How to Build Networks

Guide

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Everyone is part of several networks, be they family, friends, or community. Networks can help you achieve things and make changes on a wider scale. Building networks is about building relationships of mutual support for your project and the work of others.

Through networking you can help strengthen your community by raising awareness of what your Transition initiative is doing, while increasing support within your surrounding area. This, in turn, might help bring new opportunities, support for ongoing projects, or new relationships with potential partners.

Benefits of Networking

Why network? What are some things you can do with a network?

Sharing resources. By networking with other organisations your group can access shared resources available to networked organisations that may not otherwise be accessible. This includes funding opportunities, venues, materials, volunteers, and so on.

Creating partnerships. Networking with other groups allows you to identify and develop relationships with new partners to co-organise events, run joint projects and activities, and expand on each other's goals (see How to Create Partnerships).

Increasing visibility. Networking with other groups can help promote your Transition work, making you more visible in the community and increasing your credibility as a group.

Exchanging skills and knowledge. Networking creates opportunities to learn from other groups' experiences, skills, and knowledge. This can include new tools, successful approaches, or innovative practices.

Strengthening support. Working as a group to improve your community can sometimes feel overwhelming and isolating. Networking can help provide additional support, new inspiration, and perhaps even a shared sense of purpose.

Examples of Networking

Networking might look like:

- Organising a fair or public gathering where local resources can be promoted.
- Supporting and publicising each other's work on your website, newsletter, events.
- Asking a local group or agency to host a website listing all the brilliant and dedicated local resource groups!
- Creating a database of volunteers from networked organisations that can help work on your projects and activities.
- Creating a survey and asking networked organisations to share it with their stakeholders.
- Asking local groups or respected individual leaders to be advisors for your group's projects and activities.

Who to Network With

You can make a list of potential groups or individuals in your community by identifying people and groups to support your work. With some you might want to develop deeper relationships and create partnerships; while with others you may only want to network. Try gathering as a group, generating ideas, and producing a list of groups in your community who would be supportive of Transition (see Identifying People and Groups to Help You).

Prepare

Feel free to modify the examples below to fit your own context. Before you make any contact, since initial contact can be very important, it is useful to prepare yourself by:

- Learning a bit about the group you are meeting.
- Identifying some specific things that you like about their group.
- Considering how you will introduce yourself and your group.
- Noticing the common concerns and aims that you may have.
- Identifying how you might support their group in their activities.
- Listing some of the mutual benefits of networking with each other.

Example – First Meeting

Try to arrange for an in-person or face-to-face meeting early on, since many people find it easier to communicate during such meetings. Remember to:

1. Honour the past accomplishments and ongoing work of their group before telling them about your own:
    - Learn about their mission, goals, programmes.
    - Who do they reach, or seek to reach, in the community?
2. Share information about specific issues you are working on that may affect them (such as rising energy costs and the economic impacts on the community).
3. Offer support: ask them how your group (and the wider Transition movement) might support their organisation's work in the community.
4. Ask for support: what might they be able to give to support your work in the community? (for example, helping you connect to other groups and leaders, places to meet, photocopying, events, and so on).

Building long-term relationships

To maintain your networks, try to stay in contact with networked groups and support each other whenever possible. A few ways to do this include asking:

- What other groups might you involve when planning your own events or projects?
- Can you support an existing project, such as helping a community orchard out during harvest time?
- When putting on events, can you promote other groups' events at your event?
- What other groups might you invite to your social events? How might you attend or support other groups' events?

Your group can be more effective and benefit from having strong networks. It can be worthwhile to take time to build up those relationships, since you never know where they might lead. It can be useful to save this guide for future reference and to show new members.

Example - Email for Making Initial Contact

Subject: Exploring Opportunities for Collaboration in Our Community

Dear [Name/Organisation Name],

I hope this message finds you well.

My name is [Your Name], and I'm part of the Transition initiative in [City] working to improve our community in areas such as [briefly mention your focus areas— for example, environmental sustainability, accessibility, food safety, and inclusion].

I'm reaching out because I admire the work your organisation is doing in [mention their field or a specific project if possible], and I believe there may be shared goals or opportunities where we could support or learn from each other.

We are currently working on [briefly explain your project, goal, or interest], and I'd love the chance to connect and explore whether there's potential for collaboration, sharing ideas, or simply getting to know each other's work better.

Would you be open to a short meeting sometime in the next couple of weeks?

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Warm regards,
[Your Full Name]
[Your Group/Initiative Name]
[Contact Information – email, phone, or social media]

Related Resources

Identifying People and Groups to Help You
Building Bridges
How to Create Partnerships

10 Tips for Effective Networking - University of Maryland

For more resources like this one, go to https://resources.transitionnetwork.org/
or to the Transition Network international website www.transitionnetwork.org

Transition Network international