How to start a Women's Network

Launch of GWN, Wellington, 2016

What is a women's network?

A network is…	A network is not…
• inclusive – it welcomes everyone that supports the objectives	• exclusive – not just for women or for people at particular levels
• part of an organisation's diversity and inclusion strategy	• driven by personal agendas
• focussed on gender specific initiatives/actions	• solving all problems in the world
• managed by volunteers, attracting enthusiastic participation from others	• imposed on people
• a forum for self-motivated people who are committed to the objectives	• a passive 'talking shop' for people to sit back and wait to be served

Source: Starting a Women's Network the Vodafone Way

Benefits of employee-led networks

- Creates and builds connections across an agency (vertically and horizontally) and helps to break down barriers, enables sharing of information across the agency, puts names to faces
- Self-determining (e.g. members determine how the network is managed and the topics of interest)
- Helps to illuminate issues for women and gives a forum for discussion
- Supports the agency's diversity and inclusion strategy and goals
- Can provide input into agency policies that are relevant to women, if requested
- Builds a sense of 'inclusiveness' for staff and positivity
- Can provide peer support and inspiration for people
- Can enable people to build skills, interests, and confidence
- Provides a safe environment for people to communicate ideas and views, including any work-place barriers that might need to be addressed

Government Women's Network (GWN)'s vision

*Helping women in Government to achieve their potential by….*

- Backing women's networks within government agencies.

- Supporting new groups to form and grow.

- Connecting women through professional networking events.

- Partnering with others who share the vision of women achieving their potential.

- Providing a voice for women in the public sector.

- See www.gwn.govt.nz

Explaining the Government Women's Network

The diagram shows the individuals and groups that make up the network
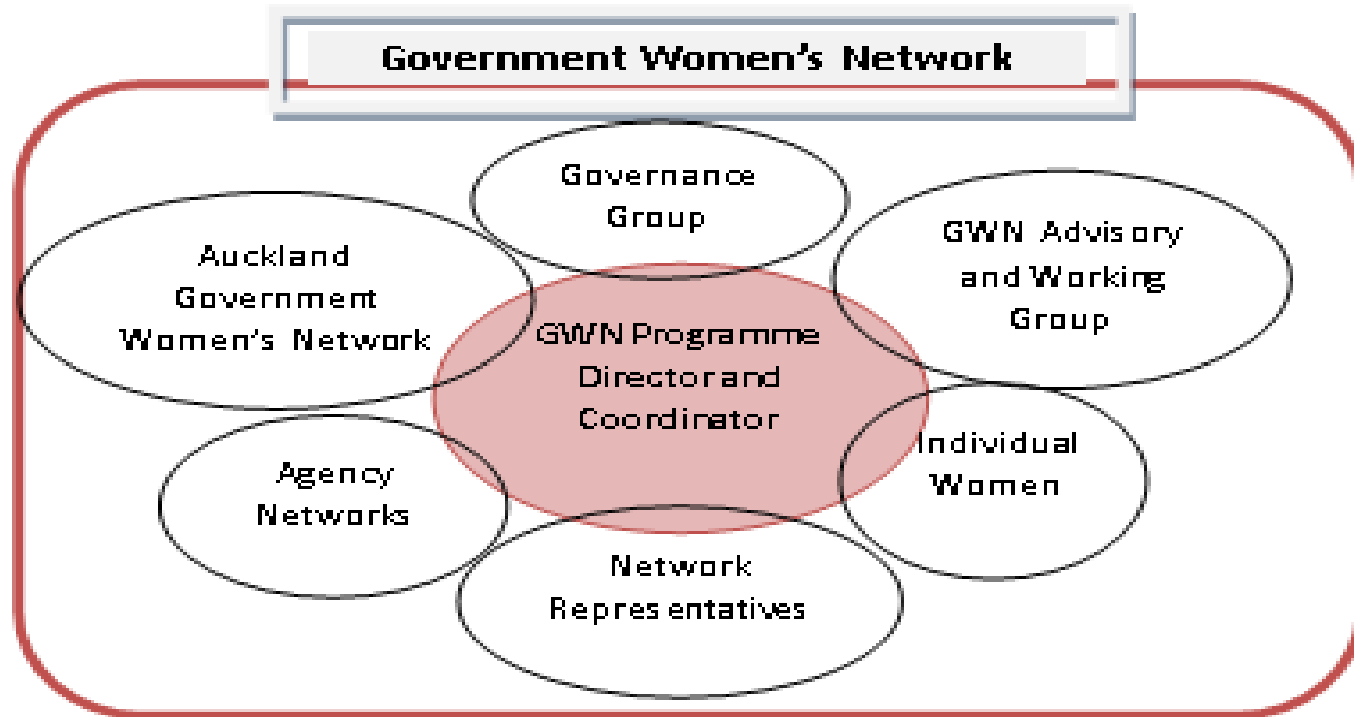
Process overview
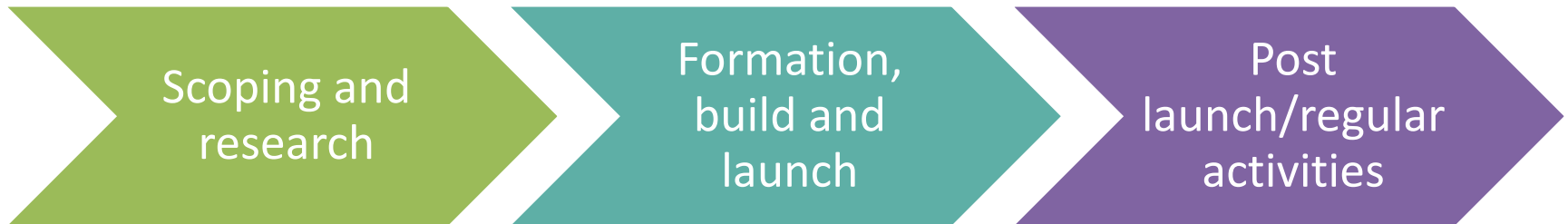
Scoping and research

Connect with a few like-minded others that are keen to help to get the network established. Set up a small *working group* to:

- check with GWN for information about an existing women's network in your agency or interested women in your agency that are on the GWN mailing list
- find out from GWN any wider system goals (i.e.. SSC) relating to diversity or workforce
- check with HR for data on profile of your agency's workforce (e.g. regional locations, numbers of staff), existing agency corporate goals, diversity and inclusion (D&I) goals and plans, gender pay gap action plan, training initiatives for women
- identify what support is available for the network e.g. funding, training budget
- find out if there was a women's network previously and who was involved
- check your intranet for other networks – talk to them to find out how they got established, activities etc.
- discuss with your manager your interest in setting up a women's network to gain their support/approval for you to be able to undertake tasks in work time
- connect with senior people in the agency for support/advice and find a sponsor
- find out what topics people at your agency are interested in or what are the current issues?

Formation and build

- Talk to representatives from other women's networks for information, advice, tips about starting a network

- Find out what the issues/interests are for women at your agency

- What is the **vision, the goals, and objectives** for the network. Be clear on the purposes of the network (e.g. more women in leadership, influence diversity and inclusion, peer support, motivation and learning etc.)

- What won't the network get involved with?

- Does the network need endorsement from the Sponsor/Management and at what stage is this required?

- Draft objectives/goals for the network to 'test' with supporters

- How does the network intend to connect with staff in regional offices and get a cross-section of staff in the committee or to support the events?

- Set up an email box, mailing list, Yammer Group and intranet page

Launch the network (1/2)

- Will it be a soft launch or a high profile event?
  - Where will it be held, who will be invited, who will be the 'presenter' at the event, what time and location?
  - Will there be any catering and who funds this?
  - Can regional staff be involved?
  - Should representatives of GWN/other networks be invited?
  - Obtain the GWN banner and display it at the launch. Notify GWN of the names of the agency representatives.
- Promote the objectives/goals for the network
- Add an activity to engage the audience e.g. brainstorm priorities/identify areas of interest to address or start a discussion to share ideas or views.
- What times of the day could the network hold events?

Launch the network (2/2)

- Call for volunteers to join the working group – the more the better for sharing the load.
  - Some people may wish to help with specific events only or others may wish to help on an ongoing basis.
  - Find out what people's key skills are or what skills they might want to develop or practise.
- Maybe have a 'core' working group and a wider group?
- Nominate a person/s to be the network's representative (notify GWN of the name/s)

Post launch, regular activities (1/2)

- Set up a regular session for *working group* members to discuss upcoming events, review past events e.g monthly meeting and set these up in the calendar in advance for the year. Does your working group want to share the Chairing role or leave it with one specific person?

- Frequency of network events e.g. monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, etc. and assign a lead person for each event*

- Build an events calendar around key dates (see slide #13)

- Develop a logo, branding, tag line, intranet presence for the network (see example in slide #14)

- Do you want to have a regular newsletter to people in your network, especially if you have regional locations – who will write this? Will this be emailed or posted on the intranet?

Post launch, regular activities (2/2)

- Should Yammer, Facebook, email, be used to communicate with members in the network? Assign a person/s to be responsible for these.

- Find out from other networks what events they have run and if they have resources/toolkits that can be shared e.g. Speed mentoring toolkit is available on www.gwn.govt.nz, use existing resources e.g. Ted Talks, Leanin.org etc. Ask women in your agency to be guest speakers.

- Are there opportunities to collaborate and run joint events with other networks?

- Can people from other networks be invited to attend your events?

- Evaluate your network's efforts – attendance rate, satisfaction of audience – get feedback so you can keep improving – inform the Sponsor

- Celebrate your achievements!!!

- Refresh the committee from time to time – share the workload.

* Different people can lead on different events – they may or may not be committee members

Dates for your events calendar

Day/event to be aware of	Date
International Women's Day	**8 March**
International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination	21 March
Women in Public Sector Summit (Wellington) – TSB Arena	**2 May**
Diversity Awards NZ closing date for applications	11 May
Pink Shirt Day NZ	20 May
Diversity Awards NZ Gala Dinner (Auckland)	29 August
NZ Women's Suffrage Day	**19 September**
International Day of Peace	21 September
International Girls Day	11 October
Women in Public Sector Summit (Auckland)	**?? October**
International Men's Day	19 November
International White Ribbon Day	25 November
International Volunteer Day	5 December

Bolded = particularly important for Government women (Source: Adapted from 'How to Guide' setting up a women's network, IWIL@Datacom, May 17)

Examples of branded templates

Poster template

Factsheet template

Powerpoint template

Document with facts and figures that can be reused

- Ministry of Justice has developed branded templates (available on their intranet)

- Creates a consistent and professional image

- Builds awareness about the women's network

- Builds a 'sense of belonging'

Source: Ministry of Justice

Some risks to be aware of

- Using a rotating Chair for the working group – there are pros and cons to think through
- Volunteer effort/burn out of members/not enough capacity/staff turnover
- Time, budget (usually lack there of), time needed for planning, administration, and events
- Lack of planning can fragment energy and focus. Set up regular working group meetings and events. People can schedule these in their calendars.
- Inadequate delegation of tasks or not enough people to share the load – recruit more help
- Sustainability of the network – everyone needs to pitch in to keep things going – the network is for 'active and passionate' people
- Conflicts with work i.e. workload means that your volunteers can't be as involved in your networks
- Effective communication with network members – consider using Yammer, Facebook, or email
- Engagement - network is invisible or only attracts a few people vs many and a cross section of people. Consider if some people need to be personally invited to attend/get involved with the network and events because they are shy or there are other considerations (e.g. not everyone will respond to the poster advertisement). Maybe have a 'bring a friend' campaign.
- Operating independently – not connecting within the agency or with external agencies. This can lead to duplication and the missed opportunity to collaborate, where possible.
- Assess how well the network is going. Is it delivering on it's goals and what people in the network want. Share the results of your efforts with your Sponsor…celebrate your achievements.

Best wishes for your network

- Join GWN mailing list.
- Keep in touch, update GWN on how your network is going and come to GWN events - see www.gwn.govt.nz
- Connect with SSC Diversity and Inclusion Network - email: diversity.inclusion@ssc.govt.nz

Resources

- [What's the secret of building a successful diversity network?](#)

- [Setting Up an Employee Network Guide](#)

- [Three keys to a Successful Women's Network](#)

- [How to build a successful women's network](#)

- For more information, contact coordinator@gwn.govt.nz