Grantmakers of Western Pennsylvania (GWP) is made up of grantmaking members representing a wide range of funding interests. Both locally and across the country, intentional collaborations among funders have increased the impact of philanthropy by combining members’ knowledge and expertise. Learning Networks within GWP can meet the needs of specific types of funding organizations, better address certain issues (e.g. education, aging) or provide a forum for peer exchange (i.e. program officers, financial officers, etc.).

The purpose of a Learning Network varies, and so does the frequency with which they convene. No two Networks are the same and needs may fluctuate from year to year. Some common purposes include: educate funders about the community; act on a shared interest; discuss promising practices, lessons learned, and common challenges; increase opportunities for collaborative activity; and react to a critical situation such as an opportunity or crisis.

GWP’s Learning Network Guidelines

In general, Learning Networks are most vibrant when they are self-directed. GWP believes that viable Learning Networks have designated volunteer leadership, regular participation of at least 4 GWP members and have activities/programs a minimum of 2 times per year.

- To establish a Learning Network, the Network should have at least one volunteer leader from GWP membership willing to serve a term of one year as a chair.
- At the end of the year, the chair (or chairs) will have the option to continue to lead for another year or step down.
- Volunteer leaders can approach GWP staff at any time throughout the year to establish a Learning Network.
- GWP will work with volunteer leaders to help frame the establishment of a Learning Network.
Benefits of a Learning Network

There are numerous benefits of a Learning Network within GWP. Such benefits include opportunities to:

- Build relationships with other GWP members who have a shared interest.
- Share information and ideas.
- Hear and learn from experts.
- Share successes and challenges with a peer cohort.
- Leverage a national network of peers through the Forum of Regional Associations.
- Participate in professional and leadership development.
- Explore defined collaboration and joint action as appropriate.

GWP networks are intended to be flexible and don’t need to last forever; networks will sunset when:

~ Members determine that their goals have been met.
~ No members choose to lead the network.

If the Network reaches a point when it agrees that it no longer makes sense to continue, chairs are asked to notify GWP staff.

Chairs/co-chairs will:

- Work with the members and GWP staff to identify and articulate the purpose and goals of the Learning Network and to annually assess the Network’s success.
- Work with GWP staff to organize members’ learning agenda and activities. This may include activities such as inviting speakers, hosting forums and sharing resources.
- Assist in developing and disseminating language and content for program announcements and promotional materials.
- Act as leads/hosts for Network meetings.
- Coordinate with GWP staff on topics, dates, speakers and logistics to ensure that sessions complement, not compete with, other GWP and Learning Network programming.
- Request GWP staff support as needed.

GWP staff will:

- Facilitate initial meeting (annually) to help identify and articulate the purpose and goals of the Learning Network.
- Assist with the planning and implementation of Learning Network programs.
- Provide a presence on the GWP website for Learning Network resource links and materials.
- Create and send program announcements and include information in GWP communications.
- Register attendees and maintain records related to meetings.
- Participate in programs and meetings.
- Act as a liaison between peer networks locally, statewide, and nationally
- Provide modest financial support through GWP programming budget.