THE ONLINE CIVIL COURAGE INITIATIVE | OCCI

INFORMATION PACK ON COUNTERSPEECH LABS
The Information Guide on Counterspeech Labs aims to explain the methodology and structure of the OCCI Counterspeech Labs. The guide contains condensed information and content from the YouthCAN Innovation Lab Report (2016), a document produced and published by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.
What is the OCCI?

The Online Civil Courage Initiative (OCCI) is a European Initiative challenging hate speech and extremism online. The OCCI was founded in Berlin, by Facebook, and is being led by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD).

What is the OCCI mission?

The OCCI mission is to promote the civil courage displayed by organisations and grassroots activists carrying out valuable counterspeech work online. We believe that engagement is more powerful than censorship in reforming prejudiced and bigoted opinions and voices, and are committed to amplifying campaigns which encourage positive dialogue and debate by:

1. Providing online support for NGOs and activists working to counter hate speech and extremism online;
2. Developing the best methods for NGOs and civil society to respond to hate speech and extremism online;
3. Assisting research into the relation between online speech and offline actions to better understand how counterspeech can be most effective.

The OCCI was founded as a partnership between the ISD, the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR), and the Amadeu Antonio Foundation, working together with Facebook. The OCCI brings together these different sectors utilising the expertise of NGOs, civil society, the creative sector and academia, to promote new partnerships and positive campaigns.
«Counterspeech content can be accessible to the wider creative industry, provided they are armed with the right knowledge and skills.»

– Berlin Lab participant

Why now?

We understand that a range of hate groups and extremists use social media to find, radicalise, recruit and mobilise new members. We strongly believe in a sense of duty to respond to this, and in the need to disrupt the routes which extremists use to reach people who are vulnerable to their propaganda. The pervasiveness of hate speech and violent extremist activity in many different forms across Europe has made civil society’s response a matter of urgency.

What is counterspeech?

The term *counterspeech* refers to responses or content that is created to counter a range of hate speech and extremist narratives online. Within the counterspeech spectrum, a counter-narrative is a tool to challenge extremist messages by discrediting and demystifying the ideologies and narratives of hate based extremists. They can do this by using logical or factual arguments or using satire and humour. They can be as specific or nuanced, as direct or indirect, as the person or the group creating them wants to make them.
OCCI Support

As part of the OCCI initiative, Facebook aims to scale up the support of European NGOs and activists conducting online campaigns. As the OCCI develops its network we aim to work closely with counterspeech activists, to promote their work. We hope to boost this work on the OCCI Facebook page, to dramatically increase its awareness and impact. Organisations working to counter extremism online should get in touch by emailing occi@strategicdialogue.org.

The Counterspeech Lab

A Counterspeech Lab is an immersive, activist-led event that creates a safe space to facilitate capacity-building and co-creation. The labs give participants the contacts, tools and skills needed to develop strategic counterspeech campaigns for preventing and countering hate based extremism. Each lab contains a series of highly interactive and practical exercises that increase civil society’s ability to effectively challenge hate speech and extremism online.

“The Counterspeech Lab helped me be aware of the risks surrounding counterspeech campaigning, and to better understand how to avoid them.”

– Paris Lab participant
The Participants

Working groups within the labs are comprised of civil society activists and experts from the media and technology sectors to provide content creation and campaign marketing support. The working groups are strategically curated to combine diverse backgrounds and harness complementary skills, resulting in innovative counterspeech content.

The collaborative learning process encourages participants to engage with relevant organisations operating in their region, and facilitate cross-sector cooperation in future efforts to prevent and counter hate speech and extremism online.
Lab Key Points

1. Participants at the Counterspeech Labs have full ownership of the campaigns they develop and the content they create during the lab.
2. Counterspeech Labs are a great way of ‘training-the-trainer’. Participants learn skills that can easily be taken away and brought back to their organisations or future activism.
3. Civil society activists are the authentic and credible messengers that positive counterspeech depends upon. The training and networking opportunities that the OCCI provides through Counterspeech Labs are vital for supporting their work.

The Lab

Counterspeech Labs are conducted over two days, with the first day focused on campaign development and the second day focused on content creation. The labs are divided into five exercises, modelled around the 8-Step process which OCCI recognises as the most comprehensive strategy for developing and delivering a counterspeech campaign.

Counterspeech Labs have ‘hands on’ group exercises and breakout sessions to ensure there is a high level of engagement between participants. This learning-by-doing method enables deeper exploration of the topic and ensures greater understanding and retention of the information presented during the lab.
Lab Exercises

1. **Campaign Focus** – the participants discuss what form of hate speech or extremist narrative they would like to focus their group campaigns around, as well as deciding their aims and goals for the campaign.

2. **Campaign Audience** – the groups work to establish exactly which audience they are hoping to reach and engage with through their campaign, and the behaviour they would like to induce or change as a result of the campaign.

3. **Campaign Message** – the tone, form and messenger of the campaign are established. Groups storyboard what their content will look like in preparation of creating the campaign.

4. **Campaign Social Media Strategy** – the groups work to plan out a marketing strategy for their campaign with support from advertising experts and Facebook to maximise the impact of their initiative.

5. **Campaign Content Creation** – in the final exercise groups actively create and finalise campaign content, ready to launch online.

Post-Lab OCCI support

The OCCI works hard to ensure that campaigns developed during the Counterspeech Lab have the opportunity to be promoted on Facebook and Instagram. After the lab, the OCCI team works closely with the groups to help them deliver the marketing strategy they developed during the lab. OCCI provides advertising credits on Facebook and Instagram to support the promotion of the campaigns.
Examples of Counterspeech Campaigns Created During the Labs

Paris Counterspeech Lab Example: a video campaign aimed at empowering young female second-generation immigrants. The video was a hand-drawn story of a young girl, Nadia, and how people in her life were defining her identity for her. The video ends with the hashtag #YouAreWhatYouWant
Paris Counterspeech Lab Example: a video campaign using people’s public Tweets to challenge the narrative that French society should not help refugees until they have helped the homeless. The campaign argues that as people do not choose to be refugees or homeless, French society should not choose between who should be provided support.

Ils ne choisissent pas d’où vient leur misère :
Ne choisissons pas non plus.

#RefugeesWelcome
#FightHomelessness
Berlin Counterspeech Lab Example: a satirical meme-based campaign, promoted in Germany. It seeks to challenge the notion that we can blame our problems on minority groups. Each meme contains the hashtag #keingrundrassistzuwerden (No reason to be racist).
Institute for Strategic Dialogue
The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) is an independent ‘think and do tank’ working with leaders in government, business, civil society and academia to develop cross-border responses to the major geo-strategic, social and security challenges of our time. Combining research and policy advisory work with innovative delivery programmes, specialised task forces, cross-sector partnerships and networks, ISD works to counter global extremism, bridge inter-communal divides, and enhance Europe’s capacity to act effectively in the global arena.

International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence
The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ISCR) is an independent and non-partisan organisation. It produces research to educate the public and help policymakers and practitioners find more intelligent solutions in dealing with radicalisation and political violence.

Amadeu Antonio Foundation
The Amadeu Antonio Foundation is an independent NGO working to strengthen democratic civic society and eliminate neo-Nazism, bigotry and hate in Germany. Since its founding in 1998, the Foundation has funded more than 850 projects and campaigns in pursuit of this goal. It brings direct support to victims of hate-based violence, and promotes alternative youth cultures and community networks to weaken the social structures that intolerance and racism need to survive.