



Deployment Plan GuideStar Europe in the Netherlands

Summary report, 31 October 2008

The GuideStar Europe project (April 2007 - October 2008) has assessed the feasibility of implementing GuideStar systems for four European countries, as well as a pan-European portal. Coordinated by GuideStar International, the project included partners with a track record in voluntary sector research, capacity building, and transparency development: DZI and MI (Germany) NIOK (Hungary), CBF (The Netherlands) and ICTR (Ireland). The project was co-funded by the European Commission under its eTEN programme and in several cases by governmental, private sector and philanthropic sources in member countries. A GuideStar system provides an online, highly searchable catalogue of reports on the civil society organisations (CSOs) operating in a country. GuideStar Europe will draw together into a single relational database, information about the entire civil society sector in Europe, enhancing transparency and accountability while creating a knowledge infrastructure for the sector and its stakeholders. The next phase of the GuideStar Europe project will include both a roll out of the GuideStar model to more countries and a launch of a pan-European search capability.

The Dutch sub-project of GuideStar Europe, referred to as "DatabankFilantropie.nl" in the Netherlands, has devised a deployment plan for initiating a national reporting framework as part of the international GuideStar Platform. The operational goal is to develop an information system from which information will be publicised through a publicly accessible website and exported to other interested parties. This process is firstly to support the availability and transparency of information on charities, and secondly, to improve the efficiency of distributing that information.

The Central Bureau on Fundraising (CBF) (a monitoring organisation for fundraising charities), in cooperation with the VFI (umbrella organisation of the biggest fundraisers), initiated this project as a part of a European consortium, aiming for a pan-European cooperation. The need to increase transparency in the civil society sector, specifically by communicating the activities and results of individual charities; through cross-border collaboration; by addressing the need for reliable reporting; and by using evolving ICT applications to improve communication between, and analysis conducted by, charities, the media, donors and other stakeholders, also demonstrates the need for information to be exchanged in an effective and efficient manner.

The fundamental basis of the databank will be a list of 'general benefit' organisations obtained from the Internal Revenue, as well as public data held by the Dutch Chamber of Commerce. This data will then be enriched with information from the CBF, the largest database in the Netherlands, constituting in-depth and up-to-date information on fundraising charities. Charities will ultimately have free access to the databank via an online portal, for further enrichment. Since there is currently no legal mechanism in Holland through which it is possible to obtain a comprehensive set of registered data, the acquisition strategy for the databank also focuses on incentives for approximately 20,000 charities to actively participate in its operation.

Since a predefined legal reporting framework does not apply to all charities within the potential population of the databank, the project has created a framework broad enough to encompass a large variety of fields. The framework draws on the accepted Guidelines for Fundraising Organizations, as generally adopted by the accountancy sector. However, since this framework is broad, it will also



be important to devise a separate framework for smaller charities, specifically with regard to endowments. This is particularly important when considering that reporting is voluntary and therefore not custom throughout the sector.

Reliability and trust are important subjects when gathering information. Of course, the system must support certain quality demands regarding the proper load and management of information, by implementing standard quality control measures. Even more important, is how self-reported information is to be deemed reliable by those who receive and use the information. Several measures have been identified to achieve this; users will be made aware of the data's origin, obvious errors in uploaded information will be identified, population management will be controlled through house rules, and a data quality process will be set up in cooperation with CBF. These measures will aim to increase the reliability of the system, rather than rank organisations.

The deployment plan will evolve based on three elements. The first is its ability to draw information. The organisation will achieve this by first securing cooperation from within the sector; stakeholders such as umbrella bodies will provide their support. When a critical amount of information is secured, it can provide added value in decision and policy-making. The support of these stakeholders is very important in terms of motivating charities to actively deliver information. Charities are the biggest stakeholder group of the databank; while transparency through information provision may be a sufficient motivation for involvement in the project, the majority of charities will require incentives, due to lack of time, energy or resources. The databank will answer questions charities may have, such as, "what is in it for me?", and therefore must be user-friendly, provide value added services, offer active support for organisations and help to create opportunities for collaboration. Together with the ability of the operating organisation to act as a trust-worthy partner, this forms the basis of cooperation.

The second element of the plan is the financial sustainability of the project; it will require a start-up grant within the first three years. From the outset, steps will be taken to engage potential clients that are interested in specific services. Sets of information will be distributed to umbrella bodies, the government, commercial service providers, charities themselves, the media and research stakeholders. In addition, income is expected from advertising and sponsorship. Strategic alliances should be entered into with partners who can perform critical or valuable activities, such as quality support, marketing and technical support. Of course, the ability to successfully attract information is an important precondition for sustainability of the project.

The third element of the plan is the potential for the organisation to serve as an informational service provider for all kinds of stakeholders, both within and outside the sector, on a national and international level. The databank will concentrate on this informational hub function, specifically, providing the necessary building blocks to other organisations, in order to support them in providing their capacity-building services for the sector. Trust and reliability will be the cornerstones of the process, in terms of the data itself, the handling process, the collaboration that takes place, and the organisation's own policy and decision-making process.

The databank will be the place to go when it comes to accessing information about charities in The Netherlands, and will perform a substantial role as part of the international GuideStar platform, supporting the movement towards the transparency of the civil society sector.