

The logo features the word "smart" in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font with a red square behind the letters 'a' and 'r'. Below it, the words "in business" are written in a smaller, black, lowercase, sans-serif font.

smart  
in business

A large red circular graphic containing the text "networking within communities" in white. The background of the circle is filled with various white and yellow line-art icons representing business and community concepts, such as a lightbulb, a handshake, a person, a gear, and a network diagram.

networking  
within  
communities

BUSINESS SKILLS FOR CREATIVE PEOPLE ■ A REGIONAL ARTS AUSTRALIA INITIATIVE

# smart in business

## network within communities

develop funds + resources

marketing

business planning

plan + program events

work with collections

good governance

the people factor

train others

project management

# Acknowledgments

## Regional Arts Australia

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# Contents

<b>Topic 1: Understanding Networks</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Understanding Your Community .....	4
Local Networks .....	4
Connection points.....	6
Types of Networks.....	7
<b>Topic 2: Networking Opportunities</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Action Plan.....	8
Community Resources .....	9
Networking with purpose.....	11
<b>Topic 3: Networking Tools</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Effective Meetings .....	14
e-networking .....	17
Sharing Responsibility .....	18
Information Management .....	19
<b>Topic 4: Communication &amp; working with groups</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Communicating with a Purpose.....	21
The communication process.....	21
Encouraging Participation .....	23
Style guide – a best practice guide for inclusive language.....	24
Reaching Agreement.....	27
Maintaining a Network .....	29
<b>Topic 5: Representing your organisation</b> .....	<b>32</b>
Introducing your organisation.....	32
Option: Business cards .....	35
<b>Topic 6: Community Partnerships</b> .....	<b>36</b>
Community Business Partnerships.....	36
Developing a Partnership.....	37
<b>Assessment exercises</b> .....	<b>42</b>
<b>Pathways to a Formal Qualification</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>Further information</b> .....	<b>50</b>
<b>Next steps</b> .....	<b>51</b>

# Topic 1: Understanding Networks

Networking within communities happens every day: it is an important community-building tool, and makes it possible for many groups to do things and pursue opportunities they would not be able to manage on their own. In regional areas, or where resources are limited, this method of sharing resources and creating links is especially important.

Networks need to be structured to suit the interests of the network members. If you are setting up a network, or tapping into one, it is important to be able to identify how it might be structured so that it best serves the needs of its network members. In this topic, we will look briefly at different types of networks, how they are structured, and their purpose.

## CASE STUDY

*In this resource book we use a hypothetical case study to help you work through the exercises.*

Riverside and Parrakilla are medium sized towns in Western Rivers Region, a fruit growing area 200 km inland from the State capital. Riverside grew up as a river port in the days of the paddle steamers, while Parrakilla was a soldier settlement irrigation area set up after World War II on the opposite side of the river, which forms the boundary between two local government areas. Over the last 20 years wine making has become an important industry.

A number of artists work in the towns and the surrounding region. The Regional Arts Council does the best it can to organise arts events, but is hindered by the lack of a proper venue for performances or exhibitions. Both towns also have active historical societies whose members have been collecting artefacts and materials connected with the settlement of the area. Recently they have become aware of the need to include the local Indigenous community within their activities.

The historical society committees have been discussing the possibility of setting up a regional museum. The Arts Council has been looking to set up a centre which would give them a venue for theatre performances and art exhibitions as well as providing work space for artists and community groups.

Active committee members from each group happened to be part of the same team at a quiz night to raise funds for the Parrakilla swimming pool. As they talked, they realised they had a number of goals in common, and that *each of their organisations could benefit if they all worked for one shared facility.*

Each of them took the idea to their own committees. All committees agreed it was a good idea. The Executives met to work out a plan of action to agree on what the facility should hold, who might use it and where they could look for support.

## **UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMMUNITY**

Communities are groups of people who share a common interest.

This could include:

- A place (your home, your school or where you were born)
- An activity (like sports, work or a club)
- A belief or value (your religion or way of life)

Members of communities think of themselves as 'belonging'. People can belong to many different communities; maybe you live in one community, participate in a social club, and have a spiritual community as well. Sometimes these communities overlap. It is our experience of sharing and belonging with others that makes our communities important to us. Members of communities may not agree on everything but there are usually things that hold the community together, and give it a sense of itself.

## **LOCAL NETWORKS**

In your community, many networks already exist. Some of them are easily visible, and some of them operate without you being aware of them at all. Networks within community groups, and between them, are working to share resources and information. Individuals come together to help each other and make connections that enrich their lives.

### **CASE STUDY**

Network members for the new shared facility project were:

- Parrakilla Historical Society
- Riverside Historical Society
- Western Rivers Regional Arts Council

Other interested bodies in the region identified during the planning stages included:

- The Indigenous communities in the local area
- Local artists and collectors
- The schools
- Local government bodies
- Tourist associations

Think about the organisations that operate in, or have links with the communities where you live. The potential for networking is huge. Key individuals with local knowledge are likely to have contacts in many of these organisations.

**ACTIVITY**

*Identify individuals and organisations with which you network already, or ones with whom you would like to make contact. Use the checklist on the next page to record your list of potential network members. You may find it helpful to think specifically about an activity you already have underway, or one you would like to start.*

**Checklist for potential network members**

**What potential contacts do you bring with you?**

Think about your friends and acquaintances, your contacts in other organisations, people who are on committees with you, even the partners, family and contacts of all these people.

Using the categories below as a prompt, write down the people you can think of who could fit into each category. Add categories if you wish.

- Trades People.....
  - Politicians and their staff.....
  - Contacts in government departments.....
  - Media .....
  - Churches .....
  - Businesses .....
  - Schools & education centres.....
  - Local councils.....
  - Financial services.....
  - Legal services.....
  - Publishing.....
  - Sympathetic people with significant money at their disposal .....
  - Sympathetic people with significant spare time .....
  - Contacts in arts & cultural organisations .....
  - Contacts in museums & libraries.....
  - People interested in history.....
  - Contacts in history or heritage groups.....
  - People with other special skills or attributes.....
  - Contacts in other sectors of the community .....
- eg. Environment, women’s groups, ethnic communities, sports clubs, etc.

Adapted from a checklist for identifying strengths in McArdle, J. *Resource Manual for facilitators in community development* Vol II, Vista Publications Vic, 1993.

## CONNECTION POINTS

Networking is about making connections with people.

Connection points need common interests or concerns.

It is important to see any connection as working both ways, so that all network members or partners benefit from their involvement.

Every network has points of connection that make it work and these are important to name. Sometimes they are a starting place for further connections. Sometimes they are a goal to be worked towards.

In each case, it is important to ask:

**What do we have in common?**

### CASE STUDY

The new network in Western Rivers Region, made a list of all the possible connections they might make to help them achieve their goal of a new shared facility.

They found dozens of potential connections. For instance, the historical society memberships of the two towns had many shared interests. Some had a collection of steam-driven engines used long ago in the area.

As well as having a shared common interest within their groups, they also had connection points with the State Historical Machinery Society, the State and National Institute of Engineers, and the Agricultural Bureaus in the surrounding areas.

## Assessment exercise 1.1 – Local networks – contacts and connection points

Think about your organisation, the networks and the potential network members that you identified with the checklist on the previous page.

*Choose three contacts (potential network members) that you can use as the basis for your exercises. Consider what you have in common – the connection points. It will be useful if you carry your example through all exercises, and this will influence your choice of contacts and connection points here.*

*Record your answers in columns one and two of the Local Networks table on page 42. This is the first part of your formal assessment.*

*(turn to page 42)*

## TYPES OF NETWORKS

Networks are working relationships between people and organisations which agree to share information and resources. They can be formal or informal.

**Informal networks** are the relationships that you use everyday – your friends and family, the people you interact with in your community. For instance, the parents at a school are an informal network, who might share the school run or mind each others children. Informal networks are not tightly structured, but are responsive and supportive in nature.

**Formal networks** are structured through an agreement process and usually include guidelines for sharing. For instance, committees at schools meet regularly to share decision-making and expertise. They have a structure that everyone agrees to use (meetings, etc).

Networks can be either on-going or project-based.

**On-going networks** maintain regular contact and usually have strong connections and matching purposes related to the overall operational activities of the organisation.

**Project-based networks** form to achieve a specific project, such as a festival or collaboration to build an arts centre. These networks may be dissolved when the project has been completed.

### CASE STUDY

*Both kinds of networks are highlighted in the Western Rivers region case study:*

*Informal:*

The committee members were informally networking at the quiz night.

*Formal:*

The Regional Arts Council and the Historical Societies from both towns each maintain their formal networks via regular meetings.

## Assessment exercise 1.2 – Local networks – type of relationship

*Complete column three of the Local Networks table by deciding if the networks that you have identified in column two are formal or informal, and whether the relationships are on-going or project-based.*

*(turn to page 42)*