

A Sense Of Belonging And Voice

A Guide For Establishing Staff Networks

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The Norfolk and Waveney Health and Care Partnership

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Introduction

The greatest resource that all organisations have is its staff. We know that engaging with staff in a meaningful and sustained way is important in helping to make continuous improvements on the equality agenda. Amongst other benefits, this engagement provides the organisation with the opportunity to make sure that staff feel valued and respected for the outstanding contribution they often make, and that staff from all backgrounds, are fully involved in the organisation's work.

Introducing staff networks is encouraged as an important source of knowledge, support and experience. The NHS England (2017) 'Improving through Inclusion: Supporting staff networks for black and minority ethnic staff in the NHS' report suggests, such an approach can contribute towards the overall success of many organisations' work in general, and specifically upon the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda.

The findings of the NHS WRES and WDES data specifically highlight there is still much more work to do to narrow the gap in experience and outcomes particularly between white and black and minority ethnic staff and non-disabled and disabled staff. The voices of these staff should play more of a critical role especially considering staff with disabilities and staff from black and minority ethnic communities are made up of different backgrounds and different experiences. For example the experience of staff with a mental health condition may differ to those with a physical health condition. Therefore, it is important to identify what exists to enable those voices to be heard.

Staff networks can be effective mechanisms of workforce engagement. Acting as a collective discussing the different experiences of their members, staff networks can provide insight into unseen barriers and devise practical, creative and workable solutions to help close the gap. We know that when staff feel they are valued and fairly treated, they are more likely to be engaged, motivated and ultimately more productive at work (see case study 1 – 'My Staff Network Journey'). This is the real business benefit of inclusive workplaces. Having a trusted source of information that is willing and able to act as a critical friend and bring solutions to the issues facing their members and the business is an asset in any organisation. Especially when those solutions can help the organisation advance, provide access to services that are sensitive and reflect different cultural realities, recruit and retain the best talent, and provide excellent patient care. That being said, it has to be acknowledged that where staff networks do exist, not all will have the necessary capacity, capability and support to be heard. Therefore, it is essential to understand how best to equip staff networks with the tools they need to be clear about their offer, and how to empower them to bring a positive and measurable difference for the organisation.

This guide is to help organisations to establish staff networks and provides best practice on how to support them to mature.

Setting Up A Staff Network

The primary purpose of a staff network is to assert equity for their members (employees) within the organisation. Using a formal structure, they support their individual needs as it relates to specific identifying characteristics, including visible and invisible identities or qualities. They come together around a shared purpose where members act as peers on the basis of exchange and reciprocity, based on trust, respect, and mutuality.

When initially setting up a staff network it is important to consider the following:

- What is the purpose of introducing the staff network?
- What will the membership look like?
- What is your equality data telling you?
- What is your organisational survey data telling you?
e.g. NHS Staff Survey results
- Would it be helpful to circulate an organisational wide survey to ask for staff thoughts on the launch of a staff network?
- What resources do you have currently to support the network?
- What could be the aims for the staff network?
- What will the reporting/ governance structure be like?
- How will the staff network be involved in decision making?
- Is there a Board Champion/ Board Sponsor who could be appointed to support the staff network?

Membership

Staff networks need to be inclusive and draw membership from across the whole workforce. Having a joint partnership including allies will provide the necessary support to implement actions addressing key areas.

It is also important to consider senior management involvement to enable agreement that all staff are entitled to the time to attend staff network meetings or activities and dealing with any issues or difficulties that arise with this.

Support and Resources

For staff networks to be sustainable and effective they need to be supported and resourced.

It is recommended to consider setting a budget for the network and consider how admin support will be provided. A study by the NHS Staff Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group (EDIG) showed that the majority of NHS organisations will usually have HR representation and support in the meetings. This resource can be a help when it comes to setting up the forum however, it would be encouraged for the network chairs to decide its membership and support going forward.

As part of the Norfolk and Waveney 'Sense of Belonging and Voice' workstream, it is asked for of each organisation to commit to resourcing their staff networks in order for them to thrive. A minimum of 12 hours per month is expected of staff network chairs as part of their usual day job. It is also expected for organisations to commit to a minimum budget of £3,000 per annum.

Terms of Reference

Taking the above points into consideration will help guide you with producing a draft terms of reference and appropriate communications. Whilst it is best practice to produce and approve terms of reference with staff network members, it can be helpful to draft a terms of reference document to allow colleagues to envisage the key purpose and principles in order for them to engage with the establishment. Appendix A provides a terms of reference template to support organisations.



Ways of Working

Governance Arrangements

As mentioned within the above section, it is important to consider whom your staff network will be reporting into. A study undertaken by EDIG, found that EDI was included as an agenda item at Joint Negotiating Council's and relevant staff network chairs were invited to contribute.

The NNUH have a clear structure whereby the staff network will feed back to the overarching Equality and Diversity steering group. The steering group then reports to the Workforce and Education Sub-Board Committee. Often staff networks are also invited to forums such as the Joint Consultative Committee with trade union representatives and managers to agree on procedures and messaging across the Trust. This provides a good link and can ensure that work programmes complement each other and areas where closer working could be of benefit are identified.

See case study 2 – Governance Structure at NNUH

Staff Network Chairs/ Committee's

To enable the networks to mature effectively, networks should have a representative chair that can take a lead on the equality agenda, engage and encourage other colleagues to participate in initiatives, take forward actions as appropriate and support awareness of an inclusive workforce. NHS England – Improving through inclusion report identified that the most effective staff networks have represented leads that have developed a working relationship with HR, Diversity and Inclusion Lead/ Team and other staff networks in the organisation.

At NNUH, the process was to communicate to the Trust about the role requesting expressions of interest. As NNUH had already set up their networks, they were able to then share the applications with staff network members to vote.

In order to facilitate this role, it is recommended to allow the chair(s) or committee members facilitated time/ hours to undertake chair activities within their current job role therefore line manager support is crucial. To allow for chairs to attend the staff network meetings and undertake the actions following those meetings, it is recommended to allow up to 12 hours per month. The messaging of this is crucial and so it is suggested to consider executive approval before agreeing specific hours so that they can offer support and help communicate the expectations.

Appendix B provides a useful template job description for the staff network chair(s) describing the key expectations and attributes. Appendix C provides a template letter to support resources and time for chairs to undertake duties.

Staff Network Board Champions/Sponsors

NHS organisations such as Mersey Care and Imperial College Healthcare, have appointed Board level sponsors for each of their staff networks. Whilst the NNUH currently have a Non-Executive Director championing Equality and Diversity. It is thought that engaging with a Board level member will enable top level accountability and enhance the commitment towards embedding an inclusive culture.

NHS Employers state that networks will be most effective if they have visible and high-level support and engagement from the board.

Board champions or sponsors are expected to attend staff network meetings and have an understanding of the networks objectives and vision. It is expected that they too will have the same vision and will support the network in achieving an inclusive and educated culture.

The Board Level Champions/ Sponsors will usually:

- Help to raise awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion and the Trust's strategy and action plan
- Encourage individuals to speak up on any issues or concerns they may have
- Be held accountable for providing feedback to the Board and helping to identify ways to improve areas raised within the network
- Raise awareness of relevant policies and guidelines reiterating local adherence to these
- Share information on Trust initiatives and opportunities such as reverse mentoring, inclusive interviewing, listening events
- Encourage membership of the Trust's staff networks



Getting Started

Staff networks need to identify the priorities their colleagues wish to work on and agree objectives and initiatives which are realistic and achievable.

This could include areas such as:

- Staff experience
- Bullying, harassment and violence (looking at staff survey findings specific to WRES and WDES)
- Identifying membership roles to support actions or objectives agreed
- Reviewing of HR Policies
- Raising concerns/ lived experiences
- Health and Wellbeing (e.g. impacts of Covid-19)
- Revising recruitment practices Revising training processes and/or talent management strategies

Top Tip: It is recommended to consider how information is shared with staff network leads and members for comments and feedback. Look at your current HR standard operating procedures to seek to understand how policies and procedures are agreed and how staff networks can provide their input.



Case Studies

Case Study 1 – My Staff Network Journey – West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust

[My Staff Network Journey | NHS Employers](#)

Michelle Healy is a data integrity officer at the West Hertfordshire Hospital and shares their reflection on the importance of staff networks and the support they provide.

Before joining our network, Diversability, I had met others with disabilities at West Herts, but everyone always felt spread out, connections were isolated and you felt ultimately powerless to effect any kind of change for the better. Our meetings, led by our staff disability champion and our equality and diversity lead, are a safe space where we can share the issues we face and can draw on support from others who may have been through similar, such as when facing redeployment, or we can work together to find ways to improve situations.

One area where many of us struggle is with parking. Adequate disabled parking for staff has always been an important issue to me, and we have now set up a task and finish group to improve this for our staff with blue badges, which I am chairing. The network also helps in other ways: when I wasn't medically able to have the particular COVID-19 vaccine our trust was administering, network connections meant I was able to arrange to have my vaccines at another local trust.

I am also a staff wellbeing champion and a member of our carers' support network (I have a teenager with autism and ADHD). During this past year the support these groups have provided has been invaluable for me and many others who have found themselves in incredibly trying times. As a wellbeing champion I have been able to provide a listening ear for colleagues needing support and signpost them to appropriate organisations. Our carer's support network has introduced our Carer's Passport, an official document aimed specifically at helping managers to identify the adjustments and support requirements that our staff carers need in order for them to achieve a balance between their jobs and caring responsibilities.

People I've spoken to - those with a disability or long-term condition, fellow carers and other colleagues have felt that although we are working hard, our quality of life has also improved thanks to blended working arrangements. Perhaps, most importantly, more people have felt empowered to say this to their managers, our trust board and even our chief executive. This is the kind of strength that is found when people are encouraged to come together and feel they are supported and being listened to. When voices are numerous and loud enough, then change starts happening, and it is known that when we make changes and improve things for minority groups, positive change begins happening on all levels.

Case Study 2 – Governance Structure at NNUH

NNUH – Our Journey to creating Our Hospital for All

Although our leaders have talked about the business case for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), it had been a struggle to raise its profile and priority in an organisation where money was tight with the pressures on the 'front door' and 'flow' are so challenging that it always feels like 'winter is coming'.

Much as there was a governance group for HR professionals, the HR and Equality and Diversity (and Inclusion) Group (known as HEDGE), it was a struggle to raise the profile of EDI.

However, through the HEDGE, a wealth of data was emerging which needed to be 'heard'.

The Deputy Director of Workforce, who chaired the HEDGE, made the decision to focus on a small number of indicators and to socialise them throughout the organisation. As such, it was decided to focus on two indicators in respect of BAME staff:

- Appointments from shortlisting
- Formal disciplinary processes

The Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) data for 2018 suggested:

- White applicants were 2.07 more likely to be appointed from shortlisting compared to BAME staff.
- BAME staff were twice as likely to be subject to formal disciplinary process, compared to White staff.

We also produced data on these indicators more frequently which was confirming that the disproportionality remained significant, even if there were occasions where the 'gap' closed.

An opportunity emerged for a newly formed People and Culture Committee to focus on a limited agenda, which allowed for an open discussion and consideration in respect of all the indicators in the WRES and the Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES). However, by commencing the debate on the data from just two indicators from the WRES, there was a level of interest and engagement which has continued ever since.

Following this in May 2019, the CQC well-led inspection identified:

“Equality, inclusion and diversity was not embedded across the trust. We were not assured that equality inclusion and diversity was fully embedded at the time of our inspection.”

This Committee meeting and the CQC inspection was undoubtedly the catalyst for significance and has sustained throughout the organisation.

EDGE, not HEDGE

Working and engaging with our senior leaders created the need for linking with our Patient Experience teams as well as our Workforce team in order to encourage and embrace an inclusive culture across the hospital. We know that a diverse and inclusive workforce results to better patient experience which means that without working as a collective, gaps cannot be fulfilled effectively.

With the above in mind and based on the changes to create greater diversity in governance, the Human Resource Equality and Diversity Group (HEDGE) has been expanded to take account of Patient EDI matters. The group has been renamed to the Equality and Diversity Group (EDGE) and continues to meet monthly, operating under a revised terms of reference. Membership of the group has expanded to include not only the Chief People Officer, Deputy Director of Workforce and HR Business Partners but also divisional leads who feedback to their own Local Equality and Diversity Groups and work on local actions, senior nursing colleagues and the patient engagement and experience lead.

Since appointing our staff network leads they have also joined the EDGE to enable a two-way structure where voices are heard and fed back to the Equality and Diversity Group (EDGE) for further intervention. This structure has enabled greater cross functional working.

EDI Workforce Focused Action Plan

A workforce action plan was formed where the EDGE could closely monitor and feedback on progress on a monthly basis. The action plan is a live document and is a means of capturing headline activities. It is adjusted with contribution from all our staff networks, EDGE and divisional EDI groups.

Since the Trust implemented a clear two-way governance structure there have been many improvements. In January 2020 the CQC Well-Led inspection identified:

“The trust has taken significant steps to change the culture of the hospital. Everyone we spoke to was able to describe these and the work undertaken to ensure that equality and diversity was centre stage of this work.”

Working together and involving staff networks within decisions has seen greater improvements to our culture and engagement.

Case Study 3 – NHS Employers – Staff Networks and Health And Wellbeing

Watch a video recording of how staff networks can support the health and wellbeing of staff:

[**How Staff Networks Can Support The Health And Wellbeing Of Staff | NHS Employers**](#)

Terms Of Reference

1. Definitions

2. Constitution

At no point is anyone under any obligation to declare any information about themselves that they do not wish to share.

The group will operate a safe space approach to meetings and treat all network members with dignity and respect.

3. Purpose

The **Purpose** of the Network is to:

Provide a voice for [INSERT PROTECTED/EQUALITY CHARACTERISTICS] staff as well as encourage all staff within the trust to celebrate diversity. It is also to encourage our staff to understand the needs of [INSERT PROTECTED/EQUALITY CHARACTERISTICS] individuals within the community so that the trusts vision, values and objectives are fulfilled. This can be achieved through;

- Creating and maintaining a forum and positively raising the profile of diversity and inclusion
- Support existing activities and encourage the expansion of initiatives to celebrate the diversity of the workforce
- To promote opportunities for social networking
- To help the Trust identify areas where staff representation can be increased
- To develop and maintain a network that provides support and promotes diversity generally within the workforce
- Create and maintain a safe environment for [INSERT PROTECTED/EQUALITY CHARACTERISTICS] staff to discuss equality matters
- To have an input in equality and diversity training opportunities for the development of all staff including [INSERT PROTECTED/EQUALITY CHARACTERISTICS] staff which may arise within the Trust.

4. Authority

The Network has no executive powers other than those specified in these Terms of Reference. The Network is authorised to investigate any activity within its Terms of Reference and all Trust staff are expected to co-operate with the Network to facilitate satisfaction of its duties.

The Network has authority to establish sub groups or working groups as it considers appropriate, efficient and necessary and responsibility for overseeing the work of such committees rests with the Network.

The Network has authority for recommending and monitoring implementation of policies relevant to its Terms of Reference.

5. Membership

The [INSERT NAME OF STAFF NETWORK] Staff Network shall elect a Chair or other Chair arrangement (such as Co-Chairs, or a Chair and Vice-Chair) from within the membership. The term for the Chair or Chair arrangement will be one year.

The [INSERT NAME OF STAFF NETWORK] Staff Network Chair(s) will be present at all meetings.

Membership of the network will be open to all employees within the trust including allies who are committed to the aims of the network.

6. Support Arrangements

The Human Resources Department or the EDI Inclusion Lead will provide the network appropriate administrative support. However, in the near future it is encouraged for the Network Chair(s) to arrange for appropriate administrative support to be provided to the Network.

7. Meetings

Meetings of the Network shall be scheduled to take place at a bi-monthly frequency.

Responsibility for calling meetings of the Network shall rest with the Network Chair(s). Notice of each meeting confirming the venue, time, and date together with the agenda of items for discussion and supporting papers will be circulated to each member of the Network by one week prior to the meeting.

Minutes and/or a record of Action Points arising from meetings of the Network shall be made and circulated to its members. Notes or minutes will be sent to all members of the network via email after each meeting has taken place.

8. Duties

In furtherance of its Purpose, key duties of the Network are to:

- Enable LGBT+ staff to feel that they are part of and have a vital role to play in the Trust

- Create and maintain a safe environment for staff to discuss equality matters
- Discuss issues affecting [INSERT PROTECTED/ EQUALITY CHARACTERISTIC] staff with key decision makers
- Assist in formulating new and reviewing existing policies and procedures.
- Assist the trust in meeting its statutory obligations regarding its duty under the Equality Act 2010
- Review, consult and make suggestions on the trusts staff survey results that relate to equality and diversity matters
- Review, consult and make suggestions on the trusts Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) data and Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) where applicable
- Review, consult and make suggestions on the trusts Equality Delivery System (EDS/EDS2) objectives
- Review, consult and make suggestions on the trusts Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Workforce Action Plan
- Support [NAME OF ORGANISATION] in developing a positive workplace environment that celebrates the contribution of [INSERT PROTECTED/ EQUALITY CHARACTERISTIC] staff, and is free from homophobia, discrimination and harassment

9. Reporting And Process For Monitoring Effectiveness

On an annual basis, an appropriate report shall be made summarising actions and progress from the Network to the [INSERT REPORTING COMMITTEE]

On a monthly basis the Network Chair(s) will report to the [INSERT REPORTING COMMITTEE] summarising topics of discussions and progress

The Terms of Reference of the Network will be reviewed annually. This may occur sooner if the membership deems it appropriate based on changes proposed to the Network. Any proposed changes will be submitted to the [INSERT REPORTING COMMITTEE] for approval

10. Relationship With Divisions And Governance Sub-Boards

For the avoidance of doubt, it should be noted that the structural position and operation of the Network is to be consistent with the existing governance and leadership arrangements through the Divisions and Governance Sub-boards. The Chair(s) of the Network will ensure that in its operation and effect the Network supports the existing clear lines of escalation, responsibility and accountability through Divisions and Governance Sub-boards.

Date approved by the Staff Network:

Date for Annual Review:

Staff Network Chair Job Description

***Note - This is a link role so is not salaried but should be supported by the individuals Line Manager.**

Role Summary

The Staff Network Chair is a visible and influential role. Working alongside the LGBT+, BAME or Diverse Ability Staff Network members, Equality and Diversity Group (EDGE) and Local Equality and Diversity Group(s) (LEDGe) they will support the continuing aims to embed inclusion across the hospital.

Other key responsibilities will include;

- To attend the LGBT+, BAME or Diverse Ability Staff Network meetings to lead on the agenda
- Actively engage with LEDGe(s) and the EDGE
- Encourage other colleagues to attend the network meetings
- To work with the admin support to draft agenda's and action points.
- Support members of the staff network and the EDGE in ensuring that diversity and inclusion is actively encouraged
- Support awareness within NNUH regarding Equality, Diversity and Inclusion matters as well as contribute to the wider diversity agenda
- Participate and help to coordinate national and local events such as Norwich Pride, LGBT+ History Month, Diverse Ability celebrations and NNUH Celebrating Diversity Day
- To develop and maintain a network that provides support and promotes diversity generally within the workforce
- Create and maintain a safe environment for staff to discuss equality matter

Hours And Resources

- The Staff Network Chair will be allocated facilitated time/ hours a month, depending on activity levels, to review the agenda, research into initiatives, attend meetings and support actions
- The Staff Network can consider their own structure whether this be to have one representative chair, rotational chairs, a vice chair and/or a committee
- Chairs will be given the opportunity to recommend spending via the Equality and Diversity Group (EDGe) for resources and initiatives which meet the specific criteria(s)

Key Responsibilities And Personal Qualities

The Staff Network Chair is expected to have the experience of chairing or leading meetings and/ or have the equivalent qualities such as ;

- Be able to work through the agenda on time
- Be able to reach appropriate decisions
- Be confident in asking questions

Other certain qualities and experience include:

- Experience in coordinating and organising events and projects in order to support the network in achieving actions, initiatives and awareness.
- Experience in planning ahead in advance.
- Be visible to all staff, particularly those on the frontline, and approachable by all.
- Be knowledgeable in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion matters and local issues, and able to promote our progress and identify areas where we need to improve.
- Be effective in assisting HR and the EDGE on the agenda, meetings and action points.
- Chairs should be approachable and have highly developed communication skills, enabling staff to feel comfortable discussing experiences and suggestions.
- Demonstrate exemplary behaviour in keeping with the NNUH PRIDE values.

Template Letter Supporting Time/Resources For Network Chairs

RE: Supporting Staff Network Attendance/ Staff Network Chairs

Dear Colleagues,

As our commitment towards embedding a more diverse and inclusive organisation continues we are writing to you as managers to support this important work. We want to ensure we harness the talents of our staff fully and one of the ways we wish to support this is through the development of our staff networks which contribute to addressing and solving equality matters within our organisation.

Engaging with staff in a meaningful and sustained way is important in helping to make continuous improvements on the Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES), Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES), staff survey results, Equality Delivery System (EDS2) etc. Amongst other benefits, this engagement provides NNUH with the opportunity to make sure that staff feel valued and respected for the outstanding contribution they often make, and that all staff, are fully involved in the organisation's work.

[For Staff Network Chairs]

To enable the networks to mature effectively, it is proposed that our networks should have a representative chair that can take a lead on the equality agenda, engage and encourage other colleagues to participate in initiatives, take forward actions as appropriate and support awareness of an inclusive workforce. In order to facilitate this, it is proposed to allow the chair facilitated time/ hours to undertake chair activities within their current job role. We are asking our chairs to undertake at most 12 hours per month therefore, line manager support is crucial. Staff networks will be able to decide the structure and may decide on having rotational chairs, a vice chair and/ or a committee which will be honoured.

Where possible we ask you as managers to consider supporting the time for your colleagues to attend our staff network meetings, cultural events and undertake chair duties. As an organisation it is extremely important to demonstrate our commitment and support to colleagues who wish to be involved in helping us embed an inclusive culture, with management support and collaboration being an important part of that support.

If allowing time to attend cultural events and/ or attending staff network meetings is not possible a conversation with your colleague(s) is recommended to consider what could be accommodated e.g. attending the occasional meeting during work time.

If you have any questions or concerns about how this can be approached please contact XXXXX

Yours Sincerely

XXXXX

Chief Executive/ Chief People Officer

Department
Location
Employer address
Direct Dial No: 01603 28
E-mail: firstname.surname@nnuh.nhs.uk

