

2.2.8 Please describe how you would build press office function(s) capacity in nascent organisations/institutions?

1. **General.** We are highly experienced professionals in providing strategic communications support in conflict or fragile environments. Such environments present a range of challenges and assets when it comes to building effective media engagement capacity. Lessons learned from previous endeavours demonstrate that press office staff are most effective when the political leadership of the organisation they work with values their contribution, understands how they operate and cooperates with them. A newly established organisation or institution permits building key understandings and relationships from the inception. In an ideal situation, we would seek to build a relationship with the institution from the inception phase to help clarify two key points to senior leadership:

- I. Firstly, the head of the press office – the press secretary – should be someone with the confidence and trust of the senior leadership.
- II. Secondly, successful media engagement requires senior leadership to be actively engaged.

2. **Indicative development.** The response is based on the actual work carried out within the **National Coalition Press office during 2013 and 2014.**

a. **Developing from inception.** Where we are called in to assist at an early stage of the organisation's development, the following actions are advocated:

- 1) Appoint a press secretary and a communications director. For each, clearly identify responsibilities and access to political leadership.
- 2) Draw up a strategic communications plan based on research, incorporating monitoring and evaluation.
- 3) Draw up an action plan that clearly outlines the responsibilities and activities of the press office.
- 4) Use the action plan to identify the press office staff necessary to deliver the outcomes and meet the aims and objectives; including press officers, editorial staff and grid officer.
- 5) Provide mentoring/training as necessary.

b. **Improving existing organisations.** We have been involved after an organisation is already functioning and the basic structure has been established. For example, our engagement with the **Syrian National Coalition**, the following course of action has been followed:

- 1) Establish a clear delineation between the responsibilities of the press secretary and communications director.
- 2) Impress upon political leadership the need to prioritise communications activities – particularly press contact – instead of developing an “outsource” mentality and empower the press secretary and communications director.
- 3) Audit current activities and approach.
- 4) Commission qualitative and quantitative research into the views of target audiences to inform planning and future monitoring and evaluation.
- 5) Amend or produce a strategic communications plan/action plan, as necessary.
- 6) Identify skills gaps and identify recruitment/mentoring/training needs.
- 7) Provide mentoring/training as necessary.
- 8) Reinforce advice on planning and structures with operational mentoring delivered on a day-to-day basis by on-the-ground mentors.

