



Staff Voice: Establishing and Engaging with Allyship Groups and Networks



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victimsupport.org.uk

Who are we?

VS is the leading independent victims' charity in England and Wales. Our purpose is to help and empower people affected by crime and traumatic incidents to move beyond crime and recover to the point where they feel they are back on track with their lives.

We are independent of the police and local authorities but work with them and the whole of the criminal justice system and other relevant bodies to improve services for victims and provide much needed support.

We are LOCAL

We are NATIONAL

We are INDEPENDENT

What we do

- Provide free, confidential emotional support and practical help.
- Provide specialist support services for people affected by domestic abuse; sexual violence; child sexual exploitation; hate crime; terrorism; homicide; antisocial behaviour; and fraud.
- Champion victims' rights and issues locally and nationally, working closely with policy-makers, commissioners, the criminal justice system, local government and other providers, partners and organisations.



EDI networks within VS

- Disability Network
- Faith & Belief Network
- Gender Empowerment Network
- LGBT+ Network
- Mental Health & Wellbeing Network
- R.A.C.E Inclusion Network



The network's purposes:

- Providing a **safe space** for staff and volunteers from marginalised communities to come together and provide peer support and networking
- Acting as a **critical friend** to the organisation, providing feedback and consultation on policies, strategies and proposed work streams
- Developing and supporting **awareness raising** activities



Creating safe spaces



- All EDI networks are staff lead, with Chairs and Co-Chairs being voluntary roles but to Chair a network you must identify with the group that the network represents
- Having a clear terms of reference and setting ground rules - especially in terms of confidentiality and escalating concerns
- Network inboxes only accessed by Chairs/ Co-Chairs and can be contacted outside of scheduled quarterly meetings
- Creating designated spaces that are just for members to further support safe space discussions
- Staff and volunteers need to be empowered to be able to attend
- Consistent communications promoting the networks, their meeting dates and their aims

Being a critical friend

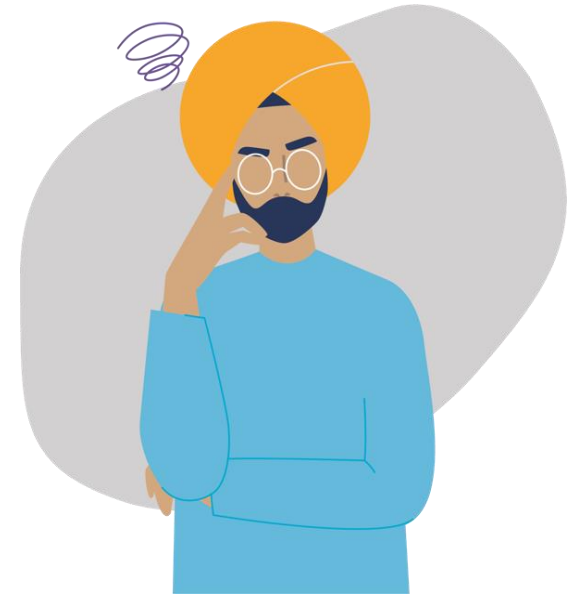
- Equality Impact Assessment process - EDI networks are encouraged as a potential route for consultation/ feedback
- Consider the routes for feedback in the network group to encourage the most diverse range of voices - e.g. via email, anonymous feedback forms, drop-ins
- Mindfulness of emotional labour often involved in being a critical friend and that if you are consulting you need a consistent feedback loop to update on actions taken to maintain engagement
- Make it a two way communication channel - not just going out to ask for feedback when the organisation needs it but creating spaces for networks to present their own ideas, barriers or concerns to senior staff

Awareness raising

- All of our networks are open to members and allies to encourage the sharing of learning and acknowledging the role of allies in creating progress
- Allyship and bystander intervention virtual sessions, allyship e-learning module, allyship guide and core behaviours documents
- Our networks support the planning of webinars with guest speakers, sharing guidance and resources and sharing posts and personal stories through internal communications throughout the year
- Since 2020 we have had a far more collaborative approach to our EDI networks with cross-network meetings of Chairs and regular joint events - virtual spaces made such a difference!

Challenges

- Each of our networks is at a different stage in its development - some have been established for over 10 years and some are very new
 - The natural cycle and change of Chairs
- Staff and volunteers feeling able to attend
- Engaging a nationally dispersed workforce where the majority of staff work directly with the public
- Incentivising engagement and uptake of leadership roles within networks without direct financial reward



Top Tips

- Make sure there is a structure of support around a network
- Create clear lines of responsibility within an EDI strategy/ business plan of what is expected from a network group and what sits with departments and specific roles
 - Burnout as a network Chair can happen really easily!
- Facilitate spaces for networks to come together and share difficulties, wins and ideas
- Keep thinking about the diversity within a network group
 - The balance of ‘members’ to allies





Thank you

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