Seeding Networks through Self-organization

The most important ingredient of a network is that it is self-organized. Self-organized means that the primary purpose of network leadership is to help many others initiate experiments and action.

This builds lots of new leadership as many different people start projects.
Guide for Supporting Projects
What is your Role with Self-organized Projects?

- Convenors and facilitators
- Coach
- Synergy Guides
- Support System Developers
Look for synergies and connections among projects and with other Practice Groups

Convene to help build the network and understand the system

Coach projects to learn and form Communities of Practice

Develop the Support System

Communications/ Resources/ Tracking
Catalyzing Self-organized Projects

- At convenings or through surveys, help people **cluster into groups** with ideas for projects or experiments *(see: Activity 8)*. Although people in first convenings often want to ‘stay together’ in a large group circle, it’s essential that they learn about self-organizing by ‘doing’ right from the start: finding those interested in the same thing and talking with them in smaller groups.

- Help people understand the importance of self-organizing through the use of quick presentations such as the slides from the Children & Nature Network webinar on self-organizing *(Link to Webinar)*.
How You Can Support a Self-organized Project

- Once people form projects, help coordinators of the projects learn skills and processes needed for effective collaboration (may pay someone, perhaps locally, to do this training and coaching) (see: Activity 5).

- **Coach** project coordinators and help them deal with challenges. (Or help local leads do this!) (see: Activity 9).

- Help self-organized projects see their network so they can improve it. You can ask people involved in such projects to **draw network maps** then identify who is missing (see: Activity 1).
Setting Up a Support System Available to All Projects

Self-organized projects need support:

1. Set up *communications systems* for collaborative projects (see: Activity 7).
2. Set up *training and Communities of Practice* for project group coordinators.
3. Set up *seed funds* for self-organized projects (see: Activity 10).
4. Embed *reflection practices* in all aspects of the practice group (see: Activity 6).
Guide for Projects
Help your project see its network so it can be improved. You can ask people involved in your project to draw a network map then identify who is missing (see: Activity 1).

Encourage people in your project to build and deepen their relationships (see: Activity 2).
1. Have the project develop a set of Ground Rules (see: Activity 3).

2. Learn facilitation skills and effective meeting processes.

3. Develop agendas for meetings ahead of time, preferably in a Google Doc.

4. Make sure meetings engage everyone in the group (see: Activity 4).

5. Make sure you have a system for tracking tasks, who will do what. Use this system to send reminders to people (see: Activity 5).

6. Make sure that part of each session includes deep reflection where you make sense of what is happening, capture insights, figure out what is working, stop what is not working (see: Activity 6).
Setting Up a Communications System & Using Technology

- People in your self-organized project can save time and money using virtual technologies. Spend time during convenings identifying local “tech stewards” who can help others and in sessions introduce the use of new technologies.

- Fill out the Communications Ecosystem chart outlining tools and platforms you will use: usually a group email, a Google Docs folder, and a videoconferencing platform (see: Activity 7).
● Set up a Google Docs folder and include:
  ○ a spreadsheet which includes people’s names, organizations, email addresses, and interests
  ○ a meeting agendas and notes document where people can make suggestions about items for each meeting agenda and can take notes during the meeting
  ○ A Task Chart

● Use zoom.us for videoconference meetings. Even if most of you meet face to face others can attend. Zoom.us can be downloaded to smart phones so anyone with a cell phone signal can attend.
Project Coordinators: Share and Spread
Create a way to track and share what is happening

How will you capture stories and share them?

Who can take short videos using phones at your convenings and share?

Who will take notes and share?
Activity Sheets
Activity 1: Map Drawing

Have a stack of PostIt notes of different colors. On a piece of chart paper put each of the colors in a row, then put one type of organization (non-profit, school, religious organization, volunteer, etc.) next to each color. Have people in the room come up, take a PostIt note that represents the type of organization they are from. Have them put their note closer to other people they work closely with and draw lines to them. Then have them add other PostIts for those in the network but not at the meeting.

Around the outside edge, put circles for individuals or groups you are not working with on this project, but who could add value to the project if they were involved. These might be people with expertise, people from others communities who have been innovating in ways that would be of value to your initiative, or people who are often left out of projects (people of color, low-income individuals, individuals being served by the initiative, young people, elders, etc).

Then answer the questions:

a. What do you notice about this network?
b. Is your core large enough to get the work done?
c. Does one type of organization predominate?
d. Who is missing from the network? Are the people you are serving in your network?
e. Who would add most value to your project network if they could become part of the network?
Activity 2: Speed Networking

This is a great activity that you can use at the start of every meeting, using different questions. The important part is the debrief that helps people become more aware of their listening skills.

Directions: Have everyone stand up and find someone they don’t know, or don’t know well. Have them take turns listening to each other as they answer one of the following questions. You can adapt the questions to fit the topic of the meeting. Give them about 5 minutes for the entire exchange. After 2.5 minutes, remind them to change partners if they haven’t already.

After the first round, have the group debrief the experience. Ask “Who had a really good listener?” Then ask one of those who raise their hands what that person did that made them aware they were listening well? Ask several others to point out other aspects of good listening (eye contact, leaning towards me, restating answers, asking questions, etc.).

Then have people find another person they don’t know and repeat the activity with another question. After this ask people if they found themselves listening more effectively.
Activity 3: Setting up Ground Rules for Project

Explain that ground rules are basic guidelines that all self-organized group participants need to agree to for the effective working of the group.

List some examples on a chart paper, such as:

- We are all responsible for the effectiveness and success of this working group.
- We will listen to each other with respect and an open mind.
- We take turns speaking and will not dominate the conversation.
- We need to ask questions to make sure we understand what others are saying.
- We will appreciate the work of others.
- If we have an issue or conflict, we will get help dealing with it.

Have the group break up into dyads or small groups.

Ask participants to modify any of these guidelines and then add additional ones.

Have the small groups report back on modifications or new guidelines.

Ask a small group to take all the suggestions, combine and edit them and bring them back to the next meeting.
Activity 4: Meeting Processes

There are several processes that are useful to engage participants in the project group:

**Go round:** Starting with one group member, go around the table in order, letting each person respond to a question or issue you have raised. Make sure that people understand they are to listen to all perspectives without responding. After the group has gone around once, ask people to summarize what they heard or suggest the sense of the group.

**Dyads:** When you sense that people need some time and space to get out their best thinking on a topic, have them pair up with another person. Remind the dyads that each person needs to get about half the time to speak. Remind people of the importance of listening carefully to what the other has to say and asking clarifying questions. After 5 minutes, ask for insights or new ideas that came up in the discussion.

**Forming Small Groups:** If a group remains as a whole group during the entire meeting, many introverts will not usually contribute and the meeting will tend to be dominated by more extroverted types. Having at least part of the meeting in small groups will provide an opportunity for many more people to verbalize their thinking. For example, if the group needs to come up with ideas for an event, break the group into smaller group of 3 to 5 people. Each group can do a quick summary of their best thinking and the group can synthesize these suggestions.
Activity 5: Task Worksheet for Projects

One of the most difficult aspects of practice groups is that there is no boss, so the group must find other ways to hold each other accountable. In addition, the practice group is only a small part of each member’s work and so it is hard to remember what they said they would do. There are several things the group can do to remediate the situation. First, having an easy-to-find project management system that tracks all the tasks and who is responsible for what is essential. Google Sheets are perfect for this. Reminders that are automatically sent out before meetings (from an event set up in Google Calendar or Outlook) should include a link to the Google Sheet and encourage people to check what they were supposed to do.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Person Responsible</th>
<th>Others Involved</th>
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<th>Progress Notes</th>
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Activity 6: Deep reflection

And the end of every meeting, phone call, or videoconference, the group should answer one to three of these questions to get people in the habit of reflecting on their work and discovering insights and new ideas about action.

1. What worked really well in this project?
2. Did it accomplish goals or outcomes? In what ways?
3. Did it fall short? Why?
4. What would you do differently?
5. What surprises came up during the project? What unexpected happened? What could you learn or capture from that?
6. What insights did you get during the project?
7. What processes did you use that worked well? Which didn’t work so well? Why do you think that was?
8. How did people work together? Were there conflicts? How were they handled? Did people get any new insights or perspectives as a result?
9. Were there people or perspectives missing from this project that you would include next time?
10. What skills and processes did you help people learn as part of this project? What skills and processes would you spend time on if you did this over again?
11. What were the most innovative aspects of the project? How did they work?
12. What did you do in this project that you could transfer to other projects?
13. What is the most troubling aspect of the project? What might you do to deal with it differently?
14. What skills came in most handy during this project? What skills did this project make you realize you need to acquire?
15. What did you do in this project that wasn’t really necessary? What turned out to be a waste of time? What activity contributed the least to the project success?
Activity 7: Setting up a Communication Ecosystem

1. Look at the chart on the following page to identify possible elements of your communication system.

2. Then fill in the Communications Ecosystem Worksheet with the platforms and tools you will use.

3. Identify who needs help with the tools you have selected.

4. Identify tech stewards willing to buddy up with people who need to learn and have them set up small group or one-on-one sessions with people.

5. Check in with people in the self-organized projects to see if the platforms/tools are working and which need to be changed or replaced.
Communication Ecosystem

**Track network development**
- Facebook Group (discussion, news, events)
- Group email (share info, discussion)
- Interactive e-newsletter
- Web page discussion groups/data base

**Share and discuss information**
- Twitter (bring in new ideas)
- ScoopIt (curate innovations on topic)
- Doodle or Meeting Wizard to set up meetings
- Share stories

**Build relationships and collaborate**
- Video conferencing for group work and learning, CoP
- Skype Google hangouts for twosies, small groups
- Google Docs for collaboration space, surveys

**Capture and share ideas for innovation**
- Face-to-face Conference calls
- Mobile Phones
- Track network through dashboards
- Conference calls
- Track network development
- Share and discuss information
- Build relationships and collaborate

- Google Docs for collaboration space, surveys
- Video conferencing for group work and learning, CoP
- Skype Google hangouts for twosies, small groups
Communication Ecosystem Worksheet

- Track network development
- Build relationships and collaborate
- Share and discuss information
- Capture and share ideas for innovation
- Mobile Phones (bring in new ideas)
Activity 8: Clustering

Have people at a meeting answer a question such as:

1. What do you think would make the most difference in your network right now (and that you would be willing to put energy into)?

2. What do you most want to learn about with others?

3. What is an action you’d like to take right now with others?

Have them write an answer on a larger PostIt and add their name. Have them post these on a wall and take a break. Get several volunteers to cluster similar answers together on the wall and then make a short title for the topic on a piece of poster board. Put these on each table – along with the set of PostIts on that topic.

When people return from their break, have them find the table with their topic.

Have each person in the group share why they selected that topic, why they think their topic is so important, what they think is a small action or two the group could do together, when they might meet next, and who is willing to remind the group and set up a group email.

Organizers need to gather all the information about each group and check in with group coordinators a week later.
Opportunity Process

1. Have people put their answer to the question “What action (that you are willing to do) would make the most difference in the next year?” along with their name on a PostIt. Have someone sort into Interest Groups of three to ten people.

2. Have each group share what they wrote on their PostItts and why they selected that action. What overlap do people see?

3. Generate ideas for small projects/small acts that could help the group explore that opportunity. Each act needs a champion.

4. Identify the skills and resources that the project team already has to accomplish that act.

5. Figure out who and what else they need to make the project successful and then invite those individuals to join their project.

6. How will the project move forward? Select a coordinator or co-coordinators. Use the project management worksheet so everyone involved knows what they are to do and when they will meet next.

7. Share what you learn and do with the rest of the network.
Activity 9: Coaching New Project Coordinators

A Network Weaver Coach is someone who checks in with new project coordinators to help them

- Notice what is going well (*this is most important!*)
- Make sense of what is happening
- Identify challenges and strategies for overcoming them
- Identify and solve problems that arise
- Articulate what they are learning
- Garner insights and reflections

Coaching Session

1. Start coaching sessions by asking the person what has been going well in his or her project coordination or network weaving.
2. Ask, “What do you want to work on today?” or “What are issues or concerns you would like to talk about today?”
3. People often just need someone to listen to them think through solutions or approaches. After they describe the issue, ask them what ideas they have about dealing with it.
4. If you have suggestions, go ahead and make them if you feel ideas are still needed. Suggest others they might talk to about this.
5. As you close the session have a discussion about what to focus on during the next time period. Record that somewhere so both of you can be reminded of it at the beginning of the next session.
6. After you have had several calls, ask the person being coached if he or she is feeling comfortable with the network weaving role or if another call or two would help.
Activity 10: Setting up a Seed Fund

1. A seed fund can be small - perhaps only $15,000 the first year - with grants from $250 - $2,000.

2. Find two to three people to make decisions who are trusted by all, know the network, and will not apply for funds.

3. Develop guidelines (projects need to involve more than one organization, you may want to emphasize youth involvement, etc.) and a short application, preferably less than one page.

4. Publicize the fund. Set a time when applications will be accepted. Most funds have a “first come, first served” policy.

5. If you have time, have the funding team ask questions and suggest ways to improve the proposal.

6. Try to tell the collaboratives quickly (within 1 month of application) if they have been approved.

7. Make sure all the approved projects agree to be part of a Community of Practice - monthly meetings, be they virtual or in-person, to help each other with challenges and share what they are learning.