

# F · O · S · T · E · R · I · N · G

ENGAGEMENT

AND LEADERSHIP



This Guide is part of our Network Know-How Guide series, a collection of six easy-to-use resources highlighting key network design and management principles for social impact network builders. Each Guide includes real-world examples of network principles in practice and clarifying questions to help you reflect on your network practice, focus your network strategy and develop an effective network plan.

The Network Know-How Guides were created by Network Impact, subject matter experts in the field of network theory. Network Impact created the guides for the Network Incubator, a program that ran from 2016 to 2018 for select members of ROI Community, a signature initiative of Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies.

The guides formed the basis for the Network Incubator curriculum and proved useful to the emerging networks that were part of the program. Schusterman Family Philanthropies worked with ROI Community and Network Impact to repurpose the guides as a publicly available resource to help developing and established network leaders further their work and scale their impact.

The case studies of emerging networks in the guides reflect organizations Network Impact worked with through the Network Incubator and in other settings. The networks featured are not necessarily grantees of Schusterman Family Philanthropies.

The **Network Know-How Guide: Getting Started** includes an overview of the key themes each Guide covers as well as a self-assessment to help you determine which Network Know-How Guides will be most relevant for you and your network.

[Download all of the Network Know-How Guides here.](#)

This **Fostering Engagement and Leadership Guide** addresses three common questions from network builders:

- **How can we encourage** member participation?
- **What strategies can we use** to build leadership and clarify roles?
- **How should we approach** decision-making in the network?

**Fostering Engagement and Leadership** includes the following sections:

**5** People Power: Ways to Encourage Member Engagement

**13** Network Mindset: Cultivating Broad-Based Leadership

**17** Network Governance: Determining How the Network Will Decide

**20** Additional Resources on Fostering Engagement and Leadership

# Fostering Engagement and Leadership

Engaging members—and keeping them engaged—is vital to building a strong network.

As the network reaches a critical mass of members, natural leaders emerge, and the network’s internal structure becomes more complex. At this point, setting up a plan for network decision-making—or network governance—becomes necessary.



## Network Snapshot

With an increasing number of alumni, the team at Retreatology, a network focused on the art of Jewish retreat-making, wanted to keep new Retreatologists engaged after their initial training. They decided to connect network members to each other more intentionally and encourage alumni to regularly share what they were learning from each other to foster participation.

*Anna Kernus of the network team explained, “Valuable responses, of course, can come from staff, but it’s a lot more interesting to have [insights] come from someone on the ground who’s actually done it before.”*



# P·E·O·P·L·E P·O·W·E·R:

## WAYS TO ENCOURAGE MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Networks thrive when members are actively engaged—building relationships, sharing insights, developing solutions or working on projects to achieve a common goal. When members don't show up or take responsibility, it drains the network's energy and undermines morale.

The following pages provide five proven techniques to help you create an environment that encourages people to get involved in your network.

## 1 Give them options.

Creating many ways to engage in the network helps members with different interests or agendas carve their own space in the network.

### **In Practice: Maximizing Opportunities to Foster Engagement in Lawrence, Massachusetts**

Lawrence CommunityWorks (LCW) engages members in actions designed to move their families and the city forward. To encourage involvement, LCW has an “open architecture” that allows anyone who lives or works in Lawrence to engage in different network activities from accessing financial education or participating in a homeownership program to contributing to playground development for the city’s youth. Engagement doesn’t

require members to adopt a particular set of ideas or values. “There’s something for everybody,” organizers note. “What matters is that there are a lot of different doors. Once you get in, you can look around and see other things you can participate in, and you can get the culture. People who will come in through one kind of door wouldn’t typically come in through another.”

## 2 Demonstrate transparency and open communication.

A network culture built on transparency creates trust, while openly sharing information and ideas encourages creativity and helps members develop solutions to reach common goals.

### **In Practice: Growing the Story of Stuff Network Through Openness and Engagement**

The Story of Stuff (SOS) is a network of over 1 million people dedicated to creating a more healthy and just world by changing wasteful production and consumption patterns. Founder Annie Leonard understood that what started as an overwhelming response to her 2007 documentary film about “stuff” could be adapted to settings well beyond those she had originally imagined. Today, SOS network members’ interests and needs inform the network’s campaigns from the local to the global level. Leonard describes the value of openness this way: “In networks, power and decision-making propagates outwards rather than being consolidated at the center. The [SOS] network accelerated learning by sharing information freely and welcoming input.”

Transparency doesn’t have to be an overwhelming task. You can be transparent in small, simple ways such as posting notes from all network meetings and events in a central, accessible hub and communicating clearly about how the network makes decisions.

### 3 Encourage collaboration in big and small ways.

A network functions best when members are working, learning and growing together, so all of your network's activities should focus on creating these conditions.

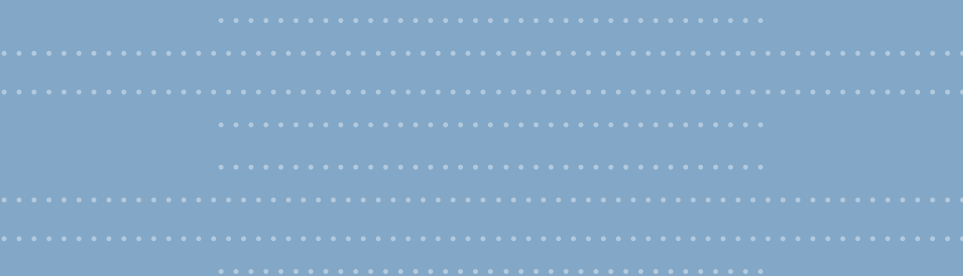
Network weaving expert June Holley recommends that networks embrace a “no one works alone” guiding principle: When someone has an idea they want to pursue, connect the person to others who might want to join the effort. Finding a mentor or a “buddy” can help new members connect with more experienced counterparts, maintaining the network's culture. Retreatology, for example, developed a mentoring initiative to support new Retreatologists, passing on lessons and guidance from seasoned members to inexperienced members planning their first retreat.

### **In Practice: Maximizing Connections to Drive Collective Action in the USDN Network**

Network coordinators are often well positioned to identify ways that members might collaborate. The Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN) coordinating staff noticed in an online network forum that several members had questions about solar energy programs and several others had answers. Staff emailed these members to ask if they wanted to set up a call to discuss their solar initiatives. More than half quickly responded to schedule the call. These members came

together because of their shared interest in working together to promote solar energy programs.

Many networks including USDN also have formal ways to encourage collaboration such as innovation funds that provide small grants to members who work together on a project. Once piloted, innovation projects are a way to test more members' interest in a specific project.





#### 4 Keep plans flexible.

Because the ability to quickly adapt is one of the top advantages of a network approach, most networks make flexible or short-term plans—a year or two at most.

After studying more than 100 community-based collaboratives, The Bridgespan Group concluded that effective networks are “by nature adaptive—adjusting their approaches based on new information, changes in conditions and data on progress against goals.” For instance, the LCW team does not consider any of their programs or committees permanent. Instead, they annually align network plans with current member interests and priorities. LCW provides opportunities and stipends to members who take on leadership roles in their network with a policy of one term, usually one year, for all opportunities. As one team member observed, “The idea is to have opportunities that members can cycle through and that can change with changing demand.” Similarly, USDN makes plans one year at a time based on member input. Members identify their priorities for the network every year at an annual meeting. Existing working group projects only continue if they have ongoing support with people willing to lead the work.

Being flexible also means responding to new opportunities as they arise. When long-time, trusted members came to Retreatology with new ideas built on their past retreat experience, staff saw a unique opportunity. And when several of these ideas did not fit in with their current program criteria, they secured funding for “concept grants” to support these creative initiatives.

## 5 Identify barriers to engagement.

While it's important to create new ways to participate in the network, it's equally important to identify potential barriers to engagement. The more you understand members' activities and interactions, the easier you can adjust your strategy to include those who are not engaged. Thinking intentionally about who is *not* participating can uncover obstacles or accessibility challenges preventing engagement, including social and cultural barriers.

It's essential to "meet people where they are," keeping communication open while showcasing opportunities that a member might explore in the future under the right circumstances.

### **In Practice: Keeping Communication Open During Changes in Engagement Levels**

One network focused on issues related to conflict resolution has a policy that excludes members who are inactive for an extended period from roles in the deliberative body of the network: No stigma is attached to this role change, and when members can restart their activities, the network reactivates them in the deliberative body of the network.

Finally, examine participation from all angles. Consider how you plan your in-person retreats and gatherings:

- **Do you design** your events to promote participation?
- **Are there ample opportunities** for everyone to participate in ways other than passively listening to panelists and speakers?

Network members often take on specialized roles to encourage healthy network practices. You can learn more about these roles in the book, *Connecting to Change the World*.

COMMON NETWORK ROLES	
<b>NETWORK WEAVER</b>	A person who takes responsibility for connecting members to maximize value for each other and the network. Weavers cultivate the “give and take” in a network and promote transparency and trust.
<b>NETWORK COORDINATOR</b>	A person who supports network activities from basic logistics to high-level network planning and management. Titles for this role vary but can also include Network Manager, Community Manager or Engagement Director.



## 1 Reflection Activity

How are people engaging in your network? What are the different ways people can get involved in your network?

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How does your network encourage and facilitate mutual learning and information sharing among members?

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How does your network promote experimentation and collaboration (members working together)?

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How are you encouraging members who are less engaged to get more involved?  
How does your network promote accessibility/inclusiveness to minimize barriers to engagement?

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# N·E·T·W·O·R·K M·I·N·D·S·E·T

CULTIVATING BROAD-BASED  
LEADERSHIP

A small group typically makes decisions in traditional organization leadership settings. But in a network setting, leadership is broad-based and decentralized.

This way of leading ensures that diverse ideas and perspectives from across the network are considered.

It takes a special mindset to work in this way. It’s a mindset that prioritizes openness, relationship-building and shared control. The chart below adapted from June Holley’s *Network Weaver Handbook* compares organizational and network leadership qualities.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP	NETWORK LEADERSHIP
Position, authority	Role, behavior
Few leaders	Everyone is a leader*
Leader broadcasts	Leader engages
Leader tells what to do	Many people initiate
Small group in the know	Openness and transparency
Directive	Emergent
Top down	Bottom up
Leader ensures tasks are completed	Leader helps identify breakthroughs
Individual	Small, collaborative group
Planning	Innovation and experimentation
Evaluation	Reflection

\*In this context, “everyone is a leader” means everyone is a potential leader.

## Building a Path for Leadership

The foundation of a resilient network is establishing a leadership pipeline for members to assume responsibility for moving the network forward. Creating this pipeline typically involves identifying leaders in your network who already have a network mindset or helping emerging leaders take on new roles.

### In Practice: Cultivating a Spectrum of Leadership Roles

Network Impact worked with a network focused on issues related to conflict resolution. This network designs roles and structures that support a flat, decentralized network where all members have an equal voice. The network divides members in the field into regional teams that operate autonomously while adhering to the network's collective principles and strategy. Members can choose to be involved in different "professional service teams" that coordinate and support the regions in various fields such as logistics or government engagement. Each professional service team has a lead coordinator, and these coordinators meet regularly as a Coordinator's Forum. The network also created a team which serves as the network's "think tank" and consists of diverse members from across regions and professional service teams. When a new member joins, the network runs orientation sessions to introduce its decision-making processes and the movement's principles and strategies. Then by creating multiple pathways for engagement and responsibility, the network encourages members to match their contribution with their individual skills and passions to lead.

You can also build connections and create leadership opportunities by forming "working groups" that focus on specific network activities or goals. Narrowly focused networks generally have fewer working groups, whereas broad-based networks can have many. For example, one network Network Impact works with has three "action teams" for their three stated network priorities; another network has 15 to 30 working groups a year based on members' expressed interests. In both situations, each working group has a "champion" who organizes group activities, while other members join and participate in a more fluid manner.







# N·E·T·W·O·R·K G·O·V·E·R·N·A·N·C·E

## DETERMINING HOW THE NETWORK WILL DECIDE

No matter how closely members identify with a network's purpose, implementing a vision that a founder established is different from guiding the network as part of a peer group. In most healthy networks, members play a leading role in setting the network's direction, including defining the network's goals, operating principles and membership criteria, as well as determining how to fund the network and use network resources.

# The process networks use to decide what they will do and how they will do it is called network governance.

**If you are just getting started, remember that a simple governance structure is best.**

Devoting a lot of time and energy to governance design discussions can outweigh the initial benefits of being part of a network. Most startup networks focus on the minimum decision-making structures needed to accomplish initial activities. Once the network has some momentum, you can create more elaborate and inclusive governance systems to help members do the work of the network and ensure that everyone has input.

## Building Internal Structures for Decision-Making

LCW network members regularly elect representatives to a steering group that sets a path for the network in line with members' interests. Likewise, WWP's decision-making processes ensure that decisions align with overall network goals while allowing regions and service teams to make operational decisions about their own activities. Decision-making in WWP is also spread among governing bodies. The WWP Steering Committee makes decisions related to financial management, commitments and contracts, services and product orders, and other topics, while the larger Hundred Team shapes the network's strategic plan.

While some networks have more informal governance structures, most have committees composed of members who monitor the network's health and sustainability.

USDN has a 10-member Planning Committee (about 10 percent of membership) that acts as the informal governing body. A group of members volunteers to serve, and the committee also regularly selects two members to replace existing sitting committee members. This arrangement preserves strong institutional memory while also including fresh perspectives. You can learn more about how these governing bodies make decisions in *Connecting to Change the World*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On pages 65–68.





ADDITIONAL  
RESOURCES

ON FOSTERING ENGAGEMENT  
AND LEADERSHIP

## Featured Networks in This Guide

### Retreatology Network

Alumni of the leadership development program that trains young adults to effectively craft transformative Jewish learning retreats for their communities. Retreatologists exchange information, mentor and provide support to each other as they plan and lead innovative, engaging, exciting retreats for peers to connect with their own Jewish identities, their friends and their wider communities.

[www.moishehouse.org/retreatology](http://www.moishehouse.org/retreatology)

### Lawrence CommunityWorks (LCW)

A community network in the city of Lawrence, Massachusetts, that engages members in actions designed to move their families and the city forward. LCW has a membership of thousands of Lawrence families, an energetic board and professional staff and has generated over \$70 million in neighborhood investments. [www.lawrencecommunityworks.org/site](http://www.lawrencecommunityworks.org/site)

### The Story of Stuff

A global, online community of over 1 million Changemakers, including parents, community leaders, teachers and students, people of faith, entrepreneurs, scientists and others interested in creating a more healthy and just world.

[www.storyofstuff.org/about](http://www.storyofstuff.org/about)

### Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN)

A network of local government professionals across the United States and Canada who exchange information, collaborate to enhance their practice and work together to advance the field of urban sustainability. [www.usdn.org/index.html](http://www.usdn.org/index.html)

## Further Reading

*Needle-Moving Community Collaboratives: A Promising Approach to Addressing America's Biggest Challenges*

Willa Seldon, The Bridgespan Group

*An Introduction to Network Weaving*

June Holley

*Network Weaver Handbook*

June Holley

"Don't Talk to Me about 'Driving' Social Change"

John Kania, Collective Impact Forum

"Leadership & Networks"

Leadership Learning Community

"Successfully Transitioning Your Organization to a Network Mindset"

Leadership Learning Community Webinar featuring Beth Tener & Carole Marton

"Leadership as Network Weaving"

Curtis Ogden, Interaction Institute for Social Change

*Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact*

Peter Plastrik, Madeleine Taylor, John Cleveland

"Living in the World of Both/And"

Adene Sacks & Heather McLeod Grant, Stanford Social Innovation Review

"The Dawn of System Leadership"

Peter Senge, Hal Hamilton, & John Kania, Stanford Social Innovation Review

*New Network Leader*

Jane Wei-Skillern



Network Impact conducts research, builds tools and provides advice to change agents who are building and using networks for increased impact. Over the last decade, Network Impact has developed frameworks and tools to monitor a network's development so that network members, organizers and supporters can be more deliberate in their efforts to support effective network practice. Find more information and resources at [www.NetworkImpact.org](http://www.NetworkImpact.org).

## Acknowledgments



Thanks to the network builders that have shared their experiences, questions and lessons.



CHARLES AND LYNN  
**SCHUSTERMAN**  
FAMILY PHILANTHROPIES



Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies strives for a future in which the United States and Israel live up to their highest ideals and achieve more just and inclusive societies. We work to advance racial, gender and economic equity in the U.S., as well as to foster a more joyful and diverse Jewish community. In Israel, we work toward a secure homeland for the Jewish people, a thriving democracy and an inclusive society that cares for its most vulnerable. We aim to drive and support long-term systemic change through investments in leaders, organizations and U.S. public policy. [www.schusterman.org](http://www.schusterman.org)