



Deployment Plan GuideStar model in Germany

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 site. 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 philanthropy 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 the Europe, enhancing transparency and accountability while creating a knowledge infrastructure for the sector and its stakeholders. The next phase of the GuideStar Europe project is planned to include both a roll out of the GuideStar model to more countries and a launch of a pan-European search capability.

Since April 2006, "Projekt GuideStar Deutschland" has been located at DZI (Deutsches Zentralinstitut für soziale Fragen), an independent documentation and information centre for social work and charitable organisations. Our project was among the first to undergo an exploration phase within the worldwide GuideStar International network.

One of our key objectives during the 18 month period of the eTEN project was to demonstrate the potential inter-operability and use of common standards in a trans-European roll-out of GuideStar. Therefore, we had to validate how the GuideStar idea and its technology would fit within a German context, specifically with its unique transparency culture. If successful, the German model could prove a viable alternative for European countries that do not have the necessary legal requirements to set up a GuideStar database; the German model constitutes a top-down approach using validated public data.

Based on earlier findings from a feasibility study, we initially relied on a "consensus" approach: the development of a comprehensive third sector information portal would have to be achieved through an evolutionary process driven by incentives for those organisations that were willing to contribute their data. Unlike in the UK, where transparency legislation facilitates the setting up of a GuideStar system as a joint effort by the government, the Charity Commission and the third sector, in Germany, the 600,000 civil society organisations (CSOs) and 20,000 non-church foundations are not obliged to be transparent and accountable to a sufficient extent. At the same time, various important stakeholders in Germany's third sector, such as umbrella bodies of the foundations, environmental organisations, cultural organisations, or BBE, a tri-sectoral network, joined DZI's steering committee in order to support us in creating a robust business model. It was our intention to emphasise the message that the third sector and its organisations "owned" this process. Giving each participating stakeholder the opportunity to influence the progress of GuideStar Deutschland.

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The results and findings of our validation exercise, focusing on an in-depth market analysis, have made it clear that there is a fast-growing demand for more information on the work and the operational status of CSOs in Germany. From our user-testing and other stakeholder consultations, we concluded that instead of filling in directory-type information and hoping for organisations to add more sophisticated data, it would be better to focus on our main asset from the beginning: providing in-depth information on CSOs. We should set a high quality standard from the start, making the German reporting framework with its mandatory fields the quality benchmark which every participating organisation must meet.

Further, while there are currently no database solutions comparable to the size and scope of GuideStar in Germany, the emergence of various new non-profit internet models promoting civic engagement (volunteering and fundraising portals such as "Better Place" or "Helpedia") has put a certain pressure on DZI to go online in order to attract both participating organisations and users. Among experts whom we have interviewed and also within our advisory committee, there currently exists a unanimous consensus that it is most important to launch a database offering a convincing quality and depth of data, even if this means that the database would initially contain only a few hundred organisations. We are positive that as soon as the database is operational, unjustified fears and uncertainties among stakeholders will vanish and open questions will be resolved. It will also be easier to attract a constant stream of data from other CSOs, as well as to attract public and/or private funding.

Since there is currently no validated public data available in Germany, and due to a lack of public reporting requirements, it is important to find organisations that are prepared to enter information and help to trigger a "snowball effect". We will start by entering high quality data of as many of the 237 Seal-of-Approval organizations as we can get, plus data on other umbrella organisations and individual CSOs who have already committed to the project, such as members of VENRO, the German development aid umbrella and several foundation networks. There are a number of factors that influence the necessity and the willingness of a non-profit entity to inform the public on its activities, including size (small, medium sized, large); resource structure (dependent on government funding, fundraising and individual donations, fees based, permanent staff or volunteers); range of activities (international, regional, local); and type of organisation (advocacy, service, or membership). DZI seal organisations cover 30 per cent of all donations being given to CSOs in Germany; if the majority of these organisations participated in the database, it would be an important pull factor in view of their importance and market share in the sector.

Presumably, GuideStar Deutschland will be launched officially in spring 2009 with DZI as the sole owner. We will then use our visibility and brand power to invite other stakeholders to join GuideStar Deutschland as co-owners. Legally, this model could be based on either an association or a limited non-profit company. Our communicative efforts will focus on the specific features of the German database, such as the most in-depth reporting framework in Germany, including rudimentary financial information. This will be part of a transparency campaign which is intended to point out the value of civic engagement for society and how more and better information on CSOs will create added values for all stakeholders involved.