RSA Fellow-led Networks Guidelines

Thank you for your interest in RSA networks. More than 30 Fellow-led networks explore, devise, test or pioneer ideas which have the potential to become a powerful source of social change. Due to the demand to create new networks we cannot support all applications and need to be selective with our ongoing support. These guidelines are designed to provide clarity for Fellows wishing to lead, leading and developing RSA networks. They cover why you might want to start an RSA Network, the life cycle of our networks and how we apportion support.

The guidelines will evolve over time in line with the networks and as such are both a reference point and a starting point for dialogue – with others leading activity for the Fellowship, and with RSA staff. They should be considered in conjunction with the RSA Fellowship Handbook and related governance documents, available on the resources page of the website.

Why start an RSA network?

Thematic networks bring together groups of people interested in the RSA mission around a variety of topics and sectors. **Place-based** networks allow Fellows to connect and collaborate with others based in and around their area. They may develop a thematic focus and grow their reach to engage the wider Fellowship network.

Some Fellows take part in a professional capacity, others in their spare time. Some networks focus on learning and sharing knowledge, others on projects with defined outputs and outcomes.

RSA networks have developed responses to government consultations, held participatory events to provide learning opportunities and open up discussion, and set challenges for members amongst other activity.

What do we mean by an RSA Network?

A **community** run by Fellows, for Fellows, and open to others with an interest in RSA work which has, or is developing, the following characteristics:

- **Purposeful:** working to devise, test and/or pioneer ideas which have the potential to become a powerful source of social change through prompting behaviour & culture change, making connections, regular or semi-regular events, projects, convening, shared learning, task and finish-groups. As far as possible they align with RSA work and values. Where networks don't align closely with current RSA workstreams, they do make explicit the network's connection to social change and work towards outcomes which contribute to it.

- **Connected**: has the ability to strategically leverage links and opportunities within the network, and to understand it as an evolving community.

- **Sustained**: aims to achieve a goal through ongoing collaboration and activity, beyond the completion of a single activity e.g. a one-off event. Allows a number of Fellows to share the leadership and shape the direction of the network, regardless of where they are based.

Find out about existing networks here, and sign up to become a member.

How can the RSA support your network?

There is a high level of interest from the Fellowship in starting networks and running activity through them, so we need to be selective when apportioning support.

Our Fellow-led Networks are structured to empower Fellows to take ownership and drive change with support from RSA staff. When you are collaborating with us to start or develop a network, you will always have a named RSA contact to connect you with the wider Fellowship and to offer guidance where needed, especially in the setting up of your network.

We ask Networks to set their own purpose & objectives using the guidance provided below. The RSA team are available to help shape these through conversations. We recognise that once started, networks may not continue in perpetuity, for example a network winding down once its aims have been achieved. We share resources amongst networks according to the following:

- Alignment to the RSA's key areas of work and wider mission (Public Services & Communities; Creative Learning Development; Economy, Enterprise and Manufacturing)
- Network impact and outputs (or what they plan to achieve whilst in the early stages)
- Level of engagement / demonstrable interest within the Fellowship
- The stage a network is at in its life cycle
- Other networks covering similar areas of interest
- The level of activity and number of Fellows in a geographic location

As a planning guide, we are usually able to support up to four activities (e.g. evening events) per year, per network.

We offer:

- Bringing together a global community of 29,000 Fellows with a broad range of expertise, passions and perspectives, all committed to the shared values of the RSA global Fellowship
- Administrative support, including facilitating and/or sending communications to members
- A sounding board for ideas
- Help connecting to other individuals & organisations working in the social change arena
- An online platform to share & disseminate ideas through blogs and news stories
- Expertise and guidance in event design and facilitation
- Assistance in evaluating the impact of your outputs, learning as the network develops
- Support with succession planning where applicable
- Limited budget to support activities such as events or projects

Your RSA staff contact is available to discuss these and other ways the RSA may be able to offer support.

Note that as the RSA is a charity, our networks cannot provide Fellows with a platform to promote products, services or other commercial endeavours that they stand to benefit from personally.

THE NETWORK LIFE CYCLE

RSA staff use this process to help support networks as they evolve.
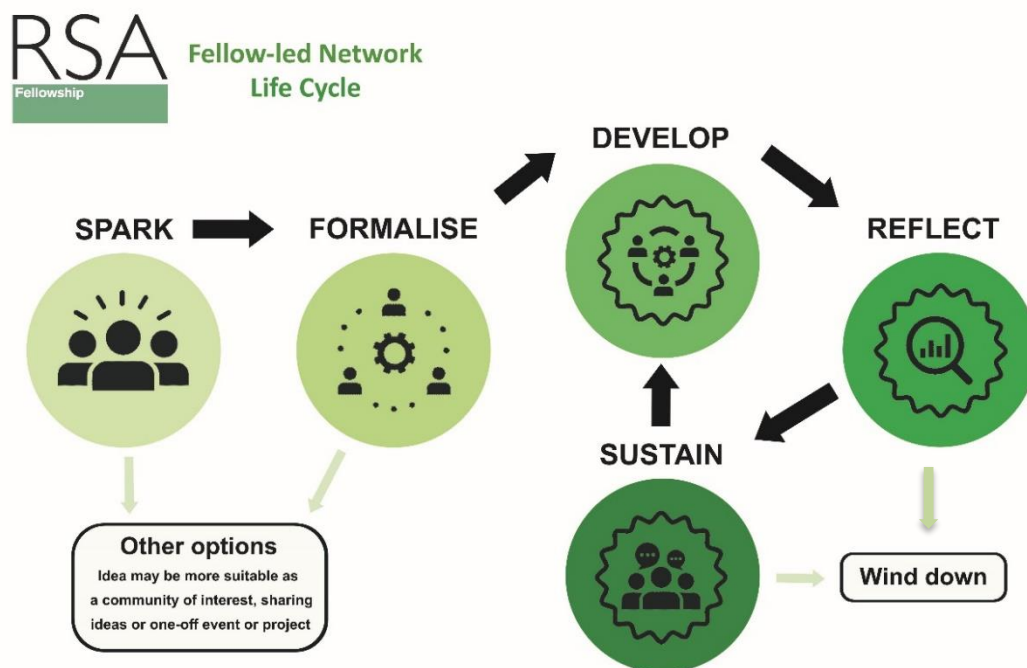
SETTING UP YOUR NETWORK: THE SPARK

Start with an exploratory conversation with your RSA staff contact (e.g. Area Manager, Global Manager) about what you'd like a network to achieve.

We'll help you to consider and test the appetite for activity amongst the Fellowship by publishing a blog outlining your ideas which allows Fellows to register their interest.

We'll discuss the scope and reach of your proposed network:

- will it be place-based? Is there scope for it to grow beyond the place in which it originated?
- would it work best as a digital-first network with national or international reach?
- do you know of other Fellows who would be willing to work with you to develop and run activity?
- are there other Fellow-led Networks or groups which explore similar themes and seek to engage similar stakeholders/audiences/groups of Fellows?

If there is very close alignment with a current area of RSA work, we may suggest an exploratory conversation with one of the Thematic Fellowship Councillors. This could begin a supportive relationship which will continue in tandem with the life of the Network and help Network Leads find opportunities for connection within the RSA.

Depending on the response to your blog, RSA staff will support you in developing your network's purpose and suggested objectives, or we may suggest another way of engaging with the Fellowship.

DEVELOPING YOUR NETWORK'S PURPOSE: FORMALISE

It's important to be clear about why your network exists: a well-defined purpose can help to attract the people and connections needed to fulfil your goals, while providing a focus for your activities. Providing clarity on what your network doesn't intend to cover is also important, helping Fellows and staff identify gaps and opportunities for new activity to emerge. Consider:

- How does your network align to the broader mission of the RSA and one or more of its three themes of work (Public Services & Communities; Creative Learning Development; Economy, Enterprise and Manufacturing)?
- What do you want your network to achieve? This could be in the short term or long term. It might be a specific objective which could change over time, or a desire to experiment, iterate and evaluate. Consider the impact you want to have and what the support of an RSA network can bring.
- How often will you engage with / develop activity for your network? There will be connections and conversations happening between members all the time; how will you frame this conversation and offer additional opportunities?
- What is the scope of your activity?
- What capacity and time can you commit to running activity? Networks should share the leadership or organisation of the network between more than one person to bring different perspectives, and allow for responsive dialogue with your RSA staff contact and with network members.

Once your group becomes an RSA Fellow-led Network, it will be listed on our website alongside others, and you'll receive semi-regular updates on related RSA projects and information on opportunities such as training, events or connections from your RSA staff contact. Fellows will be invited to contact you via MyRSA to learn more about network activities and opportunities to get involved.

You will agree a time to reflect on your purpose and objectives with your RSA staff / Fellowship Councillor contact.

DEVELOPING & ENABLING YOUR NETWORK TO GROW

The development of your network should take into account your self-defined purpose and objectives, as well as the views and interests of the network's membership.

Ways in which you may evolve your network include:

- Testing, iterating and evaluating hypotheses, sharing learning with others
- Creating network sub-groups which either focus on one issue or location, or are task-and-finish groups. Members may never meet in person but collaborate to achieve impact
- Forming Action Learning Sets
- Planning and running participatory events (in person or online) for members
- Collaborating with external organisations to increase the network's reach, design new activity or provide opportunities for members
- Collaborating with other Networks and Fellows in different locations to make activity accessible to the broader Fellowship community, or to make links between different themes/topics
- Taking advantage of opportunities to connect with the work of and colleagues in the RSA Action Research Centre (ARC), where available
- Representing your network at RSA or external events

- Managing network-wide communications (available to those with memberships under 500 people only) by signing the RSA Ways of Working Agreement

REFLECTION

Following a time period agreed upon when the network formalises, the Network will meet with their RSA staff or Thematic Councillor contact to reflect on the network's development, mission and next steps. Before this discussion, the RSA can support networks to evaluate their impact.

This provides an opportunity to reframe the relationship for both parties, confirm or amend the network's purpose, set new objectives for further development, and/or wind down the Network.

WINDING DOWN

If activity has lost momentum, objectives have been met with no appetite to continue and/or other barriers present themselves, it may be appropriate to wind down the network.

If the network leadership no longer wishes to continue, the opportunity for other network members and interested individuals to take this on will be explored before the network winds down.

As part of this process, we'll consider communications to members, the network presence on the RSA website and the data collected and held by the network.

This guidance must be considered in conjunction with the [RSA Code of Conduct, Fellowship Charter](#) and [Fellowship Handbook](#).