

Network Purpose and Vision Development

Document Purpose

This document is designed to help a network develop its purpose and vision. It can be used by emerging networks to chart a course, or by existing networks to reset their course.

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

Best Practice

A network needs to know why it exists. Establishing a set of shared purpose and vision statements provides direction for a new, emerging, or existing network. These statements must crystalize the end game, so potential and existing members and funders can buy in. Only then can members focus their collective efforts towards a common end. Developing and stating specific benefits members will realize through participation will further strengthen the network.

This purpose, also called value propositions, encourage members to focus on mutual interests - and to really invest in a sharing economy of give and get. Guiding statements help a network stay aligned with its original purpose, while implementing new programs and processes. Network purpose and vision statements are a best practice because they provide the necessary foundation on which the organization is then built. They are guideposts for the journey.

Guidance

Purpose and Vision

Chapter 2 of [Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact](#)¹ notes that at the beginning, network builders have to “translate their personal passion for creating a network into a clear statement of network purpose”. If you are a network builder, you understand that potential members have to find it compelling, too. Explain what the network will be about in such a way that others can see themselves taking part in it. Making your intentions clear serves to clarify your own thinking about why you are initiating the network in the first place. A network statement of purpose should answer three questions:

- Who is the network for?
- What problem is it working on?
- What type of activities will the network do?

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

Value Proposition

[The Guidebook for Building Regional Networks 2.0](#)² notes that a value proposition of a network is the perceived and real benefits that attract participation. The collective value proposition of a network is a benefit that is desired by network members. The network uses this value proposition as a roadmap. It is what makes a network stronger than its members can be alone, and it reflects the value created by the individual network members.

Worksheet Template

1. **Network Vision:** *What founding principle drives the network?*

2. **Network Purpose:** *1) Who is the network for? 2) What generative problem is it working on? 3) What type of activities will the network undertake?*

3. **Network Value Propositions:** *What are the specific benefits that members want to gain from participation, and how can the network offer this collectively?*

Appendix

The following table provides an example of how USDN originally articulated their vision, purpose, and mission. The organization has built their work around the objectives established in these statements.

Urban Sustainability Directors Network
Mission Statement: USDN's purpose is to be an active and engaged network of North American city sustainability directors who exchange information, collaborate to enhance our practice, and work together to advance the field of urban sustainability.
Goals/Objectives: USDN accomplishes its goal by focusing on three core objectives: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Offering members peer-to-peer Networking Opportunities2. Creating solutions that scale through a funded Collaborative Innovation System3. Expanding access and addressing specific issues through Regional Networks

² Plastrik, P. and Parzen, J. (2012). [Guidebook for Building Regional Networks 2.0](#).