NSW GOVERNMENT | **Public Service Commission**

Guidelines for
Employee Networks

Contents

Introduction & Overview

An Employee Network is a voluntary network of employees formed with common interests and objectives to enhance the workplace experience of target employee demographic/s.

Effective workplace networks can increase employee engagement, enthusiasm and collaboration. They can also demonstrate an employer's commitment to building a supportive workplace culture. Networks can assist with sensitive employee issues, encourage innovation and support better understanding of the diverse community the NSW Public Sector serves. These guidelines provide information on the establishment and operation of Employee Networks. They have been developed in consultation with NSW public sector employees following a review of leading practice within the public and private sectors.

Why have an Employee Network?

As Australia's working population ages and immigration continues to increase, the average team will become more diverse, agile and global.

Building an inclusive workplace culture is important for retaining top talent and ensuring the public sector continues to deliver high-quality services to the people of NSW.

It is proven that when employees feel they can bring their whole self to work, they are more engaged, productive and motivated to drive innovation and growth[1].

Recognising the diverse needs of employees and empowering them to achieve their full potential at work will enhance the quality of services delivered to the people of NSW.

Benefits to the Agency

NSW public sector agencies have a number of Employee Networks, which provide invaluable advice, advocacy, and training to help:

- Develop sources of expertise and support for employees with specific needs in the agency

- Enable structured feedback from employees about their experience of organisational barriers
- Provide advice on common issues and leverage the contribution of diverse employees
- Help to promote diversity within the agency and encourage compliance with legislative requirements
- Provide genuine insights about the diverse requirements of the client base that the agency services.

Benefits to the Individual

Members of Employee Networks benefit through:

- Personal development opportunities
- Showcasing personal skills and building their profile within their agency and across clusters
- Networking, mentoring and sponsorship opportunities
- Enhancing employee experiences in the agency by advocating for change.

1. The View From Six Countries, Catalyst Research 2014

Setting up your Employee Network

Getting Started

- Identify target employee group
- Secure an Executive Sponsor
- Define mission and goals, as well as membership criteria.

1

Establishing the Operating Structure and Members

- Draft Operating Charter
- Recruit members and hold first meeting
- Agree annual plan of activities.

2

Launch Your Network

- Develop a communication plan
- Launch your Employee Network
- Promote your network 's mission, goals and opportunities to get involved.

3

Sustainability & Longevity

- Ongoing recruitment of members and succession planning
- Measuring for impact
- Reward and recognition of members.

4

STEP 1 - Getting Started

In order to get started, a core group should work through the initial steps to set the direction and key documents for the Employee Network.

Understanding the organisational context

The following factors will affect the design of the Employee Network and its key priorities:

- Agency structure and size
- Location/s or geographical spread of agency
- Existence and experience of other Employee Networks
- Available HR support
- Level of Executive Support.

Targeted interviews with HR professionals, senior executives and key representative employees may help inform the network's direction and key priorities. Tapping into existing Employee Networks can also inform the design of your network.

Determining a Purpose

The overall purpose of an Employee Network is to enhance the workplace experience of a target employee demographic/s. Your network may target one employee demographic, such as employees with disability, or you may have one network that covers a number of employee demographics in your agency.

When establishing your network you should consider the following questions:

- What is its primary purpose?
- What are the aims and objectives of the network?
- How does it link to other employee networks within the agency and across the NSW public sector?
- How does it link to agency strategy?
- How does it align to existing initiatives?

Some of the purposes that Employee Networks can serve include:

Workplace Cultural Change – The network can provide advice on how to develop a supportive workplace culture or how to promote awareness of specific employment or development issues. The network may also provide feedback on workplace policies or report issues of interest to employees to the senior level within an agency.

Workplace Initiatives – The network may assist with practical initiatives, such as reporting inappropriate workplace practices or championing leading practice initiatives.

Peer Networking and Support – The network can provide a mechanism for employees to share information, advice, support and guidance with each other. Through this support, diversity and inclusion can be promoted.

Career Progression – The network may help promote the professional development of specific employee groups in areas such as business practice, presentation and leadership skills.

Determining Mission and Goals

A Mission Statement frames how the network will reach its goals, guides key activities and provides a consistent narrative for introducing the network to diverse audiences. Developing your mission statement at the start will help clarify why the network exists and how it will drive change across the agency.

Ideally, mission statements should be no longer than one-two paragraphs, define the strategic objective for the network, outline key goals and activities, and be easily understood.

STEP 1 - Getting Started

Employee Networks in Small Agencies

If you are a small agency, you may want to consider establishing a cross-agency network or sharing resources across agencies. If similar groups exist in other small-sized agencies, identify opportunities to leverage leading practice, collaborate and support each other.

Securing an Executive Sponsor

An Executive Sponsor is a senior executive that can advocate on behalf of the network for funding, guide the network's strategy and direction, help solve any issues, and generally raise the profile and influence of the network within the agency. When seeking an Executive Sponsor consideration should be given to:

- The intended role of the Sponsor – advocate, influencer, strategic advisor (or a combination of all three)
- Level of influence within the agency
- Likely level of engagement
- Ability to commit time and energy
- Understanding and empathy of the key challenges facing network members
- Clearly communicating and agreeing with the sponsor on the expectations of the role.

A senior executive who has demonstrated interest, understanding and empathy with the target employee group and has a sufficient influence and presence within your agency is recommended.

Developing an Executive Sponsor role description can provide clarity around expectations and responsibilities. For an example of an Executive Sponsor role description, see Appendix 1. If you are unsure of potential candidates, please consult with your relevant HR contact before approaching individuals.

Determining Membership Criteria

Open or Closed Membership – The network can be open to all employees or be more targeted with a closed membership to the target employee group.

Closed and open memberships both deliver specific benefits depending upon the intent of the network and the dynamics of the target employee group.

Open Membership – Opening membership beyond the target employee group can increase visibility, raise awareness and foster greater acceptance across the agency. Open membership can also meet the needs of a larger group of employees, focus employees around a specific issue and provide a broader perspective. For these reasons, open membership is typically the approach that most networks follow.

Closed Membership – Closed membership provides a safe environment for the target employee group to come together, provide support and guidance, discuss common issues and resolve concerns. When using a closed model, members should provide a strong case for its membership and clearly communicate the intent and purpose of the network.

Membership Coverage – Networks can be location based or cover the entire agency. Agencies can also consider having one network to cover a multi-agency approach and expanding the network into regional areas.

Overcoming Resistance

When establishing your network, consult with other Employee Networks to identify any challenges they faced. Identify key individuals in your agency who can act as Inclusion Allies and seek the advice of your HR contact and/ or Executive Sponsor to overcome any potential resistance.

STEP 2 – Establishing the Operating Structure and Membership

Drafting an Operating Charter

An Operating Charter provides an overview of the operating structure of your network and guides key activities. A draft Operating Charter should be developed, which can be further refined and endorsed by the Employee Network once established.

Building on the mission, goals and membership criteria established in step one, the charter should also cover roles and responsibilities, operational arrangements, funding and review. For an Employee Network Operating Charter template, see Appendix 2.

Depending upon the size and purpose of your network, you may want to consider the roles and responsibilities required for effective operation. Nominations are normally called for the Key Personnel and Stream Leads at the first Employee Network meeting.

KEY PERSONNEL - examples of key roles

Chair	Deputy Chair	Secretariat	Treasurer
Can originate from any part of the agency and from any level. The Chair will guide the network and play a key role in shaping its agenda and be the lead contact for the Executive Sponsor. Ideally the Chair will be representative of the network's target employee group and is not filled by someone from a HR or Diversity function within the agency.	Supports the activities of the Chair and coordinates the Stream-Leads (see below). When the Chair is unavailable, the Deputy Chair can act in their place.	Provides traditional secretariat function such as minute keeping, organising and coordinating meetings and other operational matters. Can be held by either HR staff or network member.	Manages budget and funding strategy.

STREAM LEADS

Professional Development	Events and Membership	Communications
Coordinates the development and delivery of key training and education initiatives.	Coordinates the planning and execution of key network events, as well as managing membership engagement and recruitment.	Responsible for the development and implementation of the communication plan. Activities may be targeted at improving awareness of current initiatives, highlighting key achievements, and promoting awareness and advocacy for the network.

OTHER MEMBERS

Organising Member	Inclusion Ally	Regional Member
Assists with the planning and delivery of networking activities on behalf of the employee network.	Does not identify as a member of the target employee demographic group but provides advocacy and support to champion the interests and activities of the Employee Network.	Key point of contact in regional areas, hosts network events and takes a lead in setting up a regional branch to expand coverage.

STEP 2 - Establishing the Operating Structure and Membership

Calling for Network Members

When approaching potential members, think about how the individual and the network will benefit. Ways to recruit members include:

- Sending out mass-emails, messages in agency newsletters and other communication channels
- Delivering a word-of-mouth campaign
- Executive Sponsor-led communications calling for members.

Conduct first Network Meeting

The individual/s who established the Employee Network should chair the first meeting. Key agenda items for that meeting include:

- Seek nominations for the Key Personnel and Stream Leads
- Discuss the draft Operating Charter and seek the network's endorsement of the Charter
- Co-design an annual plan of events and activities.

Annual Plan of Activities

The network should create an annual plan of events and activities. An example of an annual plan is provided at Appendix 4. One way to identify events and activities is to co-design the plan with the membership, or run an annual survey to find out how the network can meet the membership needs and interests. See Appendix 3 for a sample member survey. Example events and activities you may want to consider include:

Workplace Culture Change

- Awareness and education events connected to key international or national days such as NAIDOC Week or International Women's Day

- Regular reports to the Executive Sponsor about meetings and activities, and emerging issues for employees in the agency
- Delivering communications such as a network web page or blog on the intranet about the status of activities and consultations, with links to resources and a feedback or 'suggestions' function.

Workplace Initiatives

- Providing feedback to learning and development staff about target employee needs and interests
- Inviting relevant managers and human resource staff to meetings to share ideas and information
- Raising awareness of agency study leave and assistance policies, assistance with adjustments and other relevant policies.

Peer Networking

- Member networking events
- Quarterly information workshops for members
- Working with networks in other agencies to host joint activities.

Career Progression

- Encouraging employees to share their knowledge and expertise informally or through mentoring or coaching
- Delivering targeted training and development activities such as presentation and communication skills (e.g. Toastmasters)
- Gathering and distributing information of professional, general interest and training opportunities to the network members.

STEP 2 – Establishing the Operating Structure and Membership

Managing Expectations

It is important to fit the key deliverables of your network within realistic boundaries so that the work is achievable, has an effective impact and maintains the energy and commitment of members.

Things to consider include:

- Your members will need to balance the network activities with their other work
- Identify any quick wins that will show your network's potential to drive change
- Identify one to three key activities that will have the most impact rather than a long list that may not be achievable
- Apply project management principles to your network's activities.

Funding

Depending on the purpose of your network, you may require some funding to maintain operations and deliver key initiatives.

You may want to consider:

- Requesting funding as part of your agency's business planning
- Charging members on a cost recovery basis for key events.

The Executive Sponsor may be able to advise on any funding or reporting requirements of your agency.

Meeting Guidelines & Protocols

Meeting and privacy protocols ensure a respectful and safe environment for honest and constructive discussions. This may include documenting the key accountabilities and behaviours expected of network members.

The frequency of meetings should be determined by the availability of members and the key priorities of your network. Some networks may meet monthly while others may meet quarterly.

STEP 3 – Launching the Network

Develop the Communications Plan

Launching your network will promote its activities across your agency and help in recruiting new members.

Before the launch, you should consider developing a communications plan.

Networks with strong communications plans in place are better able to communicate their goals, progress and successes.

The communication plan should cover the goals and measures, key audiences and messages, communication channels and time frames. See Appendix 5 for the communication plan template.

Seek support for your plan and identify what existing communication initiatives and channels you may access as part of the delivery.

Launch the Network

The target audience for your launch event is primarily your existing and potential members, as well as key stakeholders such as the network's Executive Sponsor.

Ensure the launch event communicates your key messages to your target audience, including:

- What the Employee Network's mission and goals are
- What the network expects to accomplish and how
- Opportunities to become involved.

There are five key considerations when planning your network's launch. These are:

Timing – ensure the date and time is suitable for your target audience.

Purpose – is to promote your network, its activities and membership.

Location – ensure the location is appropriate and you have considered accessibility requirements and expected numbers.

Experience – you want attendees to have a positive experience and remember your key messages.

Follow up – ensure you register attendees so you are able to communicate with them after the launch event.

Promote the Network

Promoting your network does not end once the launch has taken place. This is a continual activity that will require focus. There are many ways to promote your network. Some ideas to consider include:

- A dedicated page on your agency's intranet
- Maintaining a mailing list of interested individuals and communicating with them on a regular basis through an electronic newsletter
- Leveraging the network's Executive Sponsor to assist in promotions
- Ways to connect with new employees, such as, presenting at induction programs.

STEP 4 - Sustainability and Longevity

Membership Recruitment

Membership recruitment should be an ongoing focus to ensure the network's longevity and that it achieves a broad reach across the agency. Ways to recruit new members include:

- Inviting employees to attend awareness and networking events
- Sending out mass-emails, messages in newsletters and other internal communications channels
- Delivering a word-of-mouth campaign
- Surveying employees to identify needs and interests
- Executive Sponsor-led communications calling for new members.

Succession Planning

Succession planning for Key Personnel roles is important to help ensure the network maintains its effectiveness and momentum over time.

A formal process for succession planning is recommended to ensure that the network is not overly reliant on a small group of dedicated individuals.

The Operating Charter should outline the length of tenure for key roles, election and voting processes and a succession process.

As a general rule, selection for key roles should be held at least every 12 months.

Measuring Impact

Measuring effectiveness of the network is important to determine whether key initiatives are delivering to employee needs.

When defining success measures, determine whether they are realistic and achievable, how they can be verified through employee feedback and data (for example using surveys or comparing your agency's results in the People Matter Employee Survey), whether they are aligned to agency priorities, and how they link to the network's mission and goals.

Consideration may also be given to how the network compares to leading practice initiatives across the public and private sectors.

Reward and Recognition

An individual's involvement in the Employee Network should be discussed as part of their performance plan and included as part of their performance objectives.

Network members may also be brought together once a year with the Executive Sponsor to celebrate and reflect on their contributions, progress and key achievements.

Supporting Documents

Appendix 1

Executive Sponsor Role Description

Disability Employee Network Example

Position Objective:

- To encourage and support employees in your organisation to develop and implement inclusive practices for people with disability
- Champion the inclusion of people with disability
- Support the activities of the Employee Network.

Suggested Activities:

- Speak at internal (or external if appropriate) events throughout the year on inclusion of people with disability
- Raise profile and intent of role, be visible and approachable though inclusion of role on Intranet, newsletters, senior leadership meetings
- Receive and discuss regular progress reports from the Diversity Practitioner
- Attend Disability Employee Network meetings and events
- Craft the organisation's key messages in relation to people with disability (with the support of the diversity practitioner)
- Read, consider and if required, challenge all papers, reports and information.

This means understanding the organisation's key drivers which may relate to:

- Skills shortages
- Business objectives
- Reflection of Australian community
- Personal support of inclusion in the workplace.

Personal Qualities:

- Strong leadership, influencing and engagement skills
- Strong desire to assist the organisation to be inclusive of people with disability
- A genuine regard for inclusion of people with disability
- Confidence in relating to people with disability
- Be visible and make the time to undertake the role.

Supporting Documents

Appendix 2

Operating Charter Template

NB: Check with your agency to ensure that your network charter meets the requirements of your agency.

Charter for the *(insert network name)*

Overview

Include a brief description of the network.

Mission and goals

Outline the purpose of your Employee Network – should be a short high-level statement of no more than one-two paragraphs.

Membership

Define the membership criteria and the process for gaining and relinquishing membership. If relevant, outline arrangements for associate members or guests.

Roles and responsibilities

Insert details in table below:

ROLE	RESPONSIBILITY
	Describe the role and responsibility of the stakeholder.

Operational arrangements

Define how the network will operate, including;

- Filling of roles
- Tenure
- Election and voting process
- Succession process
- The conduct and frequency of meetings
- Reporting obligations.

Funding

Outline the process for raising and managing funds.

Review

Outline how and when the operations of the network will be reviewed. This could for example involve a self review by members, by an external party or by surveying stakeholders.

Document Control

Complete the Revision History as below:

REVISION DATE	VERSION	SUMMARY OF CHANGES	AUTHOR

Supporting Documents

Appendix 3

Member Sample Survey

[INSERT DEPARTMENT] has launched a [INSERT NAME OF EMPLOYEE NETWORK].
The [INSERT NAME OF EMPLOYEE NETWORK] mission is to [ADD MISSION STATEMENT]. The Employee Network is driven by its members' needs and in order to be most effective; it seeks to identify potential new members and their requirements.

This survey is the first step toward making [INSERT NAME OF EMPLOYEE NETWORK] what you want it to be. Your responses will be viewed by the Executive Committee/Network Organisers, and will feed into the design and delivery of the Network's business plan and the design of key events and deliverables.

1) What are the three most important things you want to gain from participation in [INSERT NAME OF EMPLOYEE NETWORK]?

a. _____

_____

b. _____

_____

c. _____

_____

2) How interested are you in the following? *(Please circle)*

	VERY INTERESTED	INTERESTED	NO OPINION	SOMEWHAT INTERESTED	NOT INTERESTED
Driving Cultural Change	5	4	3	2	1
Career advancement	5	4	3	2	1
Networking	5	4	3	2	1
Mentoring	5	4	3	2	1
Leadership Development	5	4	3	2	1
Self-improvement	5	4	3	2	1
Enhancing Workplace Policy	5	4	3	2	1
Expanding Agency Relationships	5	4	3	2	1

Supporting Documents

Appendix – 3 *continued...*

Member Sample Survey

3) What types of activities are you interested in being involved in?
(Please tick all that apply)

- ☐ Mentoring programs
- ☐ Networking events
- ☐ Newsletter
- ☐ Other *(Please specify)* _____
- ☐ Training and Awareness Programs
- ☐ Skill-building seminars/workshops
- ☐ Social events
- ☐ Speakers/Panel events
- ☐ Employee Surveys
- ☐ Virtual events
- ☐ Regional Events

4) Realistically, how much time can you devote to providing support to the Employee Network each month?

- ☐ Less than 1 hour per month
- ☐ 1-3 hours per month
- ☐ 4-8 hours per month
- ☐ More than 8 hours per month

Name: _____

Contact Details: _____

- ☐ I wish to remain anonymous.

Supporting Documents

Appendix 4

Annual Plan Template

ANNUAL PLAN OF [insert Employee Network]		
Mission & Goals	*Insert the employee network mission and goals.*	
	TEMPLATE	**EXAMPLE**
Action areas	This is a description of what broadly you are trying to achieve	Reinvigorating Disability Employee Networks (DEN) — with a focus on the role of networks in supporting career pathways and progression
Projects over the next 12 months	**1:** describe the project	**2:** Sector-wide DEN Conference to boost the profile of DENs and share good practice across the public sector
Project description to be scoped and refined into work plans for each project	Detailed description of the project	• The project involves hosting a sector-wide DEN conference — ideally a full-day conference including guest speakers, workshops and plenary sessions • A key conference theme could be around the role of DENs in promoting career progression and pathways, and the conference should be used to share lessons learnt and good practice examples • The conference could include executive sponsors and current DEN members, and agencies that do not have DENs should be invited to participate.
Project lead	Who will lead the project	Adele Smith
Next steps	Include the next steps required to get the project off the ground	• Scope funding for conference, and liaise with other agencies with regards to a potential venue • Establish a project working group to develop a theme and agenda for the conference.
Time frame/ deliverables	Include the overall time frame and deliverables for the project	• Planning between Sept 2016 and Feb 2017 • Confirm a project working group at the Dec 2017 meeting of the Employee Network • Promote conference from January 2017 • Host conference in late Feb/early March 2017 **=** Deliver in second quarter of 2017
Challenges and issues to address	What are the challenges and issues that need to be addressed in the project	To be scoped by project working group — considerations include funding and venue
Opportunities and links to leverage	What other opportunities and links can be leveraged by the project	• Building on DENs that are established and operational • Consider expanding scope to include broader 'diversity employee networks'
Additional ideas or follow up projects	What other areas can be considered or addressed by this or subsequent project	At the Conference, or as a separate piece of work, DENs could be leveraged to promote a sector-wide survey about the workplace experience of people with disability in the public sector; DENs may be able to play a role in developing a mentoring program to support early career and graduate pathways
Links between projects	Identify any linkages between activities of the Employee Network	
Governance	Project leads report progress back to the Employee Network	

Supporting Documents

Appendix 5

Communications Plan Template

NB: Check with your agency to ensure that your plan meets the requirements of your agency.

When developing a Communications Strategy consideration should be given to:
- How you will officially launch the network?
- What level of profile you wish to build among employees?
- Do you have an Executive Sponsor and what role can they play in communication activities?
- What are your communication goals and objectives?
- What are your key messages and scheduled timing?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What communication channels do you have access to (electronic and other) and how will you communicate with those employees who don't have access to emails?
- What expertise do you need to access or bring into the network?
- Communication channels to promote the profile of your network include internal communications, training and education events, emails, Executive Sponsor announcements, member newsletters, staff induction programs, recruitment packs, flyers and payslip messages.

Introduction

Provide a brief background and context for your Employee Network, including its objectives.

Communications Goals and Measures

Describe your communication goals and the measures to achieve them.

GOALS	SUPPORTING MEASURES

Key Audiences and Messages

Identify the various audiences, messages and outline the intended impact for each audience in the table below:

AUDIENCE	MESSAGES	COMMUNICATION IMPACT

Supporting Documents

Appendix - 5 *continued...*

Communication Plan Timetable

List the details in the table below:

ACTION	TIME FRAME/ DEADLINE	TARGET AUDIENCE	DELIVERY METHOD/ CHANNEL	PERSON	KEY MESSAGES

Monitoring

Describe what successes you intend to achieve and how they will be assessed, both regularly and at completion:

Budgeting

List expenditure items and their cost:

ITEM		COST (A$)		ACTUAL
TOTAL				

Document Control

To ensure that everyone is working on the most up-to-date document, complete the Revision History below:

REVISION DATE	VERSION	SUMMARY OF CHANGES	AUTHOR

Glossary of Key Terms

Agency – Agency is used to refer to a Department, or a Public Service executive agency (being an agency related to a Department), or a separate Public Service agency. It is recognised that Employee Networks may also exist across agencies or within a cluster group.

Annual Plan – An annual plan is a document that outlines the strategy, budget and proposed activities of an Employee Network. Activities outlined in an annual plan include awareness and education events, peer networking and career progression initiatives.

Charter of Operations – A Charter of Operations is a document that outlines the governance and operations of an Employee Network. (See section 4.1 for further details).

Employee Network – Is a voluntary network of employees formed with common interests and objectives with the specific task of enhancing the workplace experience of a target employee demographic group.

Executive Sponsor – Is a senior executive, (ideally Senior Executive Band 2 or above) who provides formal sponsorship in the form of funding, advocacy and communications support to champion the interests, activities and priorities of an Employee Network within and across agencies.

Inclusion Ally – Is an employee who does not identify as a member of the target employee demographic group for a particular Employee Network but is willing to provide advocacy and support to champion the interests and activities of the Network.

Key Personnel – Is a member of an Employee Network with decision making rights in regards to key network functions such as strategy setting, budget, operations and membership management.

Stream Leads – This refers to a possible key personnel role which focuses on coordinating the development and delivery of projects, events or strategies in a particular area.