EARLY EDUCATION LEADERS

FRAMEWORK

APRIL 2021

THE PLACE TO CONNECT, LEARN, SHARE AND THRIVE

Contents

Purpose of the Early Education Leaders Peer Network

The Early Education Leaders Peer Network (the Network) is an initiative funded through the NSW Department of Education Sector Development Program.

The Purpose of the Early Education Leaders Peer Network is to establish an independent and inclusive peer network for Directors and Educational Leaders, where they can connect as a group to discuss topics of mutual interest and access reliable resources.

Community Early Learning Australia (CELA) has been appointed to establish, support, and review the pilot network.

To be part of the Network, you need to be currently or recently working in a leadership role in an early education service.

The objectives of the Network

The objectives of the Network are:
- ▶ to reduce isolation expressed by leaders in early education, and
- ▶ to form a cohort of mutually supportive members
- ▶ to enhance their professional practice together.

As such, the Network is designed to be accessible, easy, and fast to use.

The Network model

The Network model achieves this by:
- ▶ connecting leaders in early education to identify common professional challenges and explore potential solutions through discussion, workshops, and resource sharing
- ▶ facilitating forums for Directors and Educational Leaders to share and source expertise, advice, and information
- ▶ identifying topical issues that will be addressed via mini-conferences and small events organised for and by the Network
- ▶ providing online resource library of information, research, and tools
- ▶ to remain current and relevant to the changing needs of Members
- ▶ offering the service free to Members and Champions.

Term of the Network

The initial term of the Early Education Leaders Peer Network is a trial period of April to June 2021. After this time, the Department of Education will evaluate the success of the Network in meeting the objectives and needs of early education leaders, consider feedback on successes and improvements to inform the future direction of the Network.

Funding model

The Department of Education is funding this pilot Network to test the effectiveness, value, and sustainability of the peer Network strategy.

The Department has outsourced set-up, support, and review of the pilot to early childhood sector specialists, CELA.

CELA's role is to establish and monitor the Early Education Peer Leaders Network, until the end of the trial, June 2021.

CELA will be responsible for functions including initial design and structure of the Network, governance, Member recruitment, selection and monitoring of Champions, ongoing stewardship, coaching and support.

The pilot is live in market from April to June 2021.

Partners and roles

Early Education Leaders Peer Network Pilot - Organisation Model

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION Funding	⟷	CELA Set-up, support, and monitor Evaluate	⟷	EARLY EDUCATION LEADERS Champions Members

The Network partners

Department of Education

Strategic support for early education leaders via:

- funding, and
- arms' length, impartial executive oversight of the strategic approach to address sector leaders' needs.

Community Early Learning Australia (CELA)

As early education sector specialists, CELA is accountable for the following tasks within the Network:

- design/strategy
- organisation and operating model including sound governance guidelines
- initial set up of the online Network platform (website)
- populating the library with initial content
- recruiting and mentoring of Champions
- providing moderation support to the Network by guiding Champions
- enforcing ethics and behaviour, as a point of escalation for complaints or other operational issues that may arise. This includes making decisions if required to ask Champions or Members to leave the Network if their conduct is not acceptable.
- liaising with and reporting to the Department of Education
- evaluation: leading the end-of-pilot review, and
- providing recommendations about its ongoing value, viability, and sustainability in July 2021.

The Early Education Leaders Peer Network

Three Champions – Leaders of Leaders

Three representative leaders from the sector who are responsible for:

- pre-launch co-design of the Network with CELA
- leading governance of the Network
- moderating the Network
- listening to Members' needs to evolve the Network
- contributing to evaluating the effectiveness of the Network, and
- ongoing leadership if the Network continues beyond the pilot.

Members

Early education leaders who are responsible for:

- participating in the Network (and appropriately)
- informing its content based on their needs, and
- providing feedback about its effectiveness in addressing leaders' needs.

On signing up to the Network, Champions and Members agree to read and follow the Code of Conduct.

How to be actively involved

- Champion and Member participation is free and voluntary
- Champions are selected from Members who have nominated themselves to play a Champion role by demonstrating leadership and communication skills and experience, and outlining their motivation to become a leader of leaders within the Peer Network
- The three Champions chosen were recruited via an interview process in February 2021. They were selected for their experience, governance, impartiality, and leadership style
- Members participate by registering to become a member. Registration includes a survey to submit areas of interest and areas of need (gaps in support that leaders need)
- Ongoing participation is voluntary and at the discretion of each member.

Expectations of participants

For the pilot to be a representative test, there is no mandatory contribution required of Members.

Members are invited to:
- join forums
- pose questions
- contribute research and papers that are useful for Network Members
- attend information sessions and contribute to topic ideas
- attend the mini-conference in May 2021
- provide ongoing feedback, and
- contribute to the evaluation process in June and July 2021.

Described previously, Champions' roles have greater and specific accountability. Champions are required to:
- shape and test the Network experience and content before launch (March 2021 for April 2021 launch)
- play a leadership role in governing the Network - includes contributing to and owning key governing documents and practices
- operate within the scope of the Network's mandate
- be accessible to Members, inclusive, and impartial to their needs
- handle enquiries and complaints - escalate to CELA as needed, and
- contribute to the evaluation process.

Champions are not required to:
- mentor members
- provide individual support to services in lieu of other expert advice or operational support
- provide expert advice beyond their area of professional experience - it would be guidance only
- travel for meetings - this is an online Network, and
- liaise with the Department of Education.

Expectations of guest presenters

▶ A valuable component of the Network is to enhance leaders' professional practice.
▶ The Network will invite guest presenters to talk about specialist subjects.

Guest presenters have been asked to:
▶ Shape their presentation and information to provide strategies and tools to enhance leaders' practice
▶ Permission will be requested for sessions to be recorded and shared on the Network website for the duration of the pilot
▶ Where presenters are paid for the session, minimum branding and reference to development is allowable at the beginning and end of the slide deck and on shared resources. For example, "The content of this session has been developed by xxx date xxx" small logo.
▶ Members are invited to pose questions but are asked not to seek customised professional advice via the Forum. However, Members can ask to engage the speaker for a customised assignment for their service.
▶ Presenters will liaise with CELA for support and for the Network guidelines for presentations.

Champion selection criteria

Applications for Champion roles will be reviewed against five equally weighted criteria:

Criteria	Attributes	Weighting
Experience	Representative of sector Specialisation: experience that matches expertise gaps noted by Members	20%
Governance	Experience of governing and decision making (versus managing and mentoring) Experience assessing the needs of a broad group of people to think strategically, balancing current and future needs of a group of people	20%
Impartiality	Inclusive thinker Considers options on merit not personal preference No conflicts of interest	20%
Leadership style	Balances talking and listening Probes for gaps and blind spots to advance the Network Represents the whole Network i.e., recognises the Network cannot be a personal platform to address their service issues	20%
References	Two professional referees	20%

Pilot review process and evaluation criteria

During monthly pulse checks (April, May, and June) and at the conclusion of the trial period, the Department of Education, CELA and the Network will collectively review the success of the Network.

They will measure engagement, value, and viability:

- ▶ membership numbers as an indicator of demand
- ▶ participation rates
- ▶ engagement rates, and
- ▶ Champion and member satisfaction.

CELA will lead the review to assess engagement, value, viability, and sustainability using a mix of qualitative and quantitative data.

Qualitative data

- ▶ Champion feedback
- ▶ Member feedback
- ▶ Feedback data from the micro-events and mini-conference, and
- ▶ Energy and stated commitment to continue as expressed by Champions and Members.

Quantitative data

- ▶ Membership numbers
- ▶ Attendance rates
- ▶ Engagement statistics
- ▶ Regularity of contribution and activity of Members
- ▶ Range of topics requested
- ▶ Downloads from resource library, and
- ▶ Trade-offs / opportunity cost of a Network vs other methods of supporting sector leaders.

Sustainability

Ability of Champions to lead the Network in future: capacity, capability, and commitment and identify any limitations to the successful continuation of this role.

Terms of Reference – Guiding Principles

Scope of the Early Education Leaders Peer Network

The Network is intended to be a mutually supportive group of professionals operating in a moderated online Network.

Champions and Members participate on a voluntary basis.

The Network will be moderated by Champions and CELA.

The views and experiences of the Network are important insights for Members of the Department of Education.

However, the Network is not acting on behalf of the Department of Education. Specifically, it cannot:

- spend money on behalf of the Department
- commit the Department to any arrangement
- direct the actions of the Department
- represent the Department to the public or media, and
- provide legally binding advice to services.

Resource library management

The online resource library is a 24/7 service available to participants in the Network.

Resources – papers, tools, and factsheets – have been selected based on five criteria:

1. Purpose. Based on utility. Subjects and tools known to be useful to leaders based on CELA's knowledge of the sector.
2. Timeliness. The Network aims for material to be less than five years old, otherwise validated for currency.
3. Expertise. Credibility and quality: all materials should be grounded in evidence, be credible sources of information, and for public use i.e., do not infringe copyright.
4. Relevance. Is it applicable in a wide enough context? Does it fill an information gap identified by the Network?
5. Ease of understanding. Can it be easily understood? If not, a short summary of key messages will be prepared for materials to ensure they are accessible and digestible by the Network.

The library is expected to grow as participants request and add information.

Champions will review each request and submission based on the five criteria.

How and when to contact Champions

The Champions' email address is info@earlyednetwork.com.au.

Members would contact the Champions to:

- ▶ ask for help to optimise their own use of the Network
- ▶ notify the Champions of a breach of the Code of Conduct
- ▶ provide feedback about ways to improve the Network, or
- ▶ any other governance matters.

Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct Principles also exists as a stand-alone section on the Network website for easy reference.

Commitment made by Champions and Members on joining

By joining the Network, Champions and Members commit to the following principles of respectful conduct to create a positive environment in which Members are comfortable participating.

The Network is designed to be best practice, and as such:

- Participatory
- Constructive
- Equitable and inclusive
- Respectful
- Accountable
- Transparent
- Free of promotion and commercial interests
- Law abiding
- Ethical, and
- Impartial and free of conflicts of interest.

Online good practice

As an online Network, participants will also follow the conventions of respectful and safe online practices.

Champions and Members commit to:

- working together to improve the quality of practice in early education
- focusing on professional topics
- protecting their own and others' privacy
- being respectful and open to varying views, and the practices of others
- making relevant posts to the subjects being discussed i.e., not intentionally diversionary nor divisive
- non-commercial and without conflict of interests; no promotion of other external groups, nor promotion of suppliers
- be polite, without abusive, threatening, or harassing actions, including use of expletives, and hateful language
- non-defamatory comments. Individuals and organisations should not be named or inferred.
- respect that Champions and Members are volunteers. They can offer guidance to one another based on experience but should not do so in lieu of professional, legal, or financial advice, nor are Champions and Members unpaid operationally active resource for services in lieu of paid operational support, and
- be conscious of online safety, which includes posting personal information, and includes posting links to external information that are not confirmed as safe and secure.

The Network will be moderated by the Champions with the support of CELA. They reserve the right to restrict or remove Members if their behaviour does not meet the Conduct outlined.

In the event of a problem Champions will seek first to understand

If a breach of Conduct is observed or reported, Champions will investigate the situation first, by discussing it with the individual or individuals involved to understand the situation and the intention behind any behaviour. They will agree with those individuals a course of action, e.g., to not name or personalise any comments. If this does not resolve the situation, or if the behaviour persists, Champions will confer with CELA and may decide to restrict or remove Members.

Timeline and handover

The Network will be run as a pilot from April to June 2021.

The efficacy of the network will be reviewed as described during July 2021. At that point, the Department of Education will review recommendations arising from the evaluation and determine if the Network fulfils its role for the sector.

If it does, the Network will be transferred to the Champions to govern with the Department being a key stakeholder in its governance and effectiveness.

For more information

For further information or questions, please contact CELA at **peernetwork@cela.org.au** or call **1800 157 818**.