

Toolkit for setting up or reviewing a network

Contents

1. Introduction to the toolkit.....	2
Running the exercises in this toolkit	2
Materials.....	2
Feedback.....	2
2. Setting up/reviewing a network: summary of process.....	3
Before the initial meeting	3
The initial meeting	3
Ongoing meetings	3
3. Developing the vision for your network.....	4
Running the exercise.....	4
4. Added value.....	6
Running the exercise.....	6
5. Agreeing the aim and objectives.....	8
Background	8
Setting aims and objectives.....	8
Running the exercise.....	8
6. Action planning	10
Running the exercise.....	10
Action Plan template.....	12
7. Terms of reference.....	13
Running the exercise.....	13
Terms of reference template.....	15
8. Agenda template.....	17
9. Session plan template.....	18

1. Introduction to the toolkit

This toolkit is aimed at people who wish to set up a new network, or those wishing to revisit and refresh the purpose and focus of an existing network.

We hope that as an individual and as a group, you are able to use the participatory methods in this toolkit to explore the purpose of your network, build a shared vision for the future, achieve consensus about the network's aim and objectives, develop a clear terms of reference and identify how your network will add value.

By involving all members of the group in planning and setting targets this ensures the whole group have contributed to its scope, it will meet their individual needs and those of the group, and that the responsibility is shared amongst the members.

You may find this [WCVA information sheet about networks](#) provides you with useful background information about factors you will need to take into consideration when setting up your network. The tools and exercises contained in this toolkit are designed to be used in conjunction with the information sheet.

Running the exercises in this toolkit

The processes and tools within this toolkit are just suggestions that we as a team have tried and tested. They have been designed so anyone can pick them up and use them. Feel free to adapt these materials as you wish.

Approximate timings have been included to help you to plan your session, but you may wish to spend more or less time as necessary depending on factors such as the number of participants, time constraints etc. Most exercises can be run with any amount of participants and can be adapted for different abilities and needs.

An aim and objectives have been provided for each section to clarify the intended purpose and outcomes for each exercise.

Materials

The exercises suggest the use of a range of inexpensive materials such as pens, pencils, marker pens, flipchart pads, blu-tac, post-its and coloured sticky dots.

Feedback

We'd love to hear from you about how you've used this toolkit and whether you think anything needs to be changed. Please email us at participationcymru@wcva.org.uk

2. Setting up/reviewing a network: summary of process

Before the initial meeting

Please see the information sheet about [networks](#) for background information which you will find useful about setting up and initial group.

Once you have a core group together to take the network forward you can plan your initial meeting. The tools in this toolkit are designed for use at an early meeting once you have convened a core group relevant people.

The initial meeting

The initial meeting is your opportunity to set the way forward for the network. The exercises in this toolkit will enable you to do the following in a participative way.

The tools cover the following areas:

- [Developing the vision](#)
- [Identifying added value](#)
- [Agreeing the aim and objectives](#)
- [Action planning](#)
- [Developing terms of reference](#)

Ongoing meetings

Following the initial planning, its down to the network to sustain itself and achieve the things you have decided you will achieve. It may be useful to review some of the above on a regular basis:

- Vision
- Action plan
- Terms of reference

3. Developing the vision for your network

A visioning exercise encourages the group to imagine the future and to create a common goal of what success will look like. This can help to inform an action plan, set targets / goals for the network and inform your aims, objectives and Terms of Reference.

Creating a vision for the future gives us something positive to move towards.

An old proverb says:

*A vision without a plan is just a dream.
A plan without a vision is just drudgery.
But a vision with a plan can change the world*

...but only if there's action too

Running the exercise

Aim of exercise

To explore what the group hopes to achieve in the future

Objectives

- Identify what success looks like
- Identify what processes need to be in place
- Analyse potential effects for stakeholders
- Start to develop action plan for the group
- Identify factors for success and strategies to get there

Some visioning exercises to run with your network

World's Best/ World's Worst – 35 mins

Divide the group into two teams:

One group imagine the World's Best future for the network; where the network is working as it should and is achieving the best possible outcomes. What does this look like? What are the key features? What processes are in place? How are the main stakeholders affected?

The other group imagines the World's Worst future, where the network is not working as it should and is not achieving what it set out to achieve. What does this look like? What

are the key features? What processes are in place? How are the main stakeholders affected?

- The groups should write/draw on flipcharts, then share as a group
- What can be done to ensure the World's Best happens, not the World's Worst?
- What needs to happen now to achieve the World's Best?
- What are the long-term aims for network?
- What pieces of work and/or products will you have produced?
- What does the network need to achieve success?

Newspaper article – 45 mins

Imagine its 12 months from now.

- In small groups/pairs, write an article about what the network has achieved in the last year. The article will go into your community/organisations' newsletter/magazine/community newspaper and will be read by your service users/ the local community/ your organisations/the partnership that you are accountable to.
- Prepare an article including text, a headline, a photo, snappy caption etc. Use words, images.
- Display all of the articles on the wall in a gallery and ask each group to talk through their article
- Draw together the achievements which the group hope to have achieved in 12 months time. These can form the basis of your targets, an action plan etc

Individual reflection – 20 mins

Individually, imagine its 12 months from now. What difference has the network made?

- To the public
- To locality
- To the partner organisations involved
- To you as a practitioner

Feedback to a partner, or to the wider group

Draw together the achievements which the group hope to have achieved. These can form the basis of your targets, an action plan etc.

4. Added value

There are likely to be lots of other groups and networks around the locality, and they may have a common scope. What makes this network different? Is it needed at all?

Running the exercise

Aim of exercise

To explore the viability, purpose and composition of the network

Objectives

- Identify what this network will do which isn't being done already
- Identify key members
- Scope where this network fits with other networks and groups
- Explore whether other networks could achieve what this network hopes to achieve, with less resources, reduced duplication of effort

Suggested activities:

Run a brainstorming exercise to map other networks and groups with a similar focus
Who is the membership of those groups
Can those groups be used to look at the issues this network is proposing to look at?

Use a stakeholder analysis tool to identify potential partners

Ask "What will this group achieve which isn't being done already?" This will inform your aims and objectives

It might be useful at this stage to ask "what added value will this network bring?"
Explore the question in pairs/small groups/as one group

You may already have a small group established. Before you hold your initial meeting, some questions to consider as a group:

Have you involved the right people?

Who else needs to be involved?

What other groups/networks already exist?

Will this proposed group duplicate any work being done elsewhere?

What will this group do which is different – how will this network add value?

Next steps:

- If other networks/groups have very common membership and purpose, consider whether there is a need for this network. Decide whether it is worth proceeding with this network.
- If there are networks with a similar purpose, could that network expand to encompass the issues this group needs to explore – saving resources, duplication of effort etc.

5. Agreeing the aim and objectives

Background

Setting the aim and objectives for the network is a key task to do early on. It may be useful to think back to how the initial group came to form.

- What was the driver for this?
- What needs were identified by members?
- Was there a steer from members / organisations / partnerships?

All relevant documentation can be useful as a starting point to develop your aims.

Setting aims and objectives

Aims describe the difference you are trying to achieve

For example: "To improve public services through improved public engagement within the locality"

Objectives describe the activities required to meet the aims

For example:

- Share good practice
- Develop a directory of skilled individuals and available resources
- Provide peer support
- Share engagement/participation tools and methods between members
- Co-ordinate engagement/consultations across the locality

You need to choose as many objectives as you need to help you achieve your aim.

Additional resources:

<http://www.sustrans.org.uk/assets/files/Safe%20Routes/resources/toolkit/SMART.pdf>

Running the exercise

Aim of exercise

To discuss and agree the aim and objectives of the network

Objectives

- Discuss the aim
- Achieve consensus about the aim of the network
- Agree the network's key objectives

Suggested exercises for writing aims and objectives:

Aims

- Individually/ in pairs/ small groups, discuss what you hope to achieve as a group. It might be useful to consider the question “what is the difference we are trying to achieve?”. Share this with the wider group, explore commonality and develop a statement which encompasses everyone’s views.
- Cut out lots of words and phrases from related policies/documents. In small groups re-arrange these words and add your own words

Objectives

- Brainstorm ideas, each person writes objectives on post-its. As a group link similar objectives and explore each in turn until you reach consensus about the most relevant objectives.

6. Action planning

Each objective should have with it a number of achievable actions, outlining how the objective will be achieved. It might be useful to refer back to the outputs from the visioning exercises when doing this. For each objective, you will need to set actions. Each objective may be broken down into several actions.

An action plan template is provided on page 12. This section outlines how to agree the actions in a participative way involving the whole group. You may need to decide as a group who will take an overall lead on drafting the action plan and updating it so that there is no duplication.

Running the exercise

Aim of exercise

To agree an action plan for the network

Objectives

- Explore the actions needed to achieve each objective
- Write SMART actions
- Allocate an owner for each action
- Agree how the action plan will be drafted and reviewed

Setting SMART Targets

When writing targets, make them SMART:

- S Specific – describes exactly what you wish to achieve, is unambiguous
- M Measurable – what will you measure so you know that this has been achieved?
- A Achievable – can you achieve this?
- R Realistic - is this something you can take action on?
- T Time related – set a deadline for achieving the action

Additional resources:

<http://www.sustrans.org.uk/assets/files/Safe%20Routes/resources/toolkit/SMART.pdf>

Suggested exercise for writing action plan

“How, how, how?” – approx 30-45 mins

Allocate one or two objectives to small groups/pairs.

Looking at one objective, ask 'how can we achieve this?'. Write down the answer. Ask how again

For example..

Objective: 'share good practice'

How? By recording good practice and telling each other about it

How? By members of this group sharing what they and their colleagues are doing

How? Put in the Terms of Reference (TOR) that members are expected to do this

How? By tabling it as an agenda item and each taking responsibility to share good practice

How to make it SMART? Each person has to contribute at least one piece of good practice at each meeting.

Then write actions to support this. For example:

Objective	Actions	Deadline	Owner	Update
1. Share good practice	Write into TOR that members are required to share good practice from their organisations	Next meeting (date)	AA	
	Put 'sharing good practice' as a standing agenda item	Next meeting (date)	BB	
	Each member to contribute one piece of good practice or learning at each meeting	Ongoing	All	

This could be done individually outside of the network if time is short and collated across email.

Next steps

- You will need to allocate someone to collate all of the actions and produce an action plan. This draft could be circulated for comments before being accepted.
- You will need to agree as a group how you will monitor the progress against the actions. You may wish to table this as a standing agenda item to be reviewed at each meeting, or every other meeting.

Action Plan template

Network name

Date / version

Objective	Actions	Deadline	Owner	Update
1				
2				
3				
4				

7. Terms of reference

Terms of reference are a statement about the purpose of a group and how it will conduct its business so that members and external stakeholders are clear about why it exists and how it works.

Setting terms of reference in a participative way means that each member has had an input into how the network runs, and it is more likely to meet their needs.

Things change over time so it's useful to review the terms of reference at a frequency which is appropriate for the group, to keep them up to date and relevant. A terms of reference template is given at page 15.

Running the exercise

Aim of exercise

To agree terms of reference for the network

Objectives

- Involve members in discussing all aspects of how the network will run
- Agree how the network will operate

- It might be useful to agree that nothing is set in stone, what is agreed today can be changed anytime, but some consensus will just enable a draft to be produced to get things started
- As a group, set ground rules for voting – will you go with the majority vote? What about people who aren't present?
- Have headings on slips of paper, stick on flipchart or wall with blu-tack
- Ask the group what else needs to be on there? Write on slip of paper and add

Some frequent headings are below but your group might wish to add others:

Aim

Secretariat

**Accountability/
reporting**

Objectives

Hosting

Agenda

Timing

Membership

Chairing

In turn, look at each heading. Discuss and build consensus about how the network will do this. Some ideas for different ways to explore the issues are given below:

Heading		Method
Aim		Should have been agreed in previous aim and objectives exercises – draft and add to document
Objectives		Should have been agreed in previous aim and objectives exercises – draft and add to document
Timing		Agree the frequency and duration of meetings. Individuals call out preferences, write on flipchart. If consensus is not reached quickly, use coloured sticky dots for each person to indicate their favourite option
Roles There may be some overlap so explore these together as one issue	Chair	Facilitate group discussion about Chair: 1. What are the responsibilities of the Chair? Does this include hosting and secretariat? 2. Should the Chair be fixed or rotate? 3. Who will be first Chair 4. How will next Chair be decided? 5. How often will they rotate? If consensus is not reached quickly use a ballot / vote to elect chair, use sticky dots or show of hands to vote on issues
	Hosting	(if not covered by 'Chair') - Will host be fixed or rotate? Is everyone able to commit resources to this? - What are the responsibilities of hosting?
	Secretariat	- Who will provide this function?
Membership		Who is the intended membership? Is anyone not here today who should be? Callout, scribe on flipchart
Agenda		Refer to aim and objectives exercise – may be some items Use post-it notes to each brainstorm items, remove duplicates, come up with final list
Accountability/reporting		Who will the group report to and how?

Next steps

- Who will draft the terms of reference using what's been agreed today?
- Who will draft the agenda for the next meeting?
- Circulate draft documents to group including those not present at meeting and invite comments. Agree who will do this and by when
- Agree dates and hosts for the next meetings

Terms of reference template

Network name

Terms of reference

D R A F T
[date]

Aim

The aim of the network is to...

Purpose/objectives

The objectives of the network are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Roles

Hosting: Partner organisations will provide facilities for meetings on a rotating basis, therefore the host will rotate with each meeting

Chairing: The host organisation is required to chair the meeting or arrange an alternative chair

Secretariat: The host organisation will provide the secretariat function for the meeting (send email invitation, provide necessary papers, record and circulate notes and action points of meeting), and provide the venue and refreshments

Membership

Statement – *who are members of the network?*

Each member of the network is expected to:

- Attend each meeting or send an appropriate representative
- Be proactive in bringing new information to the group
- Feed back from the network to their own organisation and networks
- Achieve assigned tasks
- Set, and work to, reasonable, considerate and well planned timeframes
- Share hosting duties

Agenda

The agenda is the responsibility of the host and will be set in a participative way involving the network members. Standing items are:.... and it may also include items from members, actions from previous meetings, identified sessions from guest speakers/trainers etc

Timings

Frequency: The group will meet every three months for the first 12 months, at which point the frequency will be reviewed.

Duration: approx 2.5 hours

Added value

The network will add value in the following areas:

- Co-ordinating engagement across partners
- Enhanced communication between members
- Reduce/eliminate duplication

Accountability / reporting

An action plan will be developed to report progress against actions. The group is required to report to...

8. Agenda template

Network
Date, time
Location

Agenda

- Welcome, introductions, apologies
- Actions from previous meeting
- Standing item: member updates
- Standing item: sharing good practice
- Standing item: review action plan
- Member items
- Guest speaker
- Any other business
- Date of next meeting
- Close

9. Session plan template

Network

Date, time
Venue

Time	Item	Materials	Lead
	Welcome Introductions – names, roles	Name stickers Pens	
	Background/context What has led to us being here today?		
	What we will do in today's session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outline session plan, invite additional items - Agree how to involve people who aren't present in decision making - Put flipchart on wall to record challenges and barriers as they arise during the session 	Flipchart, pens Pre-prepared flipchart with agenda Barriers flipchart	
	Icebreaker – warm up, welcomes and introductions		
	Visioning exercise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Select visioning exercise 	Paper Pens	
	Network – what will it do? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Circulate any from supporting documents - Aim and objectives exercise - Group discussion around added value 	Copy of documents Flipchart, pens	
	Terms of reference <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exercise to discuss and agree the terms of reference - Can everyone commit to the expectations? 	Flipchart paper, pens Post-its Coloured paper	
	Future meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agree dates and hosts for the future meetings 	Flipchart Pens	
	Review barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify owners to overcome barriers and next steps 	Sheet from the wall	
	Summary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review what we've done - have we achieved what we said we'd achieve? • Review next steps and actions • Close 	Flipcharts from exercises	