

Peer Support Networks: Thinking about the intended lifespan of the Network

Introduction

It is important to consider the intended lifespan of your group. If it is a short-term group for a particular purpose, you will be able to arrange and spend your resources in a burst. If it has a long-term purpose, then you may need to be careful in how you manage resources over a longer period - particularly the resource of yourself and your supporters. This Quick Guide will help you think about the lifespan of the group.

Let's make it happen

Who and what is the network for?

You will have already done a lot of work thinking about this (see Quick Guide: Who you want the peer network to be for and Quick Guide: Thinking about the value proposition).

Your value proposition will be valuable in considering the lifespan - if it is a campaign for example, will the campaign be time limited or will it be an ongoing campaign? If it is a proposition for pre-planning for NDIS, it may only be useful until the NDIS is established, but if it is about building capacity for self-direction, it may need to 'live' a lot longer.

- Think also about who the network is for?
- Do you anticipate people will get what they need quickly?
- Will the people in the network, particularly the leaders, have the stamina for, and interest in, a long-term group?
- What will be the impact if the group can only run for a short time?

What should the network's lifespan be?

Once you have answers to the questions above, you will have a good idea of the appropriate lifespan of the network. However, it is important that you don't make this decision on your own - people appreciate being given the opportunity to have their voice heard, and are more likely to support a decision they are part of making.

Ask the people who are part of or interested in being part of the network - what do they want and anticipate for the lifespan of the group? This could be before or at the first meeting. It could even form part of the group agreements that you will work together to create when you first meet.

Finally, be prepared to change your mind! If others don't agree with your thinking, take the time to discover why, and consider whether in this instance, they are right. And, if the group decides one thing, and then things change, (for example because you achieved what you intended much earlier than expected, or the group is saying that the network isn't needed any more, or needs to be much longer term), then work with the group to change agreements (and perhaps review your value proposition, marketing and recruitment too).

Be flexible, and support the network to be flexible too.

Where you can find more information

See Quick Guide: Thinking about the value proposition that a group would offer

See Quick guide: Who you want the peer network to be for

Useful web links:

The Centre of Excellence for Peer Support (mental health) has some great resources for peer support networks:

<http://www.peersupportvic.org/index.php/2014-12-15-22-42-49/2014-12-16-02-22-27/Resources/>

Co-authored by [Queenslanders with Disability \(QDN\)](#)

