

THE BRIDGE

A Guide for Networkers

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface.	Who Needs Another Guidebook?
Chapter One.	Getting Oriented: Definitions and Benefits
Chapter Two.	Getting Started
Chapter Three.	Choosing Network Partners: Forming a Circle of Common Concern
Chapter Four.	Methods to Make it a Sharing Circle
Chapter Five.	Continuation: Let the Circle be Unbroken
Chapter Six.	Learning to Link: Some Hints on Helping People Learn to Network.
Chapter Seven.	The Bridge Between Groups.

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NETWORK!

Behind the word's popularity, there is a reality: this is a process whose time has come. Many people we talk to believe this reality deserves more substantial response than cheerleading: rah! rah! go out there and win that network game (don't ask us how).

So we asked ourselves HOW and--with a lot of help--produced a set of practical methods for networking.

PREFACE

WHO NEEDS ANOTHER GUIDEBOOK?

Our primary source for the methods suggested is our experience in the field of volunteer leadership. Here we have taken the classic model of volunteers working for an agency or organization, extended and adapted these principles to a less formal everyday volunteering of people to one another. In addition, one of us has a background in Re-Evaluation Counseling, the other in research on human personality. Both of us also have daily lives in which we try to network with others--as you do--and watch the experience rather carefully for the teachings of trial and error.

From this experience we developed some models for networking which we believe have wide applicability for individuals and organizations including agency staff and directors; volunteer coordinators; boards; leadership of service or civic clubs; churches and synagogues; and people associated with voluntary action centers.

In any case, 400 people of just this type helped us with the development and testing of our how-to-network models. The setting was nine workshops conducted between October 1980 and June 1981. In return for the evolving methods we shared with these people, they gave us good searching feedback with which we frequently went back to square one. All the while, we were grateful for continuous, intensive contributions from individuals: encourager-critics such as Jerry Bagg, Pat Hardy, and Jane Turner and internal review of this guidebook by Pam Bricker, Ann Hamilton, and Marlene Wilson. We are particularly grateful to Miriam Gingras for the extra care she gave to manuscript preparation and editing. You encounter a person who cared enough to contribute when you first pick up this book. Henry Dryovage, who designed our cover. Inside the cover, Freddie Botwin gladly gave some illustrations. And so, this guidebook is itself the legacy of a network, a growth dialogue, to which we now bid you welcome.



CHAPTER ONE

GETTING ORIENTED: DEFINITIONS AND BENEFITS

It is hard to learn gardening, if no one can tell you what a flower is, or a vegetable, or why they are important. The cultivation of positive linkages between people is somewhat similarly handicapped. The word "network" is frequently used to describe many different activities, and the concept behind the word is so broad that it's difficult to pin down a definition for it.

Visualizing the process of networking, we see a BRIDGE, a solid connection linking people as equals for the exchange of information, ideas, expertise, personal support and/or material goods. Our BRIDGE is a way of connecting resources and needs in ways that are easily managed, maximize the creativity of participants, and most importantly, provide channels for every person to give and to gain from the system.

Perhaps the key is starting where people are, rather than attempting to create the will in people to exchange resources with each other. We begin with what exists of its own, right now, in the motivation and behavior of people and find ways this can be helpful to others. Said another way, this might be called the "judo principle of motivation." Instead of trying to push people to help, we move with what's already moving in people, and make that helpful.

Another main element in networking states that while some people may have more to share than others in any given area of concern,

- a) Everyone, no matter how inexperienced or helpless, has something to give;
- b) Everyone, no matter how strong, or expert, needs something; and
- c) Reasonably systematic matching between this giving and receiving will reduce the need for outside expertise, purchased services, and other one-way help, due to the quality and accessibility of help given from within the network.

Networking is a form of the "new volunteering" which explores who volunteers may be, what they can do, and how they can go about doing it. One growing edge is the volunteering of peers to each other (sometimes called peer support networking) which gives respect to the dignity and worth of every individual. It is humanitarian in its permission for all people to have pride in themselves and their work. What is of value here is a means of encouraging volunteering to one another and recognizing the notion that people don't have to be "social-do-gooders" or offer one-way service in order to be helpful to others. We can each give and receive; help and be helped; volunteer and be a recipient of volunteer service--networking is definitely a two-way street.

In our view, barter is cousin to networking but not a twin. The notion of voluntary exchange is common to both, but barter is more likely to emphasize getting precisely as much as one gives (or maybe a little more) in points, credits, work value, etc. Networking seems to be a little less exact in measuring exchanges and encourages

people to volunteer a little more than they expect in return. But the relationship remains, as does an overlap of meanings between two sets of somewhat synonymous terms.

Currently, a major spark igniting more enthusiasm for networking is the tight economic situation in the country and the world, especially for those human service related agencies and other groups relying on governmental funding. For example, a network in Colorado is getting started because various agencies are trying to survive financially. No longer can each agency afford to do everything themselves, have a full time receptionist when they only need a half-time person, purchase a copy machine when the prices and maintenance fees escalate annually and so on. It is beginning to look efficient to network because by pooling resources with others, we are much better off than alone. The agencies can share resources, both human and material, take the time to carefully plan their network and build a mechanism for handling their own agency problems.

Several State Offices on Volunteerism are helping local agencies network with other groups around the state to provide training events and particularly inexpensive speakers (because they're from within the state). They are finding that it's not possible for most people to afford to go to workshops outside the immediate area and that most states and local communities can meet their own training needs. The lack of funding within most agencies has made this cooperative effort more viable and attractive to the participants; obviously so, or they wouldn't be networking.

Another type of networking arising today involves people of all kinds sharing job information. An example of this type of informal networking happened at a meeting for social activists: a man, on introducing himself, mentioned he was currently unemployed. Immediately another person announced a possible job he might check into. They agreed to talk more later. People truly are becoming more and more willing to share resources and needs as the economic system becomes tighter.

While traditional means of managing programs are hampered by severe budget cuts, networking alleviates many of the problems and helps various groups work together. In the future we'll rely more heavily on peer support networks among individuals of all kinds: among human

service leaders, among service, policy, or advocacy workers, among clients, etc. Effective networks between people will tend to demystify the notion of only a few experts in helping, while reducing use of terms like client and helpee. In a word, networking skills do more than help us "get by" in hard times with the same number of helpers; they actually increase the number of helpers, potentially to 100% of the population.

But what of the quality of this help? Here it is easy to be trapped in the conventional misconception: what doesn't cost a lot of money can't be worth much. On the contrary, network linkages can and do carry first class care along their helping lines. As volunteer leadership consultants, our strong impression is that 80-90% of the questions addressed to us as "experts" or to central information systems, could be answered as well or perhaps better through interactions with peers, close to home, via effective networking. Indeed, the concept of networking has potential for empowering all people.

What better case could be made for networking? Let's not forget to include creativity and fun in the scheme. Our approach to networking demonstrates that giving and receiving don't have to be trying experiences: it does not have to hurt before it helps. In one BRIDGE workshop one of many people reluctant to stop the networking exercise we were doing commented with excitement that he felt like a "kid in a candy shop" and wanted to continue making beautiful connections with others with similar concerns.

Networking can be just as effective whenever we need to involve more people; increase resources; get more accomplished with less money; build teamwork, etc. It is the ultimate in creatively tapping human resources.

Now to speak to your potential needs for connecting with others, we have below a set of benefits of networking.

As individuals, networking can provide you with: *

- a) information;
- b) needed services, advice;

- c) personal support;
- d) feedback on what you do or are planning on doing;
- e) allies with which to work.

As a group the benefits could extend to include:

- a) ability to advocate for an issue/group;
- b) needed power and clout to get a task completed;
- c) the necessary resources and people to fulfill the group's function.

As a community, or society, people could benefit from:

- a) more and more people seeing themselves as givers and receivers;
- b) the increased likelihood of each of us to become networkers;
- c) the ability to meet society's social needs through the willing help of others.

There is much to motivate the idealist in all this. Units of people as small in number as a typical family can build bridges, then move up to neighborhood groups, then community networks, then connect more widely between local bridges, to nations and, who knows, perhaps one day a planet. All this begins with you and now.

*Welch, Mary-Scott. Networking: The Great New Way for Women to Get Ahead, New York, Warner Books, 1981.

Does networking sound like the panacea for all your needs and concerns? It can be an answer to many needs but we've got to be realistic about some of the barriers that prevent or hinder networking.

CHAPTER TWO

GETTING STARTED

First of all, successful networking depends as much on knowing how to ask as in knowing how to give. Yet it is difficult for many of us to ask for what we need. We've been taught to hope for the best, but not always to strive for it.

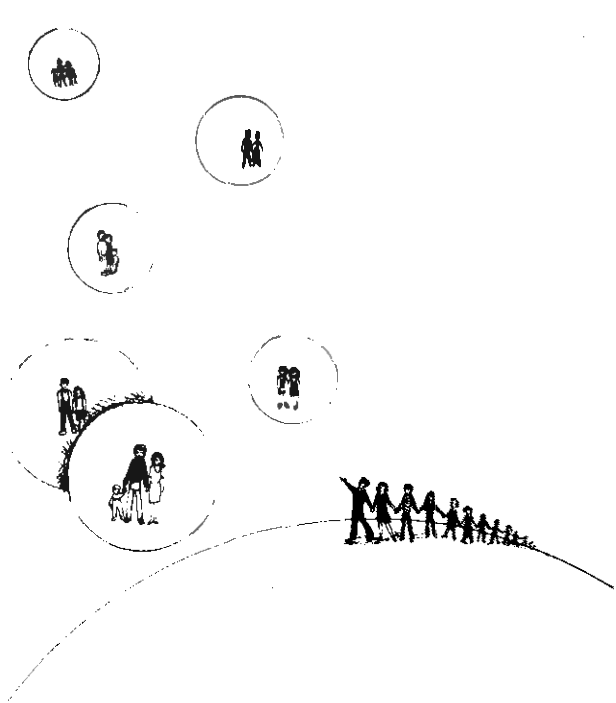
In dealing with other people, some of us have a difficult time admitting we are purposely seeking someone out. We might worry about exploiting or "using" other people*, or perhaps pride chokes off admission of need. Many of us deal with pride's close cousin, fear of rejection, with devastating simplicity: if you don't ask, you can't be turned down, right?

A lack of confidence can stop a person from doing much of anything, let alone networking. Competitiveness, on the other hand, gets in the way just as much for many other people. Taught the values of getting ahead, we're somehow led to believe we can do it alone. A quote on a wall in a food cooperative notes: "It's an illusion to think of yourself as independent . . . we are all dependent on each other." Yet individual accomplishments are applauded and group efforts (except in sports) not always validated (or the applause goes to the person in charge.)

Further impeding our progress as networkers are biases and prejudices that make it difficult to clearly see potential for helping in others. Maybe we think only the well-to-do can help anyone, or that we can't receive help from anyone who is different from us.

Network experiences will break down these barriers as we see the extraordinary help ordinary people can give. Networks are for two-way traffic, for both giving and getting. A properly designed and maintained network is win-win, well-guarded against exploitation.

*Welch, Mary-Scott. Networking: The Great New Way for Women to Get Ahead, New York, Warner Books, 1981.



And if, naturally enough, you are still reluctant to lead with your needs, our approach takes that into account. Our emphasis is to ease people into networking by providing ways in which they can lead from their strengths rather than their weaknesses. We believe most people given first the chance to give, will then become more comfortable and effective in identifying their needs.

Taking the First Steps

There may be many people who would like to network, but that first step of moving from onlooker to actual involvement is too hard. Yet once that step is firmly taken, the momentum should make it easier to walk further, perhaps someday to jog.

Why not start by remembering network experiences you have already had regardless of whether you labeled them networking. The point is: networking is probably not new to you; you probably have been doing it all your life with nuclear or extended family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, church or synagogue members, etc. You just haven't been using the word, that is all. So begin by re-identifying as networking parts of those experiences that you can now see were indeed networking. Then

RE IDENTIFYING NETWORKING EXPERIENCES

**Mary went to a week long educational workshop last summer and met many interesting, informative people. She got to know one agency director quite well and learned of a job opening which called for her skills and would provide for greater challenge. On the suggestion from her new colleague, Mary applied for the job, and got it. While she says she was "just lucky, I guess" she was really a successful networker.*

**Charlie remembers back to his boyhood town and recalls a community of networkers. Dr. Schmidt did his family's dental work, while his dad helped with the Schmidts' plumbing and outside work. Neighbors all pooled together to provide food and a place to gather when someone's relative passed away, knowing the same would be done for each of their families when the time came. Every time a tree had to be felled due to elm disease you'd find all the strong young people joining the adults in guiding the tree to the ground. WHAT WAS "JUST NEIGHBORLY" CAN BE CONSIDERED NETWORKING. CAN YOU THINK OF EXPERIENCES IN YOUR LIFE THAT CAN BE RE-IDENTIFIED NOW AS NETWORKING?*

recollect all the good help you received, and may still be receiving from these networks and it should build your confidence that more of the same is waiting in a future of more deliberate self-conscious building of new bridges. In a way, the methodology of networking is mainly an attempt to go back again, in a

WAYS TO BEGIN

**Get your family to network on household chores: I'll do the dishes if you'll vacuum the living room floor, etc.*

**Turn staff meetings into network sessions by setting aside time for staff to share new skills and information as well as register needs (which will hopefully be met by the organization and/or other staff).*

**Arrange to get together for lunch with five or six colleagues with a commitment to share support and new information . . . also to gripe about frustrations and to dream about the future.*

rapidly moving and growing society to the best of earlier family and neighborhood times now diluted or destroyed by distance.

From this reassuring "re-write" of history, your next step might be to think about family, friends, colleagues, people with whom you are close and comfortable. Perhaps you could discuss some of the networking methods, or simply introduce the topic to them. By starting to network with people from this comfortable group you'll build your skills and avoid possible problems that could accompany networking with strangers.

If you get to this tryout stage with them, pick out one or two of the more enjoyable and visibly win-win networking methods described in Chapter Four. You might even throw a network party, or introduce some of the methods as a game at a social event. Further along, and somewhat more formally, get together with others for a Bridge workshop as described in Chapter 6. At this point you might be tapping into a group you already belong to: church or synagogue; common interest group; service or social clubs. Such groups are often "unconscious networkers." All you will be doing is raising their awareness and skill levels, and our experience suggests you'll be seen as a valued contributor.

Another first step or early step is to identify networking groups in your neighborhood or community which a) focus on subjects of interest to you, and b) welcome members such as you. For example, a neighborhood recycling effort, small business owners club, etc. All the better if such a group deliberately trains and supports its members in network process.

The combination of knowing how to and understanding why, is optimistically reminiscent of what has happened in energy conservation these past few years. Previously, people didn't caulk their windows and weatherstrip their doors because they didn't understand its usefulness. Now, with education and awareness, our record is much better; far less energy is escaping from our homes. Now let us do the same for the conservation and channeling of human helping energy.

People are the primary resources in a network. The choice of these people--insofar as it is within your power--is therefore crucial to the success of networking.

Here are five steps for forming a circle of common concern:

CHAPTER THREE

CHOOSING NETWORK PARTNERS: FORMING A CIRCLE OF COMMON CONCERN

- A. Make yourself aware of the wide range of concerns for which network help is available.
- B. Within that context, identify your network needs and purposes.
- C. Look for people who have experience in that area of concern.
- D. Within this experienced group, try to find people who are likely to be compatible and considerate as network partners.
- E. Think about how you're going to get and keep in touch.

In real life application, the steps overlap and may occur at essentially the same time; we keep them separate mainly for purposes of explanation. Nor does the five-step process mean that you'll necessarily be doing all the seeking. People may also come looking for you as a network partner. In that case, use the five steps as guidelines for responding to network invitations from others--even though this chapter will be written as if the initiative were all yours.

A. Make Yourself Aware of the Wide Range of Concerns for Which Network Help Might Be Available.

Don't let your creativity be cramped by the unconscious assumption that networking is an esoteric process applicable in only highly specialized situations. Networking is essentially a problem-solving process which can help with almost any concern.

One can classify networks according to services, materials, and services designed to provide material goods.

SERVICES

advice
peer support
advocacy
building support
around an issue
information

SERVICES TO PROVIDE MATERIAL GOODS

food cooperatives
buying cooperatives

MATERIAL GOODS

tool-sharing
books
food
supplies
paintings
bikes

Merely as examples, "services" might include board development; coping better with single parenthood; career exploration and growth; nutrition in the public school system; drug dependencies; public transportation; day care; companionship for seniors (by seniors).

For an individual, the service needed may include the alleviation of personal or professional isolation, or feelings of powerlessness and lack of self-confidence, vulnerability, confusion about the future, etc.

Once you're aware of the range of network options possible, don't pigeon-hole yourself in only one network box. Thus if you are developing a women's network and assume all you'll do is share personal support, your network may be passing up some important opportunities in also advocating for women's rights, or sharing more concrete advice with each other. Or say, you're planning a neighborhood network in which you'll share lawn mowers, snow blowers, and the like; you may discover you could also usefully share information on gardening, and outdoor exercise among at least some of the neighbors.

But even when you've gotten and given as much as you can from a single people-linking system, we doubt if any one network is all you'll need. We suspect--we aren't sure--that most individuals could benefit from at least several distinct networks, and possibly as many as eight or ten.

If you have too few networks, the danger is that you're trying to get too much and too wide a variety of help from any one network. If you have too many distinct networks going, the problem may be "administrative"; keeping track of all your linkages and finding time enough for them all. But one thing is sure: there are too many places we want to go for one bridge to take us everywhere.

This leads to a people selection point: beware of burnout of trusted and respected people with double or triple duty in your networks. True, a friend might comfortably and effectively function in up to two or three of your networks. But all of them? No way, and it's not fair to allow them to remain in such an overloaded situation. Nor is it usually effective. Thus the kind of person who's helpful in your energy conservation bridge may be a cipher in your poetry-reading network. The person who's a good information networker might be poor for personal support networking, etc. We would be the last to suggest segregation, but still, strange as it may seem, people from your different networks may rarely or never meet, and have little to say to one another if they do.

B. Identify and Define Your Own Network Needs and Purposes.

If you don't know why you want the network, and what you want to get and give, you won't know who to involve.

First ask yourself what are the issues or problems you want help with and for which you are prepared to give help in return. The earlier lists of network types might be useful as reminders of possibilities, and Worksheet #1 should further assist your thinking on this.

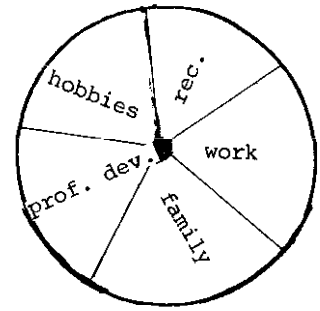
Your goals should be broad and flexible enough to change through network experience. We suggest you identify all or most of your network needs at once. That doesn't mean you should try actually to begin many networks simultaneously; one at a time is a far better rule. It does mean you are less likely to lump too many things together to overload a single bridge between people.

C. Look for People Who Have Experience in the Subject Area Chosen for Networking.

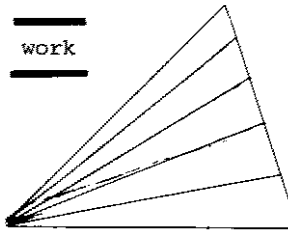
These will be people who have something to give because 1) they have experienced the problem/need firsthand, e.g., lack of money for worthy programs or projects, or 2) they have special training or expertise relevant to the area, e.g., training in fund-raising, or some combination of these two.

WORKSHEET #1 (STEPS A, B, & C)

FINDING YOUR CIRCLE OF COMMON CONCERN



1. Draw a circle, or pie shape and write in all the areas of your waking life as "pieces" of the pie. Be more specific than the chart, e.g., "photography," "birdwatching," etc. instead of just "hobbies."
2. Pick one piece of your pie, or area of your life, where you might like to connect with other people.
3. Further refine and define this segment.



- administration
- supervision
- fund raising
- crisis counseling
- etc.

4. Answer, in writing or orally, the following questions:

What do I need in order to improve this aspect of my life?

If I could wave a magic wand, what would appear?

N	-improved techniques for handling crises
E	-specific persons at agencies I can count on
D	-someone I can talk with and get support from
S	

5. When you have your needs listed from paragraph 4, choose a general area that you would like to concentrate on (for example, a crisis counselor as listed above).
6. Could other people help? Brainstorm who you already know that could help in one of these need areas.
7. Brainstorm a list of people/groups you have heard of who might be helpful. Think in terms of the widest range of logical places you could look.
8. Now you have your needs defined in one area and you have some lists of people and places to begin looking for networkers. Besides carefully selecting "good" networkers you'll more likely meet with success if you now think of what you can OFFER in this area you're choosing to concentrate on.

Brainstorm numerous answers to the following statement:

Something I enjoy doing, am fairly good at, and which might be of use to others interested in this area is _____

Now you are ready to start searching for those in your potential circle of common concern (and have something to offer them too).

In most cases, it is equally important for people to be able to acknowledge their readiness to receive help or information. Avoid pious pillars of perfection. One of the best networkers in American history once claimed that he'd never met a person he couldn't learn something from. The networker's name was Abraham Lincoln.

Worksheet #1 should help tie together steps A, B, and C, then prepare us for later steps.

D. Try to Find People Who are Likely to Be Compatible and Considerate as Network Partners.

Expertise is not the only criterion of a good networker. Certain other features of attitude, style, and belief are just as important as experience. Thus, if you're a minority person seeking personal growth, KKK members are out! Say the same for a career women's support network. Male chauvinists need not apply! Racists and sexists may have (or claim) some experience in these subject areas; it's just that their values and beliefs are beyond the pale of tolerable dissent in the above networks.

Then there's the matter of attitude and style which makes some people easier to network with while others are just awful and can actually be destructive. Our thanks to Connie Hyatt* for a vivid description of several types who specialize in blowing up people bridges in the volunteer leadership sector.

Turf Ogre: A person with insecurities who needs to control. Turf Ogres can be found dominating meetings, identifying [others'] successful projects by the pronoun "we," hiding names of volunteers, never mentioning funding sources, looking after #1, and in general being difficult. Turf Ogres fear the 'pirating away' of volunteers more than any other calamity they can imagine. They encounter great difficulty dealing with volunteers who do not see themselves as slaves.

Co-Opter: A person with a silky smile and an overly agreeable nature. Co-opting is a very effective way to neutralize the competition. Co-opters want to own people and are, in general, immature, insecure and lacking in a sense of professionalism. A Co-Opter 'assimilates' the competition by including them as members, making their

activity a part of her/his newsletter, making sure that the competition is always invited to recognition events and receives a reward if possible. [In these ways,] a Co-Opter will destroy the competition's ability to relate to anybody else. Co-Opters encounter great difficulty with networks, democracy, the vote, adults, etc. [Watch out you don't wake up and find yourself in their network, never knowing how it happened.]

Lone Ranger: A person with the 'only I can do it' martyr syndrome. Lone Rangers can be found working late, reassuring the world that only their agency is helping resolve a problem [mainly because they won't let anyone else help], heaving sighs of fatigue while volunteering to take on added tasks, suffering burnout while making sure that nobody can rescue them and generally seeking lots of sympathy. The word 'delegation' is frightening to a Lone Ranger."

*Brackets indicate additions by the authors to relate this more closely to the present guidebook.

Does all this contradict a belief that anyone can network (well, almost anyone)? Not necessarily. It may just mean that some of us are distinctly better networkers than others. And even the unpromising types might function better with certain people and situations. Thus, it may be that my ogre is your generous friend, and your Lone Ranger is my team player.

We do suggest that wherever possible you begin networks with people you know and trust, and people they know and trust, or with people whose network ability is reasonably well assured in some other way such as active membership in a credible organization. Then steadily build, through personal knowledge, linkages in subject-area groups. But, risks will be there always when people reach out. Thus when you're new in town (or at the office, the church, etc.) or just plain lonely, you're more prone to glom onto just about any available person as friend or networker.

Don't rush that reaching out; it's too important. As we've said before, do your best to associate with people you have good reason to trust.

*Connie D. Hyatt, CAVS, Supervisor of Volunteer Services, State of Oregon Department of Human Resources.

E. Think About How You're Going to Get and Keep in Touch.

Let's say the first four steps have led us to this most marvelously qualified person. In Tibet. We should never have gone that far. Our network partners must have all the three C's, not just compatible and capable, but also--connectable. Ordinarily, we're looking for the easiest, most meaningful accessibility between people, and usually, not always, that means being in the same geographical space. On the other hand, if your purpose or concern is esoteric, the relevant people are likely to be farflung. If you're really interested in the mating habits of whooping cranes, or in ancient Greco-Roman games, you might need a continent or two to complete your network with interest-sharers.

But most network purposes are ordinary and important enough so that a reasonably populated area will contain enough potential network members. Thus how many city blocks does one need before there are enough senior citizens for a network? True, since many senior citizens may not be willing or able to participate in a particular network for them, you might still have to reach out a ways.

One important consideration here is choice of network medium. Insofar as it is desirable that network connections be frequent and face-to-face, your members should live reasonably close to one another (especially with soaring gasoline prices). Insofar as your network can be a telephone tieline, you can go further out (easily to the borders of the toll-free area). Finally where occasional in-writing, or in-print contacts suffice for an effective network, members can be located almost anywhere with reliable mail service.

When and where the meetings will be in person, a few obvious points should be remembered. There should be easy accessibility for people in wheelchairs. Generally, the surroundings should be informal, comfortable, and convenient.

Almost any method used to get and keep in touch will take someone's special initiative and time to make it go. This crucial person(s) calls people for meetings, reminds them of network responsibilities, monitors and reports on progress in common projects, and generally keeps the whole thing together.

This initiator-maintainer-enabler person(s) is a key ingredient in all but the briefest and simplest of networks. Perhaps you intend being that person. If not, look for her/him as a hub of your circle of common concern.

