

Putting It All Together: Managing the Network

Background Notes

It is important for members forming a network to take time to determine how they will manage the logistics of their efforts. For example, will their meetings be held on an ad hoc basis or scheduled regularly on a monthly or biweekly basis? While meetings can be time consuming and frustrating, they are necessary if the network is to meet its objectives. The challenge is to make meetings as productive and brief as possible by following basic rules such as using agendas, engaging a facilitator, taking minutes, drafting the next meeting's agenda, and evaluating the meeting at its conclusion.

Based on the skills and professional expertise of members, what will be the roles of individuals within the network? Will responsibilities be shared through task forces or committees? Should a steering committee be elected to oversee activities? Would a rotating coordination mechanism be appropriate? How will an identity be established for the network? What will the network be called? Are financial resources available for such things as letterhead and postage? If not, how will members stay in touch? Details such as these should be decided in the planning stage of a network. They can be revised later if necessary.

Keeping members informed and involved is another crucial consideration. Communication maintains trust and interest. It also minimizes misunderstandings and identifies points of disagreement before they become serious problems. Members should receive minutes from meetings, updates, press releases, and information on future events. Are funds and a mechanism in place for this communication?

By spending time at the outset to determine how their network should function, members can avoid numerous problems and misunderstandings later. Once management questions have been worked out, network members are free to concentrate efforts on achieving their advocacy objectives.

By the end of this unit, participants will be able to

- Identify the resources that members bring to the network as individuals and representatives of organizations;
- Identify operational issues of organization and structure;
- Develop a plan for solving these operational issues; and
- Describe norms of network member behavior.

3 hours and 50 minutes

OBJECTIVES

TIME

MATERIALS HANDOUTS

PREPARATION

ACTIVITY 1

- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Copies of handouts
 - I.6.1 Background Notes
 - I.6.2 Organizational/Member Resources Inventory
 - I.6.3 Member Skills Inventory
 - I.6.4 Guidelines for Productive Meetings
 - I.6.5 Organizational Structures for Advocacy Networks

Read Background Notes in preparation for Activity 1.

Introduction to Managing the Network

Time: 5 minutes

Introduce Unit 6 by reviewing the objectives and making a brief presentation that includes the following major points:

- Up to this point, the participants have done considerable work to establish the beginnings of a network. They have
 - recruited network members who represent their own personal networks;
 - drafted a mission statement that describes the network’s reason for being;
 - devised a name (or suggested names) for the network that identifies its interests and identity; and
 - designed a logo (or suggested ideas) that creatively depicts what the network finds important.
- But sustaining a network demands more than mission, name, and identity—it takes organization, structure, systems, and resources.
- It is important for members to take the time and make decisions about such things as:
 - how to keep members informed;
 - when will meetings be held and who will decide the agenda;
 - what will be the roles and responsibilities of members;
 - what financial resources are required; and
 - are financial resources available?
- By spending time at the outset to decide how the network should function, members can avoid numerous problems and misunderstandings later on.
- When management issues are addressed, members are free to concentrate on achieving their advocacy objectives.
- The first activity in this unit involves network members in conducting an inventory of the skills and resources that members and their respective organizations bring to the network. The information will facilitate decision making about members’ roles and responsibilities and the activities to be implemented.

ACTIVITY 2

Resource Inventory

Time: 1 hour and 15 minutes

Individual Work (15 minutes)

1. Distribute the Organizational/Member Resources Inventory (Handout I.6.2) and the Member Skills Inventory (Handout I.6.3) to all participants to complete for themselves and their organizations.
2. Explain that the first form looks at resources available within the participant's own organization or offered by the participant her/himself. The second form looks at the skills of the participant only. If two or more participants belong to the same organization, they should work together to complete one Organizational/Member Resources Inventory.

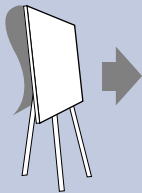
Group Analysis of Information (1 hour)

1. Ask one participant to compile all the information from the following discussion onto one inventory form. The form will be an important resource for the network.
2. In the large group, read each item on the Organizational/Member Resources Inventory and discuss:
 - Whether the resources are available and where—this information should be recorded on one inventory form;
 - If not available, whether the resource may be needed by the network;
 - If needed, how it can be obtained; and
 - Whether other supplies, equipment, or resources should be added to the list.
3. Summarize and compile the information from the Member Skills Inventory in the same way.
4. At the end of the activity, there will be a list of missing resources and skills and some ideas on how to secure the needed items. There will also be master lists of Organizational/Member Resources and Member Skills, both of which should go into a Network Resource Notebook.
5. Collect the individual inventories and photocopy them for the Network Resource Notebook.

Note to Facilitator: The network may want to make the acquisition of the needed resources and skills one of the activities that members must plan in upcoming meetings.



ACTIVITY 3



Network Organization and Structure

Time: 2 hours and 15 minutes

Brainstorming (15 minutes)

1. Refer to your introduction where you discussed several management decisions that must be made to help organize and structure the network's operations.
2. Ask the participants to brainstorm a list of issues that must be addressed if a network is to operate effectively and efficiently. Write their issues on the flipchart. This list should, at a minimum, include the following:

Issues of Organization and Structure for the Network

- √ Identification of organizations and individuals who can supply needed skills and resources
- √ Scheduling and conducting meetings
- √ Recruiting new members
- √ Communication—providing information to members
- √ Structure—who is in charge of coordinating, communicating, allocating tasks, etc.
- √ Strategic planning process
- √ Record-keeping responsibilities
- √ Financial responsibilities—budgeting, fundraising, accounting

Classification of Issues (15 minutes)

1. Most of the issues identified during the brainstorming exercise will fall into two major categories as follows:
 - **Network Organizational Structure.** Issues of structure include leadership roles; member responsibilities; setting meeting schedules; use of steering or management committees, task forces and/or subcommittees; membership dues/fees, etc.
 - **Network Communication.** Communication issues include systems for informing members of meetings and new developments, communicating with other groups/networks, establishing and maintaining record-keeping systems, etc.
2. Review the list on the newsprint and ask the group to classify each item as belonging to “Network Organizational Structure” or “Network Communication.” Using colored markers, write “S” (structure) or “C” (communication) next to each item depending on the group's classification.

Working Groups (1 hour)

1. Ask participants to self-select either “Structure” or “Communication” to work on in small groups. Depending on the number of participants interested in each topic, form working groups of no more than seven participants each.
2. Ask each group to review the issues listed for its topic to ensure uniform understanding of the issue, and to develop specific recommendations for how the network should address each issue. Ask each group to write its recommendations on newsprint. For example, the “structure” groups might suggest a specific organizational chart showing leadership and/or decision-making structures (examples from other networks are included in Handout I.6.5) or make recommendations for meeting schedules and meeting structure. The “communication” groups might recommend systems for communication within the network, types of data to collect, and record-keeping systems, etc.
3. After the small groups have worked for about 45 minutes, ask all of the “structure” groups to join together and all of the “communication” groups to join together to share and organize their recommendations, eliminate duplications, and decide how to present their recommendations to the full group. The groups do not need to reach consensus on their recommendations; they may simply present several suggestions to the full group.

Group Presentations and Discussion (45 minutes)

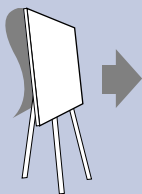
1. Ask the groups to present their recommendations in whatever format and manner they have chosen.
2. After each group’s presentation, facilitate a discussion with the entire group to try to reach agreement on some of the recommended guidelines for managing the network. Record the decisions on newsprint.
3. Similarly, help the group highlight outstanding issues that need to be resolved at some future date. Record these issues on newsprint. For example,

Network Agrees to:

- ✓ Meet formally at least 10 times a year
- ✓ Rotate meeting sites, facilitators, and note takers
- ✓ Develop bylaws
- ✓ Establish a steering committee and vote for committee members
- ✓ Set up a communication system

Network Needs to:

- ✓ Survey members for communication preferences
- ✓ Review skills inventory and design database
- ✓ Decide on subcommittee/task force structure
- ✓ Design member recruitment strategy
- ✓ Decide on fees/dues structure



Note to Facilitator: Participants should recognize that some decisions regarding network operations and management may be made at this time but that not all issues can be decided during the workshop—especially if some organization members are absent or data are unavailable. For this reason, the exercise should focus on recording decisions made by the participants, identifying issues not yet resolved, and making plans for how the network will address them. Suggest to the group that some of these issues can be placed on the agenda for the next meeting of the network.

ACTIVITY 4

Follow-Up Meeting

Time: 15 minutes

1. Review both lists from above and ask the participants to identify items that they would like to put on the agenda for their next network meeting. Highlight these items with colored markers. For example, a final decision on the network's name and logo, identification of specific committees, assigning priority to remaining issues, etc.
2. Ask participants to decide on a meeting date and site and solicit volunteers to draft the agenda and contact absent members.

SUMMARY

Management of a network is an ongoing, democratic process that requires input and involvement from as many members as possible. It is best to consider and agree on the main structure for the network at the outset of network formation. Members can then turn their attention to the work they want to accomplish, secure in the knowledge that they have a management plan in place to make the network operate as efficiently as possible. **Distribute handouts for Unit 6.**

MOVING AHEAD

Section I of this manual focused on internal considerations: forming a network, building communication and team skills, understanding the decision-making process, drafting a mission statement, and managing the network. Section II helps the network to begin looking outward. It is designed to assist participants in understanding the policy process and determining what advocacy opportunities exist within a particular political context.

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Organizational/Member Resources Inventory

Organizational/Member Resources												
	Computer	Printer	Scanner	Internet	Web Page	E-mail	Fax	Copier	Office Space	Meeting Room	Vehicle	Membership List

Organization/Member												
1												
2												
3												
4												
5												
6												
7												
8												
9												
10												
11												
12												
13												
14												
15												

Member Skills Inventory

Member Skills													
	Word Processing	Database Management	Training	Research	Financial Management	Legal/Regulatory Issues	Policy Analysis	Fundraising	Media	Public Speaking	Graphics and Design	Language:	Language:

Member Name												
1												
2												
3												
4												
5												
6												
7												
8												
9												
10												
11												
12												
13												
14												
15												

Guidelines for Productive Meetings*

The following general rules for conducting productive and orderly meetings have been tested time and time again in countless settings around the world.

Use an Agenda

Each meeting should have an agenda, preferably one drafted at the previous meeting and developed in detail by one or two members prior to the next meeting. If possible, it should be sent to members in advance. (If an agenda has not already been developed, the first 5-10 minutes of the meeting should be devoted to creating an agenda on a flipchart.)

Agendas should include the topics to be discussed and why, the presenters and time limits. Included too should be the item type and whether it requires a decision or is just an announcement.

Meetings should start with a review of the agenda, adding or deleting items depending on the sense of the group and modifying time estimates.

Engage a Facilitator

Each meeting should have a facilitator who is responsible for keeping the meeting focused and moving; intervening if the discussion fragments into multiple conversations; tactfully preventing anyone from dominating the meeting or being overlooked; and bringing discussions to a close. This role may be rotated among network members.

The facilitator should also notify the group when the time allotted for an agenda item has expired or is about to expire. Members must then decide either to continue the discussion at the expense of other agenda items or to postpone further discussion until another meeting.

Take Notes

At each meeting, someone should record key topics and the main points raised, decisions made (including who has agreed to do what and by when), and items that the group has agreed to address later. Members can use the notes to reconstruct discussions, remind themselves of decisions or actions to be taken, or see what happened at a meeting they missed. Rotate the minute-taking responsibility among members.

Draft Next Agenda

At the end of the meeting, draft an agenda for the next meeting.

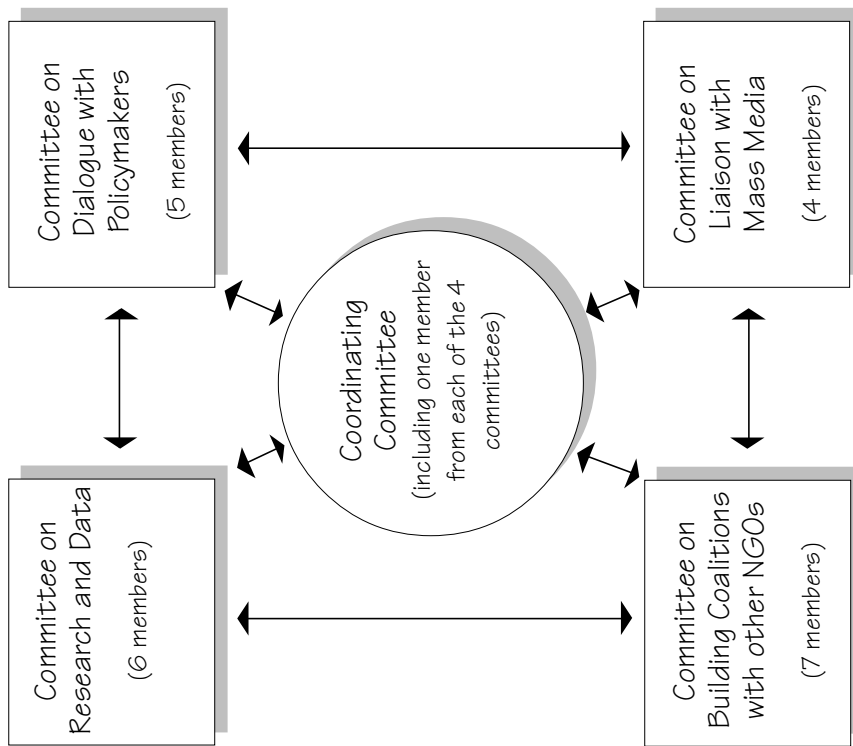
Evaluate the Meeting

Close by taking a few minutes to review and evaluate each meeting, even if agenda items go overtime. The evaluation should include decisions on what to do to improve future meetings and helpful feedback from the facilitator.

*Adapted from Peter R. Scholtes. 1998. *The Team Handbook: How to Use Teams to Improve Quality*. Madison, WI: Joiner Associates, Pp 4-6.

Organizational Structures for Advocacy Networks: Two Examples

The members of this network divided themselves into four committees or teams, according to individual expertise or interest. The committees are organized according to audience or function. The network developed a vision, mission statement, and action plan and each committee implements the action plan among its stakeholder group. The coordinating committee consists of four members, one leader from each sub-committee. The members of the coordinating committee rotate on a yearly basis.



In this network, members organized themselves into thematic teams according to the network's key areas of advocacy. Each "issue team" is responsible for doing its own data gathering, communication plan, and action plan. An elected chairperson represents each issue team on the coordinating committee. A single network coordinator was elected by the network to coordinate activities, facilitate communication flow, and organize monthly network meetings.

