

# NETWORKS

## What are social enterprise networks?

**Networks are groups of organisations or individuals who are actively interconnected for a common purpose; to share knowledge and experience and/or to gain support from each other**

Networks are often formed between social enterprises which have something in common, whether they are from the same region, all start-ups, or more established enterprises looking to scale-up, or a network of advisors to social enterprises.

Networking provides the opportunity to:

- establish new contacts and partnerships
- learn from each others experiences
- share examples of best practice
- address common problems
- develop a collaborative approach
- brainstorm ideas for the future
- develop market opportunities

In *smaller networks*, members share learning, access support, and help each other to address problems.

In *larger networks*, members can be introduced to new contacts, find and provide inspiration, generate new business, and influence markets with their collective power in their region or area of the sector.

### e.g., SEASON network in the South East:

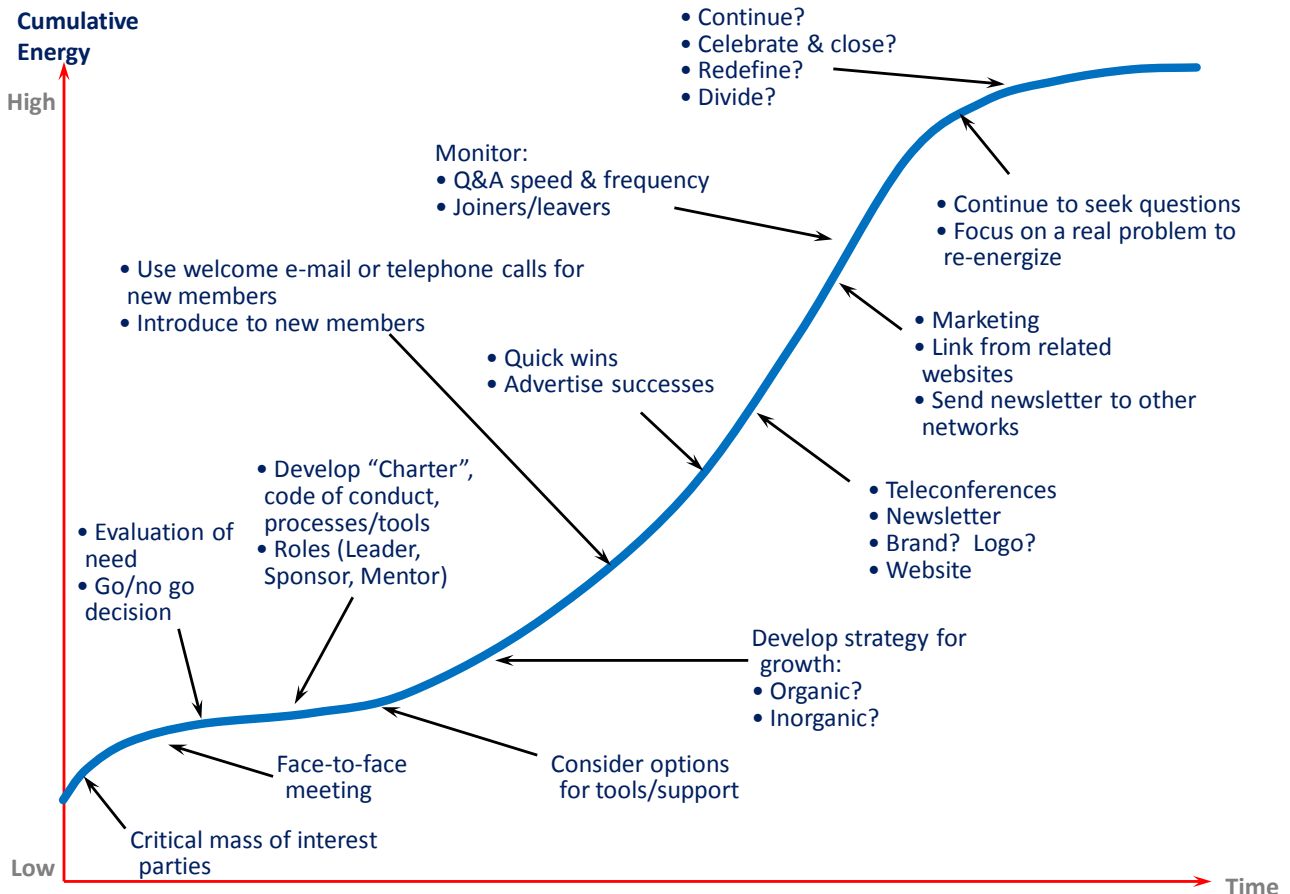
SEASON seeks to improve support for social enterprises in the South East through a regional network for social enterprise advisors.

The network is driven forward by the advisors themselves, who can access the network to attend regular meetings and events, share tips, address hot topics and professional development.



SEASON provides new business contacts and the opportunity to meet other advisors and work together. The network uses a central website, as well as events and meet-ups, to connect and build relationships.

## Stages and timeline to develop a Network



### *e.g., The Social Enterprise Knowledge Exchange*

*SEKE is a network of the regional support bodies. The leaders from the regional social enterprise bodies meet regularly to discuss work in their regions, share insights and updates. The network also provides the opportunity to discuss wider sector issues, and work collaboratively towards strategic goals.*



### *Why are social enterprise networks important?*

Networks improve the social enterprise business support landscape by:

- Creating strength and solidarity
- Producing market opportunities
- Enabling social enterprises to 'help themselves' through peer support
- Creating partnerships both within and outside of the sector
- Upskilling social enterprise advisors, improving quality assurance and accreditation

### *e.g., Plunkett Community Shops Network*

*The Plunkett Foundation have created a Community Shops Network website to create a Community of Practice, and provide a meeting point online for the many people actively involved in community owned rural shops right across the UK.*

*This site acts as a platform to enable shop employees, volunteers, and advisors to participate actively, by getting involved in the discussion forums, contributing to and using the body of resources and links that are on the site.*

*Plunkett also run networking events for shops and advisors, which compliment and integrate with the online community.*

### *Where can I find more information on social enterprise networks and how to join them?*

The Social Enterprise Coalition is the national body for social enterprises, representing a wide range of social enterprises, regional and national support networks and other related organisations:

- [www.socialenterprise.org.uk](http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk)

Each region in England has a social enterprise support and networking body:

- Social Enterprise London – SEL
- Social Enterprise East of England – SEEE
- Social Enterprise West Midlands – SEWM
- Social Enterprise Yorkshire and Humber – SEYH
- Social Enterprise North East – NESEP
- SE2 Partnership (South East)
- RISE (South West)
- Social Enterprise East Midlands – SEEM
- Social Enterprise North West – SENW

Social Enterprise Mark Holders – network for SE Mark Holders nationwide:

- [www.socialenterprisemark.org.uk/](http://www.socialenterprisemark.org.uk/)

Support and umbrella organisation networks:

- [Community Interest Companies Association](http://www.communityinterestcompanies.org.uk/)
- [Co-operatives UK](http://www.co-operatives.org.uk/)
- [Development Trust Association](http://www.developmenttrusts.org.uk/)
- [Social Firms UK](http://www.socialfirms.org.uk/)

Social Enterprise advisor networks:

- 4SE Business Advisor Network [www.socialenterprisewm.org.uk](http://www.socialenterprisewm.org.uk)
- SEASON Advisors Network [www.se2partnership.co.uk](http://www.se2partnership.co.uk)
- SEEM Business Advisor Network (BAN) [www.seem.uk.net](http://www.seem.uk.net)

Rural enterprises:

- The Plunkett Foundation have a network for community run shop social enterprises, [Plunkett Community Shops Network](http://www.plunkettcommunityshops.org.uk/),

The Guardian Social Enterprise Network:

- [www.guardian.co.uk/social-enterprise-network](http://www.guardian.co.uk/social-enterprise-network)