



The Bar Council

BAR COUNCIL EQUALITY & DIVERSITY GUIDES SETTING UP A BAR-BASED NETWORK TO SUPPORT EDI AT THE BAR

Informal networks support career advancement through networking and can provide a vital source of support for members of under-represented communities at the Bar.

This guide provides advice and tips for those interested in setting up and running effective networks.

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1. What do we mean by a network?

A network is a group formed to act as a resource for its members and for an organisation (for example: a Chambers, Specialist Bar Association, Circuit, or the Bar itself). It can be formal or informal.

Examples of existing networks at the Bar include - amongst others - [FreeBar](#); [Women in Criminal Law](#); [the Black Barristers Network](#); [Western Circuit Women's Forum](#); [Middle Temple Young Barristers' Association](#).

2. The business case for networks at the Bar

Identified business benefits associated with networks include:

- ✓ Enhancing client connections
- ✓ Enabling a Chambers, Circuit, SBA, or the wider Bar to be seen as inclusive
- ✓ Supporting identification of leadership talent
- ✓ Allowing for cross-profession learning
- ✓ Advising on EDI policies and programmes
- ✓ Providing feedback on actions affecting specific groups
- ✓ Helping improve inclusion

3. Benefits for network members

Networks help their members.

- They improve confidence levels and provide opportunities to develop networking skills and make contacts across the profession
- They expose junior barristers to more senior members of the profession
- By sharing information, they put their members 'in the know' and ensure they are more likely to be aware of opportunities

Identified benefits to members of networks to date are:

- ✓ Increased opportunities
- ✓ Access to information on the profession
- ✓ Career satisfaction
- ✓ Greater visibility
- ✓ Career advice friendships
- ✓ Social support
- ✓ Business leads
- ✓ Resources
- ✓ Improved confidence
- ✓ Professional support and encouragement
- ✓ Personal development
- ✓ Access to people who may be able to advance your career

- ✓ Access to mentors
- ✓ Friendships and allies
- ✓ Collaboration

4. Set up: Getting started

To be successful a network must align its goals and activities to its members' needs (and the needs of e.g., Chambers, a Circuit, SBA, or the Bar as a whole). You need to establish what potential members want or need from a network and whether there is sufficient interest and demand to warrant setting one up. You also need to consider how this network fits into the profession and gauge the level of support at the most senior levels.

TIP: It is worth taking the time to look at other networks and make decisions early on how you want your network to work and what it is there to do.

When setting up it is important to keep focused and ensure the network has:

1. A clearly defined purpose that meets its members needs
2. Agreed goals
3. A plan of action in place

A well-defined vision and purpose will help you identify outcomes, priorities, and actions and who needs to be involved. It will also inform the type of activities the network carries out, influence the duration of the network, and provide clarity for its members and the Bar.

TIP: Don't leap straight into setting up a network without spending the time properly researching the need and demand for it.

Key questions to ask (before setting up a network)

1. What are the barriers to progression?
2. How will a network help address these?
3. What is already being done to support this community – how will a network add value to what is already being done?
4. How will it fit into the culture of the profession?
5. How will it link to any wider EDI strategy?
6. Is there support for a network from any of the following:
 - Students
 - Pupils
 - Junior barristers
 - Senior Silks
 - Chambers
 - SBAs/Circuits/Inns
 - Bar Leaders
7. What do members want?
8. How do they think a network will help them?
9. What do they want to get out of a network?
10. What activities do they want?
11. How do they want it to operate (frequency/location/membership)?
12. What are the constraints (time/energy)?
13. Is there sufficient interest from the constituency to get started?
14. What support is already there?
15. What other networks exist or have existed in the past/how do these operate/ how successful are they/will this network complement others/If they were successful, why were they successful?
16. What will those who are not members of the group for whom the network is intended think of the network, can they be involved in any way?
17. Are there concerns about a network? If so, what are they? Can they be overcome?

TIP: Start small with informal discussions to gather initial views and grow from there. Try not to raise expectations about what the network will do – the purpose at this stage is to gauge demand.

TIP: Brainstorm success to create your vision/mission; define outcomes and set clear and achievable goals:

If the network is successful....

1. What difference will the network have made to (your target group) group and to the profession?
2. What would it look and feel like?
3. How will you know if you have been successful?
4. How can you measure it?

5. Governance

The governance model you choose will be dependent upon the purpose of the network, the people and context (i.e., if it is chambers based or covers the whole Bar)

Most networks have a leader who may be required to:

- Act as spokesperson both internally and externally
- Ensure network activities are aligned to the mission statement goals and objectives
- Maintain momentum within the network and Bar
- Coordinate activities
- Secure and increase participation

In order to maintain momentum, enthusiasm, and energy you may want to elect leaders regularly through a voting system.

TIP: Consider bringing new leaders into your network on a regular basis to keep the network fresh and energetic

6. Membership

You need to decide if you are going to open up membership to those outside the target group.

TIP: Have membership criteria.

7. Communications.

Have a clear communication strategy so everyone across the Bar is aware of the network's purpose vision and goals.

Find out preferred communication channels for your members including e.g., email, newsletters, social media and/or a website.

Have a calendar of events and activities including formal networking meetings, email discussion groups, chat rooms and conference calls.

Think about:

- **Naming and branding your network** – the name indicates who/what the network stands for and should link to your mission statement – seek views not just from your constituency, but others across the Bar
- **Provide basic information on the network** to members and to audiences so it is clear what the network does and how it operates. This should include background to the network, why it is there, what its mission statement is, how it operates and where to go for further information.
- **Make sure you provide two-way communications channels** so that you can get feedback from members on how they feel the network is operating and gather ideas for activities events and areas for improvements.

TIP: Be vigilant in keeping information up to date. Out of date information can send negative messages about the network and commitment to the agenda

WARNING: Watch out for inappropriate acronyms

TIP: To build support you need to communicate...

1. An introduction to the network its mission and goals
2. The business case for the network
3. Answers to any questions network colleagues may have
4. What support you would like from the Bar

8. Types of Network Activity

Options for Network activity include:

- Networking sessions
- Career development events (e.g., career planning, applying for Silk/Panel appointments; preparing for interviews/ leveraging contacts)
- Skills workshops e.g., body language leadership style personal branding dealing with conflict
- Conferences
- Personal and social activities
- Presentations from senior leaders to raise visibility
- Guest speakers
- Mentoring and coaching
- Commissioning research
- Focus groups for providing opinion on e.g., Bar based activity

TIP: When organising events consider:

- Primary focus. Be clear on purpose
- Location. Make sure the venue is accessible
- Timing. Find your members preferred time/day
- Costs. Use Bar based facilities to keep costs down
- Good speaker. To attract people to your event. Make sure they are properly briefed.
- Have a chair. To ensure a proper welcome, introduction and thank you as well as keep to time
- Promote the event. Use all communication channels
- Keep records. Record all enquiries and potential attendees. Collect feedback (evaluation – what changed as an outcome of the event – not just if everyone had a good time)
- After the event. Contact attendees and encourage them to be in touch with each other.

9. Budgets

Network budgets may need to include:

- Initial start-up (e.g., website)
- Ongoing maintenance and running costs (e.g., website hosting)
- Staffing/Volunteer Expenses
- Event costs
- Speaker Costs
- Travel e.g., to events

Many Bar-based organisations (e.g., Chambers, Inns, SBAs, Circuits and Bar Council) may be willing to help you set up and cover running costs for a Network. Some may even be able to offer administrative support. This can be extremely helpful as planning events, answering questions, and maintaining communications can become time consuming and it is important to spread the work load out – especially if key members become tied up in a case/have a very heavy workload.

TIP: Having a clear business case and budget can assist when seeking sponsorship.

NEXT STEPS: Do contact [Bar Council](#) if you want any further advice or support – and make sure links to your network are posted on the Bar Council's website.

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