

Membership Criteria & Benefits

There are several important criteria considerations when designing an innovation network from scratch. By carefully considering the questions in this document, innovation network designers can develop membership criteria that align with the network's purpose, foster collaboration, and create a diverse and impactful community of participants.

- **Purpose and Goals:** What is the core purpose and specific goals of the innovation network? What outcomes do you aim to achieve through collaboration and knowledge exchange?
- **Target Audience:** Who are the key stakeholders and potential participants that align with the network's purpose and goals? Identify the specific individuals, organizations, agencies, or institutions that can contribute to and benefit from the network.
- **Expertise and Diversity:** What diverse expertise and perspectives are needed to foster innovation and creative problem-solving within the network? Consider including participants from various backgrounds, disciplines, industries, and experiences to enrich the network's collective intelligence.
- **Network Size:** Determine the ideal size of the network. Too small, and there may be a lack of diversity and perspectives; too large, and coordination and engagement may become challenging.
- **Geographic Reach:** Consider the geographic reach of the network and whether local, regional, national, or international participation is essential for achieving the network's objectives.

Once an initial list of ideal participants has been drafted, consider how well these participants can contribute to collaboration.

- **Collaborative Potential:** Assess how well potential members can engage in collaborative efforts. Look for participants who are open to sharing knowledge, resources, and ideas and are willing to actively contribute to the network's initiatives.
- **Resource Contributions:** What resources can members bring to the network? Consider the financial, intellectual, and material resources that participants can offer to support the network's activities and if the participants brainstormed have the potential to bring in those resources, at least initially.
- **Commitment and Engagement:** Assess the level of commitment and engagement expected from network members, even if in different capacities or roles. Will they need to actively participate in regular meetings, events, or working groups? Knowing what you are expecting will make recruitment more clear and increase likelihood of ongoing participation.

After these prompts have been discussed, network designers will be better positioned to create membership criteria that attract members who are in service to the network's purpose and goals.

Offers and Benefits for Network Members

Once you have a clear understanding of who should or should not be part of your network, the next crucial step is to initiate outreach and recruitment efforts. To ensure that you are inviting and attracting the most suitable participants who can contribute to the network's purpose, it's essential to carefully evaluate the value that participation in the network will bring to prospective members. In general, a network wants to consider:

- **What benefits do you think would bring the most value for members?**
- **What benefits should be reserved for members?**
- **What benefits should be available to the public (members and non-members)?**
- **What additional benefits should be included?**

By tailoring the value propositions to the unique strengths and offerings of your network, you can attract the right individuals who align with your network's purpose and maximize the potential for impactful collaboration and success. Below, we have outlined several categories and examples of value that you can personalize according to what your network can uniquely offer.

- **Visibility and Recognition:** Illustrate how network membership can elevate the visibility and recognition of participants and their work.
 - Logo placement with active link on website, marketing and event materials
 - Press release templates to announce your membership in the coalition and support press coverage/publicity with funders, partners and customers
 - Recognition & credibility via use of branding on your company website and marketing materials
 - Promote your company via a link on website and via social media mentions/shares
- **Networking and Connections:** Illustrate the value of expanding professional networks through the network's diverse membership. Demonstrate how participants can forge valuable connections with like-minded individuals and organizations.
 - Networking and matchmaking events with members and broader community
 - Invitation to attend network annual meetings
 - Peer-to-peer networking and connections to multi-sector actors in the region

- Opportunities to establish new partnerships
- **Collaborative Opportunities:** Highlight the potential for collaboration and partnership within the network, emphasizing the chance to work together on shared goals and projects.
 - Access to collaborators to scope, prototype or scale key initiatives
 - Increase access to have inputs on and influence of operational and strategic decisions
 - Work with the network to identify and partner with other projects and partners to lower the “transaction costs” of developing projects on your own
 - Showcase organizational-level and network-wide opportunities, initiatives, and more at events in pursuit of new partnerships to advance project ideas
 - Increase opportunities to influence decisions of multi-sector actors
- **Knowledge Exchange and Access to Resources:** Showcase the resources available to network members, which may include funding opportunities, access to tools or technology, or support from other members. Showcase how members can benefit from gaining insights and expertise from others in the network.
 - Ability to openly share and access resources on shared virtual platforms
 - Access to trainings and tools that advance strategic priorities of the network
 - Access to trainings and tools that advance priorities of member organizations
 - Member specific learning, programs and events
 - Participate in programs and workshops
 - Benefit from peer-to-peer learning & knowledge exchange
- **Personal Growth and Development:** Communicate how participating in the network can contribute to personal and professional growth, providing new experiences and learning opportunities.
 - Access to network of actors and institutions for feedback and collaboration on proposed initiatives & projects
 - Enable collaboration without duplication of initiatives
 - Collaborative problem-solving sessions
- **Influence and Impact:** Highlight the chance to be part of a collective force that can drive meaningful change and create a significant impact in the field or industry by determining strategic direction of the network
 - Provide input on strategic priorities of the network
 - Make decisions on strategic priorities of the network
 - Apply for resources to advance solutions
 - Influence the mobilization of resources towards collective action
 - Participate as judges or evaluators in solution design review