

C · L · A · R · I · F · Y · I · N · G

P · U · R · P · O · S · E

AND VALUE



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 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.

Network Know-How Orientation

The **Network Know-How Guide: Getting Started** includes a self-assessment to help you determine which Network Know-How Guides will help your network evolve. The Getting Started Guide also has an overview of the key themes each Guide covers and a glossary of important terms.

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

This Clarifying Purpose and Value Guide addresses two common questions from network builders:

- **How can we refine** the network's purpose and value to get member buy-in?
- **How can we create** a plan that meets the expectations of members who have different priorities?

Clarifying Purpose and Value includes the following sections:

5 Realizing a Network's Purpose

8 Getting to a Shared Purpose

10 Developing Value Propositions

15 Clarifying Value Propositions

22 Monitoring Value Propositions and Value Delivery

25 Additional Resources on Network Purpose and Value

Clarifying a Network's Purpose and Value

You likely decided to build a network because you saw a need in the world or your community that only a network made up of many people could address.

To achieve your goals, you need to refine your vision to reflect network members' priorities.



Network Snapshot

In the early stages of DoubleYou, a network dedicated to creating a world that supports female leadership, Narkis Alon and partner Sarah Reifschneider needed a way to tap into their members' wisdom to ensure that the network could deliver value to both individuals and the network as a whole.

They held a series of retreats to explore what practices and activities would keep women engaged. The retreats helped DoubleYou better align its plans with its members' interests. Narkis reflected, *"In the beginning, the dynamic was that it was very much like something we were leading. We have learned to lead as shepherds: to give the lead to community members and involve them in network direction-setting; otherwise, we would burn out, and we wouldn't have the impact we have."*



R·E·A·L·I·Z·I·N·G A N·E·T·W·O·R·K·'·S P·U·R·P·O·S·E

Agreeing on a shared purpose is one of the most important steps in building a *generative social impact network*. Network builders often start by translating their passion for creating a network into a clear, compelling statement of the network's potential purpose. Outlining specific intentions for your network helps clarify your thinking about its reasons for being.

To clarify your network's purpose, you'll need to answer three questions about why working together is advantageous

1 What is the problem or opportunity that the network will address?

2 What type of collaborative activities could the network undertake?

3 Who should join the network?

Example Purpose Statements

Here are short statements of purpose from two networks that worked with Network Impact to answer the three previous questions:

The Urban Sustainability Directors Network's (USDN) purpose is to be an active and engaged network of North American city sustainability directors who exchange information, collaborate to enhance their practice and work together to advance the field of urban sustainability.

The Lawrence CommunityWorks (LCW) network connects community residents and stakeholders who want to build family and community assets, provide each other with mutual support, build leadership and civic engagement skills, and engage in collective action to transform and revitalize the physical, economic, and social landscape of Lawrence.

KEY TERM

GENERATIVE SOCIAL IMPACT NETWORK

A set of relationships maintained over time to activate as needed to reach a social goal. Members are deliberate about building, strengthening and sustaining ties so that they can activate these relationships repeatedly.



G·E·T·T·I·N·G T·O A S·H·A·R·E·D P·U·R·P·O·S·E

To begin the process of clarifying your network's purpose, it's helpful for one or more partners, or a core group of potential members, to get together to outline the network's value propositions (VPs) or the benefits that will attract members to participate in the network. Through this collaboration, your trusted peers can help you frame your thoughts about your network. These early partners can also serve as key allies when you start spreading the word to others.

In these initial conversations, you can ask a few questions such as

What value do you think this network could generate for you and others?

What might members of the network accomplish together?

Consider Your Full Spectrum of Membership

You can also work with a smaller group to develop a handful of archetypes or member profiles that represent the different types of network members who are currently involved and those you want to recruit. When discussing potential members, consider the types of diversity that would enrich the network and what members would need to share in common. With these member profiles in mind, you can then talk through network membership benefits for each type and what potential value each profile could generate for the network.

Change Is Par for the Course

Be prepared for the network's purpose and value propositions to change over time as members get to know each other and realize where the network's full potential lies. It's OK for a network founder to experiment with different collaboration activities with prospective members and use these experiences as material for group conversations about the network's path moving forward.

Remember that, in many networks, members' value propositions will continue to evolve.

Network members may initially say their top reason for participating is one thing, for example, knowledge exchange and peer learning. However, as the network matures, reasons for participating might change; for instance, members may want to engage in greater collaborative action. It is common for networks to periodically revisit and reassess what increases member participation and even occasionally reconsider the network's reason for being.

KEY TERM

NETWORK VALUE PROPOSITIONS (VPS):

The benefits members seek from taking part in a network.



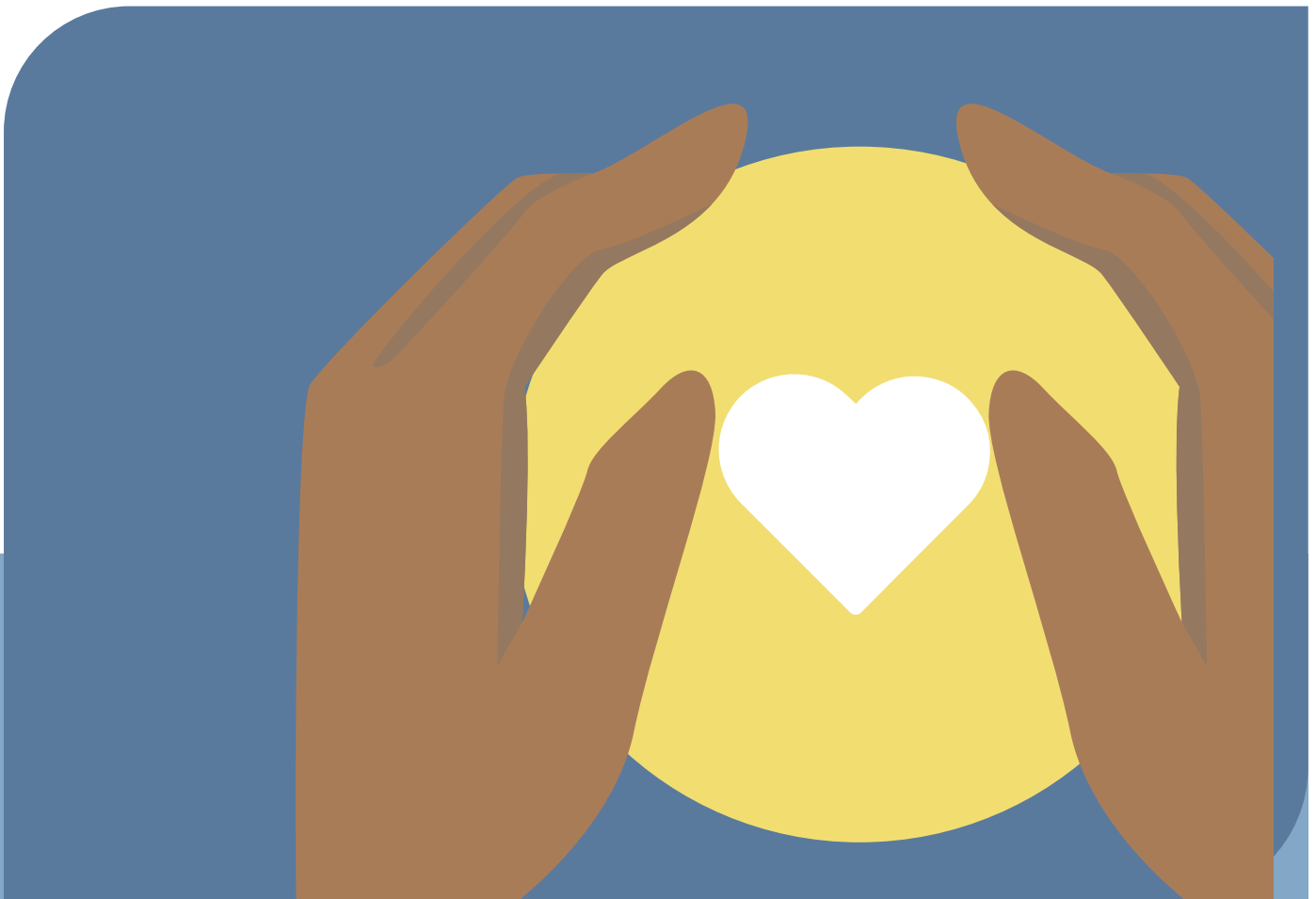
D·E·V·E·L·O·P·I·N·G V·A·L·U·E P·R·O·P·O·S·I·T·I·O·N·S

As a network builder, you know that one thing drives a network's success more than anything else: value creation for members. To be successful, you must organize the network to deliver value to your *members*—not just the network's funders, founders or coordinators.

Keep in mind that value propositions can be tricky. A member might embrace more than one proposition, other members may adopt different propositions and what members care about might change over time. Given this complexity and dynamism, it's vital to understand the primary reasons your members are involved and monitor these over time.

Individual vs. Collective Value Propositions

Most people join a network thinking it will benefit them in some way. However, they may not have considered the larger advantage of working with others to achieve a common goal. At this stage, they have an individual value proposition but not a collective one. The collective value proposition is the overarching benefit that all network members seek to produce for each other or external stakeholders. For example, USDN members create value for each other by sharing their knowledge, connections, skills and resources. These exchanges enhance their individual work and careers (individual VP) and their overall field of expertise also benefits (collective VP).



**“If there’s no value, people will start to exit.
It’s a self-regulating system.”**

– BILL TRAYNOR, LONGTIME NETWORK BUILDER, *LAWRENCE COMMUNITYWORKS*

Identifying a Network's Value Propositions

Understanding the VPs that motivate members' participation at any given time doesn't need to be complicated. Here's how one network did it: After successfully expanding a peer-supported community for new mothers who have had a perinatal mood or anxiety disorder (PMAD) from a blog to an online community of tens of thousands, its founder concluded that she could no longer keep up with her community's growing needs. After exploring various organizational structures, including franchise and chapter models, she decided that a network approach was the most promising way for the community to achieve its goals and support the unique, peer-to-peer element at the heart of its success. To clarify the top value propositions for the network, the network's founder and her team conducted interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders. These discussions generated numerous VPs, including:

- **being part of a community/ being connected to others** who have had a PMAD (a community of those who have experienced recovery)
- **having opportunities for training** to make me a better advocate or peer supporter
- **having opportunities to educate and raise awareness** of maternal mental illness in my community
- **having opportunities to work with others** to advocate for those who have experienced maternal mental illness
- **giving back** and supporting other moms through their journey recovering from maternal mental illness
- **participating in events** with other moms who have experienced PMAD (e.g., fundraiser walk)
- **accessing new projects, programs and tools** the network created
- **influencing** public policy





C·L·A·R·I·F·Y·I·N·G V·A·L·U·E P·R·O·P·O·S·I·T·I·O·N·S:

DESIGNING A SURVEY TO EXPLORE MEMBER VALUE PROPOSITIONS

After identifying a purpose and a list of network value propositions based on input from a core group of members or stakeholders, you need to determine if the rest of your network shares your perspective. We have found that surveys are an efficient way to collect VP-related information from a variety of members. Surveying also serves as a communications tool to generate reflections and reinforce network goals and expectations. Often, taking part in a VP survey motivates members to consider different ways of engaging with the network. Additionally, debriefing survey results with members can encourage productive discussions about shared priorities and next steps.



In Practice

Moving From Interviews to Surveys to Explore Support for Different VPs Across a Network Focused on Postpartum Mental Health

Based on the results of interviews and focus groups with an initial sample of members of a network dedicated to people facing postpartum depression, the network's founder and her team designed and distributed an online survey to about 600 of the network's most active members to find out what VPs resonated most. Survey results showed that peer support and educational activities both online and in local communities were members' top priorities. This discovery informed the network organizers' plans and fundraising strategies to address members' needs.

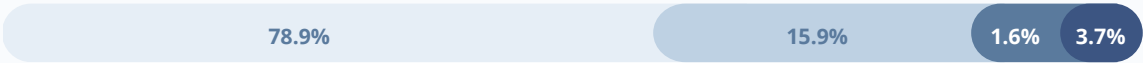


For example, here are two questions about VPs from their survey.

WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN REASONS FOR VOLUNTEERING WITH THIS NETWORK? (TOP 3 RESPONSES)

Very Important Important Not Very Important Not Applicable

Giving back and supporting other moms through their journey recovering from maternal mental illness



Opportunities to educate and raise awareness of maternal mental illness in my community

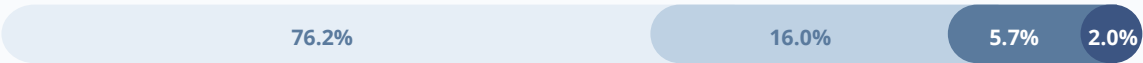


Opportunities to work with others to advocate for those who have experienced maternal mental illness



WHY WOULD YOU STAY INVOLVED IN THE NETWORK? (TOP 3 RESPONSES)

Giving back to help others because I once suffered



Supporting other moms through their journey recovering from perinatal mood and anxiety disorders



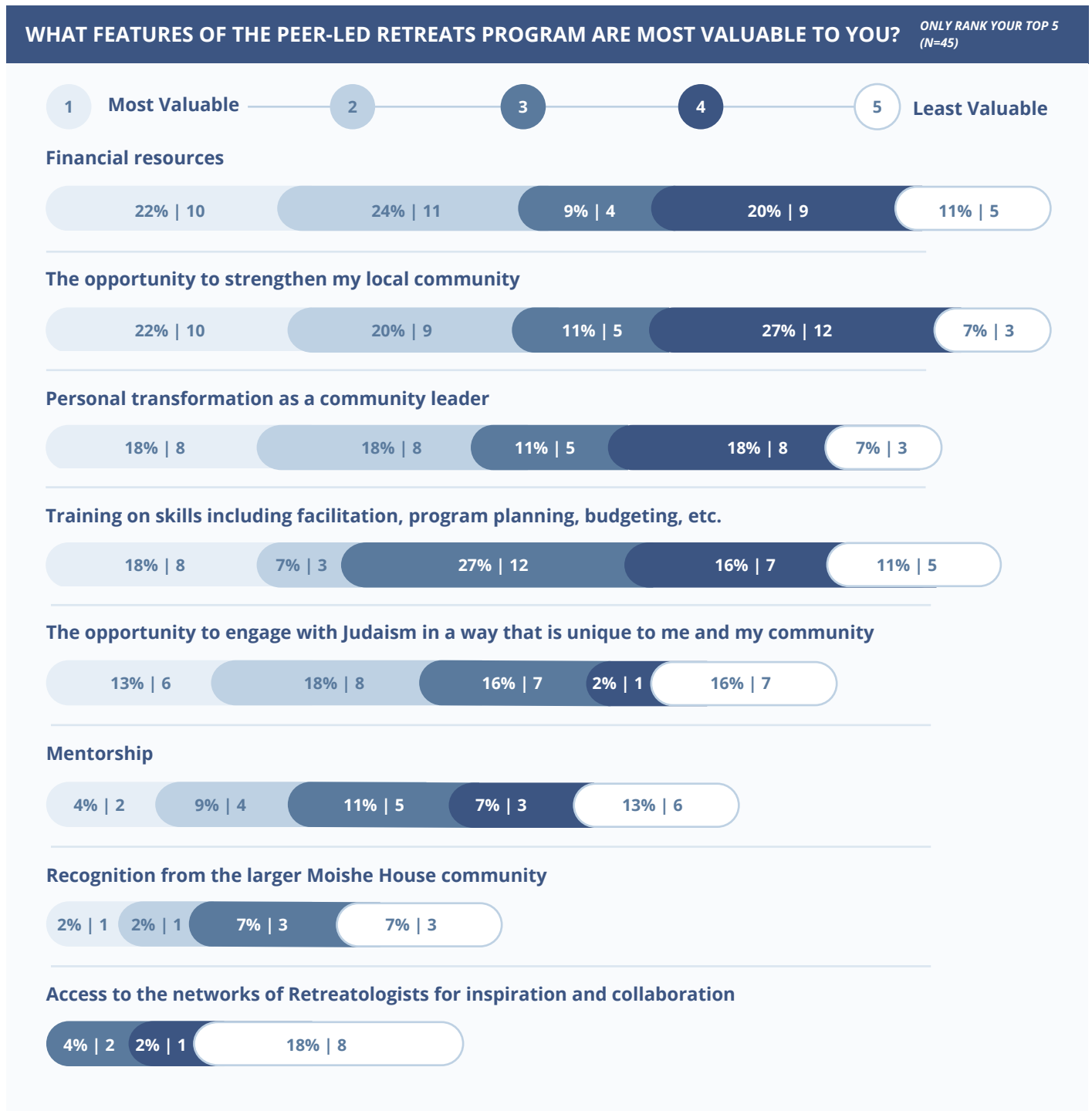
Getting opportunities and resources from Postpartum Progress that help me raise awareness so other moms and families learn about Postpartum Mood and Anxiety Disorders.



In Practice: Connecting Value to Impact for Members of Retreatology Network

Anna Kernus, the former Director of the Retreatology network, developed a survey for members about what features of the program they value the most. The results confirmed that participation in peer-led retreat programs contributes to the development of leadership and the strengthening of local communities—and these points of value were what most interested members in the network. Anna explained: “Being able to see that their personal interests and passions could be connected to their religion was something that really motivated people to keep seeking out more learning opportunities.”

Excerpt From the Retreatology Survey Results



HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE WITH EACH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS IN RELATION TO YOUR EXPERIENCE IN THE PEER-LED RETREATS PROGRAM?

● Strongly Agree
● Agree
● Neutral
● Disagree

Participating in Retreatology and hosting a Peer-Led Retreat has led me to host or attend other Moishe House or MHWOW programs. (n=42)



I benefit from the connections I made at Retreatology. (n=41)



Attending Retreatology and hosting a Peer-Led Retreat has led me to seek out other Jewish learning opportunities. (n=45)



I see a path for me to grow and change roles within the Peer-Led Retreat program (i.e. host a retreat, become an educator at Retreatology) (n=45)



I view hosting a Peer-Led Retreat as an opportunity for me to grow professionally. (n=45)



I benefit from the connections I made at my Peer-Led Retreat. (n=43)



I understand the purpose of Retreatology and the Peer-Led Retreats. (n=45)



I view hosting a Peer-Led Retreat as an opportunity for me to grow as a community leader. (n=45)



I feel that I made a positive impact on my community by hosting a Peer-Led Retreat. (n=45)



Top Tip

When and Whom Should I Survey?

Members who have limited experience with your network or who don't have current knowledge of its goals and operations—either because they are new to the network or because they aren't actively participating—are generally not good candidates for a VP survey. In our experience, if you send surveys to every current or potential member, regardless of their level of involvement or last date of interaction, survey results will be less useful as an indicator of your network's core VPs. In addition, you should aim for a high response rate (ideally, more than 50%), so, rather than sending the survey to more respondents, focus on getting responses from members who are invested in the network and its success.

For existing communities that want to take a generative network approach, you should survey core stakeholders who would be interested in organizing a member-driven network.

3 Reflection Activity: Network Readiness

How ready is your network to respond to a survey? Circle the number on the 7-point scale that best describes where your network is now.



A score of 1–3 means that members may not have had enough experience to answer questions about how the network creates value, so now might not be the right time to conduct a survey.

A score of 4–7 means that you know who the main stakeholders or groups are that you should survey about network VPs.

If you have already surveyed members for other reasons, what were your criteria for selecting survey respondents?



M·O·N·I·T·O·R·I·N·G V·A·L·U·E P·R·O·P·O·S·I·T·I·O·N·S A·N·D V·A·L·U·E D·E·L·I·V·E·R·Y

Once you know what benefits members seek from their participation, you can organize your network to provide these benefits, keeping in mind that members' VPs may evolve over time. Monitoring members' VPs, as well as your network's capacity to deliver on these VPs, is an essential step in improving your network's performance.

In Practice

Assessing Value Propositions Over Time for The Funders' Network (TFN)

Over time, TFN members have decentralized network activities and functions, evolving toward a generative social network model and away from a traditional affinity group or professional association model. TFN sends an annual survey to members to guide planning for the following year. The survey asks members to rank the five most important value propositions for their continued participation. By monitoring VPs in this way, TFN members decide if networkwide priorities should change and then direct resources accordingly. TFN also asks members to score how well the network is delivering on or living up to its top VPs. TFN then uses this information to decide if the network generates adequate benefits to members in the areas they care most about. The following are two questions from TFN's survey:

1 Participating in the Funders' Network creates different kinds of value for members. Please read all of the value proposition statements below, then rank the importance of each value proposition for your continuing participation in TFN.

Please choose #1 for the most important value proposition for you, #2 for the second most important value proposition, etc. Make sure you rank 7 in all.

- Network and cultivate relationships with other funders
- Stay informed and connected to learning opportunities
- Understand the interconnectedness of issues
- Identify and exchange best practices and tools
- Participate in working groups and collaboratives that foster learning and action
- Develop/join collaborative funding projects
- Advance civic engagement and inclusiveness in my work
- Other

2 Please score how well the Funders' Network is doing in delivering on all of the value propositions.

(See list of VPs in question above.)

- Delivering very well for me
- Delivering for me, but could be improved
- I see opportunity is there, but am not using it right now
- Not delivering for me at all
- Not applicable

4 Reflection Activity: Member Survey Results

Based on what you have read in this Guide, is surveying an appropriate next step for you? If so, what do you hope to learn from the survey results? If you have already surveyed members, what did you learn?



ADDITIONAL
RESOURCES
ON NETWORK
PURPOSE
AND VALUE



Featured Networks in This Guide

DoubleYou

A global community of ambitious, wild and helpful women, dedicated to turning on female leadership around the world. Members are executives, investors, politicians, artists, educators, and business and social entrepreneurs all committed to ignite female leadership.

More at www.doublingyou.life

The Funders' Network (TFN)

More than 150 funders in the U.S. and Canada who work to strengthen philanthropic leadership and expand funding that yields environmentally sustainable, socially equitable and economically prosperous communities. More at www.fundersnetwork.org

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. More at www.moishehouse.org/retreatology

Further Reading

“Network Building: It’s All about Value Propositions”

Peter Plastrik, Network Impact

“Lawrence Community Works: Using the Power of Networks to Restore a City”

Peter Plastrik and Madeleine Taylor, Barr Foundation

“Transformer: How to build a network to change a system”

Heather McLeod Grant, Monitor Institute





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.

Acknowledgments



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



CHARLES AND LYNN
SCHUSTERMAN
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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