

A word cloud of terms related to setting up an employee network. The words are arranged in a circular pattern, with some words appearing more frequently or in larger fonts than others. The words include: champion, support, culture, workshops, role-models, mentor, network, events, inspire, leadership, challenge, inclusive, empower, engage, cross-government, and connect. The words are in various shades of gray and black, and are oriented in different directions.

champion support culture workshops role-models mentor network events inspire leadership challenge inclusive empower engage cross-government connect

# Setting up an Employee Network

# Foreward

Employee Networks have incredible potential to shape the culture of their organisation. The Talent Action Plan recognised the important contribution that employee networks make and committed departments to establish a 'business deal' with their networks. I personally think that employee networks are immensely important, whether it be through providing mentoring opportunities or acting as a critical friend to departments.

During my first few months as Gender Champion it has become increasingly clear to me how important it is that networks share resources and best practice. Many networks are tackling similar issues; opening up events and sharing materials and lessons learned all help to improve the environment in which we work. Through working with members of the Cross-Government Women's Network, I know how vital the relationship between networks, champions and departmental Diversity and Inclusion Teams are. By developing these relationships, your network will go from strength to strength.

This guide started life as Cross-Government Women's Network document and has now been adapted to suit all protected characteristics. Whether you are in the process of setting up a network or breathing new life into an old one, I hope that this guide supports you and encourages you to reach as many people in your organisation as possible.

Melanie Dawes, Permanent Secretary DCLG  
and Civil Service Gender Champion

# Introduction

Employee networks are an incredibly powerful way to engage people in diversity and inclusion. The key to a successful network is asking the members what they want from the network. Employee networks are built and run by volunteers, so engaging a number of volunteers is absolutely crucial.

This guide has been produced to help you create an employee network. The guide takes you through starting up, keeping the energy high in an existing network and how to take a network to the next level. The guide includes case studies from existing networks, frequently asked questions and has some practical examples on how to start your network.

Establishing an employee network can be beneficial to staff, teams and the organisation as a whole.

## Employee networks can:

- ✓ build a sense of **community** across geographical boundaries
- ✓ give a **collective** voice on issues
- ✓ be a **consultee** for people related policy changes
- ✓ offer a **listening** ear for employees
- ✓ enhance **peer** support
- ✓ support the diversity and **inclusion** agenda
- ✓ promote **career** progression

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# The ethos of networks

## Any grade can lead an Employee Network

An employee network is built by staff, for staff. There can't be bureaucracy in a an employee network. Nobody is more qualified than another. Networks can be led by any grade, it's **based on your dedication and passion** rather than an importance on grade. There can't be endless approval stages for our work. As such, take a risk based approach, trust your committee and leads to complete work and approve it accordingly.

## Engaging volunteers is key

Engaging volunteers is the key to running a successful network. People aren't employed to run networks. They often do this in their spare time rather than their working hours. You can engage volunteers by using the network as a development opportunity and adding it to annual objectives and development plans.

# Starting up

Develop your aims and objectives, and identify what you are trying to achieve.

## Senior leadership

Seek the support of a Champion who is passionate about supporting the network. This will help open doors when you first start your network. The Champion can host initial events, liaise with the Board and other senior staff about the work of the network.. It is important to have regular meetings with your Champion.

## What's in a name?

The name of the network can be discussed for months. The best way to make a decision is to get your initial members to agree the name, draw a line under it and move on.

## Research

Research what others have done. Speak to established networks about what they do, what works well and what doesn't.

## Local Leads

Establish a committee of local leads to ensure everyone has a local contact. This should be someone they know and recognise in the office. Initially, ask the local leads to be a focal point to answer questions about the network and feed comments back to the committee. The local leads can hold a launch event or coffee morning to engage members locally and encourage more volunteers to lead projects.

## A simple action plan

Ask your members what barriers they feel are in their way. Tackle a maximum of three things first, achieve them and move onto the next issues. Don't get bogged down with lots of actions. Prove yourselves by delivering three things first. Set up a simple membership form to collect information on name, grade, email address and interests, for example, mentoring, networking or coaching.

## Shout about it

Use internal communication channels such as newsletters, managers cascade, intranet highlights and meet a colleague's, to share information about your network regularly. Don't do a lot of communication and then go quiet, share information throughout the year.

## Data

Gather as much data as possible.

The Cabinet Office Analysis and Insight Team provides data packs for race, gender disability and sexual orientation every quarter.

## Join up

Your organisation might already have networks for other protected characteristics. Speak to them about how their network was set up. Explore how you can work on joint initiatives, such as International Women's Day, LGBT History Month or BAME History month.

## Give it a go

Just give it a go and get stuck in. Grab opportunities when they arise. Use the enthusiasm of individuals! Be inclusive from the start and set the right environment.





# Case Study – DFID Christian Network

## Who we are

Christians in DFID is a network of 150 Christians working in DFID both in the UK and overseas. We are part of Christians in Government umbrella, which supports Christian networks in UK national government to serve Ministers and the public

## Our vision

Our vision is to seek to live, promote and work by the Christian principles of truth, love, grace and justice in order to support the achievement of DFID's mission and vision and build a community where everyone is supported and valued.

## What we do

- Provide Christians in DfID a forum to come together and exchange views on development through monthly meetings
- Support discussion of the role of faith in development (e.g. through DFID's Faith Partnership Principles) and seminars with external speakers
- Support staff in the workplace
- Partner with the ethnic minority network to hold the Whitehall Gospel Choir, which performs across Whitehall departments for Christmas and Easter

# Case Study – Women in Treasury



HM Treasury

## Origin

The Women in the Treasury (WITT) network was established in 2006 to support HM Treasury as an excellent employer, with a diverse and high quality workforce. This is achieved by

- strengthening links between women in HM Treasury and outside
- identifying constructive responses to issues that affect women in our workplace.

## Inspirational Speakers

One of our focus areas is learning from and being inspired by the experiences of successful women. We do this through our 'Top Line in Getting to the Top' series of external speakers. Past speakers include Amelia Fawcett, Jo Malone, Karren Brady, Shirley Williams, Jayne-Anne Gadhia and Shami Chakrabati.

# Case Study – Women in Treasury



HM Treasury

## Community

We focus on establishing a supportive community, through our programme of

- speed-mentoring
- networking lunches with senior Treasury women,
- linking up with the Treasury's other diversity networks

## Engagement

We examine issues that disproportionately affect women, and identify solutions. We engage with the Treasury's Executive Management Board and the Diversity Board to feed in WITT's views and ensure that gender diversity issues are factored into the Treasury's corporate processes.

# Example – initial themes

The network action plan should be based on the views of it's members and friends. The network could look at making changes to policy, provide additional guidance, raise awareness and run local events.

Common topics and themes that all employee networks deal with:

- Confidence
- Networking
- Career
- Progression
- Leadership
- Mentoring
- Coaching
- Sponsorship
- Job shadow
- Job swap
- Policy
- Role models



# Example – Action plan

Ask the members and friends of the network what they want from the network and potential barriers that the network could break down.

When developing the action plan, consider:

- the aim of the network, start with a vision
- high level themes that the network will focus on
- forming working groups under each theme
- funding requirements
- how the network will operate
- build a contact list of the committee
- consider confidentiality

Action plans should be focused on a year of activity and then refreshed. What members want from the Network could be very diverse. For example:



# Building up

This is the fun bit. You are building momentum, getting some successes under your belt and building the energy and reputation of the network.

## Members and Friends

Always encourage members to get involved in network activities so the committee isn't seen as a clique. You can do this by asking for volunteers for all activities, or via the discussion forum. The network is owned by its members and friends. Not one individual person. It's non hierarchical. All members and friends have equal responsibility and accountability. You don't need approval. People really value this in the network.

## Annual Survey

It's important to measure success. The best way to get members and friends engaged in what you do is to ask them what they want, and build this into your action plan for the year. This means they can see how it supports them and they may be therefore willing to help. Use an annual survey to evaluate how effective your work is, what worked well, what didn't work well and what people want in the future. Then you can benchmark certain questions every year. For example, confidence levels, how many moved sideways and how many were promoted. This gives you great statistics for your communications too.

# Building up

## Events

If someone has been on a course, ask them to bring their learning back to a lunchtime talk. Lunchtime talks take one hour and people can bring their lunch. Topics could include confidence, mentoring, networking and flexible working. If someone is a great networker, ask them to host a discussion or seminar. Hold face to face events for people to join, but offer them as web conferences to widen your audience. Make sure you record the web conferences for people unable to attend so they can hear them at their convenience.

## Safe Space

Build a safe space for people to discuss things. An online community will keep you in contact, across boundaries, and communicate network news and blogs. The safe space could encourage others to comment and offer support. Seeking comments creates a conversation. The safe space can include a library of resources and helpful pointers.

# Building up

## Objectives

Ask your network volunteers to include an objective in their performance plan. This will mean they get allocated time to support the network, and they will get recognised for going 'over and above the day job'. The network lead can then email their line manager at the end of the year to let them know about their support. Be flexible about what you do.

## More People

More people, more resilience. Have a stakeholder communications plan and really think about who you need to engage with and why. Never say no to a volunteer. Find everyone a role in the network. Be flexible about what you do and let your volunteers run with ideas.

## Links with HR

Build strong links with HR. Many of the questions we receive relate to HR policy and practice. Ask for a dedicated HR contact for all network queries. Be open with your members. You can't advise on HR policy, but you can point them in the right direction or raise common issues.



# Building up

## Challenges

You may come across challenges, such as fitting it in with your day job. The more volunteers you have, the smaller the workload. Managing volunteers is a very different leadership style. You may come across problems of location and people can sometimes accuse you of being 'London centric'. Be very conscious of having local leads at an office level. They could be your contact to put posters on notice boards, or they could host local events.

***“Understanding the needs of the members you are there to serve as a network are central to success. Also being organized and having a strong team will ensure you have a well-managed network which can provide leadership for resolving diversity issues quickly as well as contribute to staff professional development and the success of the departments objectives” Ahmed Bashir MBE - Chair CS Muslim Network***

# Example – Annual survey

Consider conducting an annual survey of network members and friends to evaluate the previous years work, but also to look ahead to new work areas. Questions on confidence and promotion rates can be benchmarked each year. You might want to include the following questions.

- 1) How useful do you find the following network resources and activities?  
Very useful/Fairly useful/Not useful/Don't know/No opinion
  - Local events
  - Safe space
  - National web conferences
  - National Events e.g. International Women's Day
  - Opportunities to attend conferences
  - Mentoring
  - Job Shadowing and job swap
- 2) How would you rate the number of local events available to you?  
Too many/Just right/Too few/No opinion
- 3) How would you rate the variety of the events available to you? Varied/  
Just right/Not varied enough/No opinion
- 4) What resources, activities or events would you like to see the  
network focus on in the future? Open question
- 5) Which events stick in your mind as being the most useful to you?  
Open question
- 6) Do you have any further comments or ideas regarding the work of the  
network? Open question

# Case Study – Safe space

The Environment Agency Women's Network safe space is an online community of practice. It is open to members (women) and friends (men) of the network only. Access is granted by a moderator, who can edit posts. The safe space is a way of building a sense of community across geographical boundaries. The community is hosted on the intranet.

## **Blogs**

Individuals blog, guest blogs for anonymous bloggers that aren't associated with a name. Blog posts have included menopause, depression and career blockers.

## **News**

Network news can be posted on the community by members of the Women's Network committee. The top four news posts are collated every week in an email and sent to the membership.

## **Resources library**

We store documents, guidance, links to websites, web conference recordings, power point presentations and event resources in our resources library.

## **Discussion forum**

Anyone can post a comment on the discussion forum. It's divided up into boards, leadership, career, networking and external courses. Members and friends also post news articles of interest.

## **Events calendar**

As we have members and friends throughout England, an events calendar captures all local events. This ensures people visiting an office can join an event.

## **Membership pages**

The membership pages are designed to highlight who is in the Women's Network. This means that individuals can self organise coffee mornings or local events.

# Keeping momentum

Starting a network and building the network is the fun bit. The next bit is the hardest, keeping the energy and enthusiasm going over a number of years.

## Keep it fresh

Adapt the action plan on an annual basis and launch it at an annual event. The action plan is fed by the results of the survey and is first issued as a draft for comments by members and friends, then made final. The action plan has to adapt to the current situation. Adaptability is important for maintaining energy in the network.

## Awards

Apply for awards. It is a real boost to the network members and friends to get external recognition and it's a great thing to communicate widely. Constantly change your ways of communicating as society changes. You may branch out into social media, or use video.

## Energy

Maintain the energy of leads and the committee by changing leads on an annual. Develop innovative programmes. Try creative ways to communicate, try new communication channels and work with other networks on joint initiatives.

# Keeping momentum

## Champion

Focus on keeping momentum with the champion too. Try different methods to engage with them. For example, you could offer a competition to job shadow them for a few days. Or encourage them to be open about their mentoring work.

## Work with others

Work with other organisations such as Opportunity Now or Race for Opportunity. Take part in initiatives such as the mentoring circles, Coaching Squared. Sponsor members to attend conferences and then ask them to bring back the findings and do a talk for members of your organisation.

## Reach everyone

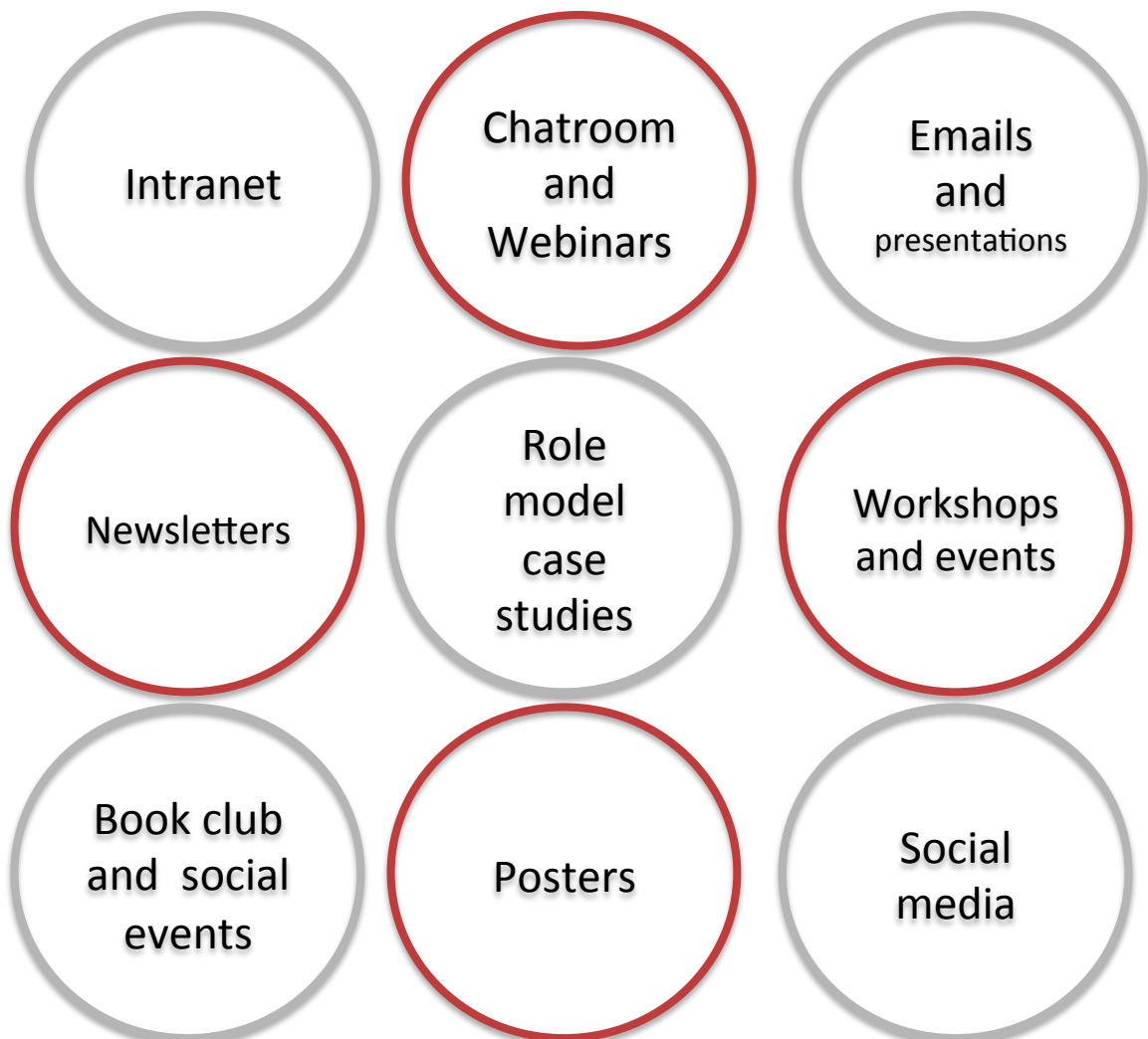
Reassess whether you are reaching every part of your organisation.

- Are some members and friends in offices where they are the only person in the network?
- What can you do to engage them in the network?
- Can you offer web conferences?
- Can you offer an anonymous function to giving feedback or raising issues to the head of the network?

# Example – Communication

Good communication is vital to the success of running a network. Constantly seek innovative ways of communicating, with members and friends, your organisation and externally. Constantly adapt your communication method. Think about your audience and ensure your messages get to every grade, role and location. If your organisation has a number of sites, consider how you will get messages to all locations. Don't forget the humble poster and don't just rely on electronic communication.

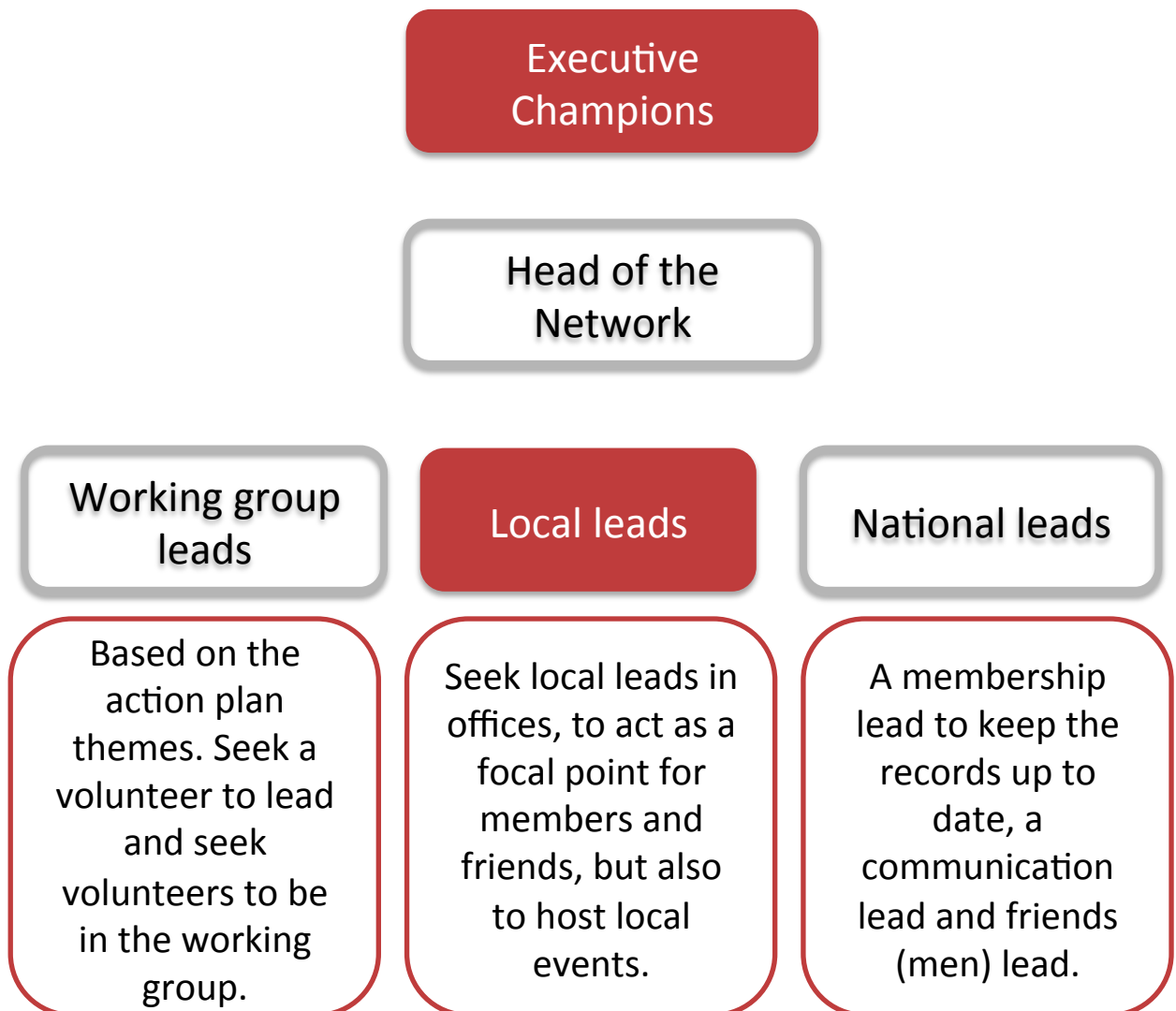
Possible communication methods include:



# Example – Structure

Employee networks are non hierarchical and not based on grade. Therefore, a flat structure is preferred, with equal responsibility for running the network. The network ethos is for it to be built and run by it's members and friends.

Here is a suggested structure:



# Key Contacts

There are a number of Civil Service wide employee networks. Use these to share best practice and network with other departmental networks.

Network	Contact
Cross-Government Women's Network	<a href="mailto:eleanor.binks@cabinetoffice.gov.uk">eleanor.binks@cabinetoffice.gov.uk</a>
Civil Service Rainbow Alliance	<a href="mailto:oliver.entwistle@dft.gsi.gov.uk">oliver.entwistle@dft.gsi.gov.uk</a>
Civil Service Disability Network	<a href="mailto:jeanette.rosenberg@bis.gsi.gov.uk">jeanette.rosenberg@bis.gsi.gov.uk</a>
A:gender	<a href="mailto:agender@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk">agender@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk</a>
Civil Service Race Forum	<a href="mailto:kulvinder.bassi@dft.gsi.gov.uk">kulvinder.bassi@dft.gsi.gov.uk</a>
Christians in Government	<a href="mailto:info@christiansingovernment.org.uk">info@christiansingovernment.org.uk</a>
Sikhs in Government	<a href="mailto:sikhsingovernment@fco.gov.uk">sikhsingovernment@fco.gov.uk</a>
Civil Service Muslims Network	<a href="mailto:ahmed.bashir@UKTI.gsi.gov.uk">ahmed.bashir@UKTI.gsi.gov.uk</a>
Civil Service Jewish Network	<a href="mailto:james.neidle@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk">james.neidle@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk</a>





## Cross Government Women's Network





**Civil Service Disability Network**



**Civil Service  
Muslim Network**