

Why do we need External Relations?

External Relations - Chapter 1
BEE Tutorials

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What is External Relations?

External Relations encompasses contacts with third parties. Whether it is getting a sponsor, looking for a venue for an event or searching for IT support, this all falls under the concept of External Relations.

But what is the purpose of these contacts?

ELSA as an association is not self-sufficient. We need external support to function and to develop. For that reason, having an external relations strategy is very important in order to keep your Group functional and growing.

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Myths about External Relations

1. External Relations is about getting financial support

No! Financial support is one objective that we can aim for, but there are many others in which we need externals. In-kind support, credibility, legal expertise are all equally important goals.

2. External Relations is about contacting private organisations to start a cooperation

No! External Relations is not just about partnerships, but also other types of relations. Grants, contacting public institutions, service providers, etc. External Relations is more than law firms.

3. External Relations is only for the President

No! Even if it is one of the main responsibilities of the President, the entire Board should participate in creating an external relations strategy and contact externals. The President has a coordinating role, but all should participate in the process.

4. A good external relations policy is to have as many partners as you can

No! A good partnership is better than ten bad ones. A good external relations policy is getting the right relationships to satisfy the needs of the Board and not just many partnerships.

Goals of External Relations

External Relations is not just about getting money. Even if the financial stability of the Group is important, there are also other important needs that need to be fulfilled. Some of them are:

1. Technical Support (IT, merchandising, printing, publisher, etc.);
2. Credibility;
3. Benefits for members;
4. Project development (traineeship providers, venues, judges for competitions, prizes, etc.)

This being the general premise, it is up to the President with the support of the Board to understand what are the concrete needs of the Group.

Maybe there is no concrete need for more funds for a project, but for it to attract more participants. Maybe getting partnerships for prizes or reinforcing its credibility is the way to go!

Targets of External Relations

In ELSA, we tend to focus our efforts on the legal market (law firms, law schools, etc). Even if these are the first organisations we should cooperate with, there are more:

1. While you have the private sector on one hand, you also have the public on the other. These entities normally not only offer good credibility to the organisations they work with, but they also provide you with a different source of fundraising: grants!
2. There is more to corporate organisations than law firms. Nowadays, it is quite frequent for companies to have a legal departments. Be creative!
3. Technical support comes from areas very different from ours. IT, voting and webinar platforms, accounting, and so on.
4. Benefits for members are a trending topic. Here you can target anything from gyms, to online apps, to hostels, etc.
5. Also, even for projects we can be creative! Hotels for the accommodation and language schools to offer prizes are easy examples.
6. Also, don't forget that there are more student associations in the world. Why not do a project with medical students?

Who does External Relations?

Indeed, the President is the one responsible for External Relations. But that person should not be alone as External Relations is better developed as a group effort:

1. Projects - Here, cooperating with the Key Areas to understand their needs and what to search for. Also, our project managers can also engage in the process of partner hunting as they are the ones that know their areas best.
2. Fundraising - If the goal is to get more funds, you cannot go anywhere without your Treasurer.

3. Partner promotion - it is frequent for partnership agreements to include promotion of partners (we will get into that later). This cannot be done without your marketer.
4. Administrative needs of the Group - Does the Group need help with the maintenance of websites? Do you need to publish your statutes? Your IMer is the person to help you with these tasks

Contacting externals should be a task done by all Board Members and coordinated by the President. You should understand their needs and create a strategy together that can be implemented by the Board.

Quality Vs Quantity

More than getting partners, external relations is aimed at fulfilling the needs of the Group. That means that the number of partners one possesses or gets is not the most important.

The question to ask is: how does this partner help my Group and its members develop?

With that in mind, if you are able to get just one partner that fulfills the needs that you identify, then you can consider your strategy successful!

Of course, diversification also plays an important role. What happens if your only partner cannot assist you in a concrete task?

It is important to cooperate with other organisations to ensure that the lack of support in a particular instance does not jeopardize the development of the Group's initiatives.

This balance is one of the tasks that the President needs to take into consideration when planning the term and the contacts they plan to approach.

Let's go to the basics

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How to do it in practice

There are a few steps that can be adopted in order to give external relations a structure:

1. Identify the needs of the Group;
2. Research externals that may satisfy those needs;
3. Approach the external;
4. Negotiate;
5. Formalise the cooperation;
6. Develop the cooperation.

Step 1: Identify the needs of the Group

First of all, what do you need?

This is a task that should be done by the entire Board. You should communicate with your Board members to identify what each of you need to develop your ideas throughout the term.

After that is done, it is time to create a strategy!

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Step 1: Identify the needs of the Group

After talking with your Board and understanding where you need external support, it is time to put that in paper and to create a concrete plan for the term.

Here, it is important to:

1. Identify the priorities - not all needs are of equal importance nor do they take the same effort. Getting a sponsor takes longer than getting a speaker for an event. Also, some needs may be more urgent than others. It is important for you to identify these differences and prioritise the needs of the Board.
2. Identify the steps that need to be taken in order to reach that priority - do you want to get more income for the Group? Do you want to get panelists for your Moot Court? Or maybe you want to reinforce the credibility of your Group and work with important institutions? For any of priorities, you need to decompose them in small steps and create a plan. Ask yourself how to reach that end goal.
3. Split tasks among the Board - If we are talking about partners just for a project (ex. providing speakers), maybe it is better to let the Key Area in charge of the project to do it while you focus on the the most complex tasks.

To help you, you will find an External Relations Database Template in the Officers' Portal to help you get started.

Step 2: Research, Research, Research!

Needs identified, strategy made. Now, get to work!

A big part of external relations is researching potential partners to try to understand them and see if they indeed can help you achieve your goal.

This process is time-consuming and, sometimes, not the most engaging one. Nevertheless, if done correctly, it makes the future steps much more efficient.

There are many ways to research externals, but a good starting point is always their website. Here, what is important to take note is their values and priorities and their areas of activities to see if they indeed match your needs and if there is potential for cooperation.

Also, take note of potential contacts that you may find. Another important thing to pay attention to is potential annual reports and strategic goals. These inform you of their goals for the future and give you more insight into their own interests.

Step 2: Research, Research, Research!

At the end of your research, you should be able to understand the values and goals that the external stands for. With that in mind, you can see if they match your own and if you can help each other reaching your goals. If so, you have a potential cooperation to develop!

Nevertheless, it is also important for you to realise that not all contacts are successful. Because of that, have a plan B, C, D, and so on. Brainstorm and research multiple externals for the same priority/goal. This way you will be prepared in case you get a no.

You will find a partner research template in the Officers' Portal to help you collect all relevant information on externals you are interested in.

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Step 3: The approach

After your first researches are done, it is time to put what you have learnt into practice. How? Let's start contacting potential partners!

The main idea here is to find a contact person that will be able to effectively discuss the cooperation and start negotiating. Here, important people to look for are:

- ELSA Alumni;
- HR and recruitment managers;
- Marketing managers;
- People that have previously worked with ELSA;
- Partners at law firms and other similar positions.

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Step 4: Negotiate

After the approach and scheduling the first call, it comes the negotiation phase. Here, most often than not we focus too much on ourselves and on trying to get the most benefits possible. But that is not the purpose of this phase.

The purpose here is to get as many benefits as possible for both parties. Why? Because it is important for your potential partner to be pleased at the term of the cooperation, or else you will lose a partner very quickly.

With that in mind, this phase is meant to confirm (or correct) the information you got while researching. It is also meant to help you understand if the interests of the two organisations are truly aligned and, if so, bring it further.

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Step 5: Formalise

If both parties are happy with the negotiation, then it comes to formalising.

Bear in mind that it is not necessary to formalise every partnership you have, nor does the formal agreement need to be overly complex. If it is a one-off cooperation on a simple project, there is - in principle - no need for an agreement, for example.

Formalise the partnerships that are meant to encompass a considerable amount of topics or/and complex ones, as well as the ones that are meant to last longer than a project/term.

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Step 6: Develop it

External Relations does not end once you get a partner. Quite the opposite.

The true challenge of External Relations is keeping partners satisfied year after year and, an even bigger one, keeping them motivated to cooperate on other projects/helping your Group more.

So keep in contact with your partners, check on their interests and expectations, so as to continuing fulfilling the needs of your Group and keeping your partners happy!

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Seems simple?

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**Now repeat, repeat,
repeat!**

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Lastly!

Your efforts are meaningless if your successors do not get informed of what you did, so keep a record of what you do!

Create an external relations log where you put your contacts, researches and feedback from contacts. This is important so that your successors can build up on what you started and not starting from scratch every year.

In the Officers' Portal you will find materials to help you keep track of this throughout your term.



Chapter 1 done!

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