

# Peer support networks: Recruiting additional members to keep the network fresh

## Introduction

Networks can go through cycles of interest and enthusiasm, and sometimes need new members to keep them fresh. This Quick Guide will help you think about how to recruit additional members when this happens in your network.

## Let's make it happen

### Recruiting new members - before you start

Before you start your recruitment, think about:

- Why you or others feel that the energy in the group is 'stale'? For example, are people no longer learning and growing, are there frequent 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 group, having an honest conversation about them, to identify and address them - bringing in new members may only be one part of your response.
- It is not always helpful to bring in new people when there is already a lot of conflict or disinterest - that won't be a pleasant environment to come into. This is potentially a great learning opportunity for the existing group, and a great way to get them on board for your recruitment drive.
- What else needs to happen in the group before bringing in new members? How does the group feel about the energy levels, and how will they feel about new people coming in? People's feelings should not stop you bringing new members in, but it is important that they are heard, acknowledged and a plan put in place to support existing members who may not be comfortable with new people, for whatever reason.
- What work has the group done on refining its purpose? What plans for the future does the group have? Does this potentially change your 'value proposition' when recruiting new members? Could this be an opportunity to review your purpose?
- How has the group changed since it started? Are the needs, individually and collectively, different than they were? How will this change who and how you recruit?

## Recruitment

With the full support of your group, and your updated value proposition/purpose and list of contacts, it's time to do a recruitment drive. This can take the same form as your initial recruitment drive (see Fact Sheet: Recruitment: spreading the word about your new network), but this time, you have some advantages you can build on:

## QuickGuide

1. Experience - you will know what worked well last time - 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, do another one. However, don't forget to also do the things that weren't the most successful last time also - this may not attract lots of new people, but may attract new people with different perspectives - always healthy for a group.
2. Achievement - your network will have had some wins, and overcome challenges. Update your marketing materials with some of these stories, and testimonials from people who have found the network valuable.
3. Connections - you will have a broader network of connections in your community now - make sure to ask for their support in your recruitment drive. Also ask for the support and commitment of your existing group to be recruiters.

### After recruiting

Make sure you pay good attention to bringing people in well. Some points that may assist:

- A good induction into the group - 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 need that. And a special 'welcome' meal or morning tea will also help them feel welcome, and may even contribute to the process of lifting the energy of the group.
- 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

### Where you can find more information

See Quick Guide: Recruitment: spreading the word about your new network

See Quick Guide: After the meeting: the follow-up work that will get people to the next network meeting

See Quick Guide: Thinking about the value proposition

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

See Quick Guide: What to do when there is conflict between network members

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/>

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