

## Tuning-up an Existing Network

(Source: June Holley's *Network Weaver Handbook*, pages 261-269)

One thing we know about intentional networks is that they need to change and evolve. The structure of your current network may not be appropriate for your purpose or the structure may not be working well.

Most existing intentional networks can benefit from a tune-up to help their network evolve and adapt. A tune-up forces the network to stop and examine its function and structure to identify both its current strengths and areas where the network needs some additional work and attention. This resource lays out a simple process for existing networks to conduct a tune-up.

There are four steps in the process.

1. Coordinating the tune-up process
2. Assessing your network
3. Tune-up activities
4. Re-assessing to appreciate progress and identify additional work

### Coordinating the Tune-up Process

Your network needs a tune-up if you are hearing any of the following phrases:

- “We’re the only ones doing any work in this network.”
- “This network just feels like too much work for too little benefit.”
- “I’m not sure what this network is about anymore.”
- “Hardly anyone comes to meetings anymore.”
- “They call all the shots in this network.”
- “None of the people who have power and influence are even in this network.”
- “We spend way too much time in meetings.”
- “I don’t feel like I get anything out of this network.”
- “This network is too cliquy.”
- “This network just isn’t accomplishing anything. All we do I talk and argue.”

If you determine that your network needs a tune-up, a group will need to coordinate the process. It’s often useful to designate a small group that will focus on this. Qualities to look for in the tune-up group are:

- Good group facilitation skills
- Ability to listen well
- Capacity to generate creative solutions

This group needs to develop commitment from the network to spend time on the tune-up, generate a timeline and arrange for time on upcoming agendas.

### **Assessing Your Network**

The first step is to assess the current state of your network. The *Network Health Scorecard* (NHS) developed by Peter Plastrik, Madeleine Taylor, and John Cleveland is a widely used assessment tool for networks to use. A downloadable copy of the NHS, administration instructions, and instructions for analyzing and reflecting on results are available on the Minnesota Food Charter Network website.

Two additional assessment tools, specific to assessing your network's strategy(ies) and relationships are attached here.

Whatever method is used for assessment, prioritize a few areas that are the most in need of attention. Make sure you only select as many areas to work on as you have volunteers to work on them.

### **Tune-up Activities**

Coordinate a self-organizing process to enable people to cluster into work groups to work on the challenges. Each work group should then meet and develop a set of recommendations that they will present to the network for feedback. After modifying their action plan as a result of the feedback, the work groups can spend the next few months implementing their plans.

### **Re-assessing to Appreciate Progress and Identify Additional Work**

After 6 months, have the network re-take the survey and determine if progress has been made and where the network needs to continue to work on its functioning as a network.

## Assessment Tool: Assessing Your Current Issue Strategy

Determine the current strategies being implemented as part of the network. Ask core members of the network (individually or as a group) to assess each strategy by answering the following questions. Discuss results.

Name of strategy:

Overall, how effective would you say this strategy is?						
Not effective	1	2	3	4	5	Highly effective
<p>What are the strengths of the current strategy? How could the network build on those strengths?</p>  <p>What are some of the problems that have come up with the current strategy? How might the current strategy be changed or shifted?</p>						

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## Assessment Tool: Relationship Building

What are the current options for engagement?

\_\_\_ Meetings

Do you have small group activities? Do you have activities during meetings so that people can get to know each other, which often builds commitment to the network? Do you use meeting to identify participants' interests?

\_\_\_ Other discussion venues

Do you have group email lists, blogs or discussion spaces where people can engage?

\_\_\_ Surveying

Do you survey people to identify their thoughts about the network? About actions they are interested in taking?

\_\_\_ Action groups

Do you implement processes to help people sort themselves into action groups?