# 1.1 Securing Leadership Buy-in

Organizing a communication network requires time and organizational resources. There are legal requirements and agency leadership needs to be engaged to support the work. Obtaining a formal written commitment can help leverage internal resources and build external support.

Soliciting formal buy-in has another benefit: Agency leaders may begin to discuss the network with their peers in partner agencies, thus laying the groundwork for your efforts to engage other agencies and partners.

This tool provides the following:

1. A template of a memo to leadership describing the value of committing resources to forming a network. The memo can be tailored to a specific agency. The bold areas in brackets indicate places to insert specific information, such as the name of the agency.
2. Tip sheet on handling resistance. These tips may be useful in working with potential network partners as well as leaders. The Network Fact Sheet template in Chapter 2 Tools can be adapted and used as an attachment to the memo or a leave-behind document when meeting with potential network partners.

The **Network Fact Sheet** template in Chapter 2 Tools can be adapted and used as an attachment to the memo or leave-behind document when meeting with potential network partners.

## MEMO TEMPLATE

|  |
| --- |
| TO: |
| FROM: |
| DATE: |
| RE: Seeking **[agency]** commitment to reach vulnerable populations in emergencies |

Our agency **[name]** is responsible for **[identify service provided, e.g., transportation, emergency management, public health, etc.]** for **[jurisdiction]**. We have a distinct obligation to communicate with and serve vulnerable populations in our community pursuant to the Stafford Act as well as other federal requirements. Under the National Response Framework’s definition, my estimate is that the percentage of people who have access and functional needs may be **[X]** in our community. These groups and individuals often have coexisting specialized communication and transportation needs.

I have recently reviewed a guide published by the Transit Cooperative Research Program titled *Communication with Vulnerable Populations: A Transportation and Emergency Management* *Toolkit.* The guide outlines step-by-step how to organize and work with public agencies, community-based organizations (CBOs), and businesses to develop a network of working relationships. These relationships will make it possible to communicate with vulnerable populations during all phases of an emergency. The action steps in the guide are simple, well researched, and based on community-wide coordination and collaboration. However, someone must step forward to start the process.

I would like to begin this work. I believe it will take approximately **[define]** percent of my time to make contacts by phone and through meetings; organize and facilitate regular meetings; document meetings and commitments; and maintain the contact database. This work will be useful in **[explain how it supports your agency’s mission/charge]**.

I am asking for your support to initiate this work in our agency, then to begin reaching out to other public sector agencies and community-based groups. Not only will it ensure that our agency is meeting its obligations, the effort has the potential to:

* Improve communication and working relationship with our community partners
* Increase our agency’s **[visibility or credibility]**
* Improve our knowledge of partner and community activities

If appropriate, I also ask that you seek the support of our **[elected or appointed]** leadership so that all are informed about this and understand the agency’s high-level commitment. In addition,

I ask that you promote this work with your peers in other agencies. Your actions can lay important groundwork so that when I contact my peers in these agencies about participating, they are more likely to get the necessary buy-in from their leadership. I am available to discuss these requests in more detail.

## Tips for Handling Resistance

Doubt. Caution. Resistance. Reluctance. A network organizer is likely to encounter one of these forms of hesitation when seeking buy-in for the emergency communication network. When you experience another’s hesitation about joining the network or committing resources, be curious and learn more before making your case.

The following are tips to help you handle the hesitation you observe:

1. Tune in to phrases like “I don’t know . . .”, “I’m not sure . . .”, “We tried that before.” Also watch for body language and facial expressions that convey doubt, concern, or questioning.
2. Check out your observation. Describe in behavioral terms what you see, hear, or sense. Say “I noticed you paused before answering . . . “ or “It seems like you were searching for words . . . “ “What was going through your mind?”
3. Listen carefully to the speaker’s response. Be prepared to ask another question like “I’m not sure I understood exactly . . . “ or “Can you tell me more about . . .”
4. Categorize the concerns as:
   1. Concern about the **people** involved: Some people have had bad experiences working with others; some are simply strangers; some only know about one another through other people.
   2. Concern about the **process** to be used: Common concerns include who will make decisions about the network; if the network will tell participating agencies what to do; and how disagreements or changes in circumstances will be handled.
   3. Concern about how the **problem** is defined or is being approached: Some individuals and agencies may believe there is no problem; others may think the problem should be addressed differently.
5. Confirm your understanding of what has been said.
6. Be sensitive to timing. Test whether people want to address their concerns immediately or whether they need some time to think.
7. Lay out an action plan to address concerns or arrange for a time to check back in to test how the speaker’s thinking may be changing.
8. Stay in touch no matter what. You sought out this person because she/he is important to the network. If the network moves ahead before the individual makes a commitment, be sure to send invitations, agendas, and meeting summaries as a way of keeping the individual informed. Check in with him/her by phone periodically. You will likely learn valuable information and feedback even if the individual does not decide to join the network.