

Communicating the Impact of Our Projects: Lessons Learned and Best Practices

ACTIF working group

The following lessons learned and best practices have been documented through the activities of the ACTIF working group. This working group brings together Canadian organizations that have received funding from the ACTIF Fund to carry out, in partnership with organizations in the South, projects that strengthen the respect, protection and fulfillment of the human rights of LGBTQ2I people.

Lessons learned:

1 Local leadership must be at the heart of impact communication

The most accurate and compelling impact stories are those carried by LGBTQI+ communities directly involved in the projects. Sometimes, Northern organizations take control of the narratives, imposing their own interpretation of observed changes, which can invisibilize local voices and reproduce colonial dynamics. Placing local leadership at the heart of impact communication means recognizing that the people directly involved are best positioned to identify the most significant changes, to tell their own stories, and to determine how and with whom these stories should be shared.

2 Activities, outputs, and impact must be distinguished

Sometimes activities or immediate outputs are confused with a project's impact. Activities are the actions implemented (training, campaigns, etc.), outputs are the short or medium-term changes that result from them (number of people trained, networks created, etc.), while **impact** refers to **deep and lasting transformations** at the level of individuals, communities, or systems (changes in attitudes, reduction of discrimination, improvement in well-being, etc.) Communicating the impact of a project for LGBTQI+ rights requires making this distinction and not overestimating the scope of activities. It is essential to recognize that impact can take time to manifest and is often difficult to measure. By clarifying these different levels, organizations gain credibility and can better articulate their specific contribution to observed changes.



3 The context of donor countries influences expectations regarding impact

The positioning of donor countries on LGBTQI+ rights, particularly concerning the rights of trans and non-binary people, is evolving rapidly. These evolutions, whether progressive or regressive, directly influence expectations regarding impact communication. Funders, foundations, and individual donors may prioritize visible and media-worthy results to justify their investments, creating pressure to produce spectacular stories at the expense of nuanced communication. Conversely, political setbacks or polarized debates may generate reluctance or pressure to adopt more politically "acceptable" approaches, limiting, for example, the visibility of certain groups of LGBTQI+ people. It is therefore essential that Northern and Southern organizations engage in frank dialogue with the audiences that support them to negotiate realistic, ethical expectations adapted to local contexts regarding impact communication, while raising awareness about the needs and priorities of LGBTQI+ communities.

4 Security is more important than visibility

Projects promoting LGBTQI+ rights are often implemented in fragile and unstable contexts. Impact communication must always prioritize the safety of people involved, even if this means limiting the project's visibility. The pressure exerted by funders or Northern organizations to obtain testimonies, photos, or data can endanger beneficiaries or partners. It is imperative to continuously assess risks and always take them into consideration, in collaboration with all stakeholders. This may mean anonymizing testimonies, not mentioning specific locations, avoiding the publication of images, or even not disseminating the activities and results of certain projects.



Best practices:

1 Amplify the voices of local champions

Rather than speaking on behalf of LGBTQI+ communities, organizations must create safe spaces for local champions to express themselves directly, in their own words. This involves supporting activists in developing their own communication capacities by offering them appropriate training and resources. Amplifying these voices also means recognizing their expertise and legitimacy, and accepting that their way of telling impact may differ from the formats expected by donors or Northern audiences. This approach not only strengthens the authenticity of communication but also contributes to the empowerment of local actors and the recognition of their central role in social transformations.

2 Establish ethical protocols from the start of the project

Establishing clear ethical protocols from the project design phase is essential to ensure respectful, safe, and consensual impact communication. These protocols must be co-constructed with LGBTQI+ communities, taking into account the cultural, political, and legal specificities of each context. They must address questions such as: Who has the right to tell which story? How to obtain free, informed, and ongoing consent? What information can be shared and what must remain confidential? How to protect people's identity and security? What are the validation mechanisms? These protocols must also provide procedures for managing situations where a person wishes to withdraw consent or modify what has been shared.

3 Train and support local organizations in documenting and communicating impact

Documentation and impact communication are not innate skills, and they require specific technical, narrative, and strategic capacities. Northern organizations must invest in strengthening the capacities of their local partners in data collection, writing stories of change, and communication strategies adapted to different audiences. Support must be offered respectfully, valuing existing knowledge and practices, rather than imposing standardized models.

By strengthening their capacities, local organizations gain autonomy and confidence, and can communicate their impact strategically, without systematically depending on external support.



4 Allocate time and resources to develop ethical impact stories

Developing rich, ethical, and secure impact stories requires time and resources. Too often, this dimension is underestimated in project budgets and planning, leading to rushed, superficial, and potentially dangerous productions. It is essential to allocate budgets for documentation, writing, translation, validation, audiovisual production, and dissemination of impact stories. This includes the time needed to consult with concerned persons, obtain their consent, and ensure that all security precautions have been taken. Funders must recognize this reality and agree to finance these activities as an integral part of projects.

5 Value different types of impact

The impact of projects is not limited to changes observed among beneficiaries or in public policies. It also includes often invisibilized but equally important transformations, such as improvements in organizational practices, network development, movement-building and strengthening, or team well-being. In the context of LGBTQI+ rights, where human rights defenders face high levels of stress and burnout, recognizing and valuing the impact of projects on their resilience and psychological security is essential. Communicating these types of impact demonstrates that projects do not merely produce external results, but also contribute to creating healthy, effective, and sustainable work environments.

6 Highlight testimonies of resilience rather than victimization

Impact communication must avoid depicting LGBTQI+ people solely as passive victims of discrimination or violence. While injustices must be named and denounced, it is important to highlight the strengths, resistance strategies, solidarities, and victories of communities. This type of narrative helps deconstruct stereotypes and affirm the agency and power of LGBTQI+ communities. To achieve this, it is essential to give concerned persons control over how they wish to be represented and to value their transformation journeys rather than focusing solely on violence suffered. It is also necessary to properly assess the risks for people who will have access to these personal stories, particularly when suffering is mentioned, and to provide content warnings when necessary.



7 Use creative formats adapted to different contexts

Impact communication should not be limited to written reports. To reach different audiences and adapt to local realities, it is essential to explore creative and diversified formats: videos, podcasts, comics, photographs, oral testimonies, artistic performances, social media, exhibitions, etc. These formats allow reaching audiences who would not read a long report. The choice of formats must always be made in consultation with the LGBTQI+ communities concerned, taking into account their objectives, technical capacities, and strategies they wish to use. It is important to ensure that these formats respect security and consent protocols, and that they do not put anyone in danger. The use of creative formats can also facilitate the expression of complex or difficult-to-verbalize experiences, offering other languages to tell lived transformations.

8 Analyze risks and remember that they can evolve

Risk analysis related to impact communication should not be a one-time activity carried out at the beginning of the project, but a continuous and dynamic process. In matters of LGBTQI+ rights, political, social, and legal contexts can change rapidly, and what was safe at a given moment can become dangerous a few months later. It is essential to establish monitoring mechanisms and regular risk reassessment, in close consultation with local partners who are best positioned to detect warning signals. This analysis must take into account different types of risks: risks to people's physical security, psychosocial risks, legal risks, stigmatization risks, political instrumentalization risks, digital risks related to online surveillance or the dissemination of private or sensitive information, etc. Depending on the evolution of risks, it may be necessary to adjust communication strategies, remove certain content from public platforms, strengthen protection measures, or even temporarily suspend certain communication activities. Anticipating, reassessing, and continuously adjusting are not optional precautions, but fundamental requirements of safe and ethical impact communication.



In partnership with

Canada