

Network Membership: Structure

Network structure is well-defined, yet remarkably adaptable. June Holley, author and curator of *Network Weaver*, compares networks to a bamboo forest. While traditional organizations are akin to sturdy trees, impressive but limited in their resources, networks are more like bamboo forests. They're dispersed and close to the ground, but when one part gets cut down, resources flow to the damaged area for repair. In other words, networks are hyper-connected, resource-sharing, decentralized powerhouses with the potential to harness collective resources to drive long-term social change.

Network structures are unique to their purpose and composition - there's no one-size-fits-all approach. The allure lies in their flexibility and co-creation possibilities. Nonetheless, network practitioners have uncovered some best practices that advise on membership bodies, ensuring impact and success.

Functional Objectives of a Network

When creating the structure of your network, you want to consider how you can support members cultivating a stronger sense of trust to support meaningful collaboration. Broadly speaking, a network seeks to move people's experience of collaboration from a place of competition, coexistence, and I-way communications to one of active cooperation, coordination, and collaboration, in a shared effort to integrate efforts to identify, develop and scale innovations that address the network's core priorities. Each are described in more detail below.

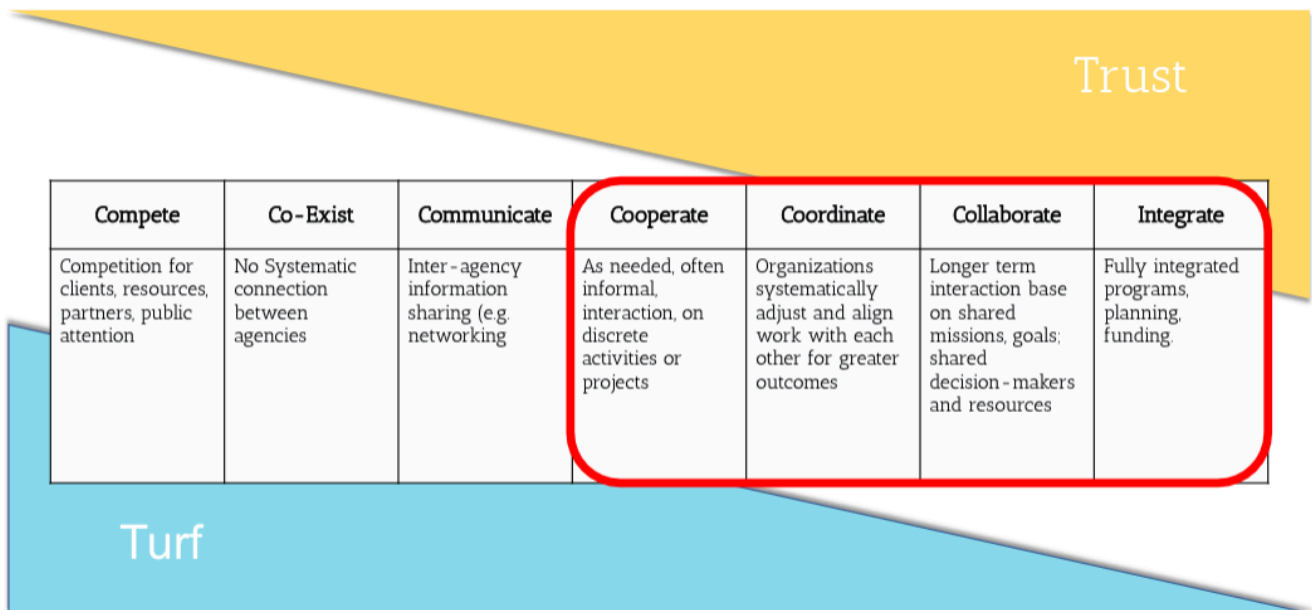


Image: adapted from the Collective Impact Forum¹

¹Turf, Trust, and Collaboration Spectrum: <https://collectiveimpactforum.org/blog/turf-trust-and-the-collaboration-spectrum/>

- Increase cooperation:
 - Bring together and connect diverse organizations so as to foster meaningful relationships
 - Use the communications platform(s) of the network to share information, knowledge, and resources.
 - Increase participation of multi-sector partners on shift teams to identify and advance solutions.
- Increase coordination
 - With an established network goal (vetted and refined with DT and confirmed by the network), confirm key changes, or “critical shifts” required to reach the goal that require multi-stakeholder involvement and collaboration to succeed.
- Increase collaboration to identify, develop and scale innovations needed to reach the shifts:
 - Use “critical shifts” to identify, co-create and advance solutions that require private and public partners to collectively prioritize, support, and activate resources, relationships, investment and implementation opportunities to enable support disaster risk reduction activities.
 - Support opportunities for knowledge sharing and learning across partners
- Increased integration across partners:
 - Co-design and -implement high impact solution concepts.
 - Leverage in-kind resources (skills, capacity, relationships) and financial resources to achieve success.
 - Create pathways for private sector investment (alongside public sector investments) to support and scale impactful solutions

Network Infrastructure and Membership Bodies²

Network roles assume a dynamic and adaptable nature. Achieving success often involves cultivating decentralized leadership and fostering shared decision-making; however, it's essential to recognize that this is not a rigid requirement. A well-functioning network is characterized by participants who are deeply interconnected and collaboratively engaged in pursuit of a shared mission or purpose. When it comes to determining leadership, assigning roles, and establishing governance structures, these endeavors often mark the network's initial significant undertakings. As such, the network's decision-making and leadership structure are largely self-determined and contingent upon the unique needs of the network.

² Adapted from Innovation Network Structure:
https://www.wearecocreative.com/_files/ugd/421acf_200e950bc0b64e0daffa8ec0f8e20c64.pdf

In the following section, you will find descriptions of common network membership bodies, which serve as vital components in many successful networks. These descriptions aim to provide valuable insights to help you chart the most appropriate course for your network's journey.

Backbone

Membership: agency with sufficient resources to staff a network and support infrastructure growth

Time commitment: ~.5 - 1.0 FTE to coordinate and manage (to start)

Description: Provide the day-to-day support to the network and its participants.

Functions:

- Set up and maintain shared documentation and file systems to support collaboration and transparency
- Identify appropriate measures and conduct evaluation
- Provide continuous communication to a range of stakeholders
- Work with network and design team members to integrate engagement opportunities
- Work closely with local leaders to maintain relevance, track shifting context, and engage leadership
- Support the selection and lead the onboarding of new participants
- Convene and coordinate the design team
- Support workgroup coordination as needed
- Convene and facilitate network meetings 2-4x/year

Jurisdiction:

- Collaborate with network and design team to set and act on strategic direction of the network
- Lead fund development effort and decision making within that context (in service to the network, including maintaining resources to support backbone function)

Design Team (aka, leadership team, network council, steering committee)

Membership: 8 people, participation is made in ~1/year commitments

Time commitment: 6-8 hours/month (~2 hours meeting time, ~2 hours material review, ~2 hours miscellaneous tasks to advance effort)

Description: Shepard and advance the network.

Functions:

- Draft coherence materials (initial scope, focus, goal, governance, and operating procedures) for network adoption; test and vet in preparation for network adoption
 - Once developed, hold network structure and intent

- Weave the network by acting as ambassadors and liaisons between leaders, project teams, and the full network, including being available to hear and consider ideas and concerns raised by participants
- Monitor shift team progress and their impact on broader network goals
- Determine and craft recommendations and proposal for the network to weigh in on and/or decide on
- Advise on network meeting design (especially meeting outcomes) in collaboration with backbone
- Alert the backbone and project team to potential obstacles and barriers and consider how to address them
- Foster breakthroughs and push speed, scale, and innovation of the network

Jurisdiction:

- Frames key questions for network to inform and decide on
- Shepherds and advances effort rather than decides the network development and strategy
- No formal authority over the rest of the network

Personalities we need:

- A weaver and someone who enjoys connecting
 - Experience with private sector – leverage their network
 - Experience with public sector – leverage their network
- An innovator and someone who sees possibilities so they can push the group
- A doer and implementer who knows how to get things done and has the energy to accomplish a lot - an achiever
- Subject matter expertise in disaster recovery, response, resilience and related sector specific topics

Project Teams (aka, initiative teams, work groups)

Membership: Led by participants, supported by backbone; 3-12 people / team

Time commitment: 3-6 hours / month; timeframes work within 3-6 months of action to allow for movement towards the purpose alongside updates and feedback from the network at convening intervals (3-6 months)

Description: Break down the complexity that the network is trying to address into short term, discrete tasks that can be deliberately planned and advanced

Functions:

- Contribute to defining the work groups critical shift and developing, refining and testing solutions

- Contribute to group analysis of what's happening in the current state and what changes would be most impactful and feasible
- Help test solutions and gather and integrate feedback from network members and broader system actors
- Projects should emerge from the group in order to ensure there are willing participants (sometimes over, or in tradeoff with best ideas).
- Work could include strong internal focus - setting up systems for participation, decision making, etc.
- Work can include the systems change and alignment necessary for the network to achieve its goal and purpose

Jurisdiction:

- Prioritize viable, feasible and desirable solutions to reach change targets
- Develop, test, and refine solutions to reach critical shift change targets
- Make needed implementation decisions to advance project ideas and solutions
- Report back to network on progress and to maintain relevance

Network Members

Membership: 50-100+ representing the range of stakeholder perspectives; all design team and workgroup team members are part of the network (though occasionally workgroups will draw in outside support from members that aren't part of the network already or elect not to be)

Time Commitment: Depending on level of engagement, participation can include monthly shift team meetings, attendance at bi-annual network convenings (1.5-2 days each) meetings, and/or participation in engagement and feedback opportunities to feed into the network's priorities

Description: Provides the intent, learning, analysis, priorities and initiatives to achieve powerful impact

Functions:

- Participate in convenings (2-4/year)
- Participate in 1-2 initiative teams (where there is interest, alignment)

Jurisdiction

- Provide the intent, learning, analysis, priorities and initiatives to achieve powerful impact