

Member Weaving

Document Purpose

This document is designed to help a network develop its member weaving structure. It can be used by emerging networks to understand the process and value of member weaving, or by existing networks to reevaluate existing member connections and establish strong member weavers.

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

Best Practices

Member weaving is a foundational block of a successful network. Member weavers act as a bridge between network members and create meaningful connections between individuals. These connections will ultimately advance the network agenda. Effective weavers have a clear understanding of how to build a robust network, and a working knowledge of their network's context and goals. The Urban Sustainability Directors Network has outlined three key activities that strong member weavers employ. They connect members with each other; serve as the “on-the-ground eyes and ears” of the network, picking up information as they connect with people; and help network members develop new knowledge and skills that will allow them to connect with others more easily.¹ The following section discusses strategies to improve member weaving within a network.

Guidance

Networks function on the principle that information sharing between members achieves a common goal. Member weavers work in a supportive role within the network to make progress towards this goal. Although weavers are some of the best-connected members within the group, it is important that they focus on encouraging other members to build relationships and find their unique voices. When a network is developing, member weavers often find themselves as a main connection point. While this is understandable, it is critical that weavers use this to build stronger connections between other members and not as a point of control. The following six strategies outlined in USDN's [Guidebook for Building Urban Sustainability 2.0](#) are ways for member weavers to become effective at building connections within the network (Parzen & Plastrik, 2012).

1. You have to know the network—get to know the players you want to connect. Find out what connections they already have. Find out what they think they need. Find out what they are good

¹ Parzen, J. & Plastrik, P. (2012) Guidebook for Building Regional Networks for Urban Sustainability 2.0 Retrieved from The Urban Sustainability Directors Network Website: <http://usdn.org/public/Products-Networks.html>

at doing. To find out, you have to ask them—by surveying or interviewing them, by searching websites and documents.

2. Provide network members with information relevant to their needs and interests. You can develop and share information that is not moving naturally through the network. Don't assume that members are finding out everything about each other.
3. Create a membership directory (online, so it's easy to access and to update) with useful information about each member, not just professional information, but also personal information that might help members get interested in each other.
4. Directly connect members to each other. You can bring people together in one-to-one meetings between members with similar or complementary needs, in meetings of a cluster or "hive" of similar members, or in broader convenings that encourage lots of people to meet each other. They can meet over lunch or in longer, more intensive sessions.
5. Identify and strengthen "hubs" in the network—members who connect with many other members. Some members of a network are well connected to other members; they are structural hubs or connectors to lots of others. You can find them by mapping the network or by analyzing where likely hubs of the network might exist or be needed.
6. Connect members to new ideas and resources within or outside of the network. You can reach outside a network to bring to it useful expertise or knowledge that it cannot generate by itself. Or you can build bridges between "distant" network members so they can identify, develop, and share new ideas and resources.

These strategies will help a network develop strong weaving methods that will forge lasting relationships between network members.

Worksheet Template

1. **Network Member Weaver Candidates:** Who within the network naturally builds relationships between others?

2. **Identify Common Threads:** What do members have in common on a professional and personal level? Identify elements that are both related and unrelated to the network goals and use to connect members.

3. **Keep It Relevant:** What is important to members in regards to their needs and interests?

4. **Provide Connection Opportunities:** What are the best ways for network members to connect? (Annual meetings, communication through website, phone conferences, face-to-face meetings/working groups, etc.)

5. **Create a Member Directory:** Who is this member? Give background information that includes professional accomplishments and some personal insights.

6. **Develop Small Working Groups or Teams:** This will encourage personal interaction between members that will build trust and strengthen connections.

Appendix

The following is an excerpt from Southeast Sustainability Directors Network 2015 Strategic Plan. The section outlines efforts of the network to connect members and collect feedback on the measures.

2015 Goal	2015 Tasks	2015 Performance Indicator
Foster dynamic engagement among members	A. Host fourth annual SSDN face to face meeting	A. Meeting Evaluation results
	B. Host quarterly webinars or small group discussion calls	B. Attendance and feedback
	C. Issue monthly newsletter	C. Newsletter Statistics
	D. Increase usage of USDN website for info sharing and mutual assistance	D. Website statistics
	E. Develop case studies and a strategy for effective dissemination	E. Number of case studies developed and measurement of distribution effectiveness
	F. Create and implement member weaving strategy such as steering committee member circles	F. Number of member connections facilitated
	All. Annual Regional Network Satisfaction Survey	
Foster adding value to each other's work by establishing relevant member driven working groups	A. Increase participation by members in working groups	A1. Percentage of members participating in at least one working group A2. Number of active working groups
	B. Take actions to assess the value in existing working groups	B1. Annual Regional Network Satisfaction Survey B2. Products produced by working groups B3. Adoption of working group products by members outside the working group
	A and B. Allow groups to be driven by member priorities collected at the 2014 meeting	
	C. Take actions to identify member interest in starting additional working groups	C. New working groups established