article 120 of the Criminal Code). Therefore, the information below does not describe the experience of a specific NGO or initiative group, but was obtained from a number of anonymous activists and is systematized according to the main issues.

Activists from Central Asia who represent the interests of the LGBT community in Uzbekistan, (which is invisible to the authorities and wider society, but is quite real and has many problems and needs) provide the following examples of cooperation with embassies:

Embassy of Germany.

In 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany opened a call for grant applications for work with LGBT organizations. The announcement instructed those interested to contact the local embassy for counselling and the necessary documents. However, the embassy did not respond in any way to the request of local LGBT activists.

In 2022, at the initiative of international human rights organizations, a direct meeting was held with embassy staff, in particular, with the officer responsible for human rights issues. A discussion of opportunities and ways to support the LGBT community in Uzbekistan, in spite of the existing criminalization of homosexuality, did not lead to any general consensus. For example, the participants of the meeting tried to lobby for a mini-grant for the community, but were told that such a grant would not receive support from the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

“This is what’s peculiar,” says one of the activists. “They can’t answer us directly. Of course, we do not know about the behind-the-scenes politics, but the trend shows that many states allow Uzbekistan to do quite a lot that they would not tolerate in other countries, and not only in Central Asia. For example, when Russia is condemned for a certain law, the same actions in Uzbekistan are not criticized.”

Embassy of the United Kingdom. According to activists, they are more reliable and open to communication. However, they received a negative answer regarding the possibility of funding human rights activities in the interests of the LGBT community. They were told that the embassy does not yet have programs aimed at LGBT people, but that they are ready to support such activities if the opportunity arises, so it is advisable to stay in touch.

According to activists, simply going to an embassy is a risk for representatives of the LGBT community:

“So we go to a certain embassy. Questions will certainly arise later: why did this person go to the embassy if not to obtain a visa?” says one of the activists. “At the German Embassy, we asked: ‘What should we do if we have an emergency, for example? If our activities are disclosed, will there be support from the Embassy? Can they at least guarantee us visa support?’ We were told yes, but that the most they can do is organize support under their emergency assistance program for activists. This means that such a visa application would be reviewed within a week rather than a month. Well, you yourself understand that in a week they can kill me or do something else. Meanwhile, at the British Embassy, they said that, in case of an emergency, they will review the visa issue within one day.”

Embassy of Canada. There is no office of the Embassy of Canada located directly in Uzbekistan, it is physically located in Moscow and periodically announces grant competitions as part of the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI). This fund mainly focuses on projects aimed at good governance, human rights and democratic development. LGBT activists from Central Asia actively communicated with representatives of the Embassy regarding support for activities in Uzbekistan. They argued that Article 120 of the Criminal Code of Uzbekistan, which establishes punishment of up to three years of imprisonment for consensual sexual relations between men, at a minimum, relates to human rights. However, the grant was denied. The official explanation was the assertion that information about grants should be public and that all activities under the grant should also be made public later.

“Unfortunately, we were refused,” says one of the Central Asian activists who led the talks. “They told us to imagine what would happen if the Canadian Ambassador travels to Uzbekistan and communicates with the President of the country, and openly tells him that they support the LGBT community in Uzbekistan. We said that we are not against our state. We are simply advocating for the democratization of our country so that all people can live freely. But the Embassy says that they have no right to interfere in the internal affairs of another state, but promised cooperation in the future.”

United States Embassy. There was no direct communication with the Embassy. The interests of the LGBT community of Uzbekistan were represented by the organization ILGA-Europe, which lobbied for their interests and the abolition of Article 120. This lobbying was successful up to a certain point, since one of the first versions of the new Criminal Code, which was being prepared in the country, did not contain this article, and the actions it provides were supposed to be transferred to the administrative code. However, following the final discussion, which took place during the pandemic under secretive conditions, it was decided to leave this article in the code. Activists also tried to apply for embassy grants, but their application was not supported, despite the fact that the embassy was willing to compromise.

“We tried to apply for a grant from the American Embassy,” says one of the activists, “although it was difficult for us. For example, they [the embassy] work only with legally registered organizations, and applications must be submitted through the state

website. They expressed understanding regarding our specific situation and were willing to accept our grant applications by mail. Unfortunately, our application did not proceed. It was very difficult to understand the application form, as we have little experience. Of course, this is our problem, but, in any case, it is a real opportunity that they were ready to consider us. The lack of resources and knowledge are problems on our side. I have no complaints at all about the American embassy. They are probably the only ones who are not afraid to work freely and speak openly about Article 120.”

It is difficult to apply for financial support for LGBT activism in Uzbekistan from foreign embassies, due to both the existence of Article 120, which has been repeatedly mentioned here, and to the fact that there is currently no officially registered organization representing the interests of the community in the country. This is problematic for most NGOs in the country. All non-governmental organizations must not only report to the Ministry of Justice on their activities, but must also seek approval from the Ministry for all of their activities for the year ahead, including trainings, meetings, and international guests. It is clear that it is difficult to discuss fundraising under such conditions.

RUSSIA: effective project in hostile conditions

Funding initiated by the embassy

The “**Chemsex in Russia**” project was implemented in 2019–2021 with the financial support of the British Embassy in Russia and the Terrence Higgins Trust¹⁰ and was aimed at educating healthcare workers about chemsex and HIV. Through the involvement of a reputable international partner and a number of key organizations across Russia, the project was able to develop a number of training initiatives for healthcare workers who work with MSM who practice chemsex. In particular, as part of the project, 25 doctors from different regions of Russia underwent a week-long internship in the UK and learned about the work of clinics providing services to MSM. In addition, 18 online sessions were held on various topics, where medical professionals discussed the most urgent current problems related to chemsex and clinical services. One of the goals of the project was to develop a list of recommendations that could help to create a more effective system for providing users of medical services with the best medical interventions, which were approved by focus groups for further consideration of their implementation as part of existing services¹¹.

According to the Russian coordinator of the project, the idea for funding came directly from the British Embassy in Russia:

“The Second Secretary of the embassy contacted me and told me about the project. Most likely, this was due to the fact that the organization that I worked for had organized a charity fundraising dinner for embassy staff, and so they already knew me, as well as my areas of interest. In addition, I was recommended by some experts, although I did not know this at the time. From a financial point of view, it was a fairly large project. I coordinated it from the Russian side, as an independent consultant. And, since there were already security issues in 2019, the Embassy did not use my name anywhere, which saved me from a number of problems in the future. The project was not presented publicly, aside from the final report and recommendations, which received a fairly positive response both among medical personnel in Russia and among medical specialists.”

IF THE PROJECT IS BEING IMPLEMENTED IN A COUNTRY THAT HAS A NEGATIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS FOREIGN FUNDING, BE CAREFUL ABOUT DATA PROTECTION!

As the fight against “foreign agents” was already being actively implemented in Russia at that time, there was no direct financing of the Russian side. The Terrence Higgins Trust managed the budget, and the Russian employees simply had work contracts, although their personal data was not disclosed anywhere.

¹⁰ URL: <https://www.tht.org.uk/>

¹¹ URL: https://nps-info.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/never_take_a_cocktail_chemsex_msm_and_clinical_services_in_russia.pdf

Although the project was quite successful and fulfilled all of its objectives, its implementation under hostile conditions clearly required certain security measures

“The main thing is data protection. Make sure all information is secure,” says the Russian project coordinator. While work on the project in Russia was being carried out, the “British Files” scandal took place, when a huge amount of data from the British Embassy was leaked to the Internet, including information about activists, in particular political activists, who received funding for human rights activities (more on data protection and embassy data leaks in the section «Information and disinformation»). The fact that the issue of security was raised by the Russian project staff at the beginning of the project was a positive; both communication and reporting used code names.

The project was also affected by force majeure circumstances, which led the coordinators to understand that when implementing a grant, they should make sure that all conditions are discussed in advance, and that there is an understanding of how funding will continue even in the event of unforeseen circumstances. The implementation of the project was suspended for six months due to the COVID-19 epidemic. As the project was put on hold, the work was not paid, and potential emergencies were not discussed with the embassy.

MITIGATION (MINIMIZATION) OF RISKS IS NOT JUST A SECTION IN THE PROJECT APPLICATION, IT IS AN IMPORTANT TOPIC THAT SHOULD BE DISCUSSED WITH THE EMBASSY WHEN FUNDING IS ALLOCATED.

However, there are risks that are difficult to foresee. “In practice, we agreed with the embassy to continue the project,” says the Russian Coordinator. “We were offered good conditions and much more funding. But the war began, Russian legislation changed, and Western sanctions were introduced. The war canceled all our plans. It was no longer possible to get by using only pseudonyms, it simply became too dangerous for people to participate in such activities, since it risked long criminal punishments, and no one wanted to take responsibility in such a situation”.

Other countries and projects

As noted above, interviews were conducted only with representatives of organizations and experts who themselves expressed a desire to discuss their experience cooperating with embassies. However, other examples can be found in open sources, some of which we would like to use.

Moldova

Cooperation agreement with the embassy
Support for organizational development

Founded in 1998, the “GENDERDOC–M” Information Center is the leading LGBT organization in Moldova, and one of the oldest operating in the post-Soviet space. It has substantial positive experience working with embassies. In particular, with the financial support of the embassies of the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom¹², it developed and operates the informational website <http://www.lgbt.md>. In addition, the organization has a positive experience working with the Embassy of the Kingdom of Sweden in the Republic of Moldova, with which it signed a cooperation agreement.

“GENDERDOC–M was the first organization that signed a cooperation agreement with the Embassy of the Kingdom of Sweden in 2018, and the organizers of this event made the document signing ceremony at the Embassy a real celebration,” said Anastasia Danilova, Executive Director of the GENDERDOC–M Information Center, who commented on this event. “First, a rainbow flag was hung at the Embassy office for the whole day. Second, special cakes with Swedish and rainbow flags were prepared for the celebration. All staff members of our organization were invited to the signing of the contract. In this way, the signing procedure was not simply a formality; the organizers turned it into a very beautiful and joyful event, which gave us the feeling that something good and bright was beginning. The Embassy of Sweden has always been friendly to us, and when we visited Swedish organizations, we adopted the experience of their work.”¹³

Cooperation with the Embassy of Sweden continues. In particular, in 2018–2021, the organization administered a grant from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) obtained through a grant competition held by the Embassy, the purpose of which was to support the activities of the organization and develop the institutional capabilities of the Center. The grant funds were used to strengthen the organization, and improve the functioning of all its internal mechanisms and structures.

12 URL: <http://www.lgbt.md/rus>

13 URL: <https://gdm.md/ru/content/novyy-grant-obspechit-deyatelnost-gdm-v-techenii-sleduyushchih-3-let>

“Despite the fact that GDM has been cooperating with the Embassy of Sweden for almost 20 years, it took quite a long time to receive this grant,” noted Anastasia Danilova. “First, we were selected as one of several organizations in Moldova who were invited to take part in the preparatory process. Of course, it was an honor for us. Then there was a system audit, as part of which the ability of our organization to ensure sustainable work and long-term development was tested. The fact that we received this grant proves once again that there is trust in us. This is because we are a visible and strong organization that has a very good reputation.”

Azerbaijan

Art-projects

In Azerbaijan, embassies support the screening of LGBT films. In 2017, Samad Ismailov, LGBT activist and founder of “Minority” magazine made a documentary about a trans* person from Azerbaijan named Sebastian, which depicted his challenges, fears and dreams for the future. The film debuted in Baku on November 25, 2017 with the support of the Embassy of the Netherlands. About 80 people attended the film screening and took part in discussions about LGBT issues.

On December 15, 2019, in the packed Landmark Baku cinema center, two short films were shown as part of an LGBT Film Festival with the support of the Embassy of the Netherlands. This was part of the joint art project “Young Artists for Change”, which was implemented jointly by the human rights organization “Stichting art. 1” (Netherlands) and by local Azerbaijani partners.

On May 17, 2022, on the occasion of the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT), the organization “Minority Azerbaijan” premiered the film «The Sun in My Body». The film tells the story of a lesbian couple, a trans* woman longing for a family, and a gay boy who has a bad relationship with his partner. The film was shot as part of one of the organization’s projects, and was screened with the support of the British Embassy in Azerbaijan¹⁶

Kazakhstan

Prompt response to current challenges

In 2020, AFEW Kazakhstan, with the support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, launched the project «Protection of the rights of vulnerable groups of the population in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Almaty». According to project manager Alexandra Lee:

“Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people face health-related human rights violations and socio-economic problems. For the Dutch Embassy, the rights of women and LGBT people have always been a priority. In addition, this project primarily

¹⁴ URL: <https://minorityaze.org/en>

¹⁵ URL: <https://www.facebook.com/stichtingart1>

¹⁶ URL: <https://minorityaze.org/en/915-sun-to-my-body-film-screening>

relates to legal literacy and the protection of rights, which has become even more relevant during the quarantine period. Since we have extensive experience in working with vulnerable groups in Kazakhstan and the idea for a project that turned out to be very much in need in today's realities, we submitted an application to the Embassy of the Netherlands. The nice thing is that the Embassy stays up-to-date and promptly responds to any emergency situations, in particular in relation to COVID-19, for which we really thank them. I was also pleasantly surprised by the fact that the process of reviewing the application, signing the contract and receiving funding did not last for months, but, on the contrary, went very quickly. In April we submitted an application, and by May 20 we already began implementing the project.”¹⁷

¹⁷ URL: <https://afew.org/ru/afew-kazakhstan-helps-almaty-residents-during-the-covid-19-crisis-rus/>



INFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION



Unfortunately, funding and support by foreign embassies of LGBT organizations and initiatives often become the subject of baseless accusations, misinformation and manipulation.



Disclosure of data

In October 2021, the official representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Maria Zakharova, wrote that “the general work plan of the British Embassy in Russia for 2019–2020 became available to the public.” Earlier, the general work plan of the British Embassy in Russia for 2019–2020 appeared online, which contained data on applications from some Russian NGOs and media outlets to finance their activities with embassy funds. The document contained 125 detailed data sheets. The data obtained was used to discredit human rights organizations in Russia, by saying that their activities were aimed at «maintaining a secret network of influential bloggers», «to create conditions for regime change» in Russia and to «undermine Russian influence» in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Particular indignation was caused by the fact that the goals of the projects, about which information was obtained through the illegal data leak, included «stimulating human rights activities, supporting the LGBT community, developing a network of independent journalists and bloggers, and establishing contacts with representatives of a new generation of public and political leaders and introducing them to British culture”.

In particular, the Embassy’s internal information on “recipients of British funding for the promotion of Western values” on LGBT issues in Russia in 2020–2023 was made public:

Charitable Foundation «Sphere»* (protection of LGBT people in the Caucasus – £240,000);

Support for a network of LGBT centers (£380,000);

LGBT Center in Yekaterinburg (2.23 million rubles).

It is obvious that the characterization of the activities of these organizations as “a blow to Russia”, “creating conditions for regime change” and “human rights activities with a pronounced political anti-Russian orientation and focusing on the protection of LGBT people” will not have a positive effect on the further development of LGBT organizations and subsequent support from foreign embassies for their activities in Russia.

Discreditation

The organization “Phoenix Plus” released a story regarding disinformation surrounding its alleged funding by the British Embassy. In Russia, the fact of obtaining support from foreign countries is used to discredit LGBT organizations. The whole story was published on the website «Parni+”.

On January 21, 2022, a small article appeared on the website of the television network, Russia Today, with the title “The British Foreign Office allocated €30,000 to research on the history of the LGBT movement in Russia,” which stated: “The Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office of the United Kingdom issued a grant of €30,000 to the Russian NGO «Phoenix Plus»* (ANO «Phoenix Plus» is included in the register of NGOs acting as a foreign agent, by decision of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation of December 21, 2020) for the project «LGBT People in Russian-language Media in the 1990s-2000s».

Although the article used the past tense of the verb “issued a grant,” in reality, there was only a grant application. There was no actual allocation of any money.

According to Yevgeny Pisemsky, the founder and director of the organization, Russia Today deliberately provides its audience with highly distorted information, to put it mildly:


“In 2018, our volunteer wrote a grant application to the British Embassy in order to obtain support for the work of the Russian LGBT Museum... The application was not accepted, and it was not approved, and we happily forgot about it. ... RT and the like are deliberately inciting hatred towards us, so that thanks to this and other things, they can continue to control people through television.”

As reported in the article, this homophobic narrative, which demonizes grassroots LGBT activism, is based on two elements:

19 URL: <https://parniplus.com/lgbt-movement/kto-i-zachem-sochinyaet-lozh-pro-lgbt-granty>

“Firstly, the paranoia about the endless streams of gay grants is built into the current discourse about Russia as a besieged fortress being stormed by external enemies, primarily Anglo-Saxon villains”. As an example, a quote from the pro-government newspaper Izvestia is given: “The work of the “Side-by-Side” Film Festival, the “Steps” Foundation, the Yekaterinburg LGBT Resource Center and the LGBT Museum is aimed at attracting as many Russians as possible to positions of tolerance, promoting the ideas of sexual minorities, and at educating LGBT leaders.”

Secondly, the publication notes that this discrediting is based on “a sincere belief that nothing can happen in Russia without secret money, obvious hypocrisy and the constant presence of a conspiracy. Officials and propagandists seriously think that no one will fight for the rights of LGBTQ people, create queer content, or build networks of interaction and solidarity “just like that”; but rather that such activities are always part of either a conspiracy against the Russian regime or a personal enrichment scheme.”



**ADVICE FOR NGOs:
HOW TO EFFECTIVELY
COOPERATE WITH EMBASSIES**

Preliminary work

It is desirable to **use all possible points of contact** when planning and beginning work with embassies. You do not need to expect that you will invite the ambassador of a country to an event, and he will immediately attend. Do you have an exhibition or premiere of an LGBT-themed film? Invite the cultural attaché and ask in writing that he delegate someone from the embassy if he is unable to attend the event. Often, there are people in embassies who attend such events, and communication with them is the best means of informal contact for establishing any kind of cooperation. Congratulate the embassy on the independence day of their country; they may often arrange receptions and events on these days, and meetings at such events can contribute to your further communication.

Communication

Communication with the embassy prior to submitting your grant application is very important. Well-established communication is the key to success for receiving funding from an embassy.

The key to the success of a grant is if the embassy knows about the activities of the organization and about the problem that the grant application is aimed at solving. This will help during the review of applications, as application forms are often not long enough to provide all the information. It is also a guarantee that “black PR” will not work, which is often attempted by unscrupulous competitors.

«Multiple Baskets»

If you expect to receive funding for an event from foreign embassies, contact **several potential donors**. It is preferable to put your proposal in “several baskets”, by requesting funding for various components of the event from different donors.

The ideal option is to develop a general concept of the program or the area of activity of the organization, after which you can apply for funding for its various components from different embassies.

Correct timing

When contacting an embassy, consider **the time cycle of its work and funding**, and find out when the budget for the next year is set. It is practically impossible to obtain funding by applying for support a month or

two before the event, unless it is truly a force majeure situation.

Even if funding was allocated, but was not applied for in time, there is a risk of not receiving financial support (*see the “Ukraine” section for more details*).

Multi-stage nature of work with embassies

You should not expect that an embassy will immediately provide large amounts of funding. The implementation of a small but high-quality project is a good opportunity to build dialogue with an embassy. This will establish a level of trust in the organization and a familiarity with its priorities. In the future, this may help when applying for large grants, or the embassy itself may seek out the organization with a proposal for funding.

If one or more small grants from embassies end with good results, **embassies can invite the organization to implement larger long-term projects** that will help the further stable development of the NGO.

Reporting

Reporting should always be accurate and meet the requirements of the embassy. The **reputation** of the organization, which is not easy to build, but can easily be lost, depends on this

Security

In some countries, the cooperation of NGOs and individual activists with embassies can be risky and pose certain security risks. **Data protection when working in countries with authoritarian dictatorial regimes is critical.** In this case, security issues should be discussed at the beginning of cooperation. Embassy staff may often initiate such a conversation themselves; a situation where pseudonyms or code names are used may be possible (*see the “Russia” section for more detailed information*).

Minimizing risks

When receiving a grant, you should make sure that all conditions are discussed in advance, and that there is an understanding of how **funding will continue even in the event of unforeseen circumstances**, since funding can be stopped, and there is no risk minimization plan in the organization, especially if the grant from the embassy is key to the organization’s or initiative group’s activities. It is necessary to foresee all the risks and potential problems at the stage of work on the project.

After completion of the project

After completing the project, you should always ask the embassy for a letter of recommendation. In the future, such a letter will be useful for any new grant, and the staff of embassies often changes due to rotations.