Media Literacy Networks – Guidelines

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(as adopted by the participants in EPRA's MIL Taskforce[1])

Martina Chapman

A number of national regulatory authorities (NRAs) have already led or supported the development of MIL networks[2].

Based on the experiences of a number of NRAs, this document summarises some of the key points to consider when establishing a MIL network.

1   Clarify the position of the NRA in relation to the promotion of Media Information Literacy

Media and Information Literacy (MIL) is a broad concept and touches on many aspects of media regulation. The comparative background paper prepared for the 46th EPRA meeting in Vienna in October 2017[3] showed that there was broad agreement that the promotion of MIL supported or complemented statutory regulation by way of:

- raising awareness of existing rights and regulations,
- addressing new regulatory challenges,
- protecting constitutional values, and
- empowering citizens to manage their media use as a parallel to the regulatory mechanisms in place to help manage media use.

Before embarking on developing a MIL network, it is important to understand what specific duties the NRA has under law and what scope there may be to work in collaboration on the promotion of MIL.

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[1] The overall aim of this informal group is to exchange information and provide informal support and guidance to members of the EPRA network on media literacy related matters. The taskforce is currently comprised of delegates from: The Communication Regulatory Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BA), the Council for Electronic Media (BG), Cyprus Radio Television Authority (CY), Director's Conference of the State Media Authorities (DE), Ofcom (GB), Technical Regulatory Authority (EE), Catalan Audiovisual Council (ES), Georgian National Communications Commission (GE), Agency for Electronic Media (HR), Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (IE), Agcom (IT), Council for Coordination on the audiovisual activity in Moldova (MD), Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services of Macedonia (MK), Broadcasting Authority (MT), Norwegian Media Authority (NO), ,National Broadcasting Council (PL), Swedish Press and Broadcasting Authority (SE), the Agency for Communication Networks and Services of the Republic of Slovenia (SI), Council for Broadcasting and Retransmission (SK), Radio and Television Supreme Council (TR), Independent Media Commission (XK)

[2] Agency for Electronic Media (HR), Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (IE), Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services of Macedonia (MK), Norwegian Media Authority (NO)

[3] Background Document EPRA/2017/10 by content producer Martina Chapman with Emmanuelle Machet and Tone Gunhild Haugan-Hepsø, for the Working group 1 on Media Literacy: Focus on the role of regulators which convened in Vienna on 12 October 2017 (Final post-meeting version of 12 December 2017), available at the following link: https://www.epra.org/attachments/vienna-wg-i-media-literacy-focus-on-the-role-of-regulators-background-document

There is no universally agreed definition of media literacy although there is widespread agreement that the concepts of 'access', 'use', 'understanding' and 'critical evaluation' of the media are cornerstones of media literacy.

Therefore, a key consideration is how the concept of MIL is understood within the NRA and how that compares with the way MIL is understood by other key stakeholders. If the NRA has no official definition or description of media literacy, it is worth developing one that is flexible enough to encompass future MIL issues related to changing technological, social, political and cultural factors.

It is also useful to understand the appetite and motivation within the NRA to promote MIL and address any concerns around the involvement of the NRA in development of a MIL network. It is important to view the network (and the set-up of same) as a key resource in assisting the NRA in meeting its duties and responsibilities across the spectrum of regulatory activities under its remit. For example, a more media literate audience will submit better quality complaints, therefore assisting the NRA in holding broadcasters accountable, and the network can provide unique and grassroots ways of improving the media literacy of audiences.

Producing a media literacy policy or position paper that clearly illustrates the NRA's interest and objectives in relation to media literacy will help internal and external audiences better understand the NRA's position.

2   Map current media literacy activity and interest

Given the wide-reaching, cross-sector interest in media literacy issues (e.g. disinformation, online child safety, data protection) it is possible, and indeed likely, that there may be a large number of diverse stakeholders already involved in the promotion of MIL.

It is essential to try and establish which stakeholders are already active in the space, and what activities they are undertaking. Therefore, it is recommended that some form of stakeholder consultation is carried out (which includes the non-traditional regulatory stakeholder group). This is also a useful way to gauge interest in and potential support for the development of a MIL network or platform for sharing experiences and resources. Similarly, this consultation process could be the first step in identifying where gaps in provision exist.

Consider consulting with stakeholders from the following sectors:

- Media (broadcasting, digital, print, games, community media)
- Education (formal and informal, primary, secondary, third-level)
- Commercial (e.g. companies and organisations who depend on digital transactions)
- Digital Intermediaries (social networks, search engines)
- Civic society (foundations, community groups and networks, special interest groups, unions)
- Government / Public Sector (Ministries, Libraries, Local Authorities)

It is also important to establish who has a formal responsibility or duty for promoting media literacy in your country, what their objectives are and what activity they are undertaking. It is also extremely useful to investigate what additional stakeholders might have an interest in the promotion of media

literacy, even if they do not have a formal duty. Examples of this could include commercial companies who promote media literacy as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility policy.

3   Draft a proposal so stakeholders know what to expect from the Network

Taking into consideration the feedback from the consultation, it is worth creating a draft proposal for the development of the Network. This draft should explain the purpose(s) of the Network and outline a set of SMART objectives (Simple, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed).

The purpose(s) of the Network should reflect the responsibilities, views and needs of the NRA and the stakeholders.

For example, it is likely that one purpose of the Network will relate to creating opportunities for stakeholders to share experiences and foster new partnerships and collaborations. Similarly, some communications function should be anticipated whereby members will receive and disseminate news and information about media literacy issues. Other functions might include commissioning and/or auditing research, projects and resources. Some Networks may provide funding for new projects so there may be a requirement to develop a scheme for application, assessment and award of funding. The draft proposal should also consider how the Network would operate / be managed and examine aspects such as:

- **Network size and membership criteria**: What is a manageable size? Are there the resources to manage it? Who should it be open to? The public? Individual members? Organisations? What is process for joining? Who manages the membership database? What are the potential data protection issues?

- **Structure and Governance**: Who will draft the Constitution? How will the Constitution be accepted/ratified? How will the Network be structured? Who will make the strategic decisions? Who will do the 'work'? How will the views and experiences of members be heard? How could members provide supporting facilities for the Network? Who will evaluate the work of the Network, and how?

- **Communication**: How will the Network communicate about its work? How public will those communications be? What communication channels will be used e.g. website, social network profiles etc.? Which role might it take in public consultations regarding MIL's position in new laws/regulations/policies? Which internal communication channels are planned? Who will manage these tasks?

- **Engagement**: How many meetings and events might take place and who might organise them? The experience of NRAs to date suggests that meetings or events where members can meet face to face, both informally and formally, can help to build trust and understanding between members and facilitate information exchange, networking and cooperation.

- **Management**: It is worth considering putting in place a small core team (perhaps funded by the authority) to manage the set-up and coordination of the Network for the first 1 – 2 years, until the Network becomes established. In addition to this small team, it might be advantageous to consider inviting members (or potential members) of the Network to work together on specific projects, such as events, communications. It is also useful to think about inviting a representative range of Network members to participate in the management of the Network.

  Depending on the available resources within the NRA, there may be a requirement to engage a third party to coordinate the Network activities on behalf of the NRA. This also provides the NRA with the option of 'stepping back' a little from the running of the Network, if desirable.

- **Resourcing**: It is likely that it will require a dedicated resource for a period of time – potentially 2-3 years, depending on the level of support provided by Network members. The experiences of NRAs who have already set-up MIL networks indicate that the budget requirements are not large but it is important that the network be budgeted for adequately, in order to address any issues arising, and be able to support the early development of the Network.

Depending on how the Network might be established, it might also be useful to draft a Constitution for the Network at this stage.

4   Re-engage stakeholders

Once the draft proposal (and Constitution, if appropriate) has been drafted, it is worth re-engaging the stakeholder group to present the proposal and secure commitment. There are a number of ways of achieving this, depending on the scope and size of the Network and the relationship between the authority and the groups of stakeholders. One to one meetings or consultations can be effective but are time-consuming and it may be more difficult to achieve consensus. A group meeting, or a focus group approach with groups within the same area, is time-efficient and may help to achieve consensus, as long as there are no significant points of difference between stakeholders.

As it may be difficult to gather all the relevant stakeholders in one place, it may be worth circulating the first draft to the key stakeholders and inviting comments on the content of the draft proposal. Reflecting those comments in a second draft and recirculating it will help to foster an atmosphere of cooperation and co-ownership from the beginning. This is an important consideration as most Networks will not have formal obligations, so success will depend to a large degree on the enthusiasm and commitment of members.

5   Encourage members to participate in the running of the Network

NRAs who have developed a Network are clear that face to face meetings pay dividends in terms of engaging members and developing relationships. Therefore it is worth considering launching the Network with an event or meeting.

This event could also be an opportunity for the NRA to call for members to participate in the coordination and management of the Network (depending on the proposed structure and management).

Some NRAs have indicated that empowering the Network to make decisions is one of the keys to success and this might require the NRA to continue supporting and facilitating the members for a period of time.

6   Maintain momentum

Engaging with stakeholders is time-consuming and requires a central resource to maintain momentum. This is an important consideration because if members can see the Network progress they are more likely to stay engaged.

Maintaining momentum can sometimes be a challenge for groups or Networks that depend on people volunteering their time.

At this point, regular and efficient communication with members is critical. They need just enough information to demonstrate progress but not so much that the Network appears to be labour-intensive.

It is also helpful to have an evaluation framework in place with agreed points for reviewing the progress of the Network.