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## LESSONS LEARNED

### *What to do and what not!*<sup>1</sup>

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This input is based on interviews with 53 CSOs from Europe and beyond, who ran a total of 56 large and small alternative or counter narrative campaigns. The interviewees wanted to share their lessons learned with fellow CSOs.

#### //01 | AUDIENCE .....

Most said they knew a lot about the AUDIENCE they wanted to reach, but many could not explain in detail the key characteristics of their audience or where and how to reach them most effectively and efficiently. Most also said they would invest more time in preparatory work on audience research next time.

For example, one of the campaigns had two kinds of audiences: European practitioners (#1) and the general European population (#2), that they intended to reach out to through four YouTube videos. As the audience was too vast, the videos did not receive enough online visibility. The interviewee explained that the preparatory work should have been more focused on research based on the differences between the audiences of each member state.

In another case, an interviewee expressed the will to invest more time in focus groups to a) validate their findings before applying them and b) engage with the target audience.

#### //02 | MEDIA CHANNELS .....

Some CSOs were overwhelmed by the massive attention their campaign received, making them question if they had targeted the right audience. Others had hoped for more traffic and clicks. Neither group had invested much in researching which (social) MEDIA CHANNELS, e.g. Facebook groups or Twitter hashtags, their target audience was using. Identifying the communication channels and echo chambers of their audience(s) will be a priority for most next time around.

For example, one of the interviewees explained that their campaign was initially launched through a website they had created; once it was launched on Facebook, the average amount of time

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<sup>1</sup> The interviews were conducted by the [European Foundation for Democracy](#) between October and December 2016

viewers spent on the website dropped dramatically, which was not an intended outcome as the campaign was designed to resonate on the website. It is important to understand from the beginning on which social media platform one wants to launch the campaign and how to research the 'side effects' of using too many platforms concurrently.

**//03 | MONITORING AND EVALUATION** .....

Most agreed that MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E) are important. Few, however, had invested time and resources in M&E due to time and budget restraints. Many said they would make M&E a priority next time so they can measure the impact of their campaign better.

While most interviewees did understand the importance of evaluating their campaigns, they were at the same time unable to identify specific measures to take in order to invest in this part of the campaign due to a lack of training and knowledge.

For example, one interviewee explained that 'the number of 'views', 'shares', 'likes' could be relevant parameters (to measure the success of an online campaign) but they are far from being exhaustive. In order to effectively measure the success of such campaigns, the interviewee explained that it is necessary to carry out an in-depth evaluation and have clear statistics in terms of sociological impact, which can only be done by engaging proactively with the audience to verify whether the content has reached the correct people and whether it has had an impact.

**//04 | CALL-TO-ACTION** .....

Most said that a CALL-TO-ACTION is important, since people sympathising with extremism often have an urge to act. Most campaigns, however, focused only on messages of what NOT to do or did not have any clear call-to-action. For their next campaign, a practical call-for-action will be a centrepiece for many CSOs.

Many interviewees stressed the importance of 'teaching rather than telling', not necessarily linked only to the call-to-action part of the campaign (since most did not have one), but to other segments, such as the general message.

In one case, the initial idea was to create a counter narrative campaign (i.e., campaigns aimed at dismantling a certain negative narrative as opposed to promoting a positive narrative) through the creation of a series of YouTube videos with interviews of victims of terrorist attacks. However, after due research, the interviewee explained that he decided to promote the campaign as an alternative narrative campaign, since this approach seemed more effective when it comes to raising awareness.

**//05 | INTERVENTION** .....

Most aimed at changing people's thinking and behaviour, but almost none had an advanced INTERVENTION component as part of their campaign. Many want to invest more next time in engaging with commentators online or even reaching out to the audience through trained professionals (1-2-1 intervention) to start conversations.

One of the campaigns (Exit USA) had set up an online platform that radicalised individuals seeking to leave neo-Nazi movements could access to seek for help. When the staff decided to run a campaign to promote this platform, they focused a lot of energy on ensuring that the staff was a) always available to talk to the individuals that contacted them and b) sufficiently prepared to respond. As a result, nine radicalised individuals contacted Exit USA to express their gratitude for having received support as they moved towards leaving neo-Nazi movements.

The engagement was implemented both online and offline; Exit USA dedicated time and energy towards ensuring that each comment they received online would have a response as well, as shown here:

