

# Peer support networks: What to do when the peer network loses energy

## Introduction

Networks can go through cycles of high and low energy. This Quick Guide will help you think about what to do when your network is low on energy.

## Let's make it happen

### *Part of a cycle, or the end?*

The first question to ask may seem like a big one, but it's important to know what the group feels is the reason for low energy. Perhaps the network is no longer needed, and it is time to let it go.

Ask the group - if there are still members, who value what they get from the network, is it important to keep going. If no-one sees the network having value to them any longer, then it is time to let go graciously (see Quick Guide: What to do when the network has outlived its usefulness to its members)

### *Bringing energy back into the network*

#### *First Step*

Ask the group what they think are the reasons for low energy, and how to respond. For example, if the group feels the meetings are a bit dull, then ask for ideas and help to make them more interesting and relevant. Perhaps many members are unwell or particularly busy at this time. It is important to honour this and perhaps just see the period of low energy through - remember that all networks cycle through such periods.

#### *Action*

Some suggestions for action:

- **Review your value proposition and purpose.** This may attract new members, and may also shift existing member's level of commitment - make sure all members are involved in this process.
- **Recruit new members.** New members will usually bring fresh energy into the network.
- Establish new roles. Invite existing members into being stretched and challenged by stepping up into different roles.
- **Seek advice.** Existing facilitators may need new ideas and connections to make meetings more lively and relevant. Ask people in your networks who are experienced facilitators for advice. Search the internet for ideas for group activities. Invite other group members to have a go at facilitating.
- **Brainstorm.** Invite the group to brainstorm ideas for injecting fresh energy into the group - they will know what they will respond to with new energy.
- **Change your environment.** Think about a new venue, meeting time, or meeting structure. Change often brings a change in energy levels. Being out in or close to nature can be particularly helpful.

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- **Add some new activities.** Adding new and interesting activities such as movement, art and craft, sound and music may bring a different energy into the group and add novelty and excitement to coming to meetings.
- **Invite new guests.** Perhaps you can find speakers and guests from different parts of your community to offer new perspectives and ideas e.g. invite an Indigenous speaker to tell some stories of their culture that offer new perspectives, or ask a leader in the community to talk about their leadership story.
- **Reflect.** Think together about the story of the network so far. When was the network full of energy? What has changed? How can the conditions for energy be replicated?
- **Celebrate.** Set aside time in a meeting/s to reflect on the achievements and stories of success in the network, and how these can be captured and celebrated. Plan a celebration that all will enjoy. Ask the local paper to write a story about the network's successes. Make a short video of someone's story and post it on Facebook. Celebrating successes can offer the group a sense of pride and may re-energise their commitment to the network.

### **Reflect**

Make sure the group reviews its efforts to bring new energy into the network. Capture what worked and what didn't as well. This information will be very valuable for the next time the network finds itself losing energy.

### **Where you can find information**

See Quick Guide: Running a peer meeting: some useful facilitation skills

See Quick Guide: What to do when the network has outlived its usefulness to its members

See Quick Guide Sharing the work around: how to get more network members involved in organising the peer network meetings

See Quick Guide Harvesting the gold: sharing stories

See Quick Guide: Recruiting additional members to keep the network fresh

Useful web links:

An index of group activities which could bring new energy into the group:

<http://wilderdom.com/games/>

And another great site for interesting activities:

<http://www.expressivetherapist.com/group-activities.html>

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 \(QDN\)](#)

