



Regional Networks: Thinking Through Membership

Presented by: Maggie Ullman, Network Advisor, Asheville, NC
maggie@ullmanconsulting.com | 828.713.9488

Connecting People. Fostering Innovation.

USDN

urban sustainability
directors network

Presentation Purpose and Contents

This presentation is to the Regional Networks Coordinating Committee, on May 6th, 2016.

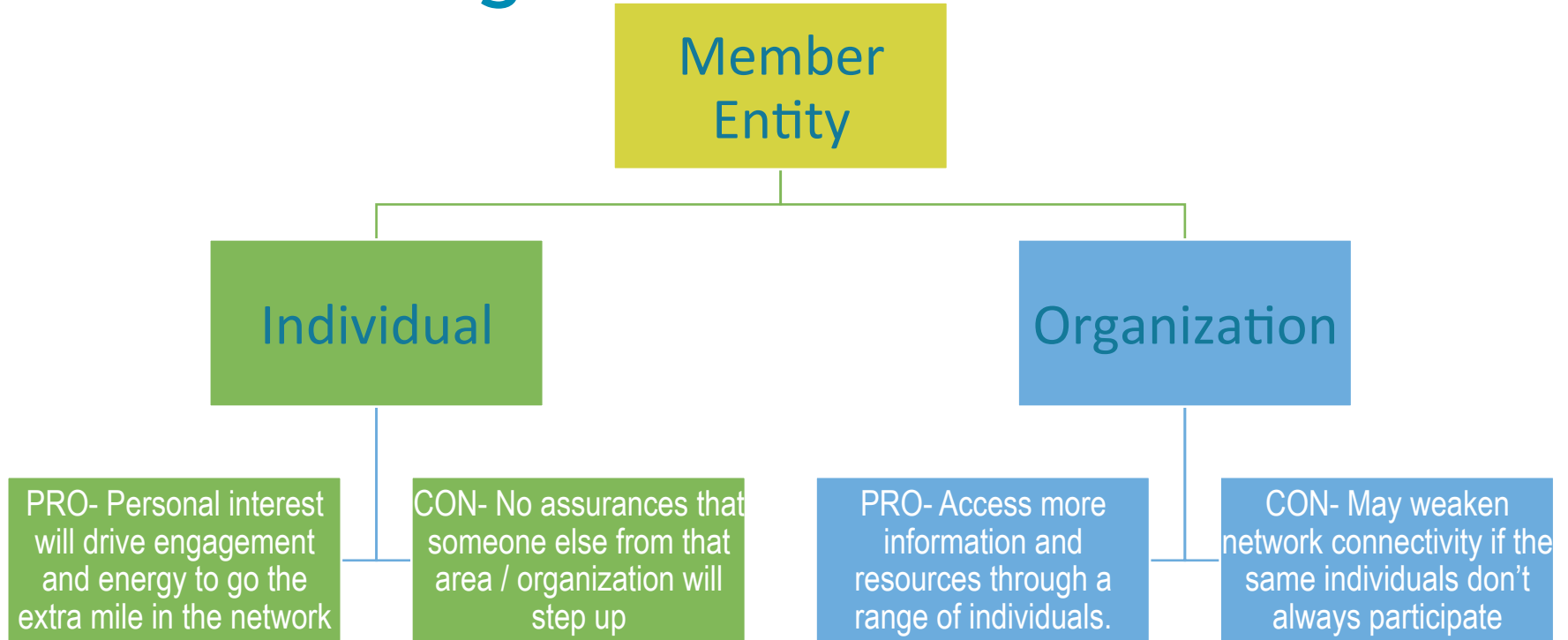
The RNCC call will address the executive summary information. All other information is for future reference. The executive summary includes:

- Who is eligible?
- Selection criteria
- Participation standards
- Size and demographics

Partner Networks	Network Participants	Representing
Green Cities California (GCC)	Linda Giannelli Pratt Erik Pearson Shannon Parry ALTERNATE- Susana Reyes	GCC Managing Director (Coordinator) Hayward, CA Santa Monica, CA Los Angeles, CA
Great Lakes	Matt Naud Matt Gray	Ann Arbor, MI Cleveland, OH
Heartland	T.O. Bowman Brenda Nations	Oklahoma City, OK Iowa City, IO
Michigan Green Communities (MGC)	Dave Norwood Sandra Diorka Jaime Kidwell-Brix	Dearborn, MI Delhi, MI MGC Coordinator (Coordinator)
New England Municipal Sustainability Network (NEMSN)	Troy Moon Cyndi Veit Virginia LeClair	Portland, ME EPA- (Coordinator) Dedham, MA
Ohio, Kansas, Indiana (OKI)	Larry Falkin Lamees Mubaslat	Cincinnati, OH Montgomery County, OH
Prairie State Network (PSN)	Catherine Hurley Dan Hughes	Evanston, IL PSN Coordinator (Coordinator)
Southeast Sustainability Directors Network (SSDN)	Peter Nierengarten Robin Cox Meg Williams-Jamison	Fayetteville, AR Huntsville, AL SSDN Coordinator
Western Adaptation Alliance (WAA)	Tamara Lawless Ashley Perl	Flagstaff, AZ Aspen, CO

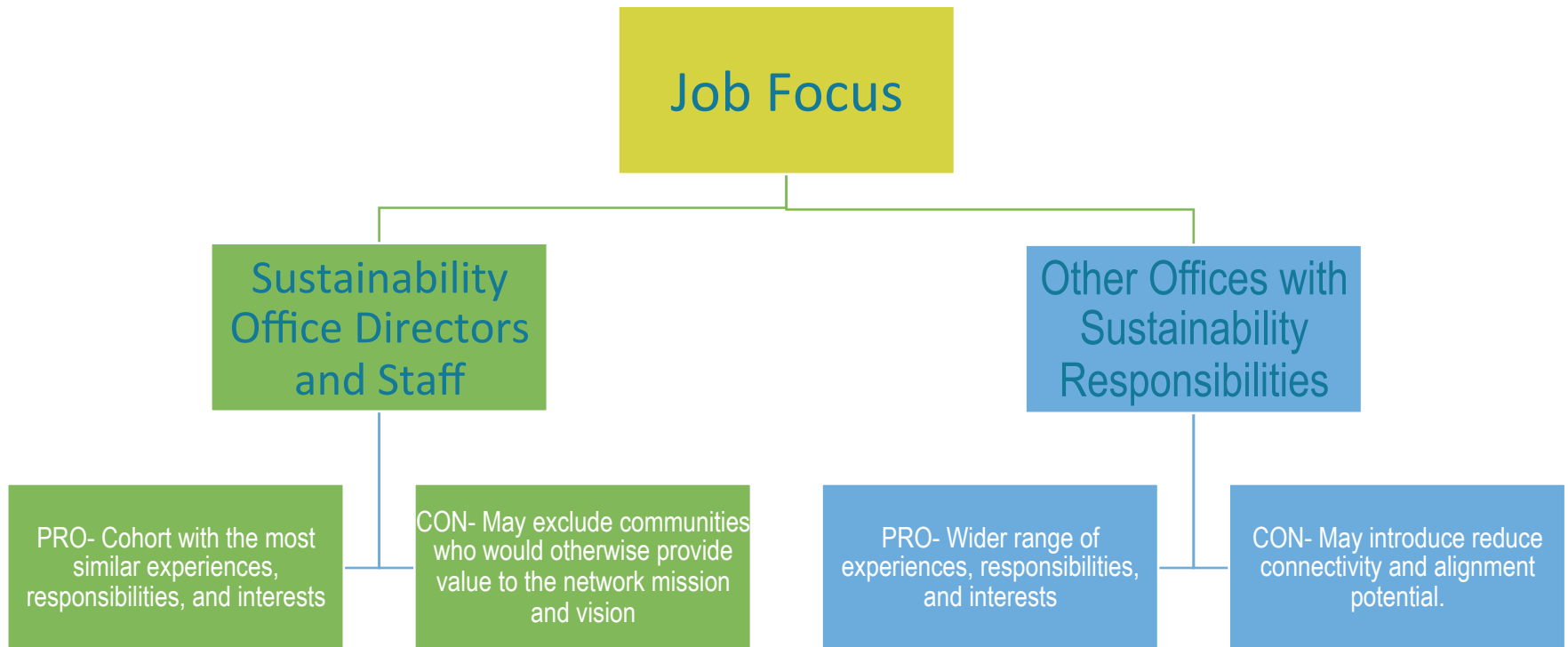
Eligibility: Member Entity

Will membership be offered to individuals, organizations or both?



Eligibility: Job Focus

What is the job focus of members?



Participation Standards

- The following are participation standards that sustainability director networks have used:
 - Attend/contribute to the network's annual meeting
 - Respond to the network's surveys of members
 - Participate actively in the network's Work Groups and other activities, such as peer-learning conference calls
 - Contribute to the network's online communications and information repository
 - Participate in governance of the network (e.g., member of Steering or Planning Committee)
 - Once a network is more established, member directors help to keep the member base invested and engaged in the work
- Plastrik, P. and Parzen, J. (2012). [Guidebook for Building Regional Networks 2.0](#).
A financial obligation will weed out members that are not serious about the network



Membership Size

Capacity of the network and its members is important to consider when thinking about the size of the network. Consider these common challenges based on membership size:

Smaller Networks

Larger Networks

*Volunteer run networks will likely outgrow their volunteer leader capacity when they move beyond 20-25 active members.**

Heavily dependent on member leaders, if leaders change network can regress

Hard to find enough people interested in same topic for collaboration

Need funding for convening and coordination

Need more process and governance

Hear from your Peers

- **Green Cities California: Shannon Parry (7 mins)**
 - Member guidelines and the community standards for sustainability performance
- **OKI Network: Larry Falkin (7 mins)**
 - OKI process and conversation about member eligibility

Guided Discussion

- What characteristics do members share (for example: affiliations, job responsibilities, geographic location, past work, etc.)?
- What requirements must members meet (for example: participation, dues, etc.)?
- How do members join (for example: open group, or referral only)?

A network diagram in the top right corner consisting of several circular nodes of varying sizes connected by thin, light blue lines, forming a complex web-like structure.

Appendix

Membership: the Foundation of a Network



- In a generative social-impact network, membership is essential to success
- Building strong relationships creates a solid foundation on which a network can create focused change
- Without this member base, network initiatives will not be able to achieve desired dissemination of resources or create collective impacts
- Members must be invested in the network - without this investment, a network cannot function:
 - There is not a single “correct” way for networks to structure membership
 - Each network can find a “best fit” membership model by assessing both the network needs as well as the individual member needs

Benefits of Creating a Membership Model

- Members serve in a variety of roles within a network - from helping to determine network purpose and goals to providing financial support through dues
- By having a strong base of engaged members, a network will gain momentum in advancing initiatives as well as troubleshooting issues that arise
- A good membership model is beneficial in many ways:
 - A membership model gives members a clear value proposition that outlines expectations of and benefits for members
 - A membership model also helps the network by outlining the specifics of a member's role within the network making a more streamlined and efficient organization



Finding a Membership Model That Fits Your Network

In the USDN [Guidebook for Building Regional Networks 2.0](#), authors Peter Plastrik and Julia Parzen **define open and closed membership in a network**:

“In network formation, who is in and who is out of the network matters a great deal. Networks have boundaries, but their borders may be “soft”—easy to penetrate—or ‘hard’—impossible to penetrate. In an open network, most anyone can become a member, the more the merrier. In a closed network, on the other hand, membership is more tightly controlled and limited.”

In a generative networks, closed membership often creates a member base with aligning interests / backgrounds to create strong relationships and better advance network initiatives

Plastrik, P. and Parzen, J. (2012).
[Guidebook for Building Regional Networks 2.0](#).



Structuring the Membership Model

In designing a membership model, there are four key questions a network should ask:

1. **Who is eligible** to become a member, and what criteria should they meet?
2. **What is the process** for deciding who is a member and inviting participation?
3. **How many members** should there be?
4. **What standards of participation** should there be for members? Does it make sense to have membership dues or financial contribution requirements to gauge network investment and support network operations?



Eligibility



- A network must determine **WHO is eligible for membership**
 - This is a decision that must be made carefully by network founders; the makeup of a network often can determine what that network is capable of
 - They must take a careful look at the purpose and mission of the network to determine how membership is offered
- **Membership eligibility varies depending on the openness of the membership structure**
 - A big factor to consider is if membership will be offered to individuals, organizations or both

Individual Membership

Individual membership is done by **selecting specific people within the network's focus area** that have personal interest in the network

Advantages :

- The benefit of offering membership to individuals is that **their personal interest will drive increased engagement** and energy to go the extra mile in the network
- Individuals can also come from broader backgrounds **which will bring a more diverse perspective to the network.**

Disadvantages:

- If the individual member leaves the network, there are no assurances that **someone else from that area / organization will step up**



Organization Membership

Organization membership is done by selecting specific organizations to participate in the network - **the organization designates a representative(s) from within their ranks to participate in the network:**

Advantages:

- For a regional network, having organizations (such as city governments) as members has the potential to achieve better market penetration: **these organizations have community influence but can also have high position turn over**
 - Because network membership is with the organization, it is **often more stable** because organizations can replace representatives internally if there is staff turnover.

Disadvantages:

- Network responsibilities are assigned by the organization to their representatives. so **engagement from**





Selection Criteria



- **Determining the criteria** that an interested party must meet to gain membership can be tricky for network builders
 - Every network must assess their specific missions and initiatives to set these standards
- Heather Creech with the International Institute for Sustainable Development has identified **valuable points to consider** when establishing membership criteria:
 1. Members must have **a shared commitment to network goals**
 2. Members must have **acknowledged expertise or competence** in the work of the network
 3. Members must have **connections that matter** (this can be to other organizations or individuals that have valuable influence).
 4. Members must have **a good capacity to collaborate both** within and outside the network.
 5. Members must **be good network citizens** and be willing to prioritize network activities

Network Member Capacity

- Although member capacity may seem secondary as a network establishes member guidelines, it is important that it is not overlooked
- Capacity is important to consider based on what a network's infrastructure can handle
- If membership grows faster than the network's capacity to support it, issues can arise, such as:
 - Dissatisfaction amongst members and coordinators
 - Loss of trust between members
 - Difficulty forging strong member connections



***The USDN Guidebook for Building Regional Networks 2.0 identifies that volunteer coordinated regional networks generally begin dealing with capacity issues when they move toward more than 20-25 active members. ***

Membership Classes

- Networks usually start out with a single “core” class of members
- As the network grows, **establishing membership classes will help preserve connectivity** among members
- The following are **common classes of membership** for less engaged members of more mature networks:
 - *Affiliate members* are asked to participate in a particular network project, but are members of the network only for the project’s duration
 - *Learning members* participate in a network’s learning activities, but not in other activities
 - *Observer members* may attend meetings and monitor network internal communications, but they do not participate in work of the network. Some networks make observers pay their own costs of participation

Plastrik, P. and Parzen, J. (2012). [Guidebook for Building Regional Networks 2.0](#).



Participation Standards

- Member participation is critical for long-term network success
- The following are participation standards that sustainability director networks have used:
 - Attend/contribute to the network's annual meeting
 - Respond to the network's surveys of members
 - Participate actively in the network's Work Groups and other activities, such as peer-learning conference calls
 - Contribute to the network's online communications and information repository
 - Participate in governance of the network (e.g., member of Steering or Planning Committee)
- Once a network is more established, member dues can help to keep the member base invested and engaged in the network
 - A financial obligation will weed out members that are not serious about the network



Plastrik, P. and Parzen, J. (2012). [Guidebook for Building Regional Networks 2.0.](#)



Conclusion



- It is very important to build membership rules and structures into a new network
- Clear parameters help network Steering Committees and Coordinators create a strong member base to drive network initiatives
- These same parameters also keep members engaged and build trust in the network
- Incorporating a tailored membership model into your network will set you on a path to success

USDN Membership Structures and Benefits

Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN)

Join USDN

USDN membership is open to U.S. and Canadian municipal sustainability directors who want to actively engage with and learn from their peers. Potential members must have proven sustainability practices to share and must commit to active participation in the network.

There are two types of USDN memberships with differing opportunities and dues structures:

CORE MEMBERSHIP

Core membership is open to city sustainability directors and includes activities solely for core members, including participation in the USDN Annual Meeting and opportunity to request Innovation Fund grants.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP

Associate membership is available to city and county sustainability directors.

REGIONAL NETWORKS

Potential members are encouraged to join a regional network, if available.

There are 8 regional networks affiliated with USDN through a Regional Network Coordinating Committee:

- New England
- Cascadia
- Heartland
- Western Adaptation Alliance
- Southeast
- Michigan
- OKI: Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana
- Green Cities California

These regional networks, which involve USDN members as well as non-member participants, collaborate through the USDN Regional Network Coordinating Committee. Through the regional networks, USDN strives to create access to a peer network for all local government sustainability leaders in North America.

Member Benefits

USDN members report that access to the network enables them to work faster and more effectively. They find solutions to key challenges, get new ideas, and avoid replicating problems already faced by peers. Perhaps most importantly, members develop valuable relationships and create a sense of community while developing the professional field of practice.

USDN members have access to an efficient, structured approach to information sharing and collaborative innovation, including:

- Rapid fire information sharing with 120 peers (weekly e-news, private intranet, and problem-solving sessions)
- Ongoing user groups that inform program development
- Collaborative projects through the USDN Innovation Fund
- In-person peer exchanges and breakthrough group convenings
- Development of new funding sources
- Support for creating and growing regional sustainability director networks



Heartland Network Membership Rules

Heartland Network

Membership Rules

- Local government staff with responsibilities for sustainability in city and/or county jurisdictions in the central states area are eligible to participate in the Heartland Network
- The network has not actively recruited new members, but has been receptive to requests from local government sustainability staff who have asked to join us
- No specific target number (or limit) on members has been established
- Members are expected to participate in monthly conference calls (and volunteer to serve as note-takers & facilitators) and annual face-to-face meetings



Green Cities California Membership Rules

Green Cities California

Membership Rules

- Sustainability or Climate Action Plan adopted or scheduled for completion by year's end
- Signatory to Conference of Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement
- Adopt GCC Sustainability Resolution within six months of membership (commit to paper and bottled water resolutions or directives)
- Pay dues