



15 Network Weaver Support Systems

Network leadership is critical to the success of all networks. And, unlike other approaches where only a few leaders are needed, a network approach demands that many (in fact most) people become network leaders or Network Weavers. For this reason one of the key support structures needed for network success is support for helping more people to become Network Weavers.

Section 1. Network Weaver Roles

"We hope people will understand leadership as a collective process."

*Deborah Meehan,
Leadership
Learning Coalition*

The theory of self-organizing networks is that anyone in the network is able to identify something that needs to be done and can to pull together the people and resources needed to make something happen. For this to occur, most people in the network need to have basic network weaving skills and understanding.

This actually isn't as difficult as it might seem if you use modeling techniques. You start with those individuals who self-identify as Network Weavers once they take the Network Weaver Checklist (in resource section of Chapter 2) and provide them with some basic training and coaching. But as soon as possible, perhaps even from the start, you do two things:

- Encourage Network Weavers to identify and support other emerging Network Weavers
- Help Network Weavers create their own peer skill-building and support network

There are several ways to identify new Network Weavers. First, mapping your network can identify individuals who are hubs, as well as hidden and emerging network leaders. Software generated maps are particularly useful for identifying potential Network Weavers because they generate a variety of individual metrics that correlate with network leadership. Next, any Network Weaver can observe others who are listening well, connecting others, and sharing information and ideas. These individuals are likely candidates for becoming Network Weavers.

Once identified, a Network Weaver can give the Network Weaver checklist to the Network Weaver candidates and find out if they see themselves as Network Weavers and whether they are interested in learning more about the skills and practices of Network Weavers. If so, the original Network Weaver can share activities and ideas presented in the handbook.

The Case Study below is an example of an incentive structure for Network Weavers (called Champions) on an online network site for community clinics.

Case
Study

Incentives for Network Weavers

DRAFT: BE A COMMUNITY CLINIC VOICE CHAMPION

The Community Champion Program supports and recognizes Voice members who actively participate in building our community.

Members who contribute will be acknowledged by a "Community Champion" or "Community Builder" designation displayed with their Voice online ID.

The number of Voice postings by members will be displayed with their online ID, to encourage and recognize frequent postings on the Voice.

Community Champions will be recognized with a certificate of appreciation to their clinic management/board.

Members become "Community Builders" by:

- Posting frequently to the Voice (25 posts to qualify)
- Logging on to the Voice site often (weekly over three months)
- Placing a "Join the Voice" badge on their organization's web site
- Including a Voice ad in their publications
- Outreach - Organizing a Voice presentation for colleagues, co-workers
- Attending an in-person members meeting

Members become "Community Champions" by:

- Serving on a Voice committee (Advisory Committee, Editorial Review Board, Welcome Wagon, Discussion Section Hosts)
- Voice Outreach (3 or more presentations at meetings or conferences)
- Moderating an ongoing, educational discussion on the Voice
- Publishing a promotional article about the Voice in their organizational newsletter, blog, or other publications

From Sue Dormanen, Online Community Manager at Tides Community Clinic Initiative

Section 2. A Support System for Network Weavers

There are three elements necessary for a Network Weaver Support System:

1. Training
2. Coaching
3. Peer Learning/Community of Practice

Each of the sections below covers one of these elements. Once you have explored each of the elements, convene a group to help design a comprehensive support system for Network Weavers in your network.

ACTIVITY: 15 STEPS TO INCUBATE NETWORK WEAVERS

Convene a group interested in identifying and supporting more Network Weavers in your network. With them, follow the steps in the worksheet *15 Steps to Incubate Network Weavers*.

Section 3. Training Network Weavers

The network can set up training for Network Weavers by drawing on the most experienced Network Weavers in the region and/or bringing in a Network Weaver trainer. Even if an outside trainer is brought in, it's important to use a "Train the Trainer" model where the outside trainer coaches several local Network Weavers to become the local trainers. These potential trainers are often local organizers, staff of leadership organizations, or consultants who are already skilled in facilitation and group process.

Becoming a skilled Network Weaver requires practice and a chance to reflect on that experience, so it's usually beneficial to have training occur over a six month or year-long period, with training sessions each month. This way people will be able to learn a few skills and tools each month and try them out before the next training session. Our best success has been when the local Network Weaver trainers offer practice sessions between trainings, where they can meet face-to-face with the trainees, assisting them in their practical application of the concepts and coaching them. This small group can try out the activities in the practice sessions and then engage their larger network in the activity. The local Network Weaver trainer generally knows the local situation and can customize the activities so they fit the needs of the local group.

A usual format for a 2 hours training would be:

1. Check-in on progress made on the previous session's action focus
2. Peer assist with one person getting assistance on a problem or challenge
3. Short training module to introduce new skill or practice
4. Activity or exercise to practice new skill
5. Discussion on how it could be used in the next two weeks
6. Reflection

ACTIVITY: TRAINING BY ROLES

Develop a training and support system for each of the roles (Connector, Project Coordinator, Network Facilitator, Network Guardian). Use previous chapters in the handbook to identify skills for each role.

Case Study

Puget Sound Network Weavers Training

The King County United Way supported a Network Weaver training for four groups who were connected to emerging networks in the area. Three skilled organizers – Bill Aal, Viki Sontag, and Karma Ruder – served as the local Network Weaver Trainers. The training consisted of one 3-hour introductory session for all participants together (with me co-leading virtually); five monthly 1 ½ hour interactive virtual trainings led by me; 6 practice sessions in the weeks following the training with the 3-7 members of each local network meeting face-to-face with the local trainers; and a final in-person reflection and networking session. The 4 trainers had one or two calls to prepare for each training session – with local trainers providing feedback on the powerpoint, worksheets and agenda, helping it to more closely fit the needs of the local networks. All participants received an early draft of this handbook. The local trainers worked with each network group as needed between trainings and practice sessions.

There is a video-recorded reflection session made by the 4 trainers at the end of the trainings. Participants took a pre and post survey and all local participants met for an informal evening of reflection about their learning at the end.

The session topics were:

1. Introduction to network basics
2. Network mapping
3. Network Weaving practice
4. Moving the network to action through self-organizing
5. Support system for your network
6. Developing a network strategy

Section 4. Coaching Network Weavers

One of the most important ways that individuals learn to become skilled Network Weavers is by practicing the many activities suggested in this handbook. However, after they try out a new activity, they can really benefit by reflecting on that experience with a Network Coach.

A Network Weaver Coach is someone who checks in with Network Weavers to help them

- Notice what is going well (this is most important!)
- Make sense of what is happening
- Identify challenges and strategies for overcoming them
- Identify and solve problems that arise
- Articulate what they are learning
- Garner insights and reflections

ACTIVITY: INDIVIDUAL COACHING SESSIONS

Follow the instructions in the handout *Coaching Sessions*. Make sure you track answers and next steps for your next coaching session.

ACTIVITY: GROUP COACHING AND PEER LEARNING

Set up a peer learning network on www.ning.com or have your Network Weavers join the www.networkweaver.ning.com site.

ACTIVITY: FREEING UP TIME FOR TRANSFORMATION

One of the issues many people raise when they think about becoming a Network Weaver is that they are too busy to add anything to their platter. We find that there is a disease of busyness in the non-profit world. However, when I have actually had someone sit down and record their activities for a few days, everyone I have worked with has found many things they are doing that are not high priority or high impact – an item had gotten on their to-do list and so the individual just did it without scrutinizing the item again. This simple worksheet is a valuable way to help people see that they can free up time for network weaving.

Have Network Weavers fill out *Freeing Up Time for Transformation* for several days, completing all columns. Once they have completed this, have them discuss their insights and the activities they have stopped doing.

ACTIVITY: TRACKING PRIORITIES

Have Network Weavers complete *Tracking Priorities* and track for several weeks. Encourage them to share what they listed in their peer learning discussions and forums.

Section 5. Communities of Practice

The most effective way for people to build their skills as Network Weavers is to set up a Community of Practice – a group of people who share an interest in developing skills in a particular area. A Community of Practice encourages people to identify their learning needs and organize training, coaching, and peer support to meet those needs. Participation in a Community of Practice is voluntary; we find

that usually those eager and natural Network Weavers form a core group, but as they employ network weaving in their work, others see the benefits and become interested in building their skills as well and become more active.

A successful Network Weaver Community of Practice begins initially with some external training, since there are few highly skilled Network Weavers at this point. It's usually effective to have a small core group of natural Network Weavers work with the trainer so that they quickly are able to conduct much of the training themselves. Those individuals might have extra sessions to read and discuss resources that could deepen their understanding of networks and self-organizing so they were working from a strong theoretical base. The external trainer(s) could then focus on coaching this core group.

Those wanting to learn more about virtual Communities of Practice should check out and join CP Square, an association all about Communities of Practice facilitated by John David Smith. See www.cpsquare.org. In addition to a local Community of Practice, it is important that at least some of the Network Weavers connect to the international network of Network Weavers and its Communities of Practice. One place to interact is the Ning site for Network Weavers <http://www.networkweaver.ning.com>.

A core practice of a Community of Practice is the *peer assist*. This is where one individual, project group, or network has a challenge and seeks the thinking and advice of others in the Community of Practice. The process is:

- The individual or group presents their situation and the challenge it is facing
- Those listening then ask clarifying questions which are answered
- Those listening then provide ideas, questions, and suggestions; they suggest sources of information or other cases that may help the challenge group
- The challenge group then responds
- The listeners talk about how this gave them ideas for their own network or project
- The entire group reflects on the session and insights gained
- The group determines whether there are any next steps or whether they want to continue the discussion in any way

Here are some comments about the benefits of peer assists from participants in a recent Community of Practice:

“It was great to show my network how to build trust among our volunteers who are spread out statewide and may not have ever even met each other.”

“I really liked the network mapping sessions and learned from them and other people's use of SNA.”

“From my peer assist I took away the concept of planning in chunks --giving network participants a broad learning trajectory but doing detailed planning in small chunks in order to leave space for addressing emergent interests / needs.”

“I gained good ideas from my colleagues of ways to approach networks and a variety of traditional and social media tools to incorporate to enrich the experience for the entire network.”

“It gave me a better view/perspective on how other networks apply network weaving within their own agencies. I was also able to get additional resources and information how to better address the issues that arise from our network. I also love the personal stories and the ‘friendship’ forged from the exercise.”

Another activity of Community of Practices centers on learning about a specific topic. An individual identifies something that he or she wants to learn and invites others to join in a learning subgroup. They may need to bring in an expert, or one of the participants may have advanced knowledge in the area. The group meets, determines a learning agenda and sets up one or more sessions to complete this agenda.

Case Study

Network Mapping Learning Subgroup

Ken Vance-Borland was part of one of the Communities of Practice I led. He was interested in learning more about NodeXL, a free network mapping platform. He found others interested in this as well, and set up a session on the software. I led the first session, walking participants through the steps to make a map. I also provided some simple data sets. Ken led the next three sessions, showing people additional techniques for mapping. He later worked one-on-one with another participant, helping her make a map of her network that proved very powerful in helping that network move forward.

ACTIVITY: READINGS ON COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Read and discuss *Communities of Practice and Organizational Performance* which can be found at http://www.impactalliance.org/ev_en.php?ID=1860_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC

ACTIVITY: VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Explore the website of the organization CP Square <http://cpsquare.org/> which is a community of practice about communities of practice. Being virtual, it provides a good example of how you can have an excellent CoP without face-to-face gatherings. Discuss how you might set up a Community of Practice for Network Weavers in your network.

ACTIVITY: SANDBOXES

A simple version of a Community of Practice is a Sandbox. A Sandbox is more informal than most Communities of Practice.

Explore the web sites mentioned in the story and then discuss how you might implement a sandbox similar to the one described in the reading *Sandboxes*.

ACTIVITY: WISDOM OF THE CROWD

Many people call peer assists the Wisdom of Crowds. This is a somewhat different version of a peer assist.

Follow the process on the *Wisdom of the Crowd* handout. Discuss how participants can set up a similar process whenever they feel they need advice or feedback on a Network Weaving issue.

Resources for Chapter 15

Reading: Network Weaver Roles

Checklist: Network Weaver Checklist by Roles

Worksheet: 15 Steps to Incubate Network Weavers

Reading: Sandboxes

Handout: Wisdom of the Crowd

Handout: Coaching Sessions

Worksheet: Freeing Up Time for Transformation

Worksheet: Tracking Priorities

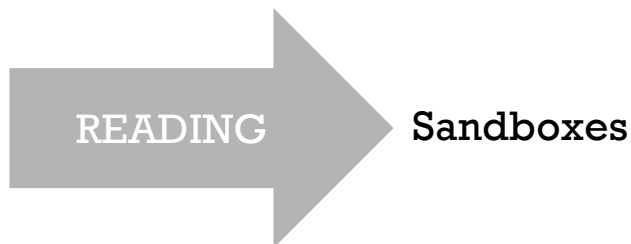
Worksheet: Notes on Network Weaver Support System

WORKSHEET

15 Steps to Incubate Network Weavers

Characteristic	Step	Notes (Who With? When? How?)
Get comfortable with network concepts and benefits	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop your elevator speech 2. Read articles on networks 	
Help people recognize that they are Network Weavers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Have people take the Network Weaver Checklist 	
Help people understand the Network Weaver role	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Point out people who are clearly Network Weavers and talk about the things that they do 5. Have them read the www.networkweaving.com blog 	
Provide training to a small group of very committed NWS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Use Powerpoints on Network Weaving to introduce concepts such as closing triangles, connecting clusters, etc. 7. Have group draw a map for a project/network they are a part of and have them use network analysis/ network weaving actions 8. Have them practice with their project/network 	
Provide coaching to NWS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Meet individually with NWS to identify their strengths as NWS, their passions, interests and challenges 10. Check in with them several times and ask them how they have applied Network Weaver skills and practices 	

Characteristic	Step	Notes (Who With? When? How?)
Set up a peer learning cluster or NW Community of Practice	11. Through FTF, phone or web venues, bring together NWs for monthly meetings to learn more, share experiences, and support each other.	
Help NWs understand self-organizing	12. Introduce to project management worksheets and Opportunity Process 13. Set up web-based project management sites and practice	
Help NWs work (together) to set up good communication systems for the network(s)	14. Review communication strategies and help them implement several 15. Set up social networking site (ning, facebook) for NW group, then encourage application to their network.	



Beth Kanter and I met at a workshop for foundations last fall. She loved the concept of Network Weaving and we decided to spend some time figuring out the synergies between Network Weaving and social media.

We decided to use a conference call line she had but www.skype.com would work as well. Meanwhile, she set up a little exercise for us to do, which she described on a Google doc.

Exercise:

1. Create 3-5 slide powerpoint with photos that defines/explains network weaving
2. Upload into www.SlideShare.com, a site where you can share powerpoint presentations.
3. Put in the Network Weavers Group <http://www.slideshare.net/group/network-weaving-be-rhizomatic>
4. Comment on someone else's slides
5. Create a new powerpoint/slideshare presentation based on feedback and/or remixing the other person's slides

I invited a friend. Good thing as Deborah was the only one who did the assignment! Beth then took us to www.flickr.com and showed us how to search the Creative Commons (free to use) pictures there. She was sharing her desktop via a desktop sharing site but letting us make decisions about what pictures to use. It was lots of fun! We noticed the power of slides with only a few words – the image was what had the power to help people get new concepts. I went back and made a new presentation, using yarn and knitting images to represent network weaving and feeling a great sense of accomplishment. See my slides at <http://www.slideshare.net/juneholley/network-weaver>

We invited several addition friends to the next session, and it was great to meet some new people. We got on Slideshare again and Beth talked about how people loved puppies and babies and so we made a deck using images of kids. Beth always had us spend the last half hour reflecting on what we had done. This time we noted the importance of helping people make an emotional connection to concepts to help them better remember and apply them.

See <http://www.slideshare.net/kanter/remix-of-junes-network-weaving-definition>

In the next few sessions, a major shift took place. Someone else helped set up the next time using www.doodle.com. At each meeting, we'd decide what we wanted to learn or talk about. Sometimes we explored new social media: Google Wave, web-based project management, etc. Sometimes we had clinics, where one person asked for advice. Sometimes we spent most of the time deeply introducing ourselves to each other. But whatever we did, we laughed a lot, appreciated each other, and reflected on what we had learned.

After Beth's initial guidance, there was no designated leader, not even a coordinator: we all took responsibility for making sure the needed tasks got done, we all took notes together (which is possible on Google docs), and we took turns facilitating as needed (watching the time, making sure we spent time on reflection). This kind of collaboration can work! I encourage others to start a sandbox of your own. All you do is invite a few friends to a Skype call and figure out what you want to learn or do together. Let me know how it works out!

A neat post about a sandbox learning how to use a new video chat tool:

The Trial Version <http://technologyforcommunities.com/2010/06/cantilever-out-from-the-know/>



1. The challenge group (the group who has requested help) members explain how they would like to see their network change and become more effective **as a network** in the coming year. Examples are:
 - have better communication and trust among members
 - improve outreach and involvement of non-members
 - clearer agreements
 - more involvement of more of the partners in project activity
 - more distributed leadership
 - adding more potential members/partners to gain more clout, access to resources, skills, etc.

Explain what problems there have been in the past and why an improvement is important to your network. Also, what have you tried already and how has that worked? What are some initial ideas you have about how to be more effective in this area?

2. The larger group asks questions, which the challenge group answers.
3. The small groups discuss what advice they want to give, drawing from their own experience when possible. Chart up advice.
4. Each group describes one action they would recommend to improve the network.
5. The challenge group responds, appreciating specific suggestions and noting how they might be applied.



Coaching Sessions

1. Start coaching sessions by asking the person what has been going well in his or her project coordination or network weaving.
2. Ask, “What do you want to work on today?” or “What are issues or concerns you would like to talk about today?”
3. People often just need someone to listen to them think through solutions or approaches. After they describe the issue, ask them what ideas they have about dealing with it.
4. If you have suggestions, go ahead and make them if you feel ideas are still needed.
5. As you close the session have a discussion about what to focus on during the next time period. Record that somewhere so both of you can be reminded of it at the beginning of the next session.
6. After you have had several calls, ask the person being coached if he or she is feeling comfortable with the network weaving role or if another call or two would help.



Freeing Up Your Time

Date	Task or Activity	Time Takes	Like? 1-5	Importance? 1-5	What would happen if I stop?	Who else can do it?	Feelings





Tracking Priorities

Tracking Priorities

Priorities That Will Help You Transform the World

Personal Growth Priorities

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Learning & Skill Building Priorities

- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

Work-related Priorities

- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15



Thoughts on Network Weaver Support Systems

1. What did I learn about what it will take to support Network Weavers? What do I see as some of the major challenges to supporting Network Weavers?

2. How will our network support Network Weavers?

3. What else do I want to learn about supporting Network Weavers?