

# UIA ASSOCIATIONS ROUND TABLES

## What they can offer

The diversity of international associations attending any given UIA Round Table is dizzying, yet each Round Table confirms that we have more in common than our associations' names might indicate. We share challenges and questions and concerns - changing membership, limited resources, complicated legal requirements, to mention just a few - and, when given the chance, we share answers too.

*Text Nancy Carfrae, Coordinator, UIA Associations Round Table*



The UIA Round Tables bring together people who are involved in running associations, have some of them tell about their experience with particular challenges, and give structured time for all of them to exchange concerns and knowledge. We consider a Round Table a success if the participants go home with new ideas, with renewed motivation, and with names of people with whom they want to stay in touch.

We have considerable experience doing this. For over 100 years the UIA has been working to promote and facilitate the work of international associations. Since 2007 the UIA Associations Round Tables are our platform to give a wide range of associations an opportunity to learn through networking and through practice. International associations - professional societies, service organisations, interest groups, charities, and all other types, active in all fields of human endeavour - send

representatives to the UIA Round Tables to meet other international association representatives, to share experience and knowledge, and to gain practical skills and tools. In 2015 the 9<sup>th</sup> Round Table Europe expects to welcome 200 participants for a full day event, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Round Table Asia-Pacific looks forward to over 100 participants.

Highlights from the 2014 Round Tables include the keynote by Cyril Ritchie, President of CoNGO - the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations, putting the role of associations worldwide in perspective. He underlined the influence and impact associations have in initiating and executing major international projects, and reminded us of the essential humanitarian values animating our work. There were stories from association representatives of challenges faced and - sometimes - overcome.

There was the passionate and motivating message from Jack Sim, Founder of the World Toilet Organization. 'Remember your mission,' he advised us. 'If you spend all your time looking for funds then what you are doing is looking for funds, not fulfilling your mission.' And throughout there were group discussions and conversations on the vision, challenges and future of our own associations, and on the strategies and solutions we employ.

### WHAT MAKES THE UIA ASSOCIATIONS ROUND TABLES DIFFERENT

First of all, they are organised by the UIA, with its century of experience. The UIA is a research institute and documentation centre. Non-profit, apolitical, independent, and non-governmental in nature, the UIA has been a pioneer in the research, monitoring and provision of information on international associations and their global challenges since its founding in 1907.



The UIA Round Tables are by and for associations. They are not business events to which associations are invited. It is perhaps the only event ALL associations can attend, no strings attached. This means the participants come from all over, and from incredibly diverse associations. And, with all our diversity, we have so much in common: questions of management and administration, policies and regulations, values and vision and pragmatism.

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The Round Tables bring together people you won't meet anywhere else. As the UIA's main work is documenting international association activity, it can draw on its own unparalleled database when inviting associations to its Round Tables. The starting point is over 36,000 currently active international associations, of all shapes and sizes. Many of them will never be found on any other list: finding them is, after all, the UIA's expertise. And many of them will never be seen at any other association event or trade fair. They often don't even get invited: their meetings are not frequent or regular enough; they are largely volunteer run; they have, simply, never come to the attention of the organisers of such events. (The recent UIA Survey on International Meeting Issues shows that only 7.3% of the international associations surveyed are familiar with,

and have profited from, "hosted buyer" programmes.)

To make it easier for all associations to attend, including those with fewer resources, the registration fee for associations is kept deliberately low (45€ for Round Table Europe 2015), thanks to the support of our sponsors. In the same spirit, we move the Round Tables each year. The participant numbers are also deliberately kept

low in order to ensure a truly interactive programme and facilitate networking and sharing.

**UIA'S RECENT ROUND TABLES**

In 2014 the Round Table Asia-Pacific, held in October in Seoul, brought together 93 people, including 58 association representatives, from 13 countries. The Round Table Europe, held in November in Dublin, was at maximum capacity with 119 people, including 89 association representatives, from 19 countries. The other participants represent various services with a keen interest in listening to and learning from associations, such as national or city tourist authorities.

**PLANS FOR THE FUTURE**

The UIA Associations Round Table Europe started in 2007, followed by Asia-Pacific in 2013, and now we are exploring opportunities to take it to other parts of the world. We know that many associations do not have the resources - time, staff, money - to travel to distant places. We would like to hold Round Tables around the world so that all associations have the opportunity to attend a UIA Round Table locally.

**WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES FACED BY INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS TODAY?**

Rightly or wrongly, money is almost always cited as the number one problem. How do we associations ensure we have the financial resources to carry out our work today and to plan for the future?

Communication is also high on the list. Seldom does one meet an association that does not know why it is doing what it is doing, but somehow many of us are unable to get the message across clearly to the people we want to hear it, whether members, funders, the public, or, indeed, sometimes our own Boards. Choosing the right medium and the right moment seem often to be great stumbling blocks.

**[roundtable.uia.org](http://roundtable.uia.org)**

Nancy Carfrae has worked for the UIA since 1984. Her current responsibilities, in addition to the Round Tables, are varied, and included supervising the maintenance of UIA's associations and meetings databases and the compilation of the annual International Meetings Statistics Report.

