



Yorkshire Consortium for Equity in Doctoral Education

Developing and Launching a Network

A short guide produced by colleagues at The University of Sheffield, highlighting their top tips for setting up an inclusive network of research professionals to share ideas, experiences, and opportunities. In 2023, YCEDE launched the Inclusive Research Network on LinkedIn; this document was produced to outline our process in developing and launching this network.

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YCEDE cannot guarantee that all information contained in this resource is accurate at the time of reading, particularly with regard to dates, deadlines, and funding availability.

Suggested Audience: Staff

Suggested Sub-Audience: Academic Staff / Professional Services Staff

This resource is intended for use in improving equity and outcomes for ethnically minoritised individuals interested in doctoral study or careers in research.

This resource was produced by the staff named above on behalf of the YCEDE project. Please ensure appropriate credits are clearly included in any external use of this resource.

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Aims of the network

Providing a platform for researchers from diverse backgrounds means recognising and actively addressing the following issues:

- **Underrepresentation:** In many research fields, the proportion of researchers from specific groups is significantly lower than their proportion in the general population. This can lead to research agendas, perspectives, and focuses that may not fully reflect the needs and experiences of the whole of society.
- **Systemic Barriers:** Institutional biases, lack of mentorship, difficulties in accessing funding, unfair evaluation criteria, and exclusive cultural environments can all be significant obstacles to the career development of researchers from marginalised backgrounds.
- **The Value of Unique Contributions:** Researchers with diverse lived experiences can pose more innovative and relevant research questions, design more culturally sensitive methodologies, and better understand and serve different communities. Their presence is crucial for enhancing the quality of research and promoting scientific progress.
- **Equity and Justice:** Promoting diversity within the research workforce is an essential part of achieving equity and justice in academia and research. This is not only about correcting historical and current structural injustices but also about ensuring that all talented individuals have the opportunity to contribute to the advancement of knowledge.

Therefore, establishing the LinkedIn Inclusive Research Network, with a greater emphasis on the diversity of researchers, focuses on supporting, connecting, and elevating researchers from diverse backgrounds, providing them with a platform to share experiences, overcome challenges, seek collaboration, and drive change.

Developing and Launching a Network

1. Define Your Network's Clear Focus and Goals:

- **What are the primary goals for the network?** (e.g. providing a platform for networking and collaboration among underrepresented researchers, sharing funding and career opportunities for diverse scholars, discussing challenges and solutions for diversity in research, promoting the work of researchers from marginalised groups, fostering mentorship connections).
- **What makes this network unique?** How will it specifically cater to the needs and experiences of researchers from diverse backgrounds beyond a general inclusive research group?

- **How will you come up with a name?** Seek input from members of the network, so that people have some ownership of the network.

2. Identify and Understand Your Target Audience:

Our primary audience is researchers from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds across various disciplines and career stages. However, this also includes allies who are committed to supporting and promoting diversity and inclusion.

3. Develop a Content Strategy:

The content should be relevant, engaging, and directly address the interests and needs of your network members or target audience. This could include any of the following:

- **Highlighting research by diverse researchers:** Share their publications, presentations, and achievements.
- **Discussing topics relevant to diverse researchers' experiences:** This could include navigating bias in academia, securing funding as an underrepresented scholar, culturally responsive research practices, and work-life balance.
- **Sharing opportunities:** Post information about grants, fellowships, job openings, and conferences specifically aimed at or welcoming to diverse researchers.
- **Facilitating discussions:** Pose open-ended questions, start conversations about current issues in inclusive research and diversity in academia, and encourage members to share their perspectives and experiences.
- **Featuring resources:** Share articles, reports, toolkits, and other resources related to inclusive research and supporting diverse researchers.
- **Promoting events:** Share information about webinars, workshops, and other events relevant to the group's focus.
- **Member spotlights:** Periodically feature members to highlight their work and contributions.

5. Plan Your Launch:

A successful launch requires getting the word out to your target audience. In planning stages of the network we did the following:

- **Invited relevant LinkedIn connections:** Personally invite individuals who fit the target demographic or are allies.
- **Reached out to relevant organisations and networks:** Contact universities, research institutions, professional associations, and diversity and inclusion organisations that work with researchers. Ask them to share the group with their members.
- **Promoted the group on other platforms:** Share the group link via other social media, email signatures, academic websites, and in relevant newsletters.
- **Launched the network virtually:** Host a webinar or online discussion related to the group's theme to generate initial interest and membership.

6. Engage Members and Foster a Supportive Community:

Active engagement is key to sustainability:

- **Be an active administrator/moderator:** Welcome new members, respond to comments and questions promptly, and participate in discussions yourself.
- **Encourage member participation:** Ask questions, run polls, and acknowledge contributions.
- **Facilitate introductions:** Encourage new members to introduce themselves and their research interests.
- **Create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere:** Ensure all members feel safe and respected to share their thoughts and experiences. Address any disrespectful or inappropriate behaviour swiftly and according to your group rules.
- **Highlight member achievements:** Celebrate successes and milestones of group members.

7. Develop a Robust Moderation Policy:

Clear and consistent moderation is essential for a positive and inclusive environment, especially when the focus is on supporting potentially vulnerable or marginalised groups.

- **Clearly state prohibited content and behaviour** in the group rules (e.g., spam, self-promotion outside of designated threads, disrespectful language, personal attacks, and discriminatory comments).
- **Outline the consequences of violating rules** (e.g., warning, temporary suspension, permanent removal).
- **Be consistent in enforcing rules.**
- **Consider having a diverse moderation team** that understands the nuances of inclusive language and potential micro-aggressions.
- **Provide a clear way for members to report** inappropriate content or behaviour.

8. Strategies for Sustainability:

Keeping the network active and growing over time requires on-going effort:

- **Maintain a consistent posting schedule:** Regularly share new content and initiate discussions.
- **Encourage member-led initiatives:** Empower members to start their own discussions, share resources, or even organise small group activities within the network.
- **Solicit feedback from members:** Regularly ask for input on how to improve the group and make it more valuable to them.
- **Monitor group analytics:** Pay attention to membership growth, engagement levels, and popular topics to understand what is working and what can be improved.

- **Adapt and evolve:** Be willing to adjust your content strategy and group activities based on member feedback and the evolving landscape of inclusive research and diversity in academia.
- **Consider forming a small, dedicated team** to help manage the group, share moderation duties, and brainstorm new ideas.

By focusing on creating a welcoming and valuable space specifically for researchers from diverse backgrounds and their allies, and by actively managing and nurturing the community, you can establish and sustain an impactful network for members.