

Membership Guidelines

Document Purpose

This document is designed to help a network develop its membership guidelines. It can be used by emerging networks to understand what they expect of members, or by existing networks to clarify their member expectations.

It contains: Best Practice, Guidance, Worksheet Template, and an Appendix with examples.

Best Practices

Membership is essential to a successful network. Without invested members, a network cannot function. It is critical that clear parameters for membership are established during the development of the organization. Network builders must consider member eligibility, commitment expectations, benefits, and possible dues. Then, they must determine the best way to serve their specific network. Members need to know what is expected of them, and what they will gain by being involved. There are many different ways to structure membership within a network. The following section discusses these structures.

Guidance

Chapter 2 of [Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact](#)¹ states: “Whatever their purpose, generative social-impact networks have borders and here, too, there are design choices. The boundaries may be soft or hard, easy or impossible to penetrate. In an *open* network most anyone can become a member, the more the merrier. In a *closed* network membership is more tightly controlled and limited. Generative networks lean toward having a closed membership, often handpicked by other members, and keep themselves relatively small so members can develop strong generative relationships with each other. “

When it comes to designing a membership model, network builders should answer four basic questions:

1. Who is eligible to become a member, and what criteria should they meet?
2. What is the process for deciding who is a member and inviting participation?
3. How many members should there be?

¹ Plastrik, P., Taylor, M., & Cleveland, J. (2014). [Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact](#). Island Press.

4. What standards of participation should there be for members? Does it make sense to have membership dues or financial contribution requirements to gauge network investment and support network operations?

Worksheet Template

Eligibility (Factors to Consider)	
What characteristics do members share (for example: affiliations, job responsibilities, geographic location, past work, etc.)?	
What requirements must members meet (for example: participation, dues, etc.)?	
How do members join (for example: open group, or referral only)?	
Benefits (for Members)	
What will members gain from participation in the network (for example: peer-to-peer learning, information sharing, conferences, grant opportunities, etc.)?	
Financial Contributions	
Do members have enough network buy in to support requiring a financial contribution? How can you tell?	
How are these contributions structured (for example: size of affiliated organization, level of participation, in kind payment for annual meeting participation, etc.)?	
How are contributions collected (for example: annually, quarterly, etc.)?	
Expectations of Members	
What is required of members (for example: consider committee membership, advancement of network goals, and participation in activities, communication with group, etc.)?	

Appendix

The following are examples of membership documents that are currently being used by sustainability networks.

Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN)	
Join USDN	
USDN membership is open to U.S. and Canadian municipal sustainability directors who want to actively engage with and learn from their peers. Potential members must have proven sustainability practices to share and must commit to active participation in the network.	
There are two types of USDN memberships with differing opportunities and dues structures:	
CORE MEMBERSHIP	ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP
Core membership is open to city sustainability directors and includes activities solely for core members, including participation in the USDN Annual Meeting and opportunity to request Innovation Fund grants.	Associate membership is available to city and county sustainability directors.
REGIONAL NETWORKS	
Potential members are encouraged to join a regional network, if available.	
There are 8 regional networks affiliated with USDN through a Regional Network Coordinating Committee:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New England• Cascadia• Heartland• Western Adaptation Alliance• Southeast• Michigan• OKI: Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana• Green Cities California	
These regional networks, which involve USDN members as well as non-member participants, collaborate through the USDN Regional Network Coordinating Committee. Through the regional networks, USDN strives to create access to a peer network for all local government sustainability leaders in North America.	
Member Benefits	
USDN members report that access to the network enables them to work faster and more effectively. They find solutions to key challenges, get new ideas, and avoid replicating problems already faced by peers. Perhaps most importantly, members develop valuable relationships and create a sense of community while developing the professional field of practice.	
USDN members have access to an efficient, structured approach to information sharing and collaborative innovation, including:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rapid fire information sharing with 120 peers (weekly e-news, private intranet, and problem-solving sessions)• Ongoing user groups that inform program development• Collaborative projects through the USDN Innovation Fund• In-person peer exchanges and breakthrough group convenings• Development of new funding sources• Support for creating and growing regional sustainability director networks	

Heartland Network

Membership Rules

- Local government staff with responsibilities for sustainability in city and/or county jurisdictions in the central states area are eligible to participate in the Heartland Network
- The network has not actively recruited new members, but has been receptive to requests from local government sustainability staff who have asked to join us
- No specific target number (or limit) on members has been established
- Members are expected to participate in monthly conference calls (and volunteer to serve as note-takers & facilitators) and annual face-to-face meetings

Green Cities California

Membership Rules

- Sustainability or Climate Action Plan adopted or scheduled for completion by year's end
- Signatory to Conference of Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement
- Adopt GCC Sustainability Resolution within six months of membership (commit to paper and bottled water resolutions or directives)
- Pay dues