

NATIONAL SOCIETY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY AMBASSADORS NETWORK

Concept note

What: Establish a network of National Society Community Engagement and Accountability Ambassadors who receive sustained, multi-year, technical and financial support to scale up community engagement and accountability within their National Society, which in turn will promote a people centred approach to humanitarian work and better support localisation.

How: National Society Ambassadors would be identified using a clear selection criteria and application process and would be expected to meet certain commitments and milestones in relation to institutionalizing CEA to continue receiving funding and support. Ambassadors would also be required to document the process and act as advocates to peer National Society.

Why: National Societies are supported to improve the quality, consistency and scale of community engagement and accountability so that local communities are placed at the very centre of change, by taking an active role in designing programmes and responses, to ensure our actions are effective, inclusive, and sustainable.

Where: Global, with Ambassadors identified in each region.

Who: The Ambassadors Network would be led by IFRC but include partner National Societies and ICRC to ensure a coordinated, Movement-wide approach.

Introduction

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Strategy 2030 calls for an urgent shift of leadership and decision-making to the most local level – placing local communities at the very centre of change so that our actions are effective, inclusive, and sustainable. Achieving this will require the IFRC Secretariat and National Societies to adopt a more systematic, consistent, and high-quality approach to community engagement and accountability by institutionalizing it within strategy, policy, process and practices so it becomes an integral part of all programmes and operations.

Despite longstanding commitments to strengthen accountability to communities¹, coupled with technical support and practical resources², many National Societies have still faced a variety of barriers and challenges in institutionalizing community engagement and accountability within their organisation's ways of working. These include limited understanding and prioritisation, inadequate and inconsistent resourcing, and a lack of dedicated, skilled staff to drive institutionalization efforts forward. Conversely, evidence shows that when National Societies are committed at all levels to improving accountability and receive sustained technical support and financial resources to achieve this, the quality and consistency of implementation and institutionalization is much stronger³.

The Community Engagement and Accountability Ambassadors Network aims to address these gaps and challenges by leveraging and coordinating Movement-wide support to provide National Societies with sustained, multi-year, technical and financial support to institutionalize community engagement and accountability. This support would be provided by multiple partners through a structured programme approach, with key milestones to meet and indicators to measure progress. In exchange, National Society Ambassadors would agree to document and share their experiences and lessons learned and advocate to their peer National Societies on the importance of stronger accountability to communities. The Ambassadors' Network is a key activity in the [IFRC's Community Engagement and Accountability 2023-2025 Strategy](#) and would contribute to achieving [IFRC Strategy 2030's](#) aim to place local communities at the very centre of change so that our actions are effective, inclusive, and sustainable.

Rationale

- **The quality of community engagement and accountability is higher when it is institutionalized:** Evidence⁴ shows the quality and consistency of community engagement is improved when it is integrated at the strategic and technical level, for example in organizational strategy, plans, policies, and other sectors' approaches and tools. This helps accountability to be seen as cross-cutting and a shared responsibility. Experience also shows community engagement is weaker in operations where no staff or systems exist before the crisis hits, highlighting the importance of institutionalization

¹ For example, the [Principles and Rules for Red Cross and Red Crescent Humanitarian Assistance](#) and [the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's Code of Conduct in Disaster Relief](#). More recently, leadership adopted the [Movement-wide Commitments on Community Engagement and Accountability](#) at the [2019 Council of Delegates](#).

² For example, the recently revised [CEA Guide, toolkit, feedback kit](#), and [training packages](#)

³ See <https://communityengagementhub.org/resource/ifrc-global-cea-strategy/>

⁴ For example, see <https://communityengagementhub.org/resource/all-the-evidence-we-need/> and <https://communityengagementhub.org/resource/closing-the-gap-a-strategy-to-strengthen-cea-in-africa-2020-2023/>

- **Need a coordinated, structured approach:** It is important that the Movement adopts a standard, coordinated, and structured approach to supporting National Societies to institutionalize community engagement and accountability to avoid confusion and duplication. Combining resources and adopting a collective, methodical approach to institutionalization will increase impact and lead to greater success
- **Inconsistent resources have been a major barrier to success:** National Societies' institutionalization efforts have often stalled or failed altogether because resources (funding and human) are inconsistent. Recognising organisational change takes several years of sustained efforts, the Community Engagement and Accountability Ambassadors Network would ensure National Societies receive seed funding and technical support and mentoring over a minimum period of 18 months. Seed funding provided can help fund staff to lead this work and develop a multi-year plan strategy or action plan, in collaboration with National Society Development. National Societies will be mentored and supported in fundraising efforts. (ex: through IFRC's Capacity Building Fund)
- **Building an evidence base on what works:** A large focus of the network will be to document and share evidence on successes, challenges and lessons learned from institutionalizing community engagement and accountability within different types of organisations and contexts. This evidence base will support peer learning between National Societies and used to refine, improve and accelerate institutionalization processes
- **Building leadership buy-in:** Evidence shows that leadership support is critical to ensure efforts to strengthen accountability are prioritized, funded, staffed and integrated in plans, policies and processes. As the Community Engagement and Accountability Ambassadors approach is voluntary and requires National Society leadership to apply to join the network, this would help secure their buy-in and ownership from the outset
- **Creating a network of advocates:** The Ambassadors approach will build a network of advocates amongst National Society leadership who can help influence their peers and share lessons learned on the process and value of strengthening organisational approaches to community engagement and accountability – from a leadership perspective. This will prove more effective in bringing other National Societies on board, than advocacy from IFRC and National Society community engagement and accountability focal points
- **National Society, not donor, driven:** Often National Societies who are committed and working to strengthen accountability approaches do not get the support they need because they are not a priority donor-country. The Ambassadors Network would select National Societies based on a set of objective selection criteria, linked to their commitment to community engagement and accountability and organisational readiness (rather than

external country context). This will enhance the likelihood of success by focusing efforts and resources on early adopters, who can then help influence others to follow suit⁵

- **Structured milestones:** To join the Ambassadors Network, National Societies would need to agree to meet certain commitments on an annual basis or risk losing their place in the network. This would provide structure to the process and help build a level of commitment to the network organisation-wide, based on the theory ‘what gets measured, gets managed’
- **Valuable learning for others:** Evidence and lessons learned on institutionalization and organisational change would be valuable for other sectors within the Movement.

Criteria for NS selection

- NS has completed a CEA self-assessment and has identified key areas which need to be strengthen/scaled up.
- NS has an assigned CEA focal point or staff
- NS focal point for this programme should speak sufficient English to participate in meetings, to exchange with other regions. (Translation will be provided for larger events, and where possible)
- NS must be at level 2 or 3 of certification process (*NB: in its first kick-off period, the programme will target five NS at level 4 of the certification process, so that these NS can mentor the next generation*)
- NS demonstrates leadership commitment
- NS demonstrates how CEA will be further institutionalized, as well as integrated into specific programmes or thematic (ex: climate, health, migration, etc)
- The urgency of scaling up CEA in the context of an emergency response, can be an additional criterion.

Application and selection process

- For the first cohort, National Societies are invited by IFRC regional coordinator, in collaboration with the Task Force, to submit an application to the network, based on criteria above.
- The NS submits to IFRC:

⁵ See <https://www.leadershipcentre.org.uk/artofchangemaking/theory/adoption-curves/>

- Letter from management explaining briefly why and how CEA will be scaled up within the NS,
- A draft roadmap with milestones, demonstrating how different departments and levels of leadership will be involved to support the institutionalisation of CEA.
- A draft budget for the allotted funding (excluding travel to attend Ambassadors Network events/peer to peer visit).
- The Steering Group composed of NS/PNS/IFRC/ICRC select Ambassadors against the above criteria.

Implementation of programme

- Duration of the programme is 18 months, with funding disbursed in installments. Identified ambassadors will continue to be part of the network beyond the duration of the programme, to mentor newly identified NS within the network.
- While the Steering Group has oversight on the programme, a dedicated person (IFRC, ICRC or NS) is assigned to each 'ambassador' for more hands-on mentoring and support.
- Kick off call with selected NSs and Steering Group, to go over objectives, milestones and next steps. Incentives for milestones are explained (participation in regional and global events, meeting with IFRC SG)
- NS Ambassadors are expected to present their achievements within the CEA Community of Practice, participate in regional events as identified by the Task Force and IFRC Regional Coordinators, and as well in Council of Delegates/International Conference side events as appropriate. A travel budget is available for NS, beyond the allotted funding to each Ambassador.
- With the selected NS in the lead, IFRC supports the development of a 'one' CEA country plan in coordination with all CEA partners in country to avoid duplication.
- The Steering Group supports the NS in applying to IFRC's 'Capacity Building Fund' (for the scale-up of CEA work in conjunction with a focus on youth, volunteering and/or PSEA).
- The NS provides feedback on the programme to the Steering Committee after six months, and at the end of the programme.
- The NS needs to be able to fulfill the requirements of the next level in the certification programme, so that they can mentor newcomers into the network.

