

# NGO Pro Bono Engagement Policy

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Harmattan Risk has conducted pro bono engagements with NGOs in the past, and we consider it to be an excellent source of mutual learning. NGOs benefit from conceptual clarity, new skills and intelligence frameworks, and advisory support in structured problem solving. Harmattan gains through exposure to new types of challenges in complex environments, and from learning NGOs' own unique intelligence and problem-solving approaches. Although pro bono work is necessarily a small part of our portfolio, we hope to sustain a handful of such engagements each year for the mutual value which they yield.

Pro bono work does not result in sales or profits, which, frankly, keep the business afloat. Therefore we carefully consider pro bono prospects on a case by case basis to ensure that there is sufficient mutual learning value to justify the time away from the daily grind. This document sets out our considerations with respect to pro bono engagements, to help prospective pro bono customers to understand if their requirement could be a fit with Harmattan's pro bono offering.

It is worth noting that we assess a number of criteria before accepting any case, including fee-earning ones. These include the credentials and legitimacy of the client organisation and requirement, how suited the task is to our unique capabilities versus other consultancies in our general space, the mutual learning merit, and our availability at the time. Thus, pro bono prospects are not alone in being tested for merit and feasibility prior to commitment.

## **Pro bono work is taken as seriously as paid engagements**

First and foremost, when we agree to an engagement, it receives our full attention and commitment to value whether or not there are fees involved. Pro bono clients might not be investing money, but they are investing time and they are taking a chance that they came to the right source of advice. Rest assured, then, that pro bono projects do not take a back seat to fee-earning work. If we commit, then an engagement takes its rightful place on the calendar and in people's schedules, and from the initial proposal to the conclusion we treat it exactly as we would fee-earning work. This includes a commitment to discretion. We might ask if we could obtain and use a reference for specific purposes, but unless explicitly agreed, we do not disclose whom we work with nor do we discuss client challenges beyond the project team.

## **We do not do desk research projects as pro bono engagements**

A typical, if rather mundane, political risk client brief is to ask for a top-level report on problematic trends and conditions in a specific operating environment, or an update and commentary on global issues that could affect an organisation. The client renders a brief, the team digs in and eventually produces a report, and this goes to the client. There might be some Q&A, but that is nearly the extent of the interaction. There is no particular value in using Harmattan for such work, since it is relatively commodified and in any case we are not regional experts. For us, there is certainly no reason to do such work for no fees, since we learn little about our client sector and their genuine challenges. The same applies to risk monitoring or other purely research and reporting activities.

## **Pro bono engagements should have a high degree of interaction**

Harmattan's unique value comes through interaction. We are experienced listeners, advisors, teachers and facilitators. To make the most of this, engagements should be interactive, with opportunities to discuss challenges and to jointly seek clarity and realistic options. From our perspective, interaction also increases the value to us, since we learn more about the genuine challenges that NGOs face, how organisations adapt to deal with different issues, and NGOs' own unique approaches to socio-political pressures.

## **Pro bono means no fees, but it does not mean no costs**

We can take a hypothetical example from the business consulting side (based on one I just happen to remember right now without looking up old costings). A month-long project to sense-check the socio-political health and resilience of an operation requires one person for 20 days' work. 10 days of that is on the ground in the city where the client has a country office, for interviews inside the organisation and with key representative stakeholders, as well as local observation. Travel and accommodation are the costs, and they would be approximately 15 % of the total price tag for the project. Thus, if fees are waived, the client is saving 85 % off the price. In a nutshell, although there can be costs associated with engagements, the pro bono aspect significantly reduces the overall financial burden. If this illustration were for an NGO project, it would be less of a discount since NGOs fees are lower, but it would still be significant.

In rare cases Harmattan has borne some of the cost in pro bono work. There was significant mutual learning opportunity and the clients in question had a pressing requirement. But as a matter of policy, in pro bono work the client covers any necessary and agreed expenditures.

## **To make the most of the engagement, clients handle administrative and publication / editorial tasks**

Harmattan's value comes through relevant experience and knowledge, and our ability to shape and share this to help a customer organisation. There are usually some administrative and editorial tasks involved in an engagement. For example, for a customised training course, someone needs to manage invitations and organise a venue. For an internal guidance paper, someone needs to put the material into a branded, standard template. If Harmattan handles admin and publication / editorial tasks, it cuts into time that is better spent on what we do best. Thus, pro bono customers should be prepared to handle administrative and related support.

## **Pro bono engagements need to be relatively concise**

Just as we can only take a handful of pro bono engagements each year, such engagements need to be reasonably concise. As a general rule thumb, a month would be the approximate limit for a pro bono project. This means that the requirement needs to be well targeted so that we could have a valuable impact in the time available, and that the client organisation should be prepared to commit some of its own personnel for part-time tasks which they could complete under Harmattan's guidance. Note that concise does not preclude the informal and periodic follow up that often comes after an engagement (for example, questions about implementing agreed recommendations).

## **Suggestions on types of engagements that lend themselves well to the pro bono model**

Given the imperatives of interactivity and impact in a concise timeframe, which actually go hand in hand, some types of projects stand out as particularly well suited to pro bono engagements. Note that this is only a general guide since specific requirements considerably vary. These reference points include the following.

### *Training*

Training covers the areas on the Learning page of the website, and would be customised for the organisation's context. Given that courses include considerable interaction between participants and between participants and instructor, they not only instil new learning about political risk intelligence and planning concepts and processes, but also shared experiences and lessons learned. Harmattan currently has three NGO courses "on the shelf". One covers the wider organisational political risk intelligence and management process, and includes several modules which come together in planning element. Another focuses on the stakeholder analysis aspect of the wider process, and a third is a roundtable format which guides structured discussion of key challenges that participants

have experienced and learned from. These are only indicative, and courses can be designed from scratch to meet specific needs. Although course design or customisation takes some time, by and large training is a concise type of engagement with outsized impact.

#### *Problem-solving and discussion workshops*

Workshops are similar to training in bringing together a number of participants, but the focus of a workshop is a particular challenge or uncertainty that the client organisation faces. The workshop design guides discussion to clarify the issues, and then generate and discuss options to deal with them. Workshop topics vary, but examples might be how to address a change in government attitudes towards NGOs in a country operation, a deteriorating security environment, the dilemma of whether or not to withdraw from a country, and how to address specific challenges such as political factional pressure on NGO neutrality. A note taker from the client organisation would capture key learning in rough form, and Harmattan would then translate these into a concise summary.

#### *Policy and process review*

Most NGOs have intelligence and planning processes either aimed at mission facilitation (such as the analysis of actors around the target issue) or their own security and integrity, as well as policies that guide process implementation. As with companies, quite often these evolved over time without explicit testing and refinement, and this can lead to gaps, information and planning stovepipes, and fragmented intelligence pictures. Harmattan can review policies and processes relevant to socio-political resilience and insight to derive opportunities to improve them. Ideas are then discussed in a workshop setting where the cross-functional client team can jointly agree on optimal modifications or streamlining. One example of this kind of project was for an anti-animal trafficking NGO which had found a disconnect between campaign planning and the intelligence function. The project discerned that campaign planning would have more confidence in intelligence if the intelligence team applied a consistent logic to analysing stakeholders around an issue, and presented the results in live briefings, not just in written reports and dashboards. A policy and process review examines relevant documentation, but an important aspect is internal interviews to check for gaps and silos, and ultimately to see how information-sharing and cross-functional collaboration could be strengthened for better effect.

#### *Country project socio-political resilience review*

When a country project or presence has been established for some time, basic research on socio-political trends and dynamics matters less than assessing the operation's socio-political fit and its capability to adapt to and manage challenges and pressures. Harmattan has found that an effective

way of conducting such an assessment is to focus on discussions within the organisation and its surrounding stakeholder ecosystem, to garner first-hand perceptions of relevant issues, attitudes and risk management gaps. This on-site exercise, preceded by desk-based familiarisation, can yield very direct insights in a relatively concise timeframe. Results are then analysed and form the basis of a workshop with the customer organisation, with the aim of deriving opportunities for a stronger socio-political fit (i.e. local acceptance), more current and relevant contingency plans, and overall adaptation to the current and medium-term socio-political landscape. A country project review would be at the outside edge of “concise” but it is still well feasible in a pro bono format, although the customer organisation would need be prepared to support project administration, sourcing interviews, and related logistics.

Again, the above are only indicative reference points, and specific requirements might not clearly fit into any of the described types.

### **Summary**

Pro bono engagements are an excellent learning opportunity for both sides, and we hope to continue to work with NGOs in this mode. Again, it might be not feasible to meet every pro bono request, but we try to maintain some flexibility to be able to respond to relevant needs. Even if we cannot conduct an engagement on a particular question, we can still discuss it with an organisation to help clarify issues and options.

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