

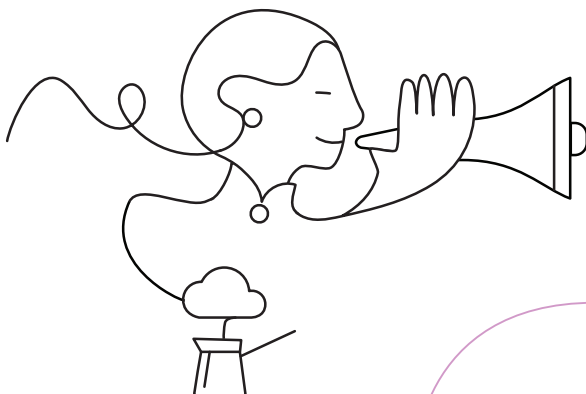


INVITING NEW MEMBERS

Sometimes, peer networks need new members to keep them fresh. This section will help you think about how to invite new members.

Before you start inviting new members, think about:

- Why you or others feel that the energy in the network is 'stale'? For example, are people no longer learning and growing, are there conflicts, are people not showing up, are people leaving, is it hard to find times that people will commit to? It may be useful to pay some attention to these issues with the existing network, having an honest conversation about them, to identify and address them - bringing in new members may only be one part of strengthening the network. This is potentially a great learning opportunity for the existing network, and a great way to get everyone in the network happy to invite new members.
- What else needs to happen in the network before bringing in new members? How do the people in the network feel about the energy levels? How will they feel about new people coming in? It is important to make sure everyone has a say before a plan is put in place. Make sure everyone is comfortable with new people coming into the network; and if some people are not, make sure everyone understands the reasons.
- What work has the network done on getting clear on its purpose? What plans for the future does the network have? Does inviting new members change your statement of purpose? Could this be an opportunity for the network to review the purpose?
- How has the network changed since it started? Are the needs, for the individual and for all, different than they were before? How will this change who and how to invite new peers?
- What kinds of experiences are missing from your peer network? Are there peers from your local community who are not connected to your peer network? This might include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, or local people from other cultures, or people who are in group services like group homes or day programs. How could your peer network reach these people?



Going out and inviting new peers

So, your peer network is clear about its purpose, and wants to bring in new members. It's time to invite more people to join your peer network.

Have a look at the ***Peer Connect Quick Guide: Recruitment: spreading the word about your new network***:



<https://www.peerconnect.org.au/setting-and-running-peer-networks/establishment/recruitment-spreading-word/>

This is a good starting point and now you have more some advantages you can build on:

Experience

You will know what worked well last time when you first invited peers along- do more of that! If most people found the network through their service providers, concentrate there. If most people read a story in the paper, get the paper to write another story. Now you can talk about the success of the group. And make sure you get the people in the network to do lots of talking about the group, make sure everyone one knows the 'statement of purpose'. Word of mouth is very powerful and absolutely free. Also don't forget to do the things that maybe weren't the most successful last time, but may attract new people with different experiences bringing new and different perspectives. That's always healthy for a network.

Achievement

Your network will have had some wins, and overcome some challenges. Update and send out any promotional leaflets and cards you use to tell people about your peer network, and do the same if you have a Facebook page or similar. The stories from people who have found the network valuable, are powerful in showing the benefits of the peer network. Don't forget to tell others about them.

Connections

You will have a broader network of connections in your community now - make sure to ask for their support in inviting new members. And it is important they know about your peer network's purpose and successes.



Welcoming new peers

Make sure you pay good attention to welcoming new peers. Some tips include:

Give them a good induction into the network: Give people all the details they will need - share with them the purpose, guidelines and plans of the group, meeting details, give them access to previous meeting notes. Encourage and answer lots of questions - be open.

Ensure a warm welcome from everyone at the first meeting they attend - perhaps you could consider a 'buddy' system for supporting new members if they want that. Maybe a special 'welcome' meal or morning tea will also help them feel welcome.

Importantly, if you have new members who are Aboriginal, or who come from other cultures and traditions, or who are in group services where they are unused to having these types of conversations, think about what your peer network can do to make these new members feel very welcome and included. This Peer Connect Quick Guide: how to make a peer group welcoming for ATSI members gives some ideas here

<https://www.peerconnect.org.au/setting-and-running-peer-networks/establishment/how-make-peer-group-welcoming-atsi-members/>



Follow up - check in with new members in between meetings - be available for them if they have concerns or questions. And also be sure to check in with any existing members who may be struggling with new members coming in.

“Peer support is this amazing space where you come and get boosted by being with people who understand you and who share a lot of your lived experience but from that space we are then trying to connect with our broader community.”

Cath Mahony CDAH

<https://teamup.org.au/resources>



Checklist for inviting new members

- Think about why members are leaving or not showing up

- Re-visit the purpose of the peer network

- Use your previous experiences in to reach out to new members

- Try different ways of inviting new peers

- Promote the group's achievements

- Use your community connections

- Ensure a warm welcome for new members



Hopefully you will have a heap of new members ready to make the peer network vibrant and energised again. You can add the violet bead to the string of beads. You now have a clearly defined purpose, new energy and new members.

A strong peer support network will be a network that works well together. Individuals will get along well together and explore different ideas and views in a constructive way. This will make the network most effective for everyone.

People will have different views and ideas. Sometimes people will disagree with each other. Having disagreements is normal. Some group members may act in ways that disrupt group effectiveness, and this can create challenging situations. These members may need more support.

This is where the facilitator role comes into play. The main aim is to foster communication among the group and to model effective interaction that members can emulate. We look at this in the next section: what to do if someone is not quite playing ball!

