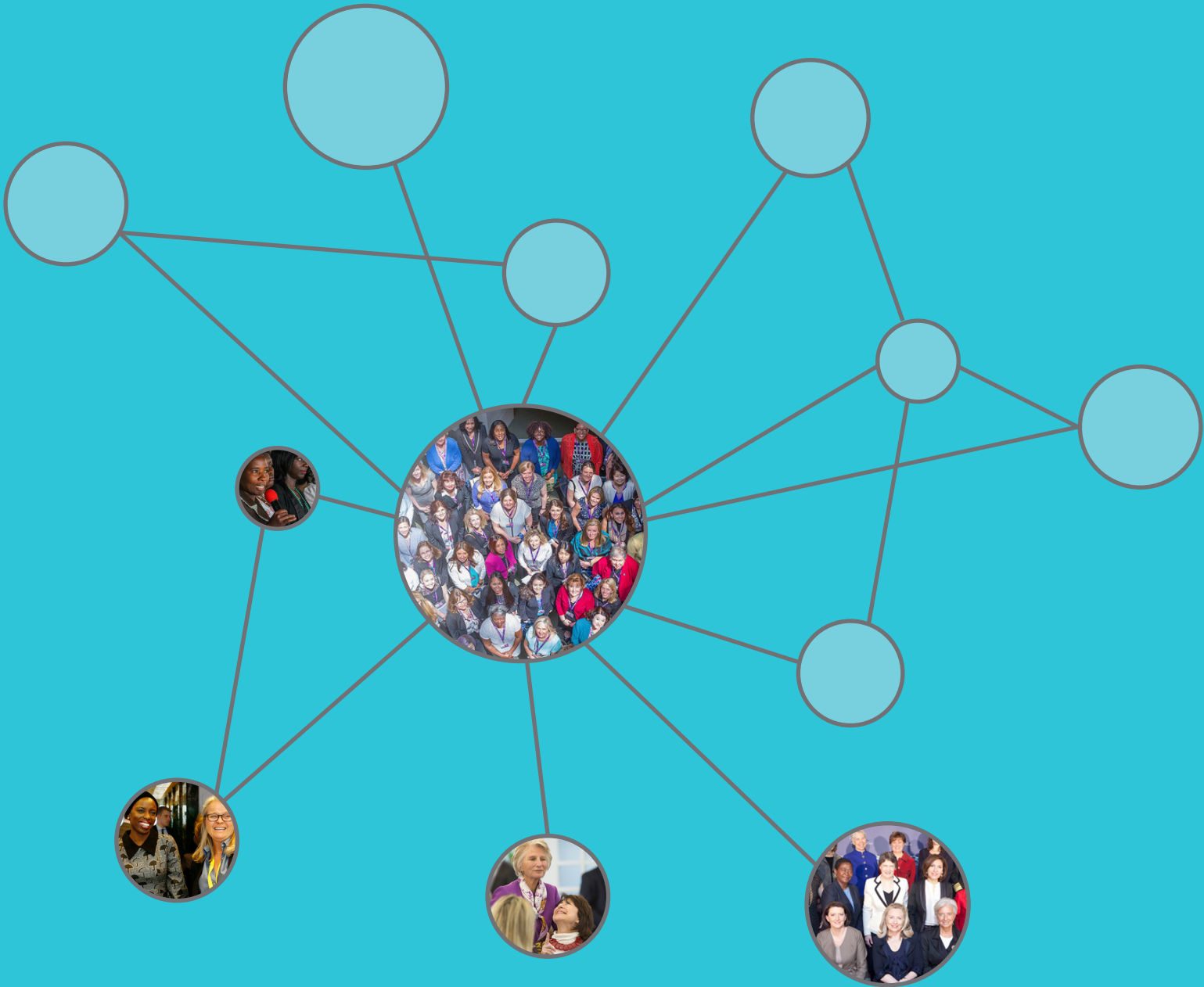


Women's Political Networks

Defining Leadership, Breaking Barriers, and Fostering Change

Lucina Di Meco



DESIGNING WOMEN'S POLITICAL NETWORKS
A TEN-STEP TOOLKIT



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About the Women in Public Service Project

The Women in Public Service Project will accelerate global progress towards women's equal participation in policy and political leadership to create more dynamic and inclusive institutions that leverage the full potential of the world's population to change the way global solutions are forged.

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Executive Summary

This paper seeks to understand the impact women's political networks have globally in supporting women overcome the universal cultural and structural barriers they face in engaging in a political career. With best practices from national, regional and international networks, this paper explores the role and modus operandi networks have adopted in supporting women running for national office in congressional or parliamentary elections, enhancing their effectiveness and shaping their leadership once in office. Through desk research of existing literature, interviews with women engaged in national politics and experts in this field, this paper also seeks to raise questions on the role of technology, the media and the correlation between women's participation in networks and their substantive representation.

About the Author

Lucina Di Meo is a Senior Gender Expert with more than 15 years of experience in the design, management and implementation of international development programs addressing gender inequality. Lucina has worked for the United Nations, as well as a wide range of international nonprofits and foundations, defending and promoting women's and girls' rights and empowerment in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Women's Political Networks: Defining Leadership, Breaking Barriers, and Fostering Change

Background & Research Paper

Annex I: Researching Women's Political Networks: A Resource Guide

Annex II: Designing Women's Political Networks: A Ten-Step Toolkit

Designing Women's Political Networks: A Ten-Step Toolkit

Background

According to Melanne Vermeer, Executive Director of the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security and first ever US Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues at the U.S. Department of State from 2009 to 2013: "Women's networks are invaluable in providing female political aspirants with the tools they need to get elected, despite the many hurdles in their paths. Women's networks also make an enormous difference in enabling female legislators to meet across party lines, share experiences and tools on how to successfully advance gender equality policies. In order to make significant progress on women's political empowerment, we need a lot more of such networks."¹

If women's political networks are defined as a set of critical actors working to increase women's political participation, recruitment and leadership and the relations among them, what are the conditions that make such networks successful?

While guidelines have been developed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the National Democratic Institute (NDI) regarding the functioning of women's caucuses and, to some extent, women's political party wings, much remains to be investigated on the conditions that make other types of networks successful in promoting women's political participation. Women's civil society networks and networks including stakeholders across sectors have proven to be vitally important in fostering, informing and sustaining women's political representation and leadership, but much needs to be researched on the dynamics that make them successful.

Drawing from the desk research and interviews with experts, coordinators of women's networks, as well as current and former women politicians interviewed for the paper: *Women's Political Networks: Defining Leadership, Breaking Barriers and Fostering Change*, this toolkit aims to provide women political activists, gender experts and practitioners in the field of women's political empowerment with a road-map to design successful networks.

Roadmap: Designing your Women's Political Network

1. The Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why do we need more women in office?• Why are women's networks helpful to increase female political participation?• In which way will your network meet the most pressing needs of the community?
2. Your Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Which barriers will your network focus on?• Why are you focusing on them specifically?• How do they overlap with the barriers women face in other professions?
3. Your Theory of Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the change you are seeking to achieve?• How will the network contribute to achieving this change?• What are your short, medium and long-term objectives? Which activities will help you reach your goals?
4. Membership Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who will your members be? Will the network be open or closed?• Will members be required to contribute information, training, advice, mentoring, financial resources, in-kind donations, etc?• How are your membership criteria linked to your theory of change and strategic planning? Do they allow for breath, connectivity and dynamism?
5. Key Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the change you are seeking to achieve?• How will the network contribute to achieving this change?• What are your short, medium and long-term objectives? Which activities will help you reach your goals?

Roadmap: Designing your Women's Political Network

<p>6. Activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What activities will most effectively enable you to achieve your goals? • Which ones will you invest more time and resources on? Why? • How do these activities link to your mission and vision?
<p>7. Leadership & Decision-Making</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the leadership be chosen? For how long will leadership serve? • Who will be responsible for which tasks? • When and how will decisions be made? Will there be a necessary quorum? Will virtual presence be counted? Will you vote openly or confidentially?
<p>8. Your Budget</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will work for your network part-time/full time on a paid or voluntary basis? • Do you receive donations? From whom? How much? • What are your expenditures? How are they linked to your outcomes and outputs?
<p>9. Communications & Fundraising Strategy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are your audiences? How will you communicate with them? What is your individualized “Why should I care?” message for each one of them? • Which technological tools (social media, website, etc.) will you use and how? • How will you defend your members from online harassment and threats?
<p>10. Your M&E Strategy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you define and measure success in the short, medium and long term? • How often will you re-evaluate and adapt your strategy according to the results you have achieved? • Do you have quantitative and/or qualitative indicators to measure your success?

1

Why a Women's Political Network? *Know the Evidence.*

Historically, women's political networks have served a few key functions: expand women's political representation by increasing the supply and/or demand of women in politics; facilitate a dialogue between women elected in office and civil society organizations; inform women's political leadership; challenge existing societal norms on women's political participation and support women in overcoming the barriers that make it difficult for them to pursue a political career. Before starting a women's political network, you should get familiar with the best practices from existing networks in achieving each one of these goals, so that you can make an evidence-based argument regarding the importance of women's networks. It is also important to know why gender parity in politics matters: whether you chose the critical mass approach, a rights-based approach or a com-

bination of both, you should familiarize yourself with evidence-based arguments and data on why women's increased political participation brings about important change in legislation and society. Finally, your motivations and, if possible, information should be grounded in your social and political reality and the specific needs you want to address.

You need to have clear, concise and convincing responses to these questions:

- Why do we need more women in office?
- Why are women's networks helpful to increase female political participation?
- In which way will your network improve, directly and indirectly, the most pressing needs of the community?

2

What do you Want to Fix? *Define your Focus.*

In pursuing a political career globally, women face two kinds of gender-related barriers: structural barriers, reflecting the overall gender gap in a society (educational, professional, economic and social differences in the roles and achievements of men and women) and cultural barriers, referring to a societal belief of women and men's roles (acquired early in life through family, community, education and reinforced through media and continued socialization). When creating a women's political network, you will want to decide very carefully which barriers you will be focusing on. One of the reasons behind EMILY's List success is its ability to focus on one specific challenge (lack of funding for women's political campaigns). Other networks take a more comprehensive approach, trying to tackle multiple challenges at the same

time. Regardless, you will want to know if the barrier(s) you will be addressing coincide with the ones women face in other professional fields. This analysis is important as it will help you identify potential allies and will be key in building your narrative.

Before moving forward, you will want to have responses to the following questions:

- Which barriers will your network focus on?
- Why are you focusing on them specifically?
- How do they overlap with the barriers women face in accessing leadership in other professions or sectors of society?

3

What are your Mission, Vision, and Goals? *Define your Theory of Change.*

A theory of change is a comprehensive illustration of how and why your desired change (e.g. increased women's representation in parliament) is expected to happen as a result of a set of actions. Your theory of change will help you define your mission, identify potential allies, as well as measure success for your short, medium and long term accomplishments. Your theory of change will also inform your strategic planning, namely the set of goals, objectives, activities, outcomes and outputs expected within a very defined timeframe.

Once you have defined your strategic planning and theory of change, you should be able to respond to the following questions:

- What is the change you are seeking to achieve?
- How will the network contribute to achieving this change? Through what activities and in what timeframe?
- What are your short, medium and long-term objectives? What activities will help you reach your goals?

4

Who will Be Part of your Network? *Identify Membership Criteria.*

Whether a network is formal or informal, big or small, membership criteria must be weighed carefully according to the desired outcome.

According to Susan Markham, USAID Senior Gender Coordinator, being specific and conscious about the network's mission and scope and making sure that they fit with its composition are very important decisions.

Some networks, like the one developed by Vital Voices Global Partnership, invest in a few, high-potential women leaders because they already have the vision and connections to change their communities. Other networks, like the Central and Eastern Europe Network for Gender Issues, empower large cohorts of women, many of whom will not necessarily start a political career, as their aim is to foster long-term societal change around women, politics and power. Some networks involve women from similar regional, societal, professional, ideological and political backgrounds, as they will understand each other and strategize more easily for specific campaigns or issues. Other networks convene women from

different backgrounds, languages and world regions, producing experiences that are extremely invigorating and sometimes life-changing for the women who take part in them, opening their minds to totally new ideas and possibilities.

Your theory of change should guide you in deciding which kind of membership criteria will best help you accomplishing your mission. You will also need to decide if you want an all-women network or a mixed one. While female-only political networks are important and might be preferable for training, they might lack the breadth (inclusion of diverse perspectives), connectivity (the capacity to link people and groups that wouldn't otherwise connect) and dynamism (ability to evolve as your goals evolve) that are so important in the passage from a simple support network to one that truly helps people advance in their careers. In addition, when it comes to achieving policy change that tackles societal norms on gender identity and roles, the inclusion of men, is key, as in the message of the #HeForShe Campaign.

Your membership criteria should provide clear responses to the following questions:

- Who will your members be (demographic, geographic composition)? Will the network be open (unlimited membership) or closed (restricted number)? Will it include men?
- Will members be required to contribute (information, training, advice, mentorship, financial resources, in-kind donations, other)?
- How are your membership criteria linked to your theory of change and strategic planning? Do your membership criteria reflect the breath, connectivity and dynamism you want to have?

5

Who are your Allies and Opponents? *Build Strong Relationships.*

Once you have decided your membership and defined your strategy, it's important you identify and map your potential allies in government, political parties and civil society (including business networks); list the relationships you would need to build to define a broad coalition with the most important stakeholders you identified. Also, try to identify what kind of resistance/opposition you will be facing and from whom, in order to devise timely response strategies.

Finally, remember that the relationship between women in politics and women's civil society organizations and associations is a very important one: for female politicians, it keeps them connected with their female constituency, informs and grants legitimacy and public support to their policy-making, and supports their voices when they

are being sidelined. For women from civil society, it provides a channel to influence policies and promote lasting change. Women's networks can play a vital role in facilitating a dialogue between women's organizations and women policymakers.

Your mapping should enable you to respond to the following questions:

- Who are your allies? What would you like the network's relationship with them to be (support, coalition, other)?
- Are there events where these different stakeholders meet? Can you leverage them to foster interest and membership to your network?
- From whom will you be facing opposition?

6

What will you Do?
Define the Network's Activities.

Women's political networks increase women's political participation and leadership through various activities, including: training and mentoring of female political aspirants; facilitating the discussion across sectors and among various stakeholders on important policy issues related to gender equality; and advocacy to raise visibility for certain issues.

Your network's activities can include some or all of the above mentioned, or totally different ones. Activities can also vary over time, in response to the changes in the political situation and as you modify your strategic plan. In all cases, however, your activities must be clearly linked to your theory of change.

In designing your activities, you should ask yourself:

- Which activities will most effectively enable you to achieve your short, medium and long term goals? Which ones will you invest more time and resources on?
- Why are you prioritizing this set of activities?
- How do these activities link to your mission and vision?

7

Who Decides?
Leadership and Decision-Making as Tools and Processes.

In order to ensure a network's sustainability over time, it's extremely important that there be clear leadership structures, inclusive decision-making and transparent criteria for accessing positions of power. Also, because political participation is not only an outcome, but also a process, leadership changes provide foundational training opportunities for women who aim at engaging in a political career.

Whether you rely on volunteers or salaried members, make sure you take into account and periodically evaluate their availability and their capacity to perform the required tasks.

When defining the leadership structure of the network, you will need to make sure that you have clear responses to the following questions:

- How will the leadership be chosen? What terms of service or time limits apply to the leadership?
- Who will be responsible for which tasks (including fundraising, communication, political outreach, research and office administration)?
- When and where will decisions be made? Will there be a necessary quorum? Will virtual presence be counted? How? How will decisions be made? Will you vote openly or confidentially on issues and leadership positions?

8

How will you Sustain your Activities? *Draft your Budget.*

Adequate human and financial resources need to be allocated, even for relatively small or virtual networks. List all the agencies, services and programs that might be available to support your work and reach out to them. If you receive international funding, you should encourage international donors to consider developing a holistic approach to supporting women's networks through the political cycles, overcoming old practices of dividing funds into categories that do not reflect the continuous nature of political empowerment work (for example, separating legislation and election related funding).

When preparing your budget, make sure to highlight the in-kind contributions you are receiving from members: you might realize (and be able to communicate) that your network is much stron-

ger and richer than you think! Also, consider a results-based budgeting framework for your activities—it offers a much more compelling argument for donors!

Your budget should provide transparent answers to the following questions:

- Who will work for your network part-time/full time on a paid or voluntary basis? How much would the services provided voluntarily by your members cost you, if you had to pay for them?
- Do you receive donations? From whom? How much?
- What are your expenditures? How are your expenditures linked to your outcomes and outputs?

9

What do you Want to Say? *Develop your Communication and Fundraising Strategy.*

Define a simple, proactive and clear message explaining the reason to be part of your network. You should try to find answers to the question: “Why should I care?” from the perspective of the different audiences you will be addressing.

Extremely important are the norms and policies ruling the network's external and internal communications. Internally, it's important that networks invest time and effort in in-person meetings where relationships of trust, mentoring and mutual validation are developed. Externally, it's key that they show unity: part of why the *Bancada Femenina* in Uruguay was so successful was because its leaders would only hold press conferences together, giving an image of strength and cooperation.

Successful networks are also savvy in using digital technologies to share information, publicize their work, launch advocacy campaigns, and build the skills of their members on defense strategies against online harassment and threats. Once you have a strong message, it will be easier for you to use it to raise funds among potential allies, programs and agencies you identified above.

In order to build a successful communication and fundraising strategy, you will need to respond to the following questions:

- Who are your audiences? How will you communicate with them (online, in-person, etc.)? What is your individualized “Why should I care?” message for each one of them? How will you

- publicize your successes?
- Which technological tools (social media, website, etc.) will you be using
- for which purpose?
- How will you defend your members from online harassment and threats?

10

How do you Define Success?

Outline a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

Using the goals set in your strategic plan, you will need to measure effectiveness on the basis of the progress made towards your goals, taking into account timeframe and resources spent. Several manuals can help you in defining a monitoring and evaluation framework that works for you, on the basis of your level of familiarity with evaluations, your sophistication in data collection, etc.

You want a monitoring and evaluation framework that can help you respond as easily as possible to the following set of questions:

- How do you define and measure success in the short, medium and long term?
- How often will you re-evaluate and adapt your strategy according to the results you have achieved?
- Do you have quantitative and/or qualitative indicators to measure your success?

Further Resources: Manuals and Toolkits for Designing Women's Networks

“How to Revive a Tired Network”

Herminina Ibarra, Harvard Business Review

Ibarra, H. (2015) *How to Revive a Tired Network*. Harvard Business Review. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2015/02/how-to-revive-a-tired-network>.

“How Leaders Create and Use Networks”

Herminina Ibarra and Mark Lee Hunter, Harvard Business Review

Ibarra, H. and Hunter, M. (2007) How Leaders Create and Use Networks. Harvard Business Review. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2007/01/how-leaders-create-and-use-networks>.

Guidelines for Women's Caucuses

Inter-Parliamentary Union

Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2016) Guidelines for women's caucuses. Geneva. Available at: <http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/caucus-e.pdf>

Toolkit: How to Build an Effective Social Network

National Women's Business Council

National Women's Business Council (2015). Toolkit: How to Build an Effective Social Network. Available at: https://www.nwbc.gov/sites/default/files/NWBC_ToolKit_508.pdf.

Gender Equality in Elected Office: A Six-Step Action Plan

Pippa Norris and Mona Lena Krook, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

Norris, P. and Krook, M. (2010) Gender Equality in Elected Office: A Six-Step Action Plan, Harvard University and Washington University in St. Louis. Report commissioned for the Programme on Increased Participation of Women in Democratic Governance by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/78432>

Creating Mentor Networks in the OSCE Region: A Practical Roadmap

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (2015) Creating Mentor Networks in the OSCE Region: A Practical Roadmap. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/163006>

Leadership 101

The National Democratic Institute (NDI)

The National Democratic Institute (2010). Leadership 101. Available at: <https://www.ndi.org/dcc-leadership101>.

Tracking Impact: A Handbook for High Quality Data Collection

Vital Voices Global Partnership

Vital Voices Global Partnership (2016). Tracking Impact: A Handbook for High Quality Data Collection. Available at: <http://www.vitalvoices.org/sites/default/files/uploads/HANDBOOK-FINAL-SINGLE%2520PAGE-2-11.pdf>

Advocacy & Running for Office: A Training Manual for Women

Vital Voices Global Partnership

Vital Voices Global Partnership (2009). Advocacy & running for office: a training manual for women. Washington, DC. Available at: <https://www.vitalvoices.org/sites/default/files/uploads/Advocacy%20Training%20Manual.pdf>



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