

**Do you want to establish
a network of groups and
organisations?**

A case study on setting up a network of women's organisations

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Establishing Women's Organisations and groups Network (WON)

Nottingham Women's Centre (NWC) established a Women's Organisations and groups Network (WON) in 2015 with a view to 'Bring together women's organisations from across the City to share information and ideas and think more about how we can work together to support women in the City.'

The network generally meets quarterly for two hours and the agenda includes:

- An hour of roundtable networking where groups can talk about their current work and make links with each other;
- An opportunity for guest speakers to talk about topics of interest to network members, spotlight issues and raise any areas of common collaboration;
- A section for updates from Nottingham Women's Centre;
- A discussion about a particular issue we are working on.

Origins

The network started in 2015 and held its first meeting in November 2015. Nottingham Women's Centre established a need for the network after they identified:

- No pre-existing network for women's organisations in the city;
- Low awareness from many groups about the work of other organisations and ways to collaborate;
- A lack of information around the different women's groups operating.

NWC was in a good position to establish the network because of funding from the local authority to work in partnership with other women's organisations. They were also striving to reach different groups with their Small Grant Funding streams. Additionally, they had a wide network of contacts in the local women's sector thanks to campaigning and strategic meetings.

Who Attends

The network is specifically aimed at non-profit women's organisations, groups, or projects. Anyone involved in a women's organisation, or a group or project providing services and support to women, can attend, and a mix of frontline and senior staff are involved. Most of the members fall into the category of women's organisations or supporting women, but there are also some in attendance from other stakeholder groups such as the City Council Community Development Team, Department for Work and Pensions (working specifically to support women) and local universities.

Reach of the Network

The network has grown through a number of means including: word of mouth, promotion through NWC's newsletter and social media.

**161 people
on the WON
mailing list**

**500% growth
in mailing list
subscribers**

**30 attendees at
each meeting
on average**

Planning and Format

NWC have learnt that a semi-formal format works best for the regular meeting. Having half of the meeting dedicated to round-table information sharing has been really positive as this is often the part of the meeting that benefits groups the most. At almost every meeting groups make valuable connections with each other. The notes from the organisational updates are shared with all members, as well as any additional information, links and contact details as requested.

NWC have taken a light touch regarding the strategy of the meetings. Meeting evaluations and a review conducted with members in 2019 showed that the networking was the most valuable aspect of the meeting for most attendees. This creates valuable links as well as a space where organisations can share similar issues and stressors. For smaller/volunteer-led groups, this latter point is especially important.

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Strategy for Meetings

- **Networking:** enable people to meet people from other organisations working in similar fields and establish new connections in the city
- **Consistency:** provide a dedicated time and space to share information
- **Understanding:** Understand any overlaps and shared goals in areas such as campaigning that could lead to collaboration
- **Collaboration:** make connections that directly feed into individual's work

By dedicating the first part of the meeting to updates from members and discussions around issues affecting women locally, this also informs NWC's own work areas, especially around policy and influencing. The semi-formal approach means that the planning and administration of the meetings does not require a lot of staff time.

Topics Covered

- Guest speaker from housing support at City Council attended following a network meeting where organisations said they found the processes confusing and housing was a big issue for many of the women that they worked with.
- In July 2020 discussion focused on how members could share support and what issues women were facing.
- In September 2020 there was discussion around hidden demand, barriers women are facing and new or exacerbated issues due to Covid.
- In November 2020 discussion focussed on how to put women at heart of future planning.
- In February 2021 there was discussion on understanding, tackling and addressing misinformation about Covid and the vaccine.

Each meeting is evaluated with a simple Google form and NWC ask about topics members would like to see covered at future meetings. This is then used to plan future discussions and guest speakers.

Value of the Network

The network is an excellent source of information around campaigning and it adds weight to requests as information has been gathered from range of places. The network also supports in identifying and reaching potential stakeholders with policy and influencing work. The diversity of the groups who come along is also really valuable as they represent a range of issues and women with attendees including VAWG organisations, fitness and social based groups, advocacy groups, groups for specific women (i.e. women from Malawi, Refugee and Asylum Seeker LBT+ women, groups for single mothers etc). The network also makes it easy to create links on social media with different groups so that we can all feed in to the same conversations.

Challenges

There are a number of challenges in running the network which include, Zoom apathy and keeping groups connected despite GDPR regulations. It can be difficult to keep groups talking between meetings and sharing information with each other without NWC being the 'middle-person'. There has been potential discussion of an online forum or private Facebook group, but this may need more resource. Staff time to run the network is also a concern which is why NWC has gone with an informal and lightly structured approach to minimise the time and resource requirements of the network.

**Got a case study to
contribute? Get in touch.**

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Charity Number 1082450. Company Number 3376716.