

# Improving inter-governmental relations (IGR) in the municipal response to HIV/AIDS

*A strong municipal response to HIV/AIDS depends on functional intergovernmental relations (IGR). Although most of the work that a municipality does will benefit from good IGR, it is particularly important for HIV/AIDS because this is a cross-cutting issue that must be tackled in many different ways if it is to be successfully managed.*

*HIV/AIDS must also be acknowledged as one of our most important key priorities, because it outweighs all other risks to our population and threatens to undo the impact of some of government's developmental milestones.*

*IGR rules, systems and procedures are not intended to be used in a rigid manner, but are guides to promote co-operation, commitment and buy-in, and a conducive environment for delivery. In their daily work, public servants need to understand the ultimate aims of the IGR framework and work to achieve these in the best possible way within their particular local context.*

*The following are some ways in which the implementation of IGR can improve a municipality's response to HIV/AIDS:*

## 1) Monitor compliance

Passion for HIV/AIDS issues can't be made a part of a job description, and there has to be some way of ensuring that a minimum level of co-operation happens. One way to do this is using the key performance indicators (KPIs) in officials' contracts. Municipalities that are serious about tackling HIV/AIDS should include HIV/AIDS-related IGR targets in officials' KPIs, for example to ensure they attend meetings and participate in HIV/AIDS mainstreaming.

## 2) Adapt the systems to your local environment

National frameworks can never be completely appropriate for all local situations, and the current frameworks may in some cases be too ambitious in the first years of their implementation.

Local authorities should not wait for the framework to be updated; if it is clear that there is a better, more effective way of dealing with HIV/AIDS IGR, then they should try it. Where it is possible, municipalities should aim to exceed

the expectations of the HIV/AIDS and IGR frameworks, and some of the stronger municipalities have already done this.

## 3) Focus on soft skills

Evidence suggests that in most municipalities, the greatest potential for improving HIV/AIDS IGR lies in paying attention to the relationships between individual leaders, officials and managers.

Friendly gestures that make others feel respected and appreciated go a long way to improving IGR. For example, as an organisation, always having someone available to answer the phone shows professionalism and a willingness to do business. When dealing with individuals, showing interest in other people on a personal level will make it much easier to work with them. Ideally, one should seize every opportunity to network with people from organisations or departments that you work with. It can make a big difference if the same person represents a department every time a particular meeting or forum takes place, so that they can become more familiar with each other.

## 4) Make people understand that HIV/AIDS is important

Municipal HIV/AIDS practitioners wanting to improve their municipality's IGR around HIV/AIDS will need to ensure that the key people understand why HIV/AIDS has to be a priority.

Once local government leadership has a better awareness of HIV/AIDS issues, they usually become more interested, and ask for more information. Understanding the issues will make them much more willing to participate, because HIV/AIDS is an easy subject to get passionate about.

The key is good communication, so that the smallest available opportunity can be used for maximum effect. For example, ask for a small slot in a top level meeting rather than asking leadership to come especially to another meeting.

To use these sorts of opportunities, presentations must be short, hard-hitting, and have all the facts at hand. Up to date and credible local HIV prevalence data will almost always 'put on a lightbulb' for leaders when they hear what the situation is really like at a community level.

## ABOUT THE HIV/AIDS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEARNING NETWORK (HALOGEN)

Halogen brings together researchers, organisations and municipal practitioners to share knowledge, skills and learning on HIV/AIDS and local government in South Africa.

For more information, or to join Halogen, see [www.halogen.org.za](http://www.halogen.org.za), or call (021) 683 7903.

