

## 10 Things to Remember When

# WORKING WITH EU COMMISSION STAFF

### 1. COMPLIANCE



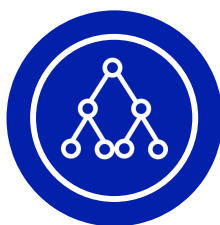
COM staff value and must respect compliance with regard to financial, ethical and other rules/guidelines. These are valued above everything else (which can greatly limit flexibility regarding your project, even if they personally would want to be flexible).

### 6. RISK AVERSION



COM staff place great emphasis on 'low risk solutions', ie creative marketing, event ideas or copywriting may get pushed back if they're considered too 'edgy' or may risk triggering a (social) media backlash, even if you are convinced they're excellent.

### 2. HIERARCHY



Be mindful of the multiple layers of hierarchy in the COM, which has a major impact on various aspects of your work:

**a. Approval:**

There are multiple steps and layers within the approval process by various managers / department heads, which will impact deadlines/feedback. Do not expect a 24-hour turnaround for issues involving significant budget implications, or internal political discussions, or project scope change.

**b. Chain of command:**

Circumventing a project manager and going straight to their head of unit, or director, may not go down well if an official feels they're sidelined, especially if you have a dispute or conflict with that person. Don't antagonize anyone unnecessarily.

**c. CC'ing:**

Think twice when to cc (or not) a manager/staffer, especially if your message is critical of someone or something.

### 7. VISIBILITY



Most COM officials want more recognition and visibility, but when praising/thanking someone, you may wish to give credit to their superiors as well (to avoid jealousy by putting the staffer in an uncomfortable situation). On the other hand, COM officials need to get prior approval when their name appears on a publication outside the scope of their work.

### 8. TRANSPARENCY



Most of your emails and written communication, including meeting notes, will be recorded/archived, and may be disclosed to the public under a freedom of information request, so choose your words/comments/commitments carefully.

### 3. UNEQUAL PARTNERSHIP



You're a service provider who's expected to follow the COM's instructions, even if your ideas/solutions are objectively better. Don't try to assert yourself above your client, but remain assertive in your communication.

### 9. DIVERSITY



COM staff come from 28 countries (even after Brexit!), and their cultural background/diversity has a major impact on their values, communication style, deadlines, and expectations towards service providers like you.

### 4. LEGITIMACY



The COM is struggling with a legitimacy crisis among many EU citizens; it's trying hard to do *'the right thing'* and *'what's popular'*, but these two often do not overlap. If you help them with this challenge, they'll be forever grateful (and award you more projects).

### 5. MOTIVATION



At the kick-off meeting, try to understand the core motivation of your COM account manager(s), and remember: *"You can get anything in life that you want, if you help others achieve what they want".*

### 10. MESSAGING



**a. Channel:** be mindful of the communication method or channel you choose, depending on the type of communication and the *desired outcome*:

- **For controversial issues:** phone calls or meetings are best (followed by a brief written memo to confirm what has been agreed)
- **For open-ended complex questions or brainstorming:** phone calls or meetings are best (with action items or minutes noted)
- **To share updates or exchange information:** email (with numbers/bullets) is best. Try to keep your email short, concise and to the point. You are more likely to receive a response in a more timely matter if they can read, review and address our requests quickly.

**b. Proactivity:** open-ended questions in an email may take a long time to get answered, so rather anticipate and insert A-B-C scenarios in your email so it's easy for the recipient to decide. No matter what problem arises, propose ideas/solutions to save them mental effort (and cut the time you need to wait for their response).

**c. Empathy:** anticipating objections or reservations, and addressing them upfront can go a long way in getting buy-in, instead of exchanging too many emails back-and-forth (e.g. "I understand you might disagree with this approach because it's too costly. On the other hand, it saves significant amounts in the mid-term already").

**d. Language:** ask, but don't demand ("I'd be grateful to receive" vs. "Can you please send me"). Whenever possible, say "thank you" instead of apologizing ("Thank you for your patience regarding my reply.")