



Bringing Associations to the Table



UIA
ASSOCIATIONS
ROUND TABLE



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amelia Folkema first came in contact with the UIA as a student archivist over 10 years ago. Since then, she has worked on various research and editing projects. She has now taken on the role of Communications Officer for the UIA.

For over a century the Union of International Associations (UIA) has been working to promote and facilitate the work of international associations. Since 2007, the annual UIA Associations Round Tables held in Europe have given associations an opportunity to learn through networking and through practice. UIA knows associations. It knows that most have limited staff, limited budget, limited time. Travelling to a Round Table is often not possible, so the Round Table started travelling to associations in 2013, leading to a Round Table Asia-Pacific and a Round Table Europe. There are now flags on the map of Belgium, Singapore, Korea, Ireland, Thailand, Monaco, France, and Malaysia. Over 500 associations have sent representatives to one or more Round Tables so far.

The UIA Round Tables are in fact the core of UIA's education project. The participants and speakers are people involved in running associations – of all sorts. The diversity of international associations attending any given UIA Round Table is remarkable, yet each UIA Round Table confirms that we have more in common than our associations' names might indicate. We share challenges and questions and concerns. We often share a close acquaintance with managing on small budgets. Above all, we share a passion for what we do.

The speakers are also all involved in running associations and share their own experience in meeting challenges in

“For me, the discussion groups are always the most interesting. The speakers give us food for thought, with new ideas and provocative questions, but in fact everyone in the room is an expert. It is in the small groups that we get to share that expertise. The passion and motivation and knowledge always give me a boost.”

Nancy Carfrae, UIA Round Tables Coordinator

membership, communication, funding, governance, and more. There are workshops and discussion groups for participants to exchange concerns and knowledge.

Thanks to contributions of UIA's partners, registration fees for association representatives are kept deliberately low, thus enabling delegates from smaller associations to attend. The UIA Round Tables are therefore able to bring together people one wouldn't meet anywhere else. Many of the invitees will never be found on any other list: finding and documenting associations is, after all, the UIA's expertise. And many of the participants will never be seen at any other association event or trade fair. These participants benefit greatly from the opportunity to exchange ideas, and to engage in active discussions with the speakers and each other.

The UIA enjoys an excellent position as the one to bring together associations. Firstly, 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. Secondly, the UIA is itself a not-for-profit association which therefore shares many of the same issues all associations face: questions of management and administration, policies and regulations, values

and vision and pragmatism. For participants, this means that the UIA Round Tables are by and for associations. They are not business events to which associations are invited. A Round Table is perhaps the only event all associations can attend, no strings attached. As such, the participants come from all over, and from incredibly diverse associations.

The Round Tables have an empowering effect on many delegates, especially those from smaller associations. Small associations are often completely unaware of how vast the non-profit world truly is (*over 70,000 international associations are documented in the UIA's Yearbook of International Associations*). They don't often get invited to fairs or exhibitions: their meetings are not frequent, large or regular enough; they are mainly volunteer run; they have, simply, never come to the attention of the organisers of such events. Without the chance to meet and engage with other associations, they can be left floating adrift, feeling isolated in their own little bubble. But it is the small associations which so often form the foundation of many local communities, when given the opportunity, and the necessary information and tools.

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? How to attract (*the right*) members is usually tied

in with this problem.

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 find it hard 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.

The third big issue is the hurdles of the practical day-to-day running of the association.

With these questions in mind, this year's Round Table Asia-Pacific (*Kuala Lumpur, 26 & 27 September*) and Round Table Europe (*Lyon, 15 & 16 November*) will be discussing some of the following topics:

- The role of international organisations today
- Community creating
- CVBs
- Funding
- Accreditation
- Governance
- Conferences
- Sustainability
- Measuring progress
- Project partnerships
- Accessing UN bodies
- Inclusion
- Membership

At UIA we consider a Round Table a success if the participants go home with new ideas, with increased motivation, and with names of people with whom they want to stay in touch.