

## **Riga NGO House – the key and the platform for cooperation of the city non-governmental organizations and municipality**

The idea of the Riga Non-governmental house (NGO House) was born in 2010 at the Riga citizens' forum when the working groups of the forum analyzed the communication problems, tried to find the solutions for better synergies and combined efforts in future and identified the possible cooperation models of citizens, non-governmental organizations and local municipality. The forum indicated that NGOs suffer from the lack of meeting and activity space. Unused, vacant municipal buildings underwent closer scrutiny and a building originally built specifically to be used as school was singled out. The Riga municipality refurbished the former school, funded the equipment and furniture purchase. To ensure proper operational capacity and content of the House, the NGOs Support Sector was set under the auspices of the Projects and Society Integration Division (Education, Culture and Sports Department of the Riga City Council).

In order to promote the society integration and participatory processes and help community and voluntary organizations articulating and representing the interests of Rigans of all ages, professions and nationalities the Riga City Council opened the NGO House on September 25, 2013.

NGO House offers resources for capacity building, information exchange, knowledge and ideas exchange, best practices and experience exchange, networking, leadership training, strategies for successful membership recruitment free of charge.

NGO House is open for visitors and NGOs from Monday to Saturday. 10 facilities are open for NGOs for non-commercial use, including the open office, access to computer room, premises for seminars, workshops, rehearsals, a public events hall with a capacity of up to 200 seats. The necessary technical equipment is provided free of charge. The space for exhibitions and information displays is available in two spacious corridors.

Statistics of the three recent years highlight the two components of NGO House operation: the growth of the number of interested organizations and visitors, intensity and scope of events, and utilization of facilities has augmented. Especially on Fridays and Saturdays the House is overcrowded, all facilities are fully booked, activities follow one another. Non-governmental organizations are involved in the whole spectrum of developmental, social, leisure activities as administrative work, trainings, creative workshops, seminars, meetings, campaigns, conferences, exhibitions, discussions, forums, festivals, theatre performances, etc. The organizations are annually provided more than 700 consultations.

	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Totally</b>
Number of visitors	9000	12 000	26 550	<b>47 550</b>
Number of events produced by NGO House	400	830	1690	<b>2920</b>
Number of NGOs participating in various events at NGO House	350	470	500	
Number of NGOs that have produced events themselves	77	110	141	

Many events promote inclusion of people with special needs and with or without health problems, socially disadvantaged children, address marginalized social groups, especially highlighting the importance of co-operation in co-working space.

An essential task of NGO House is empowering NGOs through education. In the course of the past three years more than 400 NGO members attended 104 informative or educational workshops. The most popular workshops were related to such issues as law, accounting, public relations, project management. Another extensively used facility is exhibition area. More than 30 exhibitions have been produced and offered for the visitors of the events as well as local neighbourhood residents and other interested persons.

The experience of NGO House as a valuable cooperation and support model has been presented and shared with other local governments in Latvia and delegations from abroad. The citizens have proposed to establish branches of NGO House in other neighbourhoods of Riga.

In the course of the past three years the Riga NGO House has become a trustworthy partner and assistant for the Riga non-governmental organizations ensuring long-term essential support to the activities of non-governmental sector. By joining the efforts quite a few events of paramount importance not only for a single organization but for the society on the whole have been implemented empowering the non-governmental sector. In the course of three years NGO House has become one of the community centres of the Riga city.

Information about NGO House is available at the web page of the Education, Sports and Culture Department of the Riga City Council: <http://www.iksd.riga.lv/public/56036.html>