



How to build a local anchor network

An anchor institution network is a collaboration among organisations to advance shared community benefit goals.

There are several of these networks across London at the local and sub-regional level. Though each is different, they all share a mission-oriented approach to generate community benefit in the places they operate.

From these examples we learn numerous lessons that can help any community seeking to build a strong local anchor network.

What follows is a rough How-to guide. It includes numerous steps that might be followed, in what might be a logical chronological order.

The first thing to note about this list is that none of the profiled networks followed this order specifically or included all these steps. It is a 'best of the best' list to consider and use as a suggestion, not a prescription.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

How to start is often a struggle. In many of the profiled examples, the work began with an agenda item: a need to address high unemployment or revitalise a place. Camden, by contrast, foresaw a rapidly changing economy in its borough and began with setting a vision for the nature of growth and development they desired overall as a guide to specific actions that would follow.

- **Setting the values.** Starting at the foundation with a clear articulation of community held values helps set the tone and creates guideposts for partners advancing community action and improvements. It can be a powerful force in attracting partners who seek clarity in how to align goals for growth and development.
- **Community participation.** Articulating these values should be guided by the community as their benefit is the *raison d'être* of the local anchor network.
- **Data and baseline assessment.** Basing those conversations on a fact-based picture of the current community socio/economic situation—for the borough or region as a whole—and revealing any disparities within the area that may exist can both assist in drawing focus to challenges that need to be acknowledged and allow for setting goals and tracking progress.

SETTING THE AGENDA

It is important to identify where a local anchor network adds value and build on those strengths. Broadly, it is not a policy governance board over all development for the region. Rather, it is an implementation tool to advance key priorities in an inclusive, participatory fashion.

- **Mission.** A logical place to start is to ask what high priority challenge would most benefit from a collective community driven approach to management.
- **Scale.** The anchor participants must respond to the challenge at hand. If the goal is to support an isolated and marginalised population to engage in good work, the anchor network might start with the largest anchor employers, or the sector in the area needing skilled hires and pairing them with employment training resources and credible intermediary groups who can most effectively reach the members of the resident population. A different group would emerge if the goal were to advance a community-wide design for walkability and social gathering spaces, and so on.
- **Opportunities.** Anchor networks can also be strategic in leveraging new opportunities to best advantage local residents. The Kickstart programme was seized by several local networks to secure jobs for residents in need through local employers. An investment in a large capital project by an anchor institution can be coordinated with a commitment to procuring local businesses for the build and hiring local residents to the resulting jobs.

BUILDING A TEAM

Who should be at the table will always be driven by local conditions. The anchor concept is to leverage existing institutions in their buying/hiring/physical presence to direct benefit to residents, and to attract new partners aligned with growth values.

- **Leadership.** Anyone can bring partners together—the local council, one of the anchors, and even by members of the community looking to drive community change. Our case studies gave examples of all of these. Important considerations include the capacity to manage the effort, credibility to attract to and keep others at the table, and the organisation to coordinate and manage resources. Buy-in and support from political leaders can quickly jump start and accelerate the effort. We saw in our examples that where one starts is not always where one ends. While some originating organisations maintain their leadership throughout, others moved leadership to larger organisations, or constituted new ones as success grew and demands of management expanded.
- **Expertise.** The team of anchors need to include institutions with the expertise and the levers to effectuate change within the domain of intervention. Not all team members must contribute in the same way, organisations that can offer expertise in an area may not be able to offer the right levers for change, and vice versa. It is leaderships' role to help curate and manage a team that can deliver success.
- **Committing to the anchor process.** Participating anchor institutions must understand what participating in the collective means. Many of the examples referenced in this guide had formal charters or agreements to have a clear sense of expectations.
- **Resources.** One organization, with senior management buy-in, will need to lead the initiative (at least initially). Its role will include galvanising other organisations and driving the setup of the network. That organisation will need to provide a dedicated officer (at least 0.5 FTE) during the setup period (likely 3–6 months). They should report directly to senior management, which will help to open doors and unblock barriers.
- **Partnership.** While a big tent approach of all anchors present might initially seem ideal, and might work best for some pursuits, partners should be invited with a purpose. If a narrow purpose is the starting point of an anchor effort, limiting partners to those with a role in contributing to that effort makes good sense. It can also make sense to start small, build successes and then expand.
- **Solid routines.** The network's impact will rely on the relationships formed between anchor institutions. While messaging and shared platforms can support information sharing and coordination, regular face time will help form strong relationships. Creating a regular cadence of meetings with clear agendas, concrete milestones will bring discipline to translating the ambitions into action.



MAKING COMMITMENTS

Goodwill is easy to come by compared to long term commitment and willingness to be held accountable to achieving goals against an articulated standard.

- **Clear collective goals.** Working with the network to agree on clear collective goals is key. Moving from vague commitments (We will hire local people into good paying jobs) to specific targets (30% of our workforce will be hired from residents of the borough into jobs that pay the London Living Wage) is needed to understand baselines, home in on barriers, and measure progress.
- **Individual commitments.** Each anchor member should tailor its commitment to act to meet the collective goal in a way that works for them. Not every action needs to be the same across anchors. Each will have unique strengths and challenges.
- **Wins and momentum.** Effectuating change in major institutions is hard work! Communicate and celebrate when progress is made. People deserve a pat on the back, and those markers of success can be inspirational to others.

MEASURING PROGRESS

Key to success is the data to back it all up. If you can't measure it, you can't manage it.

- **Connection to citywide metrics.** The citywide London Anchor Institutions' Network has set citywide targets for top priority actions and is developing clear metrics at that level to measure progress. Communicating local work in those same terms is critical to connecting to the broader goals and opportunities across the metropolitan region.
- **Clear shared metrics.** City-wide metrics may not capture the nuances of local need and efforts. Clear network-specific metrics will help make local efforts tangible while promoting pride and friendly competition amongst network members.
- **Regular reporting.** Providing routine updates will help to gauge impact, flag challenges for course correction and provide a basis for in-depth understanding of the nature of the evolution of the work that can propel change forward.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

Local network growth and change over time is driven by forces that often cannot be anticipated. Collaboration between the NHS and the West London Alliance was accelerated due to urgent, unforeseen hiring needs of the pandemic. The success that came from that initial collaboration has driven the production and formalization of many collaborative programmes across the institutions.

- **Start focused.** Walk before you run might be the right advice. Building trust and demonstrating the ability to add value will increase confidence, build good will, and create a reputation for time well spent on the hard work of collective action.
- **Grow over time.** A key characteristic of a strong anchor network is its ability to evolve, shift, expand and respond to community and anchor needs. To accomplish this, the group's strong but flexible infrastructure and overall strategy is key. By starting focused, tracking progress and building the strong foundation, the network can then utilise evidence-based results and community collaboration and feedback to evolve the collaborative mission and implementation over time.