

## How to set up a network

### Groundwork

Before you start to set up a network, you should find out what others, if any, exist in your area. You can use resources like your local public library, local authority and voluntary sector umbrella groups as sources of information.

If there is no network already existing, you should work out if there is really a need for one. Establishing proof of need will be particularly important if you intend to seek external funding to run and manage the network.

Finally, you should think about how you intend to contact trustees and ask them to come to the first meeting. You may be able to get access to local trustees through voluntary sector umbrella groups, local newspaper community pages, or other local resources. You will need to think carefully about advertising the first meeting, as it will need to seem interesting and valuable if you are to encourage people to attend.

### Consider the new network's needs

The new trustee network will need some resources, and it is important to be aware of what these might be at the outset, so that the network can plan to accommodate them from the very start. Needs might include:

- **administrative support.** For example, somebody to manage the contact list and ensure it is kept up to date. Contact information should ideally be the home address of each member, because if information is sent to a charity address it may not reach the trustee in time. Think through data protection issues when considering how you will manage this information.
- **meeting spaces.** Your local CVS may have a room for hire, or the group may be able to meet in the premises of one or more network member. If you do this, consider rotating the meetings to different locations if possible.
- **money.** You may need to pay for room hire, speakers, refreshments etc. However, other options include the use of free meeting spaces, and making use of services in kind. If you do need to raise money, consider whether charging membership fees may be a deterrent for some people, and be aware that managing money will need administration. Think about the possibility of finding local funding sources e.g. local authority grants.
- **active members.** Strong networks draw on a pool of active and keen members for ideas and to do the work of keeping the network thriving. Consider how the new network might cultivate these from the outset.

### The first meeting

The first meeting could be an open meeting, to which you invite many trustees, or one to which you invite those you wish to form the core of the network. Either way, it is a good idea to have done a few things in preparation. Some important preparatory activities are:

- **prepare a structure for the meeting.** During its first meeting the new group will start to form. You can help the process by presenting the key questions the group needs to answer. These should cover areas like:
  - o What is your network about?
  - o Who is it for?
  - o How will the members benefit?
  - o How will the network function e.g. meeting frequency, meeting times, etc
 You should have a set of headings ready to discuss and be prepared to make notes including action notes for distribution after the meeting. CTN can help you organise your thoughts.
- **be ready to listen to ideas and suggestions.** The people who attend the first meeting will have their own ideas about what they want from it, and how it should function and move forward. As soon as the group gets together for the first time it will develop its own characteristics and grow in an organic way. You should allow the network to take on its own characteristics.
- **be in a position to collect names and addresses.** The details you gather from the first meeting will form the core of the network's mailing list. A piece of paper that goes around the meeting and allows individuals to fill in their details is the easiest way to do this. You could ask for their areas of interest and/or knowledge on this piece of paper, to help build an early picture of the reach and expertise the network could have.
- **look out for people who might be key players.** The network which forms will need keen, enthusiastic people to keep it running. Look out for these at the first meeting, and consider approaching them a few days after the meeting to discuss their willingness to take on roles. The kinds of functions the network might require include:
  - o membership list manager
  - o venue organisation
  - o newsletter writer/communicator
  - o meeting organiser
 These roles do not have to be fixed and assigned to a particular individual, but they do need to be performed, so finding someone prepared to take them on for the first few meetings will be very useful.

## Communication

Network members are not obliged to attend every meeting, but should be sent notices of every meeting and minutes or an update of each meeting (if appropriate), so that they know what is going on and what has happened at meetings they have missed. One person should be delegated the responsibility for this task, to ensure it is done regularly.

If possible dates, venues and topics should be set several meetings in advance, to give members plenty of notice for making space in their diaries.

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