

6 Recommendations for Growing Better Networks

Based on the qualitative data we have gathered from just over 60 respondents across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, and further in-depth interviews with specific industry leaders and newcomers, we have created six key recommendations that we hope others can implement to grow better networks:

Recommendation 1: Networking is always and outcome, not a purpose

- Collective + Networking \neq Purpose
- Collective + Purpose = Networking

For most of our respondents, networking for networking's sake is not reason enough to attend an event. Many of those we surveyed defined a network as a connected group of "like-minded" individuals; in order to grow a network, you need to provide real and intentional opportunities for individuals to find common ground.

For example, a collective's purpose could be peer-learning, providing creative inspiration or support around a relevant problem or barrier, or championing a particular cause. There are endless reasons for a group of people to meaningfully connect, and we concluded that "networking" should never be one of them.

Networking is an impactful outcome, but it doesn't give your event or organisation meaningful purpose in and of itself.

Our respondents said:

- "It's no good if I'm trying to sell myself, much better if I'm there for a real reason"
- "I Love networking when it's natural and there are things to do. But when it's a setting that feels like '1,2,3...now network!' Oh no! that's horrendous."
- "Often actual "networking events" are a bit artificial, oppressive or awkward"
- "When there is a focus on something other than 'networking' it allows for more natural conversation, and meetings and connections happen more spontaneously."

Recommendation 2: Work Outwards (The Bullseye Model)

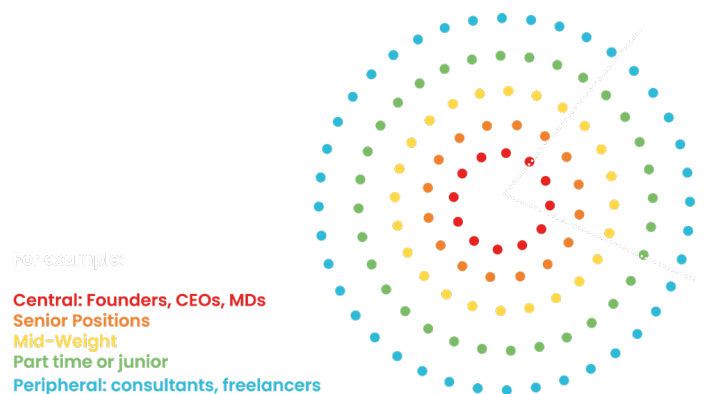
Our "Bullseye" diagram shows the typical makeup of an organisation. With the people closest to the organisation at the centre (for example the

Chief Executive and Senior Staff), and those on the peripheries of an organisation (such as freelancers and consultants) towards the edge. Usually, collectives are assembled from people of singular or adjacent colour groups. Our recommendation is that any collective or synthetic network is built to resemble a slice or wedge that includes members from every colour group.

This will:

- Improve mobility across all levels of employment.
- Improve accessibility for underrepresented groups.
- Facilitate organic cross-level networking Promote organic (non-funded) mentoring opportunities, closing the gap between the current and next generation leaders and superconnectors.

This "Bulls eye" model can inform strategies for how to grow a more diverse network but also can inform board make ups and improve diversity and voices



Our respondents said:

- "Often the same people make up various networks in Cornwall, so it lessens the impact of engaging with them all and it also isn't great if those people aren't very accessible."
- "Generally it seems like post people are already in cliques which are hard to approach and talk to"
- "The unhelpful voice saying 'this room full of people all know each other, but not you' can get the better of me when faced with a networking after hours session at a conference/exhibition."

Recommendation 3: Not Just Nouns

By using a job title to introduce yourself, you are:

- Immediately limiting other people's understanding of what you do.
- Limiting the number of potential collaborators who feel they can approach you.
- Limiting the number of potential collaborators who you feel confident approaching.

By consciously describing what you do and how you do it, instead of what you are, you can:

- Stop perpetuating a culture of meaningless and inaccessible business jargon.
- Invite conversation and collaboration with a diverse group.

E.g.:

"I am a Creative Director"

Vs

"I collaborate with teenagers and children to co-design new services, products, and creative communications campaigns that make the world a little bit better for everyone."

Our respondents said:

- *"The focus of my work has always been driven by creativity and I approach networking in the same way. My confidence has grown and – is driven by the work I am seeking to fundraise for and I am feeling more sure of its value and worth. I find networking a two way process so being interested and able to offer support opens up conversations rather than pitching an idea."*

Recommendation 4: Do the Maths

We would encourage organisations who want to grow a network (either organically or synthetically) to use our easy equations to create the conditions that will enable a network to flourish:

1. **Purpose + Resource + Superconnector(s) = Synthetic Network**
2. **Collective + Active Collaboration* = Organic Network**

*For best results, the active collaboration should be sustained over a longer period.

These equations are really simple and can provide a helpful framework to look differently at how you can plan any event, workshop, or any session where networking is a desired outcome (remember recommendation No 1: "Networking is always an outcome and never a purpose").

Our respondents said:

- *"A network works when there are good hosts – people that introduce you to others and get the conversation going/help establish why you might be interested in each other."*
- *"Elements that make a network successful are a shared sense of purpose or common goal; shared interest; shared location; and a clear benefit i.e a reason to participate."*

Recommendation 5: Live Fast Die Young

Some synthetic networks and collectives are short-lived, and that's ok! The resulting organic networks will last, though they may be more difficult to measure. Remember that collectives and synthetic networks serve as catalysts for something deeper; they may not last forever but they are still extremely valuable. Networks are never static.

Our respondents said:

- *"I find that for me (maybe this is a Cornish thing, or maybe it's an arts/ culture/non profit thing) that my professional and personal social networks blur together. [...] Networks are layers of relationships; they are living, ongoing, ever changing."*

Recommendation 6: Don't call it networking!

We have saved the simplest of our recommendations until last: The most helpful thing you can do to promote networking behaviours is to stop using the term "networking" altogether. Our research has shown that for many (especially in the creative industries or for those entering the workforce) the term is outdated and loaded with negativity. Our respondents saw "networking" as soul-less, transactional and anxiety-inducing.

Our respondents said:

- *"When things are called 'networking sessions' it's a bit of a turn off. I get The Fear!"*
- *"If something is called a networking event I don't want to go or actually don't go [...] the thought of a networking event makes me feel sick."*
- *"It depends on the event, but I often find the 'language' of networking and the expectation to promote what I'm doing is off-putting."*
- *"Networking has such negative connotations; a pressure to become the best networker in the room. Maybe we should use phrases like 'gathering' or 'conversation.'"*



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