# Setting up an Early Careers Network/ Young Employees Network

## First Steps

### Check a similar network has not been established previously.

Your HR team should be able to help with this. On occasions, previously established networks fall apart when its leading members cannot run it anymore.

In the case that one has previously existed, you may be able to save yourself a lot of work.

### Decide on a name for your network.

An ‘Early Careers Network’ is commonly used. This is beneficial from an EDI lens, as it can prevent suggestions that the network is discriminatory on an age related basis which may be a concern for your HR team. ‘Young Employees Network’ is also a common name.

### Decide the purpose of the group.

This is up to you and those you are forming the group for. It may be to present opinions to managerial bodies, to socialise, to network, to support each other.

It could be a mixture of the above. Deciding the purpose of the network prior to moving on to the next steps will help shape the network’s structure and how the group will operate.

Having decided on your purpose, it can be helpful to set small number of goals to help keep your network on track. For example, getting a goal of a number of attendees at networking events, or a particular point of organisational change you want to achieve.

### Discuss with HR what your local authority’s process for setting up a network is.

If your local authority already has other networks, it is likely that there is an existing process to follow. By finding out what steps you need to take, you can focus on which exact steps need to be taken to get the group up and running.

### Following the discussion with HR, IF APPROPRIATE, begin to establish an informal group

Send out messages to people that you know which are likely to want to join your network. It is important at this stage that this remains an informal group. Be careful with this as age is a protected characteristic.

Setting up an informal group has the benefit of providing support to one another and extending your personal network, whilst also gaining an understanding of how many people may be interested in joining the network. Having a group of people indicating they would like to join the network is beneficial, and can help demonstrate the importance of your network.

### Engage with other councils

Reach out to other councils (may be local or not) and find out whether they have a

## Next steps

### Make a plan of the different steps that you need to take.

When possible assign responsibility for each task. This will help share the work evenly and account for individuals’ workloads.

### Prepare all the documents required to form your network.

This will most likely include a Terms of Reference and email to send to senior leadership to gain a senior sponsor/ senior buy in. For more guidance on this, please see the Terms of Reference Guidance documents.

### Consider how the network will run.

What positions on the steering group are necessary? Common positions are:

* Chair
* Events coordinator
* Secretary
* Accessibility and inclusion lead
* Development coordinator
* Communications lead

You will need to consider how you will allocate rolls should more than one person apply for a certain role. A frequent way to manage this is by creating non-portfolio roles which enables people to get involved without having to create a specific role for them.

Your network’s purpose will determine in part which roles you require- there might be some others that you would like to add.

If your network steering group is going to be very small originally, it is possible to share the positions between individuals. Keep in mind individuals workloads, and reducing single points of failure to help maintain the group’s sustainability.

## Other things to think about

### Meeting organisation

How frequently will the network meet? These should be in regular intervals, but do not have to be very frequent. Common patterns are quarterly, monthly, or fortnightly.

In what ways will this occur? For example, a coffee morning (virtual/ in person), lunch and learn, drinks after work, speaker events?

Consider your meeting times, and whether these are at the best time for those in the network. Also keep in mind council specific initiatives such as ‘No meeting Monday’.

Who is responsible for organising meetings? Will this differ by the type of event?

Who will write the agenda and distribute it? There should be some time for free discussion where members can raise points that are important to them, but there should also be structure to meetings.

### Budgets

Will your network require a budget? If so, talk to HR about how to secure a budget. You will most likely need a rough idea of how you will use the budget, so begin to think of this now.

Consider aspects such as tea and coffee being provided during in person meetings.

### Communications

How will you spread awareness of your network once it is established?

Is it possible for HR to add your network to their induction information?

If possible, speak to your local authority’s internal communications team and establish a contact. They will be able to help advertise your network and events on formal channels.

Set up a designated email address and mailbox. Your HR or IT team will help you be able to do this.

Set up an online forum for members to interact and discuss issues. This is often done on platforms such as Teams or Slack.

Many networks have a monthly round-up newsletter. This is a good opportunity to highlight past and future events, and relevant successes from the network and its members.

Having a designated communications lead will help to manage these elements and ensure that your network is able to present itself professionally.

### Succession planning

A common stumbling block with networks is that they rely on one colleague for maintenance, and the colleague can then no longer run the network.

Consider what you can put in place to prevent this from occurring. Sharing responsibilities between colleagues, and having a formal process for replacing the chair should they leave will help.

## To consider if the network is for socialising and networking

### Accessibility

Ensure your network conducts itself in an accessible and inclusive way. Be mindful of peoples’ differences. For example, intentionally having alcohol free social events.

### Confidentiality

How will you ensure that the network is a safe space and that members can speak openly?

## To consider if the network is for influence

### SLT buy-in

It is highly beneficial, especially if the purpose of the network is to influence, to have buy-in from senior colleagues. This is typically at Assistant Director or Corporate Leadership level.

In some local authorities this will be required to establish a network, but if it is not then this is recommended for the purposes on having a senior voice linked to the network.

### Feedback structures

It is helpful to formalise how you will collect feedback from the network and pass this on to the organisation.

Think about what feedback will be collected and when, who is responsible for collating feedback, who will pass this on, and who will it be passed on to.

Also consider how you will gain responses from your feedback to bring back to your network.