

Around the world

EFC and NEF – natural born allies?

The European Foundation Centre (EFC) and the Network of European Foundations for Innovative Cooperation (NEF) have always worked closely together. Recently, they signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to formalize their ongoing close collaboration. The organizations' missions are complementary but different: while the EFC acts as a meeting place for European funders, NEF acts as a catalyst to spark collaboration. Together, they offer great potential to make a difference at European level. Alliance talked to EFC Chief Executive Gerry Salole and NEF's Chairman of the Board, Luc Tayart de Borms.



Gerry Salole

How does NEF complement the EFC's work?

In Gerry Salole's view, NEF is 'the most exciting example of collaboration among foundations anywhere. Having a group of foundations collaborating like this serves as an aspiration to others, who may be eager to become involved and yet feel timid and uncertain about it. Part of the EFC's mission is to promote collaboration, and the simple existence of a consortium like NEF means that there is a good example that can be pointed to and so furthers our mission.'

So could NEF be described as the operational arm of the EFC? No, it couldn't. Luc Tayart is very emphatic on this point. 'Current NEF members do not want to be viewed as a monopoly. Not every NEF project originates from the



Luc Tayart de Borms

EFC and vice versa. For example, the EFC is a partner in the Bellagio Forum for Sustainable Development, but NEF is not involved in this initiative.'

'Since the EFC cannot be operational (or at least should not be),' says Salole, 'it is very welcome that an institution exists that can make collective grants to complement principles that we can espouse but not support.' He mentions the NEF/EFC partnership to continue supporting *Alliance* as a good example of this.

Apart from providing a model of collaboration, NEF supports the EFC in very direct and practical ways. The key members of NEF are also EFC members, Salole points out, and their support takes a number of different forms – paying more than their nominal membership subscription, hosting events, giving advice, taking part in EFC committees, engaging with interest groups, etc. 'I see this as being support from the individual organizations but also from NEF,' says Salole.

Does the current situation force the EFC and NEF into competition?

Both Luc Tayart and Gerry Salole seem almost puzzled by this question. 'In view of what each organization does,' says Tayart, 'I can't see how we could be viewed as competitors. NEF is an operational platform for concrete collaboration among foundations. The EFC is a kind of trade organization for the foundation sector. The MoU clearly spells out a division of labour.'

Salole admits that there has been widespread confusion about their

roles, but insists that the two organizations are 'natural allies'. 'We are not competing with each other,' he says. 'Our roles are clearly demarcated, particularly now with the MoU.'

Moreover, he points out, both parties are represented on EFC- and NEF-related committees. 'People working in both organizations know and trust each other.' However, both the EFC and NEF are open to partnership and collaboration with organizations that are not members of either.

Why do foundations need to collaborate more?

Luc Tayart is an enthusiastic advocate of collaboration. 'Foundations are relatively small players compared to governments and corporates,' he points out. 'On top of this, today's problems do not stop at national borders. Consider the issues of migration, human trafficking and poverty, to name just a few. Creating economies of scale is a compelling argument for collaboration and partnership. By bringing together our different strategies and methodologies from our individual philanthropic toolboxes, foundations working together surely create a greater impact.'

Gerry Salole admits that it can be difficult for independent institutions to collaborate, but agrees there is no substitute for partnership. 'If different institutions work together, the product is better, the work is more creative and the results create a bigger footprint.'

For more information

www.efc.be www.nefic.org

THE EFC AND NEF

The EFC is an independent association representing about 200 corporate funder and foundation members, primarily based in Europe. NEF is an operational platform managed by 12 foundations. This year it involves more than 60 foundations in different projects.