

## Network Handbook

Sourced from the 2018 Network Learning Exchange hosted by the Ford Institute for Community Building and coordinated by Roi Crouch and Lindsey B. Jones.

### What is a Network?

Individuals or organizations choosing to connect around a common interest or purpose, with the potential to increase impact.

### Reasons to Network:

Reasons can occur along a continuum moving from simple to more complex structures:

- *Communication*: Information sharing encourages cross promotion and referrals and decreases duplication. Provides opportunities for learning, motivation, and encouragement. Builds relationships. Participants gain broad, diverse perspectives.
- *Coordination*: Working alongside each other for cohesion. Builds momentum.
- *Collaboration*: Working together towards common purposes. Sharing resources. Building trust, capacity and confidence.
- *Collective Impact*: Creating a larger, unified voice to expand reach.

### When not to Network:

- When there is insufficient capacity or desire to interact collectively
- When there is no obvious benefit
- When the need is gone
- It is not useful to form a Network during crisis/emergency response, but if already established, it can be a great resource to draw upon in an emergency.

### Types of Networks:

- *Place-based*: participation represented by those within geographic boundaries. Example: a neighborhood watch.
- *Cross-sector*: participants have different focuses, but benefit from shared knowledge. Example: a Network of Nonprofits
- *Issue-based*: participants have similar focuses. Examples: A Faith Based Network; a Homelessness Network; a Local Food System.
- *Project-based*: a clear purpose/project has been established and participants are working toward a common goal. Example: Friends of the Park.
- *Peer Learning*: Participants come together around learning. Example: Ford Community Learning Exchanges.

### Network Lifecycles:

1. Need: Identify common issue, interest or need.
2. Convene: Begin to meet.

3. Plan: What will be done together?
4. Implement: Do the thing.
5. Evaluate: How did it go?
6. Decide: Shall we continue?
7. Adjust and Refine: What's next?

**Networker Roles** (one person may fill more than one role):

- *Coordinator*: handles logistics, operations, fiscal management
- *Convener*: calls meetings, writes agendas, facilitates
- *Communicator (internal & external)*: in charge of marketing, invitations, emails, phone calls...
- *Outreach/Engagement/Network Builder*: recruiting & retaining membership, partner development, connecting networkers
- Other Roles:
  - *Implementer*: project manager, oversees event or initiative, "champion"
  - *Visionary*: the "idea fairy," instigator, initiator
  - *Coach*: develops capacity, motivates
  - *Provocateur*: can challenge group, but provides alternative perspectives
  - "Swing": can fill other roles as needed, cross-trained

**Communication Strategies Pros and Cons:**

★ **Types of INTERNAL communication Networks use:**

**Direct contact:** Gatherings/Meetings/Face-to-Face (MOST EFFECTIVE)

Cons:

- Time to travel (especially rural)
- Must have meeting space, common day/ time for multiple people- doodle poll
- Discussions must be facilitated skillfully, conflict mediated/ managed

Pros:

- Words are only 7% of communication*--Less chance for misunderstanding body language, allows for clarification in an expedited manner
- Ability to see when someone is getting frustrated/upset or disengaged
- Tend to take things more seriously, be present
- Language is constrained in face-to-face
- Participants more fully engaged and more accountable for completing tasks

**Emails**

Cons:

- Long Email chains
- Email content that is too long/too many subjects
- Too much use of "reply all"

- Doesn't provide a hard copy

Pros:

- Provide trainings/instruction for effective use of emails
- Use effectively for convening, attach minutes from previous meeting, attach agenda
- Easy to archive
- Document date/time on subject line

**Phone**

- Conference calls or people call in to central meeting location
- Text messaging
- Social media apps

**Meeting minutes/Handouts** at meetings/fliers

Cons:

- Paper is a valuable resource

Pros:

- Reminders in-hand

★ **Tools to collaborate and store information:**

**Google Drive**

Cons:

- Requires some training for it to be used effectively

Pros:

- Very useful once you get the hang of it
- Intuitive
- Free, accessible (no ads)

**E-mail**

- Personal/ work email on personal computers
- Email list serves - MailChimp, Constant Contact

Pros:

- use of groups makes for efficient notification

★ **Types of communication Networks use for EXTERNAL communications**  
(invites, public events or activities, projects, volunteer opportunities).

★ What we are communicating:

Invitations to meetings, gatherings, events, project work days, collaborators' news, etc.

Newsletters

Announcements

Informational flyers and brochures  
Fundraising appeals  
Grant Reports and Results (especially in phase work)  
Surveys  
Advertising  
Opportunities  
Needs

**★ Best strategies/tools to send out different types of communications**

**Oral/Face-to-face**

Cons:

- Same as above for Direct Contact AND
- May need more time to process: the average person is able to speak about 150 words per minute, but we are able to hear at about 1,000 words per minute
- Listening can be challenging- you have two ears and one mouth

Pros:

- Same as above for Direct Contact AND
- Shows respect, personal connection, which is highly valued in some cultures
  - Need translators or bilingual skills, accessibility- MEETING THEM WHERE THEY ARE
- Enthusiasm and personal connection
- Direct and immediate response possible

**Drop Box** (storage)

**Community sharing platforms** - Ning.com, ShowMe.com

**Mail and Hard copies**

**Virtual communication:** GotoMeeting, Zoom, Webex

**E-mail list serves** - Mail Chimp, Constant Contact

**Websites**

**Social Media:** Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat,

**Media (radio, television, newspaper)**