



Facilitating an Effective and Energizing Nourishing Network Meeting

Networks thrive when people are clear about their passions, what they want to do, and look for partners who share similar passions and interests. Most organizations or coalitions need to agree on their priorities to coalesce around, while networks have the capacity to connect lots of efforts and tap into resources in a much more dynamic way. The key to networks thriving is to make sure that what is happening in a meeting is a reflection of the interests and passions of all those in the room, rather than being determined by a few people who decide for the group what is important. This requires that the agenda be somewhat fluid and adaptable and that conveners trust that passionate people will self-organize around the topics that have a lot of energy. Following is a guide that will help you hold energizing meetings.

Part I: A Gracious Welcome:

- Warmly welcome and thank those who have come
- Remind people of their network's shared purpose: i.e. "We have learned that there are significant gaps in food security support for many people in our community. Our network's shared purpose is about how we can work together in new and expanded ways to ensure that every member of our community has access to enough nourishing food. During our regular gatherings, we learn from each other where gaps in hunger support exist, how others are working to fill those gaps, and how we can connect efforts, identify untapped resources and expand support to reach more people in need. "

Part II: Building Relationships (starting with who is in the room today)

If there are new people attending, it's best to do two rounds. If everyone is familiar with each other, the rounds can be combined into one.

- **Round One:** "Let's take a few minutes to: (15-20 seconds per intro)
 - Introduce yourself and share what network(s) you are representing here today (i.e. *my church, my school, my family, my organization, my neighborhood, my business, my Rotary/Kiwanis, etc.*)" It's also fun to ask people something interesting about themselves that could illuminate shared interests (i.e. what is their favorite pastime, author, TV show, what they are doing for fun this weekend, etc)"
- **Round Two:**
 - "During this next round, please let us know what information you would like to bring to the network today and if there is something in particular you would like to walk away with from this meeting? *Do you have an update on a past commitment? ... A challenge you are looking for network help with? ...A story or experience to share that might enhance our understanding of our community's need? A specific "offer" or "ask" to share?*"
 - "If you have a question or a topic you would like the network to spend more than a couple of minutes discussing, I will track those ideas and we'll come back to those in the next part of the meeting."

Note: Convener/Facilitator tracks the topics and questions that surface from the introductory round that people would like to discuss. This becomes a discussion guide for the next part of the meeting.

Tips & Reminders

- The Currency of Networks are relationships
- Those who join the network do so because they share an interest and/or passion for the "shared purpose"
- The most important thing in a network meeting is knowing who is in the room and what each of us cares about or wants to do
- The energy in a Network meeting happens when people feel free to ask for help or to offer resources to advance each other's good work
- Projects happen *through* the network not *by* the network
- The stronger the relationships in a network, the faster community impact is manifested

Part III: Building Understanding and Opportunities (See *Variations below*)

- Review the list of topics that surfaced from the introductory round and ask if there are others to be added. Start with the most urgent and/or potentially energizing topic.
- The person who introduced the topic shares and asks for the group's response, ideas, input, etc. The goal of this discussion is to support that person or effort in whatever way seems most helpful. It is also a way to identify interest around emerging network themes, possible collaborations or opportunities for others to ask for network support or to offer resources and connections.
- Continue with all of the identified topics being sensitive to the time and needs of the individuals in the group. If there isn't enough time to fully explore each item, make sure there is time for the person to at least share their thoughts and offer to either add it to items for the next meeting or for an after-meeting option.

Part IV: Making Connections and a space for people to make asks and offers

- Each person in the network has needs and resources to share. The energy of a network begins ebb and flow when people are actively asking for help and/or offering support/resources.
- It is likely that this has already begun to happen in the discussion phase of the meeting. If not, take a few minutes before the round of commitments to encourage people to think about what they might need or have to offer. If there are clear areas of interest that have emerged from different groups within the room, you might encourage them to huddle after the meeting to make a plan.

Part V: I Make the Net Work

- The unique nature of working in networks requires that each person is accountable for what they care about and what they want to do to expand the work. The magic occurs when people make a commitment (small or large) from a place of passion and interest. It is also true that the stronger the relationships in the room and over time, the more accountable people are and the faster the work progresses.
- In closing, ask each person to share one (simple or grand) commitment that they *want* to work on during the next month or so. This last round will also provide the network with more information about where each person wants to spend their time, which also opens the way for more connecting opportunities during the following month.
- Thank the participants for their time and close the meeting.

Variations of the meeting for Part III: *Building Understanding and Opportunities*

- Sometimes there will be important topics that require the time of the whole group, for example, creating a public awareness campaign or debriefing a network undertaking. In those cases, it is helpful to schedule a topic in advance so everyone knows what will be happening and to make sure that there is time for the necessary conversation.
- Another variation is breaking into small groups so that a number of topics can be given more time with those who are most interested in that particular topic. This is likely to be helpful when there are a number of projects underway to be discussed.
- It is also useful for different members of the network to have more in-depth time to share what they do and how their work is related to the network. Again, that can be scheduled and announced ahead of time. Some groups have even changed meeting locations so that they can see that member's organizational space.
- Each group will need to find the balance between planning important conversations and keeping the meeting fluid enough to respond to the concerns and interests that people bring with them as they enter.