Implementing & Adapting the Consultation Strategy

The implementation phase is all about putting ideas and plans into action. Crucial to us is documenting progress and maintaining continual contact with all those involved who can make a difference to the work. We monitor the work by holding regular meetings with stakeholders and partners to ensure that we meet our objective.

The truism states that even the best laid plans often go astray; consulting, especially in crisis regions is no exception. Where peace and conflict processes can change rapidly, we remain flexible to these changes and adapt our approach in consultation with our partner/client.

In short, it is about:

- holding consultation management meetings with our partners to assess progress and targets
- guiding feedback back into the consultancy
- revising and adapting action
- taking successful action

Evaluating our Impact & Learning for the Future

At the end of the consultation, we work to gather feedback from our partner concerning the consultation covering all aspects of the engagement: Has it met their expectations and needs? How was the communication? Were there any major changes required during the implementation? In addition, we ensure that sufficient time is allocated to have a thorough debriefing of the work and collect any best practices or lessons learned that

have arisen from the work.

Specifically, this phase is about:

- listening to our partner's feedback
- reflecting on our joint work
- identifying and integrating lessons learned and best practices for the future.

Closing the Consultation & Follow-Up

While our engagement with our partner is now formally at an end, we strive to maintain our partnership. We strongly believe in the principle of long-term engagement and continued support to all of our partners. Where possible, we continue to follow, act in support and be there for further problem-solving. This has resulted in many long-term and ongoing friendships and relationships of mutual learning. This is about:

- designing continuity supports
- promoting and handing over to local ownership
- follow-up activities (where appropriate)
- providing ad hoc advice

About Us

Austin Consult is an independent consulting practice for decision-makers and local stakeholders in conflict environments working on strategies for addressing ethnopolitical conflicts.

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Our Consultation Process

a guide to our peacebuilding and conflict-transformation consulting work

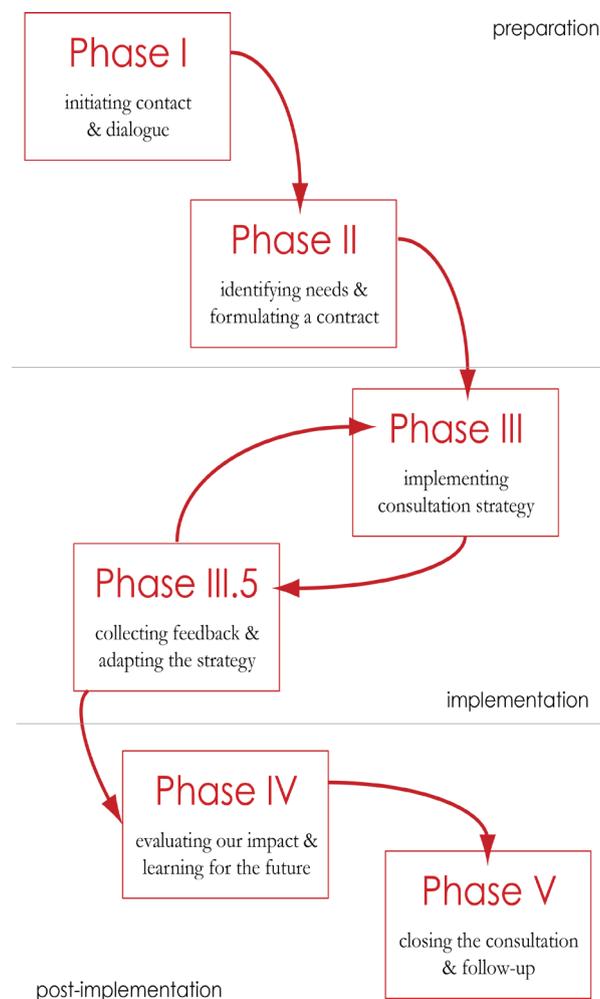*"Taking pleasure in ... finding things out."*

The following is a short outline of a standard consultation process. Over the years, we have developed an approach aimed at best meeting our partners' needs and maximising the possibility of change. This introduction aims to give our partners and clients a clear idea of how we approach consulting in peacebuilding and conflict transformation as well as what they can expect from our services. While no single approach fits all settings, the following is an outline of how we engage in peacebuilding consultations.

Initiating Contact & Dialogue

The start of every consultation begins with building trust with the partner, their trust to allow us to accompany them in resolving issues and meeting their needs. Frequently, people see and understand tasks, problems and solutions differently and this first stage is about listening and grasping the scope of the issues at hand. All consultancies are based on the assumption that a change should happen in the future, whether it is a change in organisational structures, in new or closing programmes or in being able to implement new strategies for old challenges.

This stage is also about forming an idea concerning the readiness for change within the partner organisation and whether there will be opportunities or resistance to change. Finally, we reflect upon our own role: Why us? Does it fit our realm of expertise and skills? Can we uphold our principles of peacebuilding and conflict transformation? What chances do we have for creating the space for change (and long-term change beyond the consultancy)? We discuss with our partner what are our and their expectations and reflect back what we have

Consultation Process Cycle

Phase I
initiating contact & dialogue

preparation

Phase II
identifying needs & formulating a contract

Phase III
implementing consultation strategy

Phase III.5
collecting feedback & adapting the strategy

implementation

Phase IV
evaluating our impact & learning for the future

Phase V
closing the consultation & follow-up

post-implementation

heard to be the underlying issues as a foundation for the consultancy. Specifically, it is about:

- understanding our partner and client
- building a trusting relationship
- listening to the issues presented by the partner
- helping to identify and clarify the need for change
- examining our own role and leverage

Identifying Needs & Formulating a Contract

This planning phase is about the practical design and approach to the consultation. Consultancies vary tremendously dependent upon partner, issues at hand, specific contexts (regional, hierarchial). To ensure that we get it right, we focus on two main levels: the relationship/working level as well as the content level of the consultation. We work together with our partner, in a spirit of shared responsibility until we have jointly clarified and understood:

- *consultation content:* identified desired outcome, approach and method, concrete activities, realistic timeframe, specific deliverables and how these will meet the partner's needs
- *working relationships:* specific roles, agreeing clear lines of communication and decision-making, understanding who is responsible for what, identifying opportunities and pitfalls for change on the organisational level

Once all aspects have been identified, this phase concludes with the contract for work. Given the details required for large and complex consultancies, the design and structure of the process can in itself become a consultancy. For these projects, we propose a pre-project consultancy.

This phase is about:
- identifying desired outcomes
- determining who should do what
- developing a joint strategy including a timeframe
- assessing organisational development issues
- finalising the contract