

Communications and Social Change: Forging Strategies for a New Century

A Bellagio Conference
April 21 - 25, 1997

Context

From its work in development since the 1920s, the Rockefeller Foundation takes it as a given that the tools of communications have power and legitimacy to address the wrenching problems of our time. And as the Foundation assesses the changes of the past few years -- political, social and technological, among others -- we recognize vast new possibilities to use communications to accelerate positive social change...in villages, across countries and around the globe.

Purpose

The purpose of this Bellagio conference is to explore the connections between social change and communications in the 21st century. Through an exploration of the work and experience of its 15 - 20 participants, the conference seeks:

- to understand how and why communications practices are changing, and can change more dramatically, to reflect new realities and new possibilities in developing nations;
- to describe the characteristics of the new communications that best links the emerging value set of a global civil society with the potentials of the new technologies; and
- to define the leverage points for putting the ideas, tools and resources of this new communications into the hands of those around the globe who can experiment with them and benefit from them.

Outcomes

- a shared vision and heightened sense of urgency among participants of how the power of communications can be tapped to bring about social change;
- a call-to-action for new communications thinking and priorities for funders and prime actors, accompanied by a strategy for leveraging the new thinking and priorities;
- a draft framework for how to think about and implement effective communications paradigms for the new century.

Participants

Individuals invited to participate represent thinkers and practitioners from around the globe. They are working in family planning and population assistance, public health, grassroots organizing, energy transformation, education, human rights, environmental activism, business and other fields. Some are recognized already in a worldwide arena as pioneers and innovators in social change and the applications of communications strategies, practices and technologies. Others are leading and doing work that is only just being recognized for its ground-breaking quality. Some have worked on national or international scale; for others the experience base may be a village or province. Some are filmmakers, storytellers or

pioneers in interactivity; others are publishers, electronic activists, journalists, specialists in public engagement and social marketing. All are brought to Bellagio by the strong desire to expand their own thinking and knowledge through interaction with pioneering colleagues from around the world.

Shared Work in Advance of the Conference

To make their time together as productive as possible, participants will share advance information about their aspirations, work and thinking, and also review a selected body of communications case studies. Through a pre-conference electronic dialogue coordinated by the conference planning team, participants also will be able to identify issues for discussion in order to shape the final agenda for the time in Bellagio.

Accommodation of Multiple Languages

The primary conversation of the conference will be conducted in English, but accommodations for speakers of other languages can be made, given sufficient notice.

The Rockefeller Foundation

The Rockefeller Foundation is committed to leadership in the rapidly changing arena of communications, so that both new and traditional techniques can be understood, shared and used as effectively as possible in the development process.

We seek to support people and organizations in developing nations to do their own communications work most effectively, and to provide tools and resources to help them. We look to the possibility of providing ongoing support for innovative and reflective communications and change projects, that either emerge from this conference or grow from the work of conference participants once they return to their home environments.

We will continue to engage the network of people and body of knowledge begun at this Bellagio conference, so that the work of the conference can be spread to communicators and social change activists throughout the developing world.

Information on the Bellagio Conference Center is enclosed. For further information on this conference, please contact Denise Gray-Felder, director of communications at the Rockefeller Foundation, in New York City on 212-852-8450. The fax number is 212-852-8441 and e-mail address is: dgray-felder@rockfound.org.

*They gave no phone
number for Bellagio.*



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