



National Day for Staff Networks
#UnitingForEquity
Relationship Building

Everything is about relationships: how we show up, how we connect, how we listen, how we influence, how we treat people. As a Staff Network or Employee Resource Group lead, chair or committee member how you build connections is key. Here are 5 core steps to build strong relationships to help your network flourish.

1. Within your committee

Step one is to build strong relations within your networks steering committee or organising team. If you've been operating as a one-person band then the very first step is getting support. You can't do it all alone. What will happen if something happens to you – reach out to others and let them know that the work can't be done if it's you alone. If and once you have a steering committee, spend some time getting to know each other. What are your skills, strengths, what areas are you each passionate about. Play to your strengths and ensure there are roles and responsibilities that play to your strengths. But also take time to get to know each other. Running a network can be challenging so have fun, be light-hearted as you all connect but be committed to the work of course. Take time out as a team – and that's the objective, move from being just a group to a team. Support each other, always sing from the same song sheet as a choir even though you'll all have your own unique tone and solo moments.

2. Within your network

The chances are that even though your network may represent one protected characteristic that you will still have a real diverse membership: different backgrounds, personalities, circumstances, views on the network and the organisation. Being passionate about equity means that you need to ensure you welcome the diversity of approaches and perspectives of your network. If you're dealing with complex and emotive matters then it's worthwhile having a few ground rules for meetings : being respectful, courteous, keeping confidentiality, listening and allowing everyone to have their say. At events and gatherings add in icebreakers and exercises where people get to know each other. Ensure new members are welcome and feel really welcome. It's possible to attend networks and still feel lonely, isolated, unsure. Your network is a place where strong bonds and connections can be made. These connections can help

people personally and may be useful to build the knowledge of different roles, teams and opportunities in the organisation.

3. Between networks

Get to know all the other network lead and networks and what they do. Signpost between networks to build strength, unity and affinity across your network landscape. Find intersectional issues that you can work on together to work on and collaborate together. Meet regularly as leads to talk through common challenges, learn from each other and to gain peer support – leading a network can be tough and challenging this can help ease the strain and renew your sense of energy, passion and purpose. Try to come together as networks at least once twice a year. One opportunity is the National Day for Staff Networks where you could jointly run an educational, celebrational and promotional event to showcase achievements and draw people in.

4. Across your organisation and with key stakeholders and sponsors

The first step is to map out who all the key stakeholders, sponsors, influencers and senior staff are. With sponsors, stakeholder and supporters ensure you all have a clear understanding of what you do, what the network does and how all the roles and responsibilities fit together. Do sponsors and ambassadors know what's expected of them. Do you know how they might amplify the voice of your network. Have check ins to explore this and to talk through issues. Ensure they come along to your events and meetings whenever it's wise to do so. These can be a great opportunity for you all to build cultural knowledge, hear lived experience, gain organisational insight and be visible to key decision makers. In all these conversations ensure that you're personable, professional, courteous and compassionate even when dealing with areas of difficulty. Stand your ground like a tree but always reach out your branches.

5. Beyond your organisation

We tend to limit our thinking to our own organisation. But how might you now learn, share learning with and flourish by working from other networks?

If you're at an early stage why not reach out to similar networks in others who've been there and done that. If you're more established why not scope out what other organisations are doing? Perhaps you could start out with organisations that you are in your area, region, sector or where you have stakeholder or partnership connections. Perhaps you could explore ways to visit, have virtual catch up coffees or even run joint events where appropriate. By doing these things we build our visibility, knowledge, resourcefulness, credibility and sense of community.