

Setup and management of successful intergroups

1.	Introduction	2
2.	Nature, formal establishment, and governance	3
3.	Intergroup structures.....	3
	a. President(s)	
	b. Secretariat	
	c. Membership	
4.	Strategic planning and daily organisation.....	7
	a. Daily organisation	
	b. Strategic and yearly planning	
	c. Reporting and accountability	
5.	Parliamentary and institutional monitoring	9
6.	Driving parliamentary work	11
7.	Non-parliamentary activities	14
8.	Building networks within and outside Parliament	15
9.	Public relations	16
10.	Possible caveats and pitfalls.....	18
11.	Annex: Resources	21

This briefing provides the Open Society European Policy Institute (OSEPI) and civil society organisations intelligence into the setup and management of successful intergroups in the European Parliament.

It stems from the author's experience running the European Parliament's Intergroup on LGBT Rights over five years in 2009-2014. It was designed in consultation with OSEPI. In the course of writing, the author spoke with the Barrow Cadbury Trust and the European Network Against Racism to take into account their experience and expectations running and working with similar structures in the European Parliament and the House of Commons.

1. Introduction

Why set up informal groups of parliamentarians in addition to existing committees, delegations, or political groups? The answer lies in the nature of parliamentary work, and all the more so in the European Parliament: to build consensus. Since no political group holds an absolute majority, coalitions must be built for each vote, and shift depending on the issue at stake. In this context, consensus becomes central to law- and policy-making—which, in turn, require sharing research, views, and political priorities. This is normally done in formal committees or geographical delegations, but some topics may span several of these parliamentary bodies.

To discuss topics of interest to MEPs, numerous informal groups exist: intergroups, working groups, or ‘friends of’ groups. Among them, only intergroups are regulated by the Parliament’s Rules of Procedure.

These groups’ unique strength lies in uniting elected officials from various political groups and Member States around a shared interest. MEPs may bring their own national or political interests to an informal group, or indeed choose to forget them for the sake of the topic’s importance. Members can usually be relied upon to support resolutions or reports on a given topic, and to work more consensually together than when allocated a file through their political group. **Essentially, these informal groups constitute a concentrated silo of parliamentary attention and expertise around one issue.**

However, these structures do require investing time, political leadership and resources to function and deliver tangible outcomes. Their setup and management need not be cumbersome, but their informality means their achievements are proportional to their resources; the Parliament provides no secretarial support.

There are minimal differences between various types of informal working groups:

	Intergroups	Other informal groups
Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Loosely regulated	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Not regulated
Establishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">With political groups’ supportAt legislature’s beginning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">No requirementAnytime
Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Annual reporting of members & resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">No reporting
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">None	<ul style="list-style-type: none">None
Rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Via political groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Via political groups

This briefing focuses exclusively on the setup and management of intergroups, although working methods would be similar in other informal groups.

2. Nature, formal establishment, and governance

Intergroups are informal forums set up by MEPs to discuss issues of shared interest. They generally focus on topics that span the competences of several committees. Unlike committees or delegations, they are no official organs of the Parliament and cannot officially represent its positions.

They are established at the beginning of every legislature for its entire duration. A decision of the Conference of Presidents¹ lays down the rules governing their establishment. Formally, candidate intergroups must receive the support of at least 3 political groups. Each political group receives a number of signatures proportional to its new size, following the D'Hondt method.

There is intense competition to set up new intergroups. Political groups are likelier to support intergroups that will advance their own political priorities, although this is less important for intergroups dealing with consensual issues (e.g. media). Candidate intergroups should set up individual meetings with senior MEPs (president and vice-presidents) in the political groups whose support they seek, as well as their secretary-general. It may be advisable to actively campaign and show an intergroup's existing achievements to all MEPs in target groups or, failing that, a rationale and set of arguments supporting this new intergroup. Groups will decide which intergroups to support from September 2014, and the final decision to set up intergroups should be expected by December.

Unlike working groups or 'friends of' groups, intergroups must produce short annual declarations as to the financial support they receive (if any, see **3. b. Secretariat**), as well as an updated list of their membership. This report is due at the beginning of every calendar year to the Parliament's Member's Activities Unit. The information is then published on the Parliament's website.

- *Personally approach progressive groups' key MEPs and secretary-generals to present any existing track record and ask for their group's support.*
- *Prepare an e-mail campaign to all MEPs (apart from identified opponents) in those groups, showcasing achievements or pertinent arguments.*
- *Remember to report on financial support and membership at the beginning of every year.*

3. Intergroup structures

a. President(s)

One or several MEPs take responsibility for running an intergroup, and chair (or preside) it. carry political and administrative responsibility for the intergroup's activities. In the eyes of many MEPs, media, and other institutions, an intergroup is its leader(s).

The success of an intergroup will be in large part determined by its chairmanship. It is essential that intergroup leaders (a) be committed to the intergroup's subject matter, and willing to provide a significant amount of time and attention to it, and

¹ Rules governing the establishment of intergroups, see **11. Annex**.

(b) have a non-partisan approach focused on advancing the issue, rather than marking points for their political group alone. Constructive cooperation with other political groups is fundamental.

Furthermore, the intergroup's legitimacy, efficiency and political power will depend in great part on its presidents, and particularly on the following factors:

- Leaders from a specific **political group** will enable the intergroup's work to be received with open ears by this group's MEPs and staff. If the Greens/EFA group, for instance, is crucial to the intergroup's field (e.g. on environmental matters), having a president from this group will be crucial to open its doors and build lasting partnerships with MEPs and staff. Political groups also occupy a central role when agreeing to draft a report or a resolution in committees or plenary (see **6. Driving parliamentary work**). As larger groups hold more political power, ensuring their support is crucial to facilitate support for the intergroup's parliamentary work. Finally, political groups are also responsible for allocating meeting rooms—a crucial asset, and the larger the group, the more available rooms.
- Presidents' **seniority** in their political group and the Parliament can dramatically increase an intergroup's political reach. Useful senior posts include group vice-presidents, coordinators, committee/delegation chairs or vice-chairs, or European Parliament vice-presidents—as long as their portfolios are relevant to the intergroup's field. Seniority will also help build trustworthy relationships outside the European Parliament.
- In the European Parliament, Members will specialise in specific areas and develop related expertise. Intergroup presidents who are also identified by their peers for their **expertise** in the intergroup's field will greatly help involve the intergroup in relevant parliamentary work.
- The **time and availability** leaders are willing to put into running the intergroup will influence how quickly it can respond to political developments.

There is no limit to the number of chairs in an intergroup. The advantages to having several (high visibility; open doors in several groups; intergroup positions taking several political views on board, in turn ensuring higher success at voting time) ought to be counterbalanced with potential drawbacks (difficulty of coordinating between numerous presidents; political egos at play). A tiered system of co-presidents (in charge of overall coordination and day-to-day management) and vice-presidents (collegially in charge of defining the work plan, chairing meetings, writing letters, etc., but not relied upon daily) was an efficient mix in the Intergroup on LGBT Rights. Having more than six leaders will greatly complicate decision-making and leadership.

Finally, the strength of an intergroup resides in gathering several political forces around a single issue: it is crucial to ensure a politically diverse leadership so that the intergroup advances neutral, issue-based interests, rather than group interests.

- Take into account political groups (their size and interest in the intergroup's subject); seniority; expertise; and availability when approaching potential presidents, co-presidents or vice-presidents.
- Always ensure that several presidents speak in statements; that visible tasks (especially chairing events) rotate between presidents; and that all presidents get a chance to do the same amount of work over the legislature.
- Any decision, and particularly the election of (a) president(s), must always chiefly involve MEPs.

b. Secretariat

Intergroups may be staffed in three ways: MEPs' assistants can be given the task to run an intergroup in addition to other tasks; MEPs can hire one or several assistants with the sole task of managing an intergroup; or civil society organisations may provide an external secretariat.

	Description	Advantages	Drawbacks
Regular assistant	The chair(s)' assistant(s) run the intergroup on top of other assistant tasks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inexpensive for MEPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very little time available to run the intergroup
Exclusive assistant	The chair(s) employ an assistant specifically to run the intergroup.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very high return on investment for MEPs and NGOs • Focus and dedication to the topic • Single point of contact for civil society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive for MEPs, but may be shared among chairs
External secretariat	Civil society provides an external secretariat to the intergroup ² .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control of the agenda for the NGO providing staff • Close connection with civil society concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No access to Parliament's internal systems (e-mails, intranet) for staff • Little visibility in the Parliament • Easily disconnected from parliamentary life

The **regular assistant**³ model is often used, and requires little effort to set up and maintain. However, assistants find it challenging to oversee an intergroup's activities in addition to other time-consuming tasks. Intergroups can often be put aside as unimportant, while reports and resolutions require time-constrained and official attention.

² While external groups may contribute towards the organisation of events, materials costs, research, communication costs and other overheads, external groups cannot contribute towards staff costs in the European Parliament.

³ The **Anti-Racism and Discrimination Intergroup** and the **Intergroup on Tibet** used this model during the 2009–2014 legislature.

The **exclusive assistant**⁴ model is harder to set up, and requires MEPs' political and financial commitment. However, it provides unparalleled resources throughout the legislature for both MEPs and civil society groups.

In this model, the presidents employs a member of staff to run the intergroup on a daily basis. Salary arrangements may vary, but it is good practice to share staff costs (salary, missions, training) among different presidents. This will ensure that staffing structures reflect the secretary's responsibility to serve presidents from different political groups, and not advance a single group's views. Any number of MEPs may share an assistant's costs, and they are free to use any contribution combination (e.g. 50%-50%, 25%-75%, 33%-33%-34%). Regardless of payment arrangements, staff ought to serve all presidents equally and without discrimination. If employed jointly by several Members staff will be formally attached to one MEP's office and political group. The salary of an accredited parliamentary assistant is located on a 19-point scale, ranging from €1,680 to €7,740 for a full-time salary before taxes and allowances⁵. When hiring staff, attention should be paid to the skills required to oversee and implement the work described in chapters 3-8 below. In addition to pure skills, it is highly advisable to recruit staff who will be familiar with the intergroup's subject matter, as they will be required to advise presidents, MEPs and other stakeholders on substantive issues.

The **external secretariat**⁶ model is also used frequently. It provides the staffing organisation more control over the intergroup's work, although presiding MEPs will—in theory—always have the last word. It also enables the staffing organisation to build stronger links with the intergroup's presidents. Negatively however, it means staff has no access to a parliament-provided e-mail address, or to the Parliament's intranet. Parliamentary information will be slower to reach the secretariat than in the other two models, which require less back-and-forth communication between inside and outside Parliament.

c. Membership

An intergroup's strength depends directly on its size, particularly for its voting alerts (see **5. Parliamentary and institutional monitoring**). MEPs may join any number of intergroups, and can leave them at any time.

MEPs' top concern is the time investment necessary to join or be active in an intergroup, and they should be reassured that this could be negligible. Intergroups have an interest in acquiring new members because it shows support for its issues, and MEPs have an interest in joining intergroups because it will facilitate their work (e.g. with voting alerts, briefings, and general expertise on the intergroup's field of work). It will also help portray MEPs as active in this field to their voters.

⁴ The **Intergroup on LGBT Rights** used this model during the 2009–2014 legislature.

⁵ See Article 133 of the *Staff Regulations of Officials and the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community*.

⁶ The **Sustainable Hunting Intergroup** and **Disability Intergroup** used this model during the 2009–2014 legislature. (They were respectively staffed by the European Federation of Associations for Hunting & Conservation, and the European Disability Forum.)

There is no formal procedure for joining an intergroup, but it is advisable to have a written commitment, even if only an e-mail. Recruitment can be done by e-mail, letter, or by directly approaching Members. Importantly, Members to approach must be carefully selected: a hostile Member may realistically decide to join an intergroup to learn about its work and strategies, in order to oppose them. It is advisable to either approach Members certain to politically support an intergroup's aims, or wait for the first nominal votes on a connected issue to map allies and opponents.

It is important to demonstrate to Members that an intergroup is transparent, and run by MEPs, for MEPs. Being linked to a lobbying scandal will be a possibility on Members' minds.

- *Plan how to approach potential future members, and set ambitious goals for membership growth.*
- *An intergroup's mantra should be to help MEPs: answering queries, readily providing useful information, and acting as a trustworthy partner.*

4. Strategic planning and daily organisation

Since the Parliament provides no secretarial support, an efficient intergroup must establish clear working procedures for staff and presidents. Clear procedures should be set for the daily organisation, long-term planning, and reporting of an intergroup's work.

a. Daily organisation

Intergroups use this 4-step process for any action it considers taking up (whether writing a letter, organising a conference, or asking for a resolution):



Propose Staff must stay abreast of relevant topical and parliamentary developments, described in detail in **5. Parliamentary and institutional monitoring**. Based on these developments, staff should make proposals to the presidents. If several presidents are involved and action is relatively likely, it may be helpful to circulate a draft letter, video statement, or press release from the start, instead of asking an open 'What should we do?' question. Asking for responses by a given deadline is essential (and so is agreeing on procedure when presidents do not respond) to avoid waiting for responses that may never come. Taking collegial decisions must be as easy and quick as possible.

Decide Intergroups function under the responsibility of their presidents, and all of its work must be led by directly-elected MEPs. Intergroup presidents must be the ones to decide whether or not to take a proposed action, and under what terms. It is also for them to decide which decisions must involve them, and which ones can be considered operational (i.e. what decisions staff can take without requesting presidents' consent).

Implement Once presidents choose to go ahead, it is up to staff to implement the action (be it sending an e-mail, a letter, a parliamentary question for signatures, planning an event, etc.). It is equally important for staff to plan following up on important actions, (for instance, chasing the European Commission if it does not answer an important letter).

Report Reporting on the work done serves two purposes: firstly, it enables the staff to inform presidents of the quantity of work done over a given period (see [c. Reporting and accountability](#) for more detail). Secondly, it will allow the intergroup to keep track of the work done, albeit in lesser detail (especially if that report is made public).

- *Early on, set clear procedures and expectations to exchange with presidents.*
- *Create a system to track presidents' responses, and to remember to follow up on important actions (e.g. checking whether a given letter was replied to).*
- *Remember to record all work done, both for staff's sake and the intergroup's own formal records.*

b. Strategic and yearly planning

In addition to being driven by parliamentary business and developments in other institutions (see [5. Parliamentary and institutional monitoring](#)), intergroups ought to try and set the tone for topics or files of importance. To this end, strategic planning consists in setting a limited number of political priorities for the duration of the legislature (or half a legislature, which may be more useful for fast-shifting political areas). These priorities will guide the intergroup's work, and may help exclude working on other, less important areas when time and resources become scarce.

Yearly planning will simply consist in planning activities—notably non-parliamentary activities (e.g. seminars, attending external events, or marking specific days)—in advance, so that the intergroup stay in sync with the field it seeks to influence. This should take account of planned activities on the part of civil society partners; relevant non-EU political processes; any international day to mark; presidents/staff meetings (see [c. Reporting and accountability](#)), etc.

- *Establish a set of political priorities for the entire legislature, or 2.5 years.*
- *Plan non-parliamentary activities for up to a year in advance, surveying relevant developments outside of the Parliament and the EU.*

c. Reporting and accountability

Since the intergroup's work is always carried out under the presidency's responsibility, it is essential that staff record completed work. Like any political structure, intergroups are likely to be involved in occasional conflict—internal or external; a record of work will help solve a number of tensions (see [10. Possible caveats and pitfalls](#)).

Regular meetings between presidents and staff (e.g. quarterly) can enable the former to review work done in recent months; take decisions requiring substantial discussion; and collectively exert their management prerogatives. These are also

important moments to bring presidents and staff together, a useful addition to long-term cohesion and loyalty.

→ Set up mechanisms to record and regularly report on completed work (e.g. writing down all work done, and planning regular presidents/staff meetings).

5. Parliamentary and institutional monitoring

Whereas committees and delegations are statutorily involved in parliamentary work, intergroups are not official structures of Parliament. Therefore their involvement chiefly depends on their relevance to other actors: MEPs and their assistants; staff in political groups (e.g. political advisers, press officers, plenary coordinators); staff in the administration (e.g. administrators in committee secretariats, researchers, Parliament's press officers); and staff in other institutions and agencies. Relevance implies knowledge of the intergroup's own field, but also knowledge of the parliamentary processes at play.



Topical knowledge consists in staying abreast of developments in an intergroup's field. It is necessary to establish and maintain close relationships with civil society to that end.

Parliamentary knowledge consists in staying abreast of key developments across institutions:

- **Committees and delegations** Establish a list of committees and delegations relevant to the intergroup, and screen meeting agendas for discussions of relevant files, deadlines for amendments, and voting dates⁷.
- **Plenary** Read the draft agendas⁸ of upcoming plenaries to monitor relevant files coming to a final debate and vote, as well as potentially relevant resolutions and debates planned for the plenary session.
- **Parliamentary questions** Regularly search for written questions with an established set of keywords⁹. This will highlight written questions relevant to the intergroup, useful (a) to keep track of other institutions' answers, which count as formal statements; and (b) to monitor friendly or hostile questions from MEPs, and help classify them as friend or foe.
- **Institutional developments** Establish professional relationships with staff in relevant Commission units, agencies, and Council working

⁷ This can be done via the *Legislative Observatory*; see **11. Annex**.

⁸ Draft agendas for each plenary session are published on *Séance en Direct* every Thursday preceding it; see **11. Annex**.

⁹ This can be done on the European Parliament's website; see **11. Annex**.

parties, and position the intergroup as a legitimate stakeholder. (This aspect is covered in detail in **8. Building networks within and outside Parliament.**)

These screening exercises should be repeated regularly: once a month for committees, delegations and plenary; and once every quarter for parliamentary questions and institutional developments.

Upon finding reports relevant to the intergroup in committee or plenary:

1. In a tracking spreadsheet, **log** the report's title, rapporteur, shadow rapporteurs, committees involved, deadlines for amendments, and voting date to keep track of its state of play.
2. **Screen** the report for relevant content (whether friendly or hostile to the intergroup's views), as well as the absence of any relevant content where there could be some.
3. In case relevant content could be added, hostile content removed, or existing content modified, staff should propose to **amend** the report: chiefly to the rapporteur and shadow rapporteurs if they belong to, or are friendly to, the intergroup; failing that, intergroup members or allies in the relevant committee; failing both, intergroup presidents. Amendments should be worded so that the largest possible number of shadow rapporteurs (or groups) may support them. Ensuring support by shadow rapporteurs will—almost always—secure support from all MEPs in the corresponding group.
4. Within 48 hours preceding the vote, **alert** intergroup members to the upcoming vote, and advise them on voting behaviour.
5. **Monitor** voting, and keep track of relevant modifications. Final texts may take up to several weeks to become available after a vote in committee. Plenary vote results become available within 24 hours.
6. If the vote was significant, either positively or negatively, **communicate** the outcome (see **8. Public relations**).
7. **Archive** the relevant portions of the adopted text in a database, classifying the text with its date of adoption, report title, relevant content, and any thematic categories that can be used to search in the future.



The last step will help build a database of relevant paragraphs in adopted reports and resolutions, which can then be referred to when looking for relevant texts on given topics. This will be useful on a number of occasions: searching for European Parliament positions on a given topic, which could otherwise take hours; referring to previously-agreed compromise formulations when negotiating with political groups; and tracking the evolution of the Parliament's position on a given issue. This will also largely contribute to the intergroup's unique relevance and expertise.

- Ensure the intergroup remains relevant to key actors: MEPs and their assistants; group staff; administration staff; and staff in other institutions.
- Remember that relevance is key to an intergroup's political capital.

- Regularly spend time updating parliamentary knowledge across committees and delegations; plenary; questions; and other institutions and agencies.
- Log, Screen, Amend, Alert, Monitor, Communicate, and Archive relevant texts.

6. Driving parliamentary work

The power of an intergroup resides in using cross-party support to drive parliamentary work. It can do so chiefly with four parliamentary vehicles, in increasing order of political strength: briefings; parliamentary questions; resolutions; and reports. The decision to drive parliamentary work is a political one, and it should be taken in consultation with the leaders, as well as with any MEPs to be involved in the process (e.g. senior MEPs in a group or committee) following the process described in [4.a. Daily organisation](#).

Briefings Briefings can usefully inform political discussions at key stages—ahead of a specific report being discussed in committee, for instance. Briefings should be short (no more than a couple of pages); reliable (fully referenced and appropriately researched); and written with Members’ needs in mind (providing essential information simply, explaining stakes clearly, and providing useful arguments). Depending on the briefing’s strategic value, it may be better restricted to intergroup members only. This will also help attract new members.

Parliamentary questions Parliamentary questions are an effort-free way to exercise parliamentary oversight over other institutions, seek a formal statement from them, or request further action on their part. Questions are regulated by the Rules of Procedure¹⁰, and require little effort to produce. With the form available on the Parliament’s intranet, staff may propose a question to the presidents, and any other MEPs whose expertise may be relevant—preferably intergroup members. Questions may be asked by any number of MEPs, and will be considered seriously in proportion with their number of signatories. They should not be used for urgent business, since other institutions are given between six and eight weeks to respond¹¹. Finally, asking a parliamentary question will lead to a formal public statement, which binds the institution responding. On sensitive matters, it may be more strategic to exchange private letters (see [7. Non-parliamentary activities](#)).

Resolutions Committees, political groups, or a number of Members may draw up motions for a resolution and submit it to a committee, or the plenary¹². Resolutions are a flexible political tool, and establish an official position of the European Parliament. They can be used to react to specific political developments that are relevant to the European Union.

They must be planned carefully, as a political majority is required to agree to their placement on the agenda (by the coordinators in a committee; by the Conference of Presidents in plenary), as well as its adoption. Suggested resolutions should have the support of senior MEPs in as many groups as possible, so that political

¹⁰ See Rules 128-131 of the *Rules of Procedure* (see [11. Annex](#)).

¹¹ Different rules apply for ‘Priority written questions’, see the *Rules of Procedure*.

¹² See Rules 133-135 of the *Rules of Procedure* (see [11. Annex](#)).

groups representing at least 50% of Members may support it. They require a considerable amount of preparatory effort, summarised in these steps:

1. Secure support from intergroup presidents and senior MEPs;
2. Seek the agreement of political groups to place it on the agenda;
3. Produce a neutral draft for political groups to build on¹³;
4. Assist tabling, negotiating, amending and adopting the resolution.

Written declarations At least ten MEPs from at least three political groups may submit a written declaration which will be adopted if an absolute majority of their colleagues sign it¹⁴. Written declarations must be short (200 words), and strictly declarative: they cannot call for legislative action. MEPs have three months to gather the required signatures, starting on the day the written declaration becomes public (always during a part session). The President of the European Parliament announces when a written declaration becomes adopted in plenary, and it is forwarded to EU institutions mentioned therein. If the relevant institutions fail to follow up on the declaration within three months, the declaration's authors may ask that the relevant committee discuss the issue. (However, when it comes to controversial subjects, other institutions would likely choose to issue a non-committal response to close the subject before a committee can debate it.)

Written declarations should be worded so as to attract support from various ends of the political spectrum, and their sponsors should make significant efforts to gather signatures: MEPs do not consider this an important part of parliamentary business, and need to be chased numerous times in order to sign. Declarations may be signed by e-mail, or in secluded rooms in Brussels or Strasbourg where MEPs must go themselves. (This almost never happens.)

Although declarations are easy to produce, most fail to gather the required number of signatures in time. Their political capital is less than a resolution's, because written declarations have not been put to a democratic debate and vote. However, they may be useful to show other institutions and Member States that a given view enjoys particular support in the Parliament. They have no legal effect, and tend to be ignored by everyone apart from their promoters.

Reports Reports are the main vehicle of parliamentary work¹⁵. Legislative reports are the Parliament's contribution to a legislative procedure, carefully controlled and negotiated by political groups in committees and the plenary. Intergroups mostly monitor existing reports (see **5. Parliamentary and institutional monitoring**). However, the Parliament may draw up own-initiative reports on

¹³ Political groups are supposed to draw up their own motions for a resolution. In practice however, the political group to first propose the resolution usually produces a draft, shared with other groups for them to adapt with their own views. In theory, intergroups play no role in this process; but in the case of a resolution proposed by an intergroup, political groups will usually be grateful for an initial draft. This is a priceless opportunity to influence the outcome right from the start, but it should be done in a spirit of discreet, constructive cooperation and mutual understanding.

¹⁴ See Rule 136 of the *Rules of Procedure* (see **11. Annex**).

¹⁵ See Rules 49-56 of the *Rules of Procedure* (see **11. Annex**).

topics for which a committee is competent, and a well-prepared intergroup may initiate such a report. Coordinators—senior MEPs responsible for overseeing the committee on behalf of their group—must first decide to draw up such a report¹⁶. The report’s authorship is then assigned to one political group: every committee runs a point-based system, whereby political groups are given a number of points to spend over the legislature. Securing authorship will cost a number of points, and spending them will require political commitment. All other groups then assign a shadow rapporteur to the report, who become their group’s spokesperson on the report. The secretariat of the committee responsible then assigns an administrator to the file, in charge of helping the rapporteur draft the text.

The central difference between resolutions and reports consists in the drafting process and the research involved in drafting the latter. One to six months may elapse between the ‘opening’ of a report and the presentation of its draft in committee, during which any number of meetings between the rapporteur and shadow rapporteurs may take place (‘shadows’ meetings). Committees have the opportunity to exchange views, discuss the first draft, consider amendments, and eventually vote on own-initiative reports. Once voted, reports become the committee’s formal position, and are sent to plenary for a final vote. A complex set of rules determine whether the report may still be amended in plenary, or if it will be subject to a single vote. Once adopted, reports become the official position of the Parliament.

They require considerable efforts (greater yet than resolutions) for intergroups to:

1. Secure support from senior MEPs in political groups;
2. Seek the agreement of coordinators to create the report, and assign it to a political group for drafting;
3. Potentially assist the rapporteur in their drafting duties, in liaison with the committee’s administrator;
4. Potentially invite the rapporteur to attend intergroup meetings and discuss relevant views;
5. Potentially take part in shadows’ meetings, and help table, negotiate, amend and adopt the report in committee;
6. Help table, negotiate, amend and adopt the report in plenary.

If a report is particularly important to an intergroup, its presidents could discuss its contents with the shadow rapporteurs from their own group; invite the rapporteur to intergroup meetings (public or private); or submit amendments together.

The table below summarises these four types of parliamentary vehicles; whether they count as formal achievements for MEPs; the extent of their regulation; the effort required and approximate timing for their implementation; and the political capital they can bring.

¹⁶ Committees are limited in the number of own-initiative reports they may be working on at any given time (3-6). For the complete rules surrounding own-initiative reports, see Annex XVII of the *Rules of Procedure* (see **11. Annex**).

	Formal	Regulated	Effort & timing	Political capital
Briefings	No	No	Average; any	Mostly internal
Parl. questions	Yes	Loosely	Low; 1-8 weeks	Low
Resolutions	Yes	Somewhat	High; 1-2 months	High
Written declarations	Yes	Strictly	High; 3-4 months	Low to medium
Reports	Yes	Strictly	Very high; 6-12 months	Very high

- *Driving parliamentary work should be done in close consultation with intergroup presidents, and receive the support of other MEPs, senior if possible.*
- *Carefully consider political forces, and engage in parliamentary work that will be supported by majorities at different stages (committee, plenary).*

7. Non-parliamentary activities

Less formal tools are available to intergroups, which can serve to exert soft power. Although only limited by presidents' and staff creativity, two main such tools are events and letter-writing.

Events Perhaps the most visible of an intergroup's activities, events such as seminars, roundtables or conferences bring together MEPs, political and administrative staff, other institutions, civil society, and sometimes the press and general public. They helpfully allow experts to share expertise with the institutional sphere, foster constructive discussion between different actors, and help bolster the intergroup's role as a trustworthy platform for knowledge in its field. Events are excellent opportunities to discuss the contents of a specific report, or invite the Council or Commission to present their work on a specific file.

Events require advance preparation, and should feature in an intergroup's yearly planning. Between one and four events should be foreseen per year (any more will require a significant amount of time, to the detriment of other staff duties). Intergroup presidents can provide funding for events (travel and accommodation for any speakers; catering; interpretation, if any) from their parliamentary allowance. Political groups may also be willing to support an event financially, with specific conditions such as featuring their logo on the poster. Organising an event is straightforward, but can be time-consuming:

60 days ahead Design programme and invitation for speakers; have them approved by the president(s) to chair the event; secure a room through a political group (including video projection, video or audio recording, interpretation); invite speakers.

30 days ahead Arrange catering (before, during and/or after); design and print posters, hand them to ushers for display; request a Parliament photographer; announce the event online and open registration for the public if relevant; arrange speakers' travel to Brussels.

15 days ahead Announce the e-mail via mailing lists, as well as inside Parliament; provide speakers' briefing with timings and topics.

7 days ahead Close registration and give names to security services; request nameplates from ushers; request presentations/speaking notes from speakers; send out reminder mailing.

2 days ahead Confirm catering; gather materials; send out reminder mailing.

D-Day Send out reminder mailing; welcome speakers and hold preparatory meeting; assist chair during the event; circulate presence sheet; take any minutes if required.

Follow-up Post event summary online with pictures and any recordings or presentations; thank speakers.

Letter-writing Like most parliamentarians, intergroup presidents may wish to make their position known to colleagues, other institutions, the governments of Members States or third countries, and any other public figure. It may be useful to write a letter to other institutions in order to advance arguments, or exchange outside the formality of parliamentary debates or questions. Letters are also a good way to involve other intergroup members, particularly if they hold formal positions in relevant committees or delegations. Finally, although letters are an easy way to make an intergroup's position known, sending too many will decrease the credit given to them individually.

- *Plan events so they coincide with the parliamentary or institutional developments the event seeks to influence.*
- *Strike a balance between the ease of writing letters and their symbolic value.*
- *Bear in mind the time required to put together non-parliamentary activities, and their outcome compared to parliamentary work.*

8. Building networks within and outside Parliament

While successful intergroups are central to parliamentary work in their field, they should not seek to do all of the work in that field. The power of an intergroup lies not in controlling all related parliamentary work, but in linking knowledge and influence which may be held by other actors, or located in other institutions.

Establishing professional relationships with all relevant actors—both inside and outside Parliament—will go a long way to weave a trustworthy network of support. This 'grapevine' will be priceless to alert the intergroup staff to relevant developments (e.g. a new report in preparation, a study or project by a unit or agency, or developments in a Member State), and provide first-hand information.

While it is in the intergroup's interest to stay abreast of all relevant developments, it is in the interest of other network members to rely on the intergroup's topical knowledge (e.g. while writing resolutions or amendments), and in the interest of staff in other institutions to interact with a constructive, cross-group interlocutor who may open doors in Parliament.

Networking simply consists in maintaining professional relationships across five groups:

Political supporters Intergroup members are far from the only source of political support in the European Parliament. In addition to Members themselves, intergroup staff should seek to establish trustworthy relationships with their assistants; friendly political groups (political advisers, press officers, parliamentary work senior managers, advisers to the secretary-general, the secretary-general); and advisers to the President of the European Parliament. Remember to look for friendly individual staff in unfriendly political groups.

European Parliament administration staff Staff in the following units and directorates-general might play an important support role: committee and delegation secretariats (assistants, administrators); research staff (library staff, European Parliamentary Research Service); press and communication staff (Parliament's press officers, office of the spokesperson, key staff in DG Communication); presidency staff (plenary organisation and follow-up, Tabling Desk, Members' Administration Unit, relations with national parliaments); infrastructure staff (ushers); and linguistic support staff (interpreters, translators, terminology coordinators). It is also advisable to be on good terms with staff responsible for room bookings in political groups.

Staff in other EU institutions and agencies Staff in relevant directorates-general and units in the European Commission; those working on an intergroup's subject matter in Member States' permanent representations; those working in the secretariat of relevant Council working parties; and those working in relevant agencies.

Press and journalists Online and printed Brussels-based press; national newspapers who have shown an interest in the intergroup's field; international newspapers with an interest in the European Union; influential bloggers and tweeters interested in the intergroup's field, but also the EU generally; press officers and spokespersons from other institutions; and individual journalists who ever were in contact with intergroup staff or presidents.

Civil society Members and leaders of Brussels-based European NGOs with an interest in the intergroup's subject matter; those in Member State-based NGOs; any professional group interested in the subject matter; staff in public relations consultancies with a stake in the subject matter; trade unions; and any private companies or corporate associations if relevant.

- *Upon establishing a new intergroup, it may be useful to dedicate specific time to chart possible network members and introduce the intergroup to them.*
- *During the legislature, networking opportunities should be systematically followed up to expand the intergroup's network.*

9. Public relations

Intergroups have the potential to create and occupy niches as unique interlocutors at the crossroads of parliamentary and political knowledge on the one hand, and

topical expertise on the other hand. Adequately promoted, this combination can attract significant interest from journalists and the general public.

Most communication can be done online at little cost: a website; regular statements; and presence on social media.

Website A website forms the basis of any good online presence. While it does not have to be extensive, its absence will mean the intergroup's only web presence is on the European Parliament's website (see **11. Annex**), hardly an advantage in building relevance and trustworthiness. Any professional-grade website can be bought for as little as €2,000. Together with hosting costs (approximately €60/year), these costs can be borne by presidents' general office allowance.

The bare minimum for an intergroup's website includes a presentation of the intergroup and its work; its presidents; and contact information. Providing more information will directly contribute to portraying the intergroup as trustworthy and legitimate in its field. Additionally, visitors will often be looking for information on the secretariat; an updated list of members; a detailed description of the intergroup's work; regular statements (see below); event reports; public briefings; and links to relevant institutional resources.

When designing a website, it is crucial that staff is later able to fully edit it by easily posting statements or updating static pages. Investing time in the website's setup and ensuring its back-office works well will dramatically reduce time and money spent throughout the legislature. Regular backups must also be programmed.

Regular statements In order to remain relevant, intergroups ought to make their position known on political developments in their field. These statements serve a triple purpose: (a) they inform MEPs, political supporters and staff in other institutions of relevant developments in Member States or third countries; (b) they highlight the work done by the European Parliament and the European Union in a given field to the general public; and (c) they make the intergroup's political position known to MEPs, political supporters, other institutions, the press, and the general public.

Statements should be concise, and provide information to both institutional actors and the general public. An intergroup can choose to craft its statements as neutrally as possible, or to slant them to represent its political views. It may be best to provide factual accounts, and limit political judgment to any quotes. This will help cast the intergroup as reliable.

Statements should involve at least two different MEPs, to move away from party politics as much as possible. Political, geographical and gender balance will reinforce the strength of the message. And when possible, involve other members of the intergroup by quoting them on a file they were rapporteur on; on which they are considered an expert; or in which they have an official position, e.g. the chair of a delegation to the country concerned.

Statements should be published on the intergroup's website; on social media; e-mailed to all intergroup members; and to the networks described in **8. Building networks within and outside Parliament**.

Social media Maintaining a presence on social media has become unavoidable. Dozens of social networks exist, but as of 2014 European politics only require a serious presence on Facebook and Twitter.



Facebook allows building a community of fans who like an official page. One of the most-frequently visited websites in Europe and in the world, posting statements and interacting with fans on Facebook will ensure a wide coverage. Posts should be crafted to encourage sharing: use catchy headlines, a personal tone, add an image, and encourage interaction. Do respond to comments, positive and negative. Remember to remove abusive comments regularly, as leaving them will affect the intergroup’s image.

Twitter offers a looser community of followers, consuming a high amount of 140-character messages. Often more interactive than Facebook, Twitter enables politicians (including intergroups) to interact directly with fellow MEPs, constituents, civil society, and journalists. Using Twitter well will include following and interact with MEPs from the intergroup; promoting the intergroup’s activities and statements; and interacting with followers in a friendly and helpful way. Twitter is a great interface for the public to reach parliamentarians, and a great—and inexpensive—public relations tool. It is worth spending time to learn its codes and customs.



	Frequency	Tone	Cost
Website	One-off	Official, formal	From €2,000
Statements	Up to 3/week	Journalistic, factual	Nil
Facebook	Up to 1 status/day	Friendly	Nil
Twitter	Up to 5 tweets/day (+ replies)	Friendly	Nil

Other networks such as YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram and Pinterest may be considered, but no presence at all is better than a half-curated account updated infrequently.

- A professional website and presence on social media are good long-term investments. Establish a communication that’s easy to follow.
- Communicate as often as necessary to bolster the intergroup’s relevance, but without drowning followers and subscribers under too much information.

10. Possible caveats and pitfalls

- Political support was insufficient to establish an intergroup.

Even though every effort should be made to set up a formal intergroup at the beginning of the legislature, it may prove impossible. In that case, nothing forbids Members from setting up working groups, or other informal cooperation structures (see **1. Introduction**). These structures are unregulated, unlisted on the Parliament’s website, and may be considered less formal—but no less efficient.

- The presidency is somehow dysfunctional or irreconcilably conflictual.

The right chairs are absolutely critical for an intergroup's success. This topic is covered extensively in **3. Intergroup structures**, but conflict and disinterest may arise nonetheless. It should be up to staff to raise this with presidents trusted for their constructive approach, and suggest that they solve any conflict among themselves. It may be necessary for one or more presidents to resign their post in the interest of the intergroup. The staff's primary loyalty ought to reside with the intergroup itself, and not individual presidents.

- *Presidents do not coordinate the assignment of work to staff between themselves, or assign so much work that it becomes unmanageable.*

Very few MEPs will have solid managerial experience, and managing an office under their responsibility alone can already be challenging enough. Staff should be responsible to keep an overview of their own workload, and constructively inform presidents if it becomes unmanageable. It is in the intergroup's interest to ensure that essential work can be completed. Staff should offer a plan to prioritise important tasks over others; once presidents agreed to it, staff will be freer to turn down low-priority requests.

- *One or more presidents object to work that has been done/not been done.*

Any work done should be based on a decision from the presidents—in the intergroup's priorities, the annual plan, or from a joint discussion (preferably by e-mail for the record). Recording all work done may help show the extent of all the work done. Presidents and staff should jointly agree on reasonable work priorities.

- *One or more intergroup presidents show little interest in supporting the intergroup's work, or do not wish to spend any time on it.*

Intergroup leaders will significantly influence the amount and quality for that intergroup's work, and potential presidents should be considered very carefully (see **3.a. President(s)**). In case one president is uninterested, other presidents may ask them to reconsider their role, or offer to replace them altogether. If the sole president or all presidents fail to demonstrate interest or provide sufficient resources to run the intergroup efficiently, a supporting NGO could step in and offer to run the secretariat. Should this fail, it may be necessary to wait until the next elections to help set up a more efficient presidency.

- *A member of the intergroup disagrees with a specific action or statement.*

Staff should meet with the Member to discuss the disagreement, and seek to understand their opposition. It may be useful to take their views into account for future work; but if their view is too far removed from the intergroup's, they may have to agree that not all views are shared. Ultimately, they may also leave the intergroup, but this should be avoided at all costs.

- *Political opponents have attacked the intergroup.*

As political entities, intergroups will almost mechanically be involved in political disputes. Countering political attacks should be done in close consultation with the presidents, and could lead to increased media interest.

- *Intergroup presidents disagree with proposals made by the organisation running its secretariat.*

Disagreements may arise between an intergroup's presidents and the civil society organisation providing its secretariat. Often this will be resolved by open discussion, but irreconcilable disagreements may arise on political strategy or priorities. Although an organisation may put significant time and resources into running an intergroup's secretariat, intergroups ultimately remain under the responsibility of MEPs, and they will have the last word. If these disagreements arise frequently, it may be useful to consider reviewing the partnership.

- *Unconstructive members of civil society (NGOs, companies, corporate associations) insist on amending parts of the intergroup's work to suit their own agenda.*

As an interface between elected MEPs and civil society, intergroups should strive for a balanced representation of the latter's interests. This involves interacting with several different stakeholders, and establishing a consensual position. If isolated groups continue to take issue with a position after a constructive and respectful dialogue, they may have to live with it. If more stakeholders take issue with an intergroup position, it will be worth reconsidering rather than alienating a significant share of civil society.

11. Annex: Resources

The resources below can be useful to setting up and running an intergroup:

- **European Parliament intergroups** The official European Parliament list of intergroups, their members, declarations of financial interests, and the rules governing their establishment. - <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/00c9d93c87/Intergroups.html>
- **Rules of Procedure** Lay down the rules for parliamentary business, including procedures for reports, resolutions, amendments, deadlines, parliamentary questions, etc. - <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getLastRules.do?language=EN&reference=TOC>
- **Legislative Observatory** Tracks parliamentary and inter-institutional procedures, committee and plenary agendas, new documents, etc. - <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil>
- **European Parliament RSS feeds** Provides custom RSS feeds to follow any type of parliamentary activity, including videos, documents, briefings, videos, agendas, etc. - <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/rss>
- **Séance en Direct** Lists all documents related to the upcoming plenary session: agenda, reports, motions for resolutions, amendments, voting lists, and voting results. - <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sed>
- **Parliamentary questions** Lists all questions (oral and written) by MEPs to the Commission, Council, and EEAS. - <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/parliamentary-questions.html>