

Ten Building Blocks for Developing a Strong Network

- 1. Trust and relationships.** Trust and relationships are the glue that holds a network together. They are built over time as network members work shoulder-to-shoulder on coordinated work that meets their organizations' and their communities' interests. Building trust enables networks to take more risks and share resources more willingly.
- 2. Shared analysis, vision, interest, and identity.** Network members mentioned the importance of having or developing a shared analysis, a shared understanding of the challenges that the network is coming together to address. Related to this are a shared vision, a collective identity, a shared interest, and a shared sense of place.
- 3. Shared direction, goals, measurement, and work.** Network members mentioned the importance of setting shared goals, developing collective plans, creating a shared measurement system, and working together on a coordinated, strategic body of work.
- 4. Strong network management.** Strong network management is essential for networks to grow, thrive, and accomplish their goals. Having a capable, committed, skilled network management team is necessary rather than optional.
- 5. Clear benefits for local people.** Network members emphasized that a network's efforts have to connect to the bread-and-butter issues that people face every day in their communities and work. Networks need to focus on getting something done; they also need to focus on something that everyone is concerned about.
- 6. Shared power and control.** Networks operate most effectively and efficiently when power, control, and leadership is dispersed and balanced. Network managers, network staff, or staff at the network's sponsoring organization find ways to share decision-making, direction-setting, and planning with working groups and network members.
- 7. Communication.** Communication within a network is important. People need to be in the loop and feel like they're part of the loop. Conversations among network members need to be focused on things that are of value to them, rather than getting together just to talk and share information.
- 8. Enough structure, but not too much.** Network members described a balance between having enough structure and having too much. They felt that networks should focus on getting work done and let the processes, structures, and governance emerge from the network's collective efforts.
- 9. Mutual accountability.** Network members need some way to hold each other accountable for moving the work of the network forward. This accountability can be either formal or informal, but it needs to be effective.
- 10. Clear benefits for member organizations.** Network members are most engaged when there are clear and strong benefits for their organizations and their work.