

Institutionalising CAN Europe working groups

1. Intro

The external evaluator that made the impact assessment for the Oak Foundation made several observations related to the ownership and involvement of member organisations in the work of the CAN Europe Secretariat. One important observation he made was the need to increase attention for actions to be taken at national level as opposed to a too heavy focus on EU policy development. As a way forward the evaluator suggested for members to engage more in defining the priorities for CAN Europe, in ensuring the perspective from outside of Brussels is more regularly reflected in meetings, to clarify responsibilities of members, and to overall increase the ownership by members of the work of CAN Europe. To put this in practice, the evaluator suggested to institutionalise the system of working with working groups. This suggestion builds further on observations made earlier by the CAN Europe Secretariat when comparing the functioning of different other European networks with the work of CAN Europe.

There are several advantages of further institutionalising the working groups, as the current situation is not ideal:

- irregular meetings, depending on the initiative of the staff;
- limited and irregular participation by members;
- facilitation and secretariat all lead by the staff;
- limited responses to calls for comments and suggestions;
- few discussions on priorities.

Subsequently, there are a number of improvements that can be achieved by institutionalising the working groups, though there is no automatic guarantee. The main objective of doing this would be to increase the sense of ownership of the network by CAN Europe members, and by doing so increase and improve cooperation, on those topics that people want to work together on.

2. Terminology

This proposal uses the following terms:

- core working groups: members of a working group that are elected by the General Assembly;
- (open) working group: all members of CAN Europe, interested in a certain subject, that participate in calls, meetings, workshops, mailing lists;
- task forces: ad-hoc groups, established by the core working group, to deal with a specific sub-issue. These are automatically open groups, but need at least a member facilitating the meetings/calls, together with a member of the Secretariat.

3. Concept

The proposal is to establish a limited group of working groups with a core team that a) gets a mandate from the GA; and b) gets special tasks that go beyond what members currently do in working groups.

The working groups will function similar to how they function now:

- regular calls/meetings;
- communication through mailing lists.

The objective of working groups will remain:

- exchange of intelligence and experience between CAN Europe members;
- discuss relevant CAN Europe strategies;
- agree on actions to be undertaken by the Secretariat and/or members;
- develop CAN Europe positions.

The core working group (or members thereof) would have a few additional tasks:

- facilitation of the group meetings/calls;
- deciding on the participation of non-members on mailing lists and in meetings/calls;
- endorsing next year's work program, on the basis of proposals from the Secretariat;
- support finding compromises on draft positions, when needed.

These tasks of the core working members are to be fulfilled during the open meetings/calls or via e-mail.

The core working groups would only occasionally have separate meetings. The core working groups will also not have separate e-mail lists.

Points of discussion:

- do people agree with the concept of having core team members, mandated by the GA?
- do people agree with the specific tasks these people would take on?

4. Composition

The core working groups would have maximum seven members, of which one or (preferably) two facilitators, supported by one (or more) CAN Europe staff members.

These seven core team members should be nominated by the General Assembly and should reflect a balanced representation from CAN Europe, in terms of gender, Brussels vs. capitals, small vs. big organisations, regional balance (east-west-south), ...

All working groups will be open: any CAN Europe member can volunteer to be part of the working group (but not of the core team); and participation of experts from outside the membership is possible, on the condition the core team agrees.

Points of discussion:

- is seven a realistic number?
- should we set fixed representations? at least one from the east? from the south? less than halve from Brussels?...

5. Which groups

The proposal would be to set up 4 groups. These working groups will cover very broad areas of work and might therefore decide to establish task forces that would deal with specific pieces of work.

The four working groups would be:

1. EU Climate Policy working group
2. Energy working group
3. Climate and Development working group
4. International Climate Policy working group

The division of overlapping issues between the different working groups will be defined by the working group facilitators in consultation with the CAN Europe staff.

Points of discussion:

- Would we prefer to have separate energy efficiency and renewable energy working groups? And if so, what then with coal? Would it make sense to have a coal working group, separate from the European Coal network?
- Would we need an overarching group, like PCG (political coordination group) at the international level? Or is that something the Secretariat and the Board should deal with?

6. Meetings of the working groups

The working groups meet preferably three times a year in a face to face meeting, possibly linked to the General Assembly of CAN Europe. Core team members are expected to participate at least twice/year in the face to face meetings.

7. Elections

Members for the core working groups will be nominated during the General Assembly. Each member organisation can nominate a member for each of the core working groups. When more than seven nominations are received, an election will take place.

Core working group members can resign or be asked to resign (when not fulfilling their duties) at every General Assembly.

8. Costs

Most of this proposal is without additional costs. Potential costs relate to:

- travel costs for core team members;
- staff time for core team members.

Travel costs for core team members should be covered by the current CAN Europe budget. Remuneration of staff time (for the members that would need this) should be part of the 2016 budget, if possible.