



ACE Practitioners' Network

by Sara Staino

ACE Facilitator/Policy Specialist
International IDEA

Introduction

In this presentation I will talk about how we will continue to develop ACE and how we envision it to grow, and explaining how EMBs and electoral managers and practitioners from around the world can be, and actually to some extent already are, part of ACE.

I would like to raise and address the following three questions in my presentation:

1. What is the Practitioners' Network (PN)?
2. How can you benefit from it?
3. How can you contribute to it?

What is the Practitioners' Network (PN)?

Over and above the facelift that has been done to ACE over the last year or so, such as the new design, the merge with other databases and the update of all the topic areas in the encyclopaedia, we have also added a new dynamic and interactive dimension to ACE - the ACE Practitioners' Network.

The Practitioners' Network is the first ever global knowledge network in the field of elections.

The aim of this global network is to better **address the needs of EMBs and electoral administrators around the world**. We all know that there is a wealth of expertise and experience in this field, but we also know that this experience is not always being retained and even less shared. A third thing we know is that EMBs and election professionals still have many questions on how to deal

with both big and small issues regarding elections and that they are having difficulties finding help to solve these issues.

In many cases electoral administrators can find answers to their questions and solutions to their problems within the vast amount of knowledge resources that exist within the ACE website, but not in all cases. In reality comparative data, lessons learned and best practices are actually still quite hard to come by. This is why the ACE partners, with the financial support of the European Commission, have now launched the ACE Practitioners' Network - to bring practitioners and election experts together to **generate and share and apply specialized knowledge on elections.**

At this point the network benefits from the global and thematic expertise of almost **200 election professionals** from around the world. This group of professionals and practitioners were invited by the seven ACE partners in February this year to be part of the pilot phase of the Practitioners' Network, and to help us properly test the dynamic functions of the website. This group is however quite limited so after the pilot phase - which will last for 6 to 9 months - we will be opening up the network to include a wider and more diverse and geographically balanced group of experienced election practitioners and administrators from around the world.

To add an even stronger geographic focus, the Practitioners' Network is as we speak being complemented by the establishment of **Regional Electoral Resource Centres** around the world, which will act as the regional knowledge hubs of ACE. The Resource Centres will be hosted by existing electoral institutions, organisations or networks in strategic geographical locations worldwide. Ten Resource Centres were invited in the beginning of March to join as associate partners and to bring a stronger regional dimension to ACE and to the Practitioners' Network.

The Resource Centres will help generate, share and apply specialised knowledge that is contextualised to the actual needs, priority issues and challenges confronted by each specific region and the countries within. The Resource Centres will translate existing resources and generate new knowledge in local and regional languages - and will thereby increase the accessibility of ACE worldwide. They will help populate the country pages for their respective countries, update relevant information in the Comparative Data section of ACE, and they will act as the regional arm of the ACE Practitioners' Network, liaising and networking with EMBs in their region to **identify needs and challenges.**

The pilot of the Practitioners' Network and how it is set up

The peer networking, professional dialogue and collaboration among the members of the network take place in a private forum behind the scenes of the ACE website. Through the log in box that can be found in the Electoral Advice

section the members of the network can log in to come to what we call the **ACE Workspace** - the dynamic platform where the members of the Practitioners' Network meet, share experiences and collaborate.

As I mentioned before we are still testing the functions of the website, and therefore the networking activities in the Workspace are a bit limited at this point. We have a few things in place though. One of them is the possibility for the members of the network to **answer question** that have been asked by ACE users through the public website. When we receive a question, which we do almost every day, and if it is deemed relevant, we post it on the Workspace and notify the relevant members. If they want to contribute with their expertise and help answer the question they can do so by just logging in to the workspace. This is of course completely voluntary.

We receive a varying number of questions. Many of them come from the members themselves, from EMBs and election administrators around the world.

As you can see here in the Workspace we now have 13 open questions, meaning that the members can still contribute with their answers. To give you one example there was a question post on EMB members' financial benefits, which received many interesting comments from the members. Once the questions have been closed for further answers, they are consolidated and made available to the public.

Another feature that is available in the workspace is the "**online discussions**". This is different from the questions as it is more of a free flow, open ended discussion. What happens in the "online discussions" is private and will not be displayed for the public. The other difference is that the members of the network can initiate new discussions themselves. As you can see there is now one ongoing discussion on the "Proper "Political Context" for an election to achieve credibility".

Finally we post relevant **announcements** (like the GEO and the new IDEA handbook) on the workspace, as well as **vacancies**, and remunerated assignments on the workspace.

In the near future there will also be functioning "working groups" in the workspace. Through the "**working groups**" the ACE partners will be able to select and invite a number of members that they would like to engage in a specific task. This could for example be writing new guidelines, reviewing and updating a publication, writing policy papers etc.

How can you as an EMB benefit from the Practitioners' Network?

This is a network dedicated to the promotion of more professional, effective and sustainable electoral administration worldwide. ACE and the Practitioners' Network has been developed for you, and we hope that you will help us build and expand it, and make sure that also your EMB and the electoral issues in your country and your region is represented and reflected in ACE.

- As of today you can start asking questions through the ACE website (you don't need to be a member to do that) and get support and advice from the ACE partners and the member of the Practitioners' Network.
- Subject to funding there might be opportunities for the Resource Centres to do capacity development in region. By being engaged and in close communication with the resource centres you can influence and help decide priority areas in your region, and as an EMB you may also benefit from capacity development programmes and you can take part in regional events to be organised by the Resource Centre in your region.
- You can benefit from ACE by promoting your EMB or your regional network in the website.
- You can gain more transparency and visibility.

How can EMBs and election practitioners contribute to ACE and the Practitioners' Network?

By sharing and engaging in this global network you can help generate new knowledge and help find new effective and sustainable ways to apply the knowledge and address existing needs.

- You can contribute by sharing your experience and expertise with other EMBs and electoral administrators that are facing similar or the same challenges as you have.
- Advise your peer EMBs on practices and lessons learned. Recommend to use, or not to use specific election materials or election technology.
- Help build institutional memory.
- Support the ACE Resource Centre in your region. Facilitate their collection of materials, their data gathering by sending them ballot papers, codes of conduct, laws, statistics and facts, instructions and guidelines, training manuals etc
- Help populate your country page with case studies, information and news on elections in your country, in English or in any other language you see fit.
- One of the tasks of the Resource Centres is to write a monthly newsletter both in English and a regional language. This newsletter will highlight important elections and other election related news and issues in the region. All the regional newsletters will together form part of a global newsletter on electoral issues from around the world. You contribute by providing your Resource Centre with news for your country, to make sure it gets included in the newsletter.

- To contribute and facilitate the flow of information you can, if you wish, also designate an ACE focal person within your EMB that the Resource Centre can communicate with regularly.
- Identify what you would like to share with the world and make sure it gets posted to your country page on ACE.

In May the Resource Centres will be trained and equipped to formally start their work as ACE electoral knowledge hubs. One of their first and most important tasks of the Resource Centres will be to contact and establish good working relations with the EMBs in their regions. So you should expect to be contacted shortly by the ACE Resource Centre in your region, asking you to be part of and share your knowledge and materials with the ACE community.

Not only do we hope that you as EMB members and electoral administrators will join the Practitioners' Network after the pilot period to share your regional knowledge and expertise with the ACE community, we also hope that you will engage with and support the ACE Resource Centre in your region to gather and accumulate knowledge from your specific countries.

Thank you all for your attention.