



## Management School for Civil Society Organizations in Armenia *June 2014 – December 2015*

The [Civil Society Development Program – CSO DePo](#) aims to build capacity for CSOs so that they become viable and sustainable actors in promoting democracy in Armenia. The program is implemented by Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF) in a consortium with five other organizations.

EPF has designed a dedicated organizational development process to undertake this task. We start with understanding the needs of the CSO before introducing alternatives to the systems and structures of the organization. We assist in changing the values, attitudes and behavior of the CSO team, targeting both individual and company growth.

[Market Research](#) carried out by one of the Consortium members – CRRC, revealed that Armenian CSOs need to improve their fundraising strategies, coalition-building and financial management capacities. It also showed that there is a lack of understanding among organizations on the need to connect sustainable organizational development (OD) with building strong institutional systems. CSOs are occupied with day-to-day activities, such as obtaining resources for survival, offering new services, organizing events and delivering programs, and little time remains for the CSO staff to step aside, for a moment, from the routine of program implementation; to take time to revisit the status of the organizational systems; and to identify the source of hidden problems and to develop effective strategies for tackling them.

Our approach is underpinned by the principles of the CSO DePo Management School. The DePo program builds its learning curricula for CSOs based on the need to give CSOs a chance to realize the necessity of strengthening organizational capacities, improving existing systems, and/or building new systems; so that CSOs deliver higher quality products and services to the public on a sustainable basis. The DePo program strives to shift CSOs' thinking from 'survival' mode to a 'sustainable growth' mode.



The CSO Management School is a signature tool of DePo for addressing CSO needs. There exist other complimentary opportunities in the chain of resources offered to CSOs to reinforce the learning opportunities offered by the Management School. These include the CSO Portal (<http://www.hkdepo.amw>) which provides a set of resources of interest to CSOs, such as grant and training opportunities, research and development data, CSO news and networking options, as well as CSO experts' databases. In addition to this, CSOs are offered the unique ability to develop their capacities via the [Capacity Enhancement Tool](#) (CET), applied by DePo experts for a targeted consultancy to the applicant CSOs. The CET, which is an unrivaled state-of-the-art Armenian-language capacity level measurement and education tool, assesses the existing systems and values of CSOs and helps with planning systems improvements and suggests ways to optimize organizational growth.

The CSO Management School typically offers three-day long intensive and interactive training for 10-15 CSOs, with up to three team members from each CSO. The training takes place at EPF or the premises of other partner organizations across Armenia.

Themes covered at the School are shaped by the results of the Market Research. To date, they include organizational systems and structures; sustainability and social enterprise; financial management of CSOs; program management cycle and approaches; communications and strategic fundraising. Based on changing needs, future sessions may also address issues such as leadership; team-building; network-building; consortium management; and more in-depth studies covering various aspects of fundraising, project management, financing, and resource management.

The School serves as an education and innovation lab for CSOs. It attempts to consolidate the best CSO development methodologies available in Armenia. The Market Research as well as other studies clearly demonstrate a certain level of 'training fatigue': a significant part of CSO staff have participated in many collective trainings; however, they do not see a direct linkage between the development and sustainability of their organizations and the amount of trainings they have taken part in. That is why, while keeping the collective workshop format for the School, the DePo program does not overuse the word 'training'. Rather, the DePo School is a mutual learning environment. The School uses 'elicitive' methodology, i.e. participants are a key resource, not passive recipients of a top-down approach whereby knowledge and information are transmitted unilaterally. The assumption is that they, being often quite experienced CSO managers, have encountered all possible issues and challenges in their daily work, and the assumption is that this knowledge is passively stored in their brain. They just need the critical space to rework their legacy knowledge and formulate new approaches to help them overcome hurdles. The engagement of participants is empowering and promotes the sharing of problem solving, solutions and common needs. Knowledge shared by and with participants serves the purpose of motivating interest in learning and promotes action and change. Experts who impart knowledge and skills in such a setting are no less learners than the program participants.



School sessions are facilitated [by well-known experts](#) in the field of CSO development in Armenia, including EPF staff. To strengthen the local technical resources available for CSO development, EPF identified a pool of dedicated and highly qualified CSO experts. EPF organized ‘Trainings for Trainers’, or rather, another set of facilitated discussions with the experts, to share with them the ‘elicitive’ methodology. EPF works on developing the skills of experts to be able to respond to the changing needs of CSOs. These specialists have become a strategic resource for the operation of the School along with experts from EPF staff. Experts continue to enhance their ability to respond to individual CSO needs.

Following completion of the Management School, experts select and engage a number of CSOs individually and help them improve their internal systems and program development; fundraising and communications. This is a consultancy work program developed by DePo and experts. It begins with the application of the [CET](#) and continues on with helping CSOs develop strategic plans to address their needs identified via the CET.

In 2015, the School offered two cycles of three-day workshops to 50 participants representing [34 small- and medium-size CSOs](#) in Armenia. Organizations represented a diverse profile, including environmental, human rights, information freedom, youth development, business support, media promotion and support for people with special needs. A value-added of the School is the opportunity it offers to CSOs to exchange and establish partnerships and plan joint undertakings in the future. This, as well as larger networking, including with CSOs outside of Armenia, is another need and opportunity that the DePo program emphasizes and promotes.

The majority of the training participants (55%) stated in the post-school evaluation that they would like to participate again in a similar school, while about 60% of participants said they would agree to cover at least some of the costs associated with their participation in the school. This is a possible breakthrough, since CSOs in Armenia are notorious for refusing to pay for OD services, as they have learned to rely on grants, which often do not cover such expenses. If CSOs realize that OD processes are not just for satisfying donors but that they will have a direct impact on their sustainability, it will have a consequential and positive impact on civil society development in Armenia. Seventy percent of participants said that they would recommend the training to their peers and other CSO representatives.

Another two-day CSO Management School was organized outside the auspices of EPF by [“Support for Noyemberyan”](#) (SFN) NGO, a member organization of the CSO DePo Consortium. Nine NGOs from the Tavush region participated in the training in Noyemberyan. The tools and systems built through the DePo program were introduced to local NGOs. Participants learned and discussed the basics of NGO management, financial management, fundraising and grant proposal writing. The two-day workshop launched SFN’s capacity building work with local partner NGOs. Based on the results of the training and capacity gaps discussed, SFN with the help of EPF and the DePo Consortium, will plan further development of partner organizations’ institutional development by providing individual consultations for developing strategic plans, policy and procedures, and work out internal working regulations and increase funding opportunities.

Our experience reveals the next steps that need to be taken by the DePo program. Market Research and other studies demonstrate that CSOs often do not receive funding for OD; also, a very small number of CSOs receive funding from local businesses and/or from the Armenian

government. In order to put them on the right development path, the DePo program will try to create communication and meeting venues for CSOs with businesses and government offices; it will also advocate the international community to include OD funding in the projects they fund.

The DePo Consortium continues to build the School's offerings and one-on-one work with CSOs: EPF is developing several OD modules accessible on the DePo website. Media Initiatives Center (MIC) will support the School with training modules on media relations and on the development of a strategy for a media campaign; Caucasus Research Resource Center – Armenia (CRRC) will oversee a training module on the effective data analysis methods.

If you are a CSO and/or a CSO support organization and would like to learn more, use the resources and/or help the DePo program. Please contact Gayane Mkrtchyan at [gmkrtchyan@epfound.am](mailto:gmkrtchyan@epfound.am) or Vazgen Karapetyan at [vkrapetyan@epfound.am](mailto:vkrapetyan@epfound.am). Office phone: 010-25-15-75.



Note: This material covers DePo Management School activities up to the end of 2015.

*This article is made possible by the generous support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents of this article are the sole responsibility of Eurasia Partnership Foundation and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.*