Innovation Network Roles

STEWARDSHIP TEAM

PRIMARY ROLE
Shape and lead the network's strategy

CONTRIBUTIONS
Hold network intent, oversee initiatives, engage other stakeholders, act as sounding board for process designs, shepherd network strategy

TRAPS
Taking ultimate responsibility away from the network itself, being too directive OR not directive enough with network, acting like a "Steering Committee"

WHO'S NEEDED
Key influencers with servant-leader mindsets who are respected for their integrity, connected to the issue, and have proven collaboration abilities, with key roles of maven, connector, and salesperson

COMMITMENT
4-6 people at 6-8 hrs/mo who participate in bi-monthly and/or in-person meetings to lead network through work

LEADERSHIP
Two co-chairs at 8-10 hours/month, preferably from different sectors, who convene Stewardship Team meetings, shape agendas, prep initiative
strategy, and coordinate with Project Team as needed
(2 additional hrs/mo)
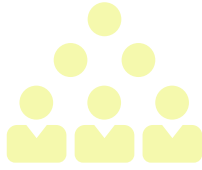
NETWORK

PRIMARY ROLE
Analyzes, prioritizes, innovates solutions

CONTRIBUTIONS
Provides analysis, insight, and feedback on key shifts, ideas, concepts and prototypes to maximize impact of the initiative

TRAPS
Waiting for strategy leadership from the Project Team and/or Stewardship Team, not integrating network duties into regular work

WHO'S NEEDED
A diverse group that represents the varying perspectives held by the larger community on the issue/challenge, and is willing to work together to make progress

COMMITMENT
Two annual 1.5-day meetings to develop shared intent, analysis, and solutions, plus serving on an initiative team

LEADERSHIP
The Stewardship Team is the coordinative entity for the network.

ADVISERS
Experts and other resources who are not in the network itself but have offered to serve as resources to support the work, possibly as part of a network advisory group
(unlimited-internal and/or external)

INITIATIVE TEAMS

PRIMARY ROLE
Scale up "on-the ground" solutions

CONTRIBUTIONS
Co-designs, tests, refines and scales solutions based on shared metrics, and networks' analysis around strategic intent and key shifts

TRAPS
Not solving for the team's mandate from the network, waiting for Project Team to make work happen, getting caught in analysis mode

WHO'S NEEDED
Network participants who have a passion for the specific shift and/or solution that the team is working on; they develop, test, and refine a specific initiative (e.g. a new service)

COMMITMENT
Groups of 3-12 at avg. 3 hrs/mo in calls and work sessions (where they work intensively for 3-4 hrs to develop concepts)

LEADERSHIP
Initiative Team Chairs convene and manage each Initiative Team to produce analysis; communicate and coordinate with staff and other groups as needed.
(1 person per team at 2 additional hrs/mo)

Innovation Network Roles

BACKBONE ORG

PRIMARY ROLE
Design and facilitate network engagement

CONTRIBUTIONS
Run the Stewardship Team; provide strategic analysis and framing, develop choice points; lead resource planning; lead overall programs to objectives

TRAPS
Treating the overall network as just a program; not scoping the work carefully and explicitly, not leverage the network's assets, taking more responsibility than the network does

WHO'S NEEDED
Independent organization that has a connection to the issue/challenge but is respected by diverse parties; must have strong organizational base and servant-leader mindset

COMMITMENT
1 senior-level co-chair from backbone organization to serve on network Stewardship Team

PROJECT TEAM

PRIMARY ROLE
Support the work of the network

CONTRIBUTIONS
Planning and resourcing initiatives appropriately, engaging other stakeholders to advance the work, coordinating with other initiatives

TRAPS
Not scoping the work carefully and explicitly with the network, not leverage the network's connections and resources, taking more responsibility than the participants do

WHO'S NEEDED
Strong project management skills, willingness and ability to create alignment across competing interests, advances narratives that increase meaning & engagement

COMMITMENT
1 FT Initiative Manager (can be contracted); 1 FT Initiative Coordinator; 1-3 hrs/mo from comms; 1-3 hrs/mo from L&E

LEADERSHIP
A full-time Network Director runs Stewardship Team meetings, shepherds backbone resources and stakeholder engagement, and coordinates implementation of strategy (often supported by a coordinator, other staff members and outside process consultants)
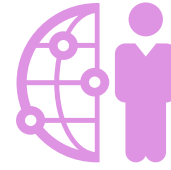
WHOLE COMMUNITY

PRIMARY ROLE
Hold the network accountable to the community and its real needs

CONTRIBUTIONS
Experience, expertise (as guests) and aspirations

TRAPS
Expectations of process exceed capacity and commitment of the community, community members wait for "them" to take leadership on the issue of concern

WHO'S NEEDED
Whoever has a stake in the work and the outcomes, meaning that they are impacted by the current situation or may be impacted by the work of the network

Innovation Network Structure

The network is a change system that's carefully cultivated from the larger system we are working to change (the "target system"). The graphic below shows how various stakeholders play multiple roles in order to ensure representation, alignment, and coordination across the network. For example, Stewardship Team members are also involved in Initiative Teams to help ensuring alignment and coordination of the work of the network. As the graphic implies, note all network participants are involved in Initiative Teams (in fact, as many as half may not be), but they contribute to the prioritization, analysis, testing, and evaluation of the initiatives.

In addition to the structure below, some networks have a fundraising/resourcing team and/or an advisory group. Typically, however, fundraising is handled by the Backbone organization and Stewardship Team and we tend to advise against advisory groups unless they have a clearly-defined (and limited) role and scope of authority.
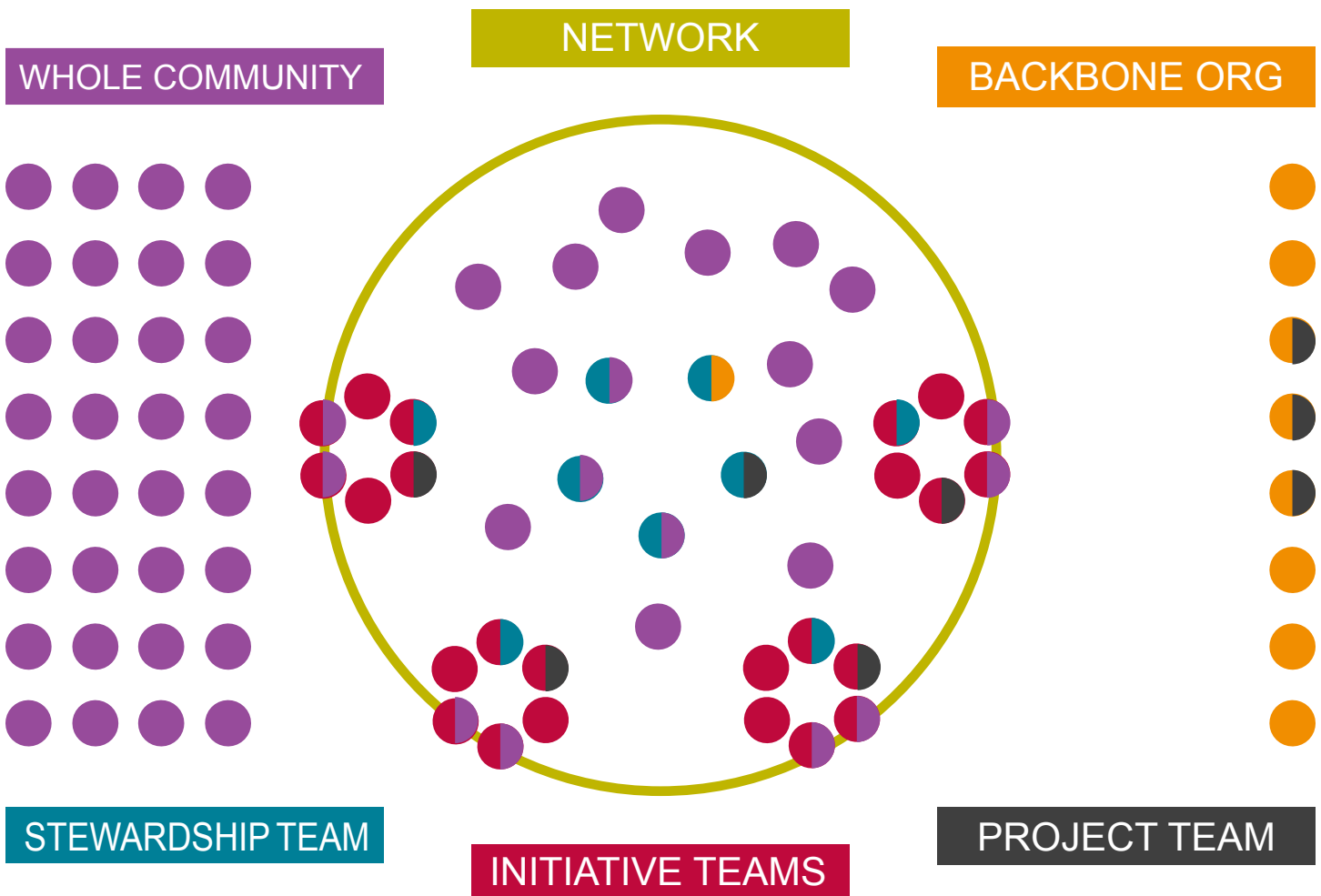
In the above graphic, note that:
- The Stewardship Team and each Initiative Team has representation from the network and the Backbone organization.
- Each Initiative Team has representation from the Stewardship Team and the Backbone organization.
- The Backbone team may include consultants acting as facilitators or filling other roles.

Innovation Network Responsibilities

STEWARDSHIP TEAM MEMBERS

PRIMARY ROLE
As the name implies, the Stewardship Team stewards rather than dictates the network's development and strategy. They advise on network meeting design (especially desired meeting outcomes), help shape the strategy and priorities for the network, provide guidance on network structure and recruitment, and also help alert the Backbone team to potential barriers and how to address them.

RESPONSIBILITIES
Be leaders, influencers, and connectors in the network
- Act as spokespeople and ambassadors for the network
- Inspire and motivate other participants by modeling engaged behavior
- Decide purpose and outcomes for network meetings
- Act as leaders at network Meetings, reiterating the intent of the network and helping to clear up any confusion around direction/strategy/content

Develop and hold network structure, priorities and intent
- Draft the initial scope, focus, and working goals of the network
- Develop the initial governance and operating procedures for the network
- Co-determine priorities with the Project Team for moving the work forward between network meetings
- Foster breakthroughs and push speed, scale, and innovation in the work of the network

Engage other stakeholders
- Decide which stakeholders should be invited into the network
- Help recruit other stakeholders into the network
- Leverage professional/personal connections to engage other potential network supporters and advisers

Oversee initiatives
- Give direction to Initiative Teams and ensure necessary coordination across them
- Participate in a leadership and/or advisory capacity in the Initiative Teams once they are formed

Steward network strategy
- Shape and confirm ongoing strategy emerging from the network itself
- Provide cross-network insights and identifying new work where gaps exist
- Help test assumptions and plans, acting as the primary sounding board for the Project Team

SIZE
4-6 people, but sometimes more in a larger or complex network. Usually not sure than 8 people.

COMMITMENT
2-4 hrs/mo participation in bi-monthly and/or in-person meetings, depending on the complexity of the network and its work

LEADERSHIP
Two co-chairs at 8-10 hours/month, preferably from different sectors, who convene Stewardship Team meetings, shape agendas, prep initiative strategy, and coordinate with Project Team as needed
(2 additional hrs/mo)

INTERACTIONS
Works in tandem with the Project Team (who provides the day-to-day support) to guide the work of the network

Innovation Network Responsibilities
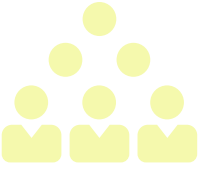
NETWORK PARTICIPANTS

PRIMARY ROLE
Provides the intent, learning, analysis, priorities, and initiatives to achieve powerful impact

RESPONSIBILITIES
- Participate in the bi-annual network Meetings
- Participate in 1-2 Initiative Teams where they have energy and can make meaningful contributions
- Conduct research within, or compile information from, their organizations to share with the Initiative Team and/or network
- Contribute participation fees or in-kind support (if appropriate for the specific network)

COMMITMENT
Two annual 1.5 to 2-day meetings to develop shared intent, analysis, and solutions, plus serving on an initiative team

SIZE
35-50 people from across the focal system (community, supply chain, or sector), maybe more depending on the nature of the network, but rarely fewer

LEADERSHIP
The Stewardship Team is the coordinative body for the network

INTERACTIONS
All the Stewardship Team and Initiative Team participants are typically members of the network, although Initiatives Teams occasionally draw in outside participants (e.g. people who don't have time to fully participate in the network but have strong expertise to contribute to a specific initiative)

Innovation Network Responsibilities

INITIATIVE TEAM CHAIRS

PRIMARY ROLE
Convene and manage an Initiative Team to define their critical shift and developing, refining and testing solutions; communicate and coordinate with Project Team staff and other Initiative Teams as needed

RESPONSIBILITIES
- Work with Network Director or member of Project Team who's working with the Initiative Team to shepherd the Initiative Team's strategy
- Set the agenda for Initiative Team meetings/calls in collaboration with the Network Director or Project Team member
- Facilitate the meetings with the support of a Project Team member (although the Project Team member might do this instead)
- Determines strategy for the Initiative Team in collaboration with the Network Director or Project Team member
- Determines additional resources and research needs for the Initiative Team in collaboration with the Project Team
- Participates in regular calls with the Network Director or Project Team member
- Participate in a quarterly meeting will the other Initiative Team chairs to coordinate and align work as needed
- Present the work of the Initiative Team at network meetings
- Participate in all Initiative Team meetings

Role Considerations
- The exact role that the Initiative Team Chair varies based who is in the Initiative Team and what the Initiative Team is working on. It also depends on who is available to be the Initiative Team chair and what his/her time and leadership abilities allow.
- The Initiative Team Chair role can range across a spectrum of involvement and leadership from being an advisor on one end to being an active facilitator and leader on the other. The Network Director explores the options with those participants who are being invited to be Initiative TeamCchairs and together they agree on what role the chair will play.
- Initiative Team Chair roles can also change over time. As an initiative plan becomes more developed (with milestones and deliverables) the Chair may want to take on more responsibilities and leadership. The Network Director should check in with Initiative Team chairs several times a year to see how the chair is doing and if they would like to change their roles in anyway.

COMMITMENT
2 hrs/mo, in addition to Initiative Team time

SIZE
1-2 people per Initiative Team (i.e. a chair or co-chairs)

INTERACTIONS
- Initiative Team chairs are active participants in their respective Initiative Teams
- They are invited to be the Initiative Team chair by the Network Director

Innovation Network Responsibilities

INITIATIVE TEAM MEMBERS

PRIMARY ROLE
Contribute to defining the Initiative Team's critical shift and developing, refining and testing solutions

RESPONSIBILITIES
- Show up at Initiative Team meetings
- Take on special writing or solution development tasks between Initiative Team meetings
- Contribute to Initiative Team's analysis of what's happening in the system and what intervention would be most feasible & impactful
- Help garner additional resources for the Initiative Team
- Help present the work of the Initiative Team at network meetings
- Help test solutions and gather and integrate feedback from members of the network and the larger system or community
- Participate in all Initiative Team meetings

COMMITMENT
Average 3-6 hrs/month for calls and subgroup work sessions (where they work intensively for 1-2 hrs to develop concepts)

SIZE
3-12 participants per Initiative Team

INTERACTIONS
- Initiative Team participants will work with other members of the Initiative Team in ad hoc subgroups to advance pieces of the work
- They also work with their own organizations to align and coordinate the organization's work with the emerging work of the network

OTHER TYPES OF INITIATIVE TEAMS
Some networks also have Initiative Teams that are focused less on a Network initiative and more on peer-based learning and support for network participants to advance work within their own organizations. We usually call this Peer Coaching Groups or Implementation Groups. Some networks also have Research or Monitoring Initiative Teams that conduct or shepherd research that the network needs to support its work and/or they monitor developments in the policy realm and report those to the rest of the network.

Innovation Network Responsibilities

BACKBONE ORG

PRIMARY ROLE

The Backbone is the organization (or, less often, multiple organizations) that provide strategic and administrative staff capacity to the network. We refer to the staff dedicated to work on the network as the Project Team. The Project Team is primarily responsible for leading, facilitating, moving the work of the network forward, especially in its early development. The Project Team focuses on making optimal use of participants' often limited time. The leadership of the Backbone organization ensure adequate resources and attention are provisioned to the Project Team and other functions in the Backbone organization (e.g., communciations, graphic design, IT) contribute as needed.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Leading Stakeholder Recruitment & Engagement

- Identifying and recruiting committed participants for the network
- Ensuring that network participants are actively engaged in the work of the network, that they understand their roles, and that they are having their needs met through the work
- Communicating with participants before, during, and after network meetings
- Engaging with participants in Initiative Team meetings
- Sending information, updates, reports and other communicates to network participants
- Keeping track of and documenting information on the status of each participant as needed

Resourcing the Work

- Securing resources to support the network and its work
- Identifying and applying for grants and government funding
- Securing member participation fees (for certain types of networks)

Shepherding Strategy Development for the Network & Initiative Teams

- Ensuring a clear critical shift and scope for each Initiative Team
- Working with the Stewardship Team to shape, document, and test the strategy of the network

Supporting the Process

- Providing process design and facilitation for network, Stewardship Team, and Initiative Team meetings
- Helping participants develop clear priorities, plans, and roadmaps for their work together
- Providing project management services as needed to Initiative Team
- Providing meeting planning, preparation and logistics, and facilitation for the network and Initiative Teams

PROJECT TEAM

- Creating a safe environment in which participants feel comfortable expressing themselves
- Ensuring that everyone's voice is heard and understood by participants
- Take notes during Initiative Team and network meetings for recording, theming, shaping, and summarizing the group's thinking
- Following up on commitments made by Stewardship Team and Initiative Team members

Overseeing Learning & Research

- Shaping research and learning priorities with the network, Initiative Teams, and Stewardship Team
- Co-determining with participants how to resource any research
- Engaging experts and community members to contribute to the learning of the network and Initiative Teams

COMMITMENT

Either regular staff or, less often, a contracted position within the Backbone organization

SIZE

The size of the Project Team varies based on the scope of the network, both programmatically and geographically. Most networks have a Network Director to lead the network's work and a Network Manager or Coordinator to provide administrative and logistical support. Backbones also provide other resources such as program evaluation, communications, design, etc. Some networks have many more staff with certain staff supporting specific Initiative Teams.

INTERACTIONS

A Network Director who works for the Backbone organization and reports to leadership of the Backbone leads the Project Team and is often supported by outside consultants during the network development stage. The Network Director meets frequently with the Initiative Team chairs and at least monthly with the network's Stewardship Team. The Network Director and other Program Staff will meet one-on-one with network participants at least once a year, but many teams does one-on-ones after the biannual network meetings, especially if the network participants don't normally interact (e.g. if the network is national or global).