

The Network Accelerator method for action planning and building momentum

This is a flexible format for people to share their views and mobilise round an issue, opportunity or problem. The process is focused round an event, over at least three hours and usually a day (10am – 3.30pm), but preparation and follow-up activities are essential parts of the process.

The event combines elements of appreciative inquiry, future search and open space to help people clarify their concerns, create a shared vision, set priorities, create an action plan and develop networks to carry it out. This process has been used to involve people in many different contexts, such as:

- A national roadshow in 10 local authorities to bring parents and representatives from local agencies together to plan work with parents
- A charity brought homeless people together to develop a strategy for supporting them
- Eight local authorities ran one day events with pupils, parents, teachers and community representatives on ways of making schools more participative and democratic.
- Nine regional events on [building capacity for campaigning](#), involving 600 local groups.

The Network Accelerator process is locally owned, with outside facilitation and support to give an independent perspective. It can bring representatives of the whole system in a room – from politicians and senior officers to frontline staff, service users and citizens, to create momentum for action, by setting priorities, creating working groups and inspiring people to overcome barriers together.

The process loosely follows 10 steps:

- 1) form a steering group with key stakeholders concerned with the issue, to plan the event and support follow-up action;
- 2) invite people working on the issue to contribute, through ideas, workshops, stalls and other ways;
- 3) invite key decision-makers to take part, to give the event authority and get their support;
- 4) involve community leaders, activists and others involved in these issues;
- 5) use an interactive keynote talk or performance to set the context and inspire;
- 6) use cabaret seating for people to work in groups to clarify the issues and plan action together;
- 7) pool key points onto a large mind-map (“issues mapping” – see illustration) and invite people to prioritise issues for action (“dot voting”);
- 8) allocate each priority to a table and invite people to work on one: define the priority more clearly (what does it really mean?), draw up action points, and decide who is going to do what. If action is needed by another agency, someone needs to take responsibility for persuading them to do it.
- 9) form action groups round priorities and an **action learning** network (see below).
- 10) Follow up with a report to participants and stakeholders about the priorities and action groups, and use the network to build mutual support, learning and action on the issue using action learning circles and coaching if appropriate.



Issues mapping & prioritisation at a 'Network Accelerator' event

Local ownership and collaborative working gives people a voice in a creating shared vision, which builds on what exists to create momentum for joint action and mutual support following the event, through action learning.

Outline planning documents, as used in examples above

People's voices in [topic]

How can people have a stronger voice in health?

We want the public to have an effective voice in [topic] and hold it to account for providing the best possible care, now and in future.

Add note about the specific context, rationale and possible outcomes

We want to ask people at a local level about how they feel and what they want to about [topic]. By coming together to share experiences, hopes and fears something new can emerge from this process.

As part of this process, we are inviting [10? 20? 100?] areas to host an event at which a wide cross section of people can explore ways in which they would like to have a say in [topic].

We would like a local steering group to host the event and invite people from many different networks to take part.

One person or agency should take the lead, inviting others to take part in the steering group.

1. Decide which local agencies have the best networks across civil society in the area, such as the CVS/voluntary action centre, adult education, schools, police, health service, faith communities, family centres, sports organisations, unions etc.
2. Form a small action group of no more than six people to organise the event
4. Decide on preferred dates and check with venues and us about availability of a facilitator
5. Promote the day and reach out through local networks to potential participants to ensure that a diverse range of interests and experience in health will be represented
6. Draw up detailed plans for the day (see Suggested Structure and Resource Action sheet)
7. Optional: involve potential participants in community consultation activities, to canvas a wider range of views (using the 'tool kit')
8. Organise and enjoy the day
9. Write up and disseminate outcome, and invite comments
10. Follow-up event to draw out the lessons and take action

Follow-up may include coaching, action groups or bringing together representatives from local groups to a national forum.

Your voice in [topic]

How can people have a stronger voice in [topic]?

- 10.00 Registration/coffee
- 10.30 Chair: Outline of aims, structure and process of the day
- 10.35 Base Groups: we suggest that all participants meet in groups of 5 – 6, meet round tables in the main conference space to introduce themselves and their relationship with [topic]
Discussions are most useful when groups consist of people from different stakeholder groups, eg parents, community, staff, managers & policy makers.
- 10.45 National keynote speaker: setting the wider context
- 11.40 Local keynote speaker (Mayor, MP, CEO) on the local context
- 12.00 Base group discussion: round table response to the keynote talks and what each person would like to do in relation to the issues raised, then agree what they see as the top three issues / areas for action.
- 12.15 **Issues map:** this requires a large wall covered in flip chart paper which could be used to identify issues people want to discuss and take forward. Each round table puts forward their top three issues, which are added to the issues map (a mind map or spider diagram).
The issues are prioritised through a process of “dot voting” to decide which should form the basis for workshops: every individual is given 3 or 5 sticky dots which they put on the topic which they think should be a priority. They can ‘weight’ their votes by putting one or more dots on different topics.
- 12.30/1.00 LUNCH
- Dots for each topic are added up to give a priority list of areas for action. Each table is given a label to say what topic will be discussed at that table.*
- 1.30/2.00 Feedback from prioritisation / people move into groups
- Action planning workshops: each table clarifies what needs to be done about their topic and makes recommendations for action.
- 3.00 Summing up and ways forward
- 3.30 Tea and depart

*As far as possible workshop topics should be based on topics identified through the issues mapping process, but the steering / planning group should identify potential topics in advance and invite people with relevant experience and knowledge to facilitate round table discussions.

The event can be followed up with Action Learning Circles or Action Groups.

Titus Alexander

Action Learning Circles

Action Learning is a structured approach to learning, action and mutual support which enables people working on their own projects to make faster progress than would otherwise be possible. We have adapted and developed this model for work with diverse communities in many areas working on a wide range of topics.

Action Learning Circles (or sets) offer a simple, powerful way for small groups to follow-up the priorities identified through a Network Accelerator event.

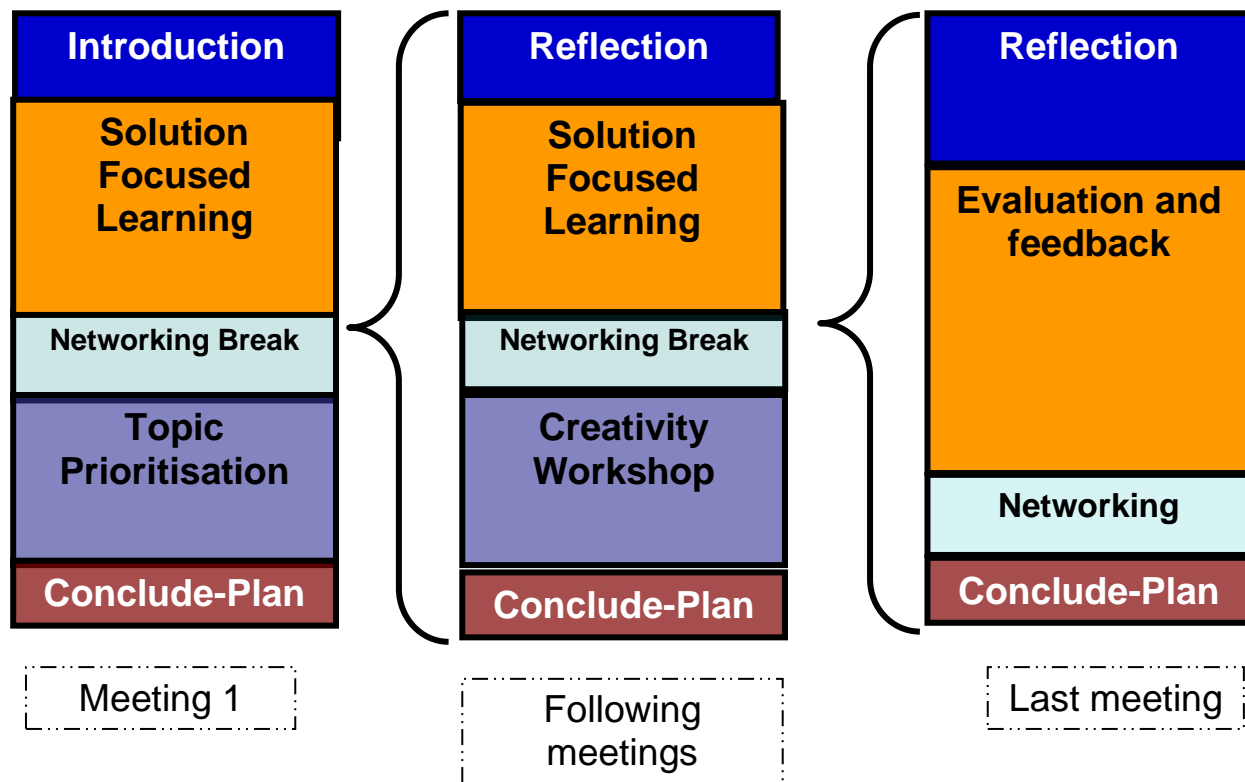
The following diagram summarised the format for an action learning programme, which can be self-organised or run by an experienced facilitator.

The facilitator ensures that everyone is able to take part fully keeps the discussion focused.

Participants or a guest speaker introduce new information, skills or learning activities at each session.

The outcome of action learning includes deeper understanding, mutual support among participants and more effective action on an issue such as social cohesion.

For more details of how to run Action Learning Circles click [here](#).



Titus Alexander and Mike Holdgate
Novas Scarman
13 Jan 2009