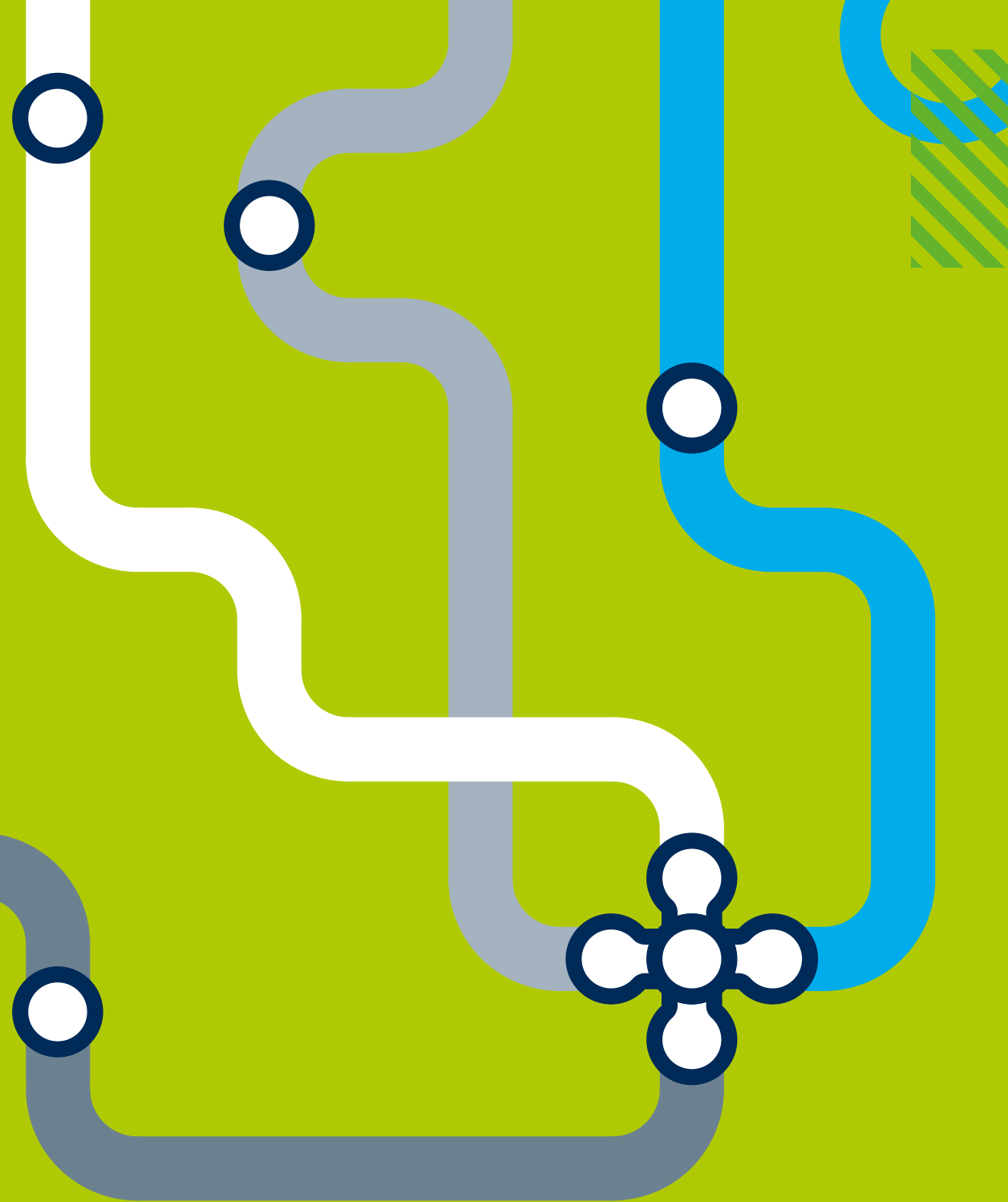


Mapping out cross-regional expert exchange

A practical orientation to global
peer collaboration and growth



1. DEVELOPING
THE CONCEPT

2. PLANNING
THE PROGRAM

3. APPLICATION
AND SELECTION

4. IMPLEMENTATION

5. CONCLUSION

Your step-by-step guide to cross-regional expert exchange for media development

What is this guide for?

As a result of digital transformation, changing user habits, disinformation and eroding trust in media, many media organizations around the world find themselves locked in an existential struggle. In many countries, this development is exacerbated by authoritarian governments threatening freedom of the press and shrinking spaces for civil society organizations. Subsequently, fewer people have access to reliable and relevant information.

To find ways out of the systemic crisis, media development challenges must be tackled on different levels. Media viability consultancy for individual media organizations or media and information literacy trainings for the general population, for instance, are as important as shaping policy debates aiming at improved legal and political conditions for media ecosystems. Most importantly: **Extraordinary challenges need new ways of working together.** Thus, there is an urgent need to join forces, exchange experiences and come up with joint ideas for solutions.

This guide provides some **practical recommendations for bringing together experts in a specific media development topic from around the globe.** Cross-regional exchange allows the experts to enrich their knowledge with insights from different parts of the world and to understand their focus topic more holistically. Eventually, such a program can leverage the power of an international group to reach advocacy goals on the policy level together. And it can help to make experts from all different world regions more visible, a development long overdue.

Reading this guide, practitioners of media development organizations will **understand step by step how to implement a cross-regional expert exchange program.** It draws on conclusions from the Media Viability Ambassador program, a pilot project implemented by DW Akademie in 2023.

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READ MORE ABOUT THE PILOT PROJECT

In 2023, DW Akademie brought together ten Media Viability (MV) experts from ten different countries around the world: Ecuador, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Mexico, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan and Ukraine.

The fellows of the MV Ambassadors program participated in nine online modules and one in-person meeting in Bonn, Germany, between August and December 2023. The modules allowed the MV Ambassadors to reflect on their work, enriching it with new tools and approaches and deepening their understanding of media viability. They learnt from each other and polished their consultancy and advocacy skills, as well as working together on relevant media viability topics identified throughout the program.

Currently, the ten experts are strategizing on how to continue tackling global media viability challenges together.

More information is available here:

akademie.dw.com/en/media-viability-ambassadors/s-67704019



THE MEDIA VIABILITY
AMBASSADORS

Together
for strong
media





1. DEVELOPING THE CONCEPT

CO-CREATION

IDEATION WORKSHOP

1. Developing the concept of cross-regional exchange programs

1.1 Co-creation

To organize a program that brings together experts from different world regions, a strong **buy-in from everyone involved on the organizers' side** is needed. Depending on the size of the initiating organization, there might be different internal and/or regional departments to be considered. Additionally, or alternatively, the program could be implemented together with partner organizations in the different regions.

As a first step, set up meetings to **identify joint goals** and to reach **clarity about roles and resources**.

1.2 Ideation workshop

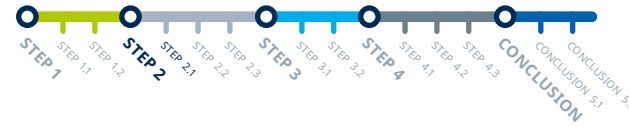
The program design should be attractive for relevant experts. Organizing a workshop with representatives of the potential target group can be an effective way **to identify their needs**, thus making sure that resources are allocated in the most useful way possible.

Experts participating in this kind of ideation workshop, contributing their experience and professional perspectives, should be paid as consultants. Organizers can send participants an **online questionnaire** beforehand, with questions about their understanding of the focus topic and related challenges in their country or region. Their responses can serve as a basis to build upon in the ideation workshop.

When planning the ideation workshop, think about how to unleash creativity and collaborative thinking. **Human-centred design methods** such as empathy interviews, prototyping and reverse brainstorming can help to identify important elements of the program and shape its design.

HELPFUL KEY QUESTIONS FOR A POSSIBLE IDEATION WORKSHOP

- *What challenges around the focus topic do media practitioners face in your country?*
- *What challenges around the focus topic do you face in your daily work as consultant/trainer/researcher/...?*
- *What would make this program attractive and useful for consultants/trainers/researchers/working on the focus topic?*
- *What would be the most effective approach to the focus topic?*



2. PLANNING THE PROGRAM

PARTICIPANTS

CONTENT OF THE PROGRAM

TIMELINE

2. Planning the program

2.1 Participants

A central goal of the program is to explore the potential of a group of experts from different regional contexts to tackle a global media development challenge. To reach that goal, the program should bring together a mix of experts with different professional backgrounds. While participants may regularly discuss the focus topic and related challenges within their respective professional circles, conversations between representatives of different media-related professions may be more unusual, and thus particularly fruitful. Facilitating this kind of exchange may bring up more comprehensive solutions. With this in mind and depending on the exact focus topic, the group could be made up of:

- Media consultants
- Researchers and academics
- Journalists, media practitioners and managers
- Advocates and legal experts
- Trainers and educators

The group should also be diverse in other ways. Read more about this in section 3.1 on selection criteria.

2. PLANNING THE PROGRAM

PARTICIPANTS

CONTENT OF THE PROGRAM

TIMELINE



2.2 Content of the program

This kind of program is designed to bring together highly qualified professionals who are experts in their field. With that in mind, we recommend shaping the program's content to focus on peer exchange rather than training. Experts bringing in their own expertise and learning from each other is key. We recommend aiming for a highly participative workshop format right from the start, with less expert input and more participant input.

No matter what the focus topic is, the program can aim to sharpen the skills and abilities of the participants (such as consultancy, advocacy or training skills) and at the same time to deepen their knowledge of specialized content. For the latter, it is crucial that the participants choose the specific topics themselves – to make sure they work on the most relevant ones and to create ownership. If one of the program goals is to strengthen the participants' profiles as individual experts, we recommend including a training module on self-positioning and self-marketing. This can introduce important impulses aimed at sustaining each participant's professional success.

Especially in a program that brings together experts from different parts of the world, regional and other diversity criteria should also apply when choosing the facilitators.

EXAMPLE PROGRAM (Pilot project 2023 "The Media Viability Ambassadors")

- MODULE 1: *Getting to know each other and finding common ground* (online)
- MODULE 2: *E-facilitation* (online)
- MODULE 3: *Media viability consultancy lab* (online)
- MODULE 4: *Media viability approaches and tools lab* (online)
- MODULE 5: *Media viability on the policy level: Advocacy workshop* (face-to-face)
- MODULE 6: *Deep dive: Aspects of media viability I "Technology, digital transformation and AI in journalism and its implications for media viability"* (online)
- MODULE 7: *Deep dive: Aspects of media viability II "Revenue models and diversification"* (online)
- MODULE 8: *Deep dive: Aspects of media viability III "Audience engagement and community building"* (online)
- MODULE 9: *Self-marketing as expert/consultant* (online)
- MODULE 10: *Final session: Presentation of expert profiles, discussing next steps* (online)

2. PLANNING THE PROGRAM

PARTICIPANTS

CONTENT OF THE PROGRAM

TIMELINE



2.3 Timeline

The success of a peer exchange program also depends on creating an atmosphere of trust. Participants will only share their knowledge and experience openly if they get to know each other well and feel part of a safe learning space. This also increases the likelihood of the participants continuing to collaborate as a whole group or in subgroups after completing the program. An atmosphere of trust is not built overnight. Therefore, the program needs to be well prepared. We also recommend that the intense program phase with online and offline modules has a duration of several months.

Here is a possible timeline for the implementation of a cross-regional expert exchange program:

PROGRAM PHASE	DURATION
Developing the concept	3–4 months
Application process	2 weeks
Selection process	3–5 weeks
Buffer between communicating selection results and start of program	6–8 weeks
Program with online and offline modules	4–6 months
Transition phase (follow-up support by organizing institution until the group has defined ways to collaborate in future)	3–6 months

Find out more about program timelines in section 3.2.



3. APPLICATION AND SELECTION

SELECTION CRITERIA

STEP-BY-STEP

3. Application and selection process

3.1. Selection criteria

In order to put together a group of professionals who can look at the focus topic from different angles, participants should be selected according to criteria for the individual candidate as well as criteria for the group composition.

Possible selection criteria for individual candidates:

- Relevant media industry related experience
- Proven experience in connection to the focus topic
- Good language skills in the program's working language
- Excellent communication skills
- Willingness to share knowledge
- Availability and time to commit to active participation
- Good contacts and access to networks
- Motivation

Possible selection criteria for group composition:

- Regional diversity
- Gender diversity
- Age diversity
- Diversity of professional backgrounds and experiences



3. APPLICATION AND SELECTION

SELECTION CRITERIA

STEP-BY-STEP

3.2 Step-by-step

We recommend setting up a two-phase selection process: (1) Written applications and (2) online interviews with shortlisted applicants. This allows the selection committee to get a good overall impression of the candidates. Plan 3–5 weeks for the selection process to have a time buffer in case of a high number of applications.

PROCESS PHASE	RECOMMENDATIONS
Call for applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Leave the call open for 2 weeks. – Set up a standardized online application form to collect the applicants' details centrally. This saves on the time and effort needed to extract application documents from emails. – Requirements for the written applications could include a letter of interest (set a max. length) and a CV. – Make clear how much time participants will need to allocate to the program (e.g. XX days/month). – Make clear that only shortlisted applicants will be invited for an interview. – Include the date when successful candidates will be informed about selection results.
Selection of written applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluate the written applications according to a clear catalogue of criteria. – Set up an evaluation system with points (e.g. 1–5) for each criterion. Discuss the highest ranked candidates in a meeting with all selection committee members and invite the shortlisted candidates for an (online) interview.



3. APPLICATION AND SELECTION

SELECTION CRITERIA

STEP-BY-STEP

Online interviews

- Conduct the interviews in a team of at least two interviewers, considering diversity aspects when setting up the team.
- Interviews should be well prepared to be efficient. With well thought out questions that assess critical points, an interview may not need to last longer than 30 minutes.
- Plan extra time for a second round of interviews, if necessary.
- Evaluate your impression of the candidates according to a clear catalogue of criteria.
- Set up an evaluation system with points (e.g. 1-5) for each criterion. Discuss the highest ranked candidates in a meeting with all selection committee members, select participants and decide on a waiting list.

Confirmation of selected candidates

- Inform selected candidates and wait for their confirmation of participation.



4. Implementation: Peer exchange and capacity development

In general, we recommend a mix of **online modules** and **at least one face-to-face meeting**. Online modules allow for a continuous exchange and learning process over time, while a face-to-face meeting is a real booster for the group process of familiarisation, creating trust, unleashing creativity and the motivation for active cooperation.

If one goal of bringing the group together is for the participants to share their expertise and knowledge, actively **assign tasks to each participant right from the start**, rather than later in the program. A task could be for small groups to organize the content (internal and external inputs) and moderation of modules on specialized topics of their choice.

Tasks like these increase (1) the sense of individual responsibility for the program's success, and (2) the possibility of finishing the tasks within the proposed time frame.

The shorter the time frame planned for the overall program, the fewer modules there should be. However, **regular meetings** are necessary for growing together as a group and creating an atmosphere of trust. Therefore, we recommend organizing online modules more often than once a month—e.g. every two to three weeks—but for a fairly short amount of time (e.g. 2–3 hrs) to increase the chances that participants will attend regularly and stay for the whole session.

To further motivate consistent participation, we recommend keeping an **attendance list**. Announce at the beginning of the program that participation will be tracked in all sessions and that no more than, for example, 20% of the sessions can be missed in order to receive a participation certificate at the end. Ask the participants to inform the project manager(s) beforehand if they cannot attend a session or part of it.

4. IMPLEMENTATION

ONLINE
MODULES

FACE-TO-FACE
MEETING

GROUP
MANAGEMENT



4. IMPLEMENTATION

ONLINE
MODULES

FACE-TO-FACE
MEETING

GROUP
MANAGEMENT



4.1. Online modules

Online meetings work well for geographically dispersed groups. But poor internet connections in some regions can mean some people are regularly excluded from crucial sessions and discussions. Consider establishing ways to bridge the information gaps in such cases. This could be by providing meeting summaries or nominating one 'buddy' for each session who volunteers to update the peers who could not fully attend for technical or other reasons. Discuss possibilities with the group and agree on what works best.

4.2 Face-to-face meeting

As mentioned above, at least one face-to-face meeting is crucial for the success of a cross-regional expert exchange program. It can be used to carry out one of the modules in a different setting. If advocacy plays a role in the program, we recommend using the opportunity for an advocacy workshop. In our experience, the impetus needed to develop advocacy strategies together is more likely to emerge from a face-to-face workshop than from an online meeting.

It is also important to plan enough time for informal activities and free time for the participants, the best way for them to get to know each other well. Four to five days might be a good duration for the meeting.

Preferably, the face-to-face meeting would be organized towards the end of the program. This works best for the group to start strategizing on their way forward upon completion of the program. Certificates could also be handed out in-person.



4.3 Group management

Managing a cross-regional group of experts who are slowly getting to know each other and who are very busy with their everyday work outside of the program can be a challenge.

Some aspects to consider for group management:

- While facilitators might change from module to module, it is **crucial that one or two project managers accompany the group of fellows throughout the whole program**. This allows the project manager(s) to quickly identify any need for adjustments and, by establishing a relationship of trust with the participants over time, to solve any problems or conflicts more easily.
- Right from the start, **encourage participants to set rules for themselves** that will enable them to hold each other to account as regards full participation in the program.
- Offer an **introduction to culturally sensitive communication**, as the program may involve people with many different cultural backgrounds and communication habits coming together.
- Early in the process of convening the group, set up a **professional exchange space** (e.g. a LinkedIn group or similar social platform) that each participant can contribute to and showcase their expertise. Regularly encourage participants to use it. As an interactive space, participants can use it to share job/project opportunities, events, publications, or other inspirational links connected to the focus topic.
- If possible, provide a learning management system or other **shared online workspace** and encourage participants to use it. It should be a central location where participants can easily find key information, deadlines and tasks agreed on. Sending the information in separate emails eventually makes it difficult to track.
- Plan **regular short review and feedback sessions** within the online modules in order to be able to respond flexibly to participants' needs and to strengthen their sense of ownership.
- Listen to the participants' ideas on **how best to communicate information about them and the program to the public**.

4. IMPLEMENTATION

ONLINE
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FACE-TO-FACE
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5. Conclusion

5.1 Building a lasting exchange

You successfully planned a program, selected participants, facilitated online and face-to-face modules over a certain time period and finally hand out certificates. So what happens next?

If enough budget is available, you might have planned the program over a longer period, maybe even with several cohorts of fellows. In that case, discuss with the participants of the first cohort what kind of role they might take when the second cohort is selected and how to best get the groups acquainted with each other.

However, in media development cooperation, budget is often more limited and only one project cycle can be planned at the outset. Organizers often hope the group will build a network that lasts over time. But this will only happen if the fellows themselves see a benefit in continuing to collaborate as a group and are ready to take initiative and responsibility for keeping their group alive.

What the organizing institution can do is to **offer support for the transition phase from being fellows of a pre-designed program to being members of a self-organized group**. That transition phase should start in the face-to-face meeting at the end of the program. Beyond that meeting, the development organization's support might include consultancy, facilitation of strategy meetings, financial support for travel costs, or other services, depending on the fellows' needs and the organization's availability of resources.

5.2 Final thoughts

There is enormous power in cross-regional learning. Bringing together experts on one focus topic from different regions allows them to grow in a unique way: Their expertise is enriched with their peers' experiences and perspectives; they discover similar challenges around the globe and they unleash their creative potential finding solutions together, especially when meeting face-to-face. What grows out of the mutual learning process can empower the group as well as the individual experts to speak up for their cause, thus diversifying global debates.

Last but not least, we want to point out that the learning process the program fosters is not a one-way street. Quite the opposite: For the media development organization, it represents a great opportunity to learn from practitioners on the ground, to reconsider its own approaches to the focus topic and to enrich its theories and concepts with a breadth of real-life experiences.

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