

Before leaving Canada, gather background on the NGOs and the representatives you plan to meet. Determine each NGO's political and program orientation, and learn about the economic and political history of the regions they serve. Find out about the culture and customs of the local people. Are there certain unspoken rules? Your Filipino partners are unlikely to have the same opportunity to learn about you beforehand. Consider how you can most effectively tell them about yourself.

Try to obtain the names of your counterparts. Begin corresponding with them before you leave Canada. Try to find someone who will introduce you to others in the network on your arrival.

Bring all of the equipment you will need to do your job. If your work takes you outside Manila, you may need to bring your own computer.

The most common mistakes Canadians make are to dress too formally and to insist on getting down to work too quickly. Find out what is appropriate to wear, and take the time to develop a relationship with your Filipino colleagues before starting work.

Your first meeting with your partners is crucial; it can make or break your relationship. Don't rush to get to your work agenda; it is important to first

get to know your new colleagues on a personal basis. Allow time for you and your partners to explore each other's expectations and perceptions.

Watch for problems or misunderstandings as you settle down to work. One Canadian learned the hard way. Shortly after his arrival, he grew frustrated with his Filipino colleagues' attempts to find housing for him. Because he was vague about his requirements, his Filipino colleagues gave him many options, too many from his perspective. Without letting his Filipino colleagues know, the Canadian went out and found accommodation on his own. This offended the Filipinos. For the next three months, they were unable to communicate effectively or complete any work.

Be flexible when negotiating contracts or contribution agreements. Canadians like to follow the rules to the letter, while Filipinos like to suggest different ways of reaching the same goals.

Be a student before you are a teacher. Ask questions before telling people what to do. Learning may take many months. If your counterparts raise a problem, ask them how they solved it in the past and what lessons they learned from the experience. Be a facilitator.