15 Tips for a Successful ACC Network Year

Community

Now that the holidays are behind us and 2022 has arrived, many of us engaged with ACC Network leadership have turned our attention to our network goals and activities.

For many leaders, you will have assumed your new roles at the 2021 ACC Annual Meeting. You are just getting situated, having overseen a few monthly meetings, and beginning to work with your new leadership team.

The road ahead in 2022 may appear even more daunting if you are operating under the time pressures of a one-year term, in contrast to two-year terms adopted by some networks.

Having just completed our terms as chairs of our respective networks, Women in the House (WITH) and Intellectual Property (IP) (and being involved in others), we wanted to share some tips on starting the new year effectively and accelerating your network's progress toward meeting its goals. No suggestion here is mandatory, but all are worth considering as you lead your network forward this year.

1. Get started early

If you have a one-year term, this is especially true. Even with a two-year term, time goes by fast. If you have plans to work with other networks, chapters, or outside entities, know that they take time to bring to fruition.

It's also never too early to start thinking about your successor. Networks with strong succession plans begin developing their next chair starting with their first leadership role.

Identify one or two significant projects that should be managed by your vice chair. They will have no "minutes" responsibilities having moved on from the secretary role. The more the vice chair builds

relationships working with others, and has specific project responsibility, the better they will be prepared to lead the network as chair in the future.

2. Develop a strategic plan

Similar to your business role, the key to success is developing a plan and executing and measuring against it.

A good starting point is using the Annual Network of the Year Application as a framework for building your network's plan. Report on the achievement of the goals at each network meeting. Hold your leadership team and sponsor accountable for any gaps or required course corrections.

3. Prepare your award applications

Obtain commitments from two or more leaders (e.g., co-chairs of the Annual Award application) to review the award applications at the beginning of the term, understand the relevant criteria for success, and begin collecting evidence of success as the year proceeds.

Submission deadlines are in June, only six months after the start of the new year. Coordinate with the previous network leadership as the yearly award's coverage will extend over two leadership terms.

Don't begin writing the award application one week before the deadline. Have a draft completed three weeks before the deadline and share it with the leadership team for input and amendments. Network leadership submits the award, not several individuals.

4. Make targeted improvements

It is hard to seek Network of the Year and Sponsor of the Year in the same period. Often, it may be best to make a choice on which awards to pursue.

Review the criteria for a successful application, identify opportunities for improvements in your network, and begin steps to implement these improvements well before the application deadlines.

The important point is to make network improvements early. Any ancillary benefits such improvements create with respect to a later network application are a pleasant surprise and welcome.

5. Establish a committee of "doers"

Don't try to do too much yourself; more success will come when you delegate. Your leadership pool will be strengthened when projects and workloads are distributed broadly.

Identify co-chairs and establish a committee of "doers" to make improvements to the network. For example, you may need to revise your governance documents or your member survey.

6. Determine what leadership positions make sense for your network

The membership of each network provides a broad and diverse array of skills and experience among the network members from which to draw your leadership pool. Develop a network structure that

capitalizes upon your network members and their strengths.

For example, the IP Network divided responsibility for publications, rather than simply having one person overseeing all publications. We assigned leaders for ACC Guides, Quick Counsels, and the *ACC Docket*.

By assigning targeted responsibilities, the network allows each leader to focus on their specific tasks. Recognizing that many leaders have limited volunteer time, they may prefer to be responsible for one project and to complete it well and on time. Moreover, your sponsor will likely assign specific attorneys to be responsible for specific publications, so there are opportunities to align processes.

7. Use the buddy system

If possible, assign at least two leaders to a specific responsibility.

Ideally, one will have handled the responsibility previously, and the other may be less experienced. This way, one trains the other simply through their interaction, and if one of them moves to a new role or leaves the network, the network has a built-in succession plan.

8. Engage with your network members

A key tool to engage with your network members is through a survey. Take steps and provide incentives to secure a high percentage of members responding. Consider using targeted short surveys to collect specific information ("Are our Legal Quick Hits meeting member needs?") as opposed to one annual, broad-based survey. The availability of free, online survey tools makes multiple surveys more practical.

There are various ways to communicate the survey results, including the network leadership calls, the network newsletter, the lister, ACC Forums, and at each of the events recommended in the survey.

The Real Estate Network under Erik Valderhaug created a template newsletter that has been used to efficiently engage on a regular basis with its membership. Consider spotlighting network members or summaries of recent Legal Updates in the newsletter

Use the survey results at term inception to develop programming responsive to member interests. Be responsive to member feedback and communicate that you have incorporated their suggestions into programming or other network activities. Consider recognizing members who provide valuable feedback that is incorporated into future plans.

9. Create global and diverse programming

The network program topics should consider the global ACC membership. Presenters and program presentation times should reflect the global reach of ACC.

For example, the WITH Network, as part of its International Women's Day Celebration coordinated programs in various regions, involving chapters in APAC, Africa, and the Middle East. Toward this end, the current IP Network chair has established an international member council to coordinate international programming. Legal Quick Hits will be offered at a time convenient to international

members, with opportunities to tailor such programming to more directly address issues germane to our IP global constituency.

Consistent with ACC's core operating value to "Promote diversity and inclusiveness within ACC and the in-house community as a whole," networks should reflect diversity in their membership, programming, and presenters.

To achieve this, networks can set goals against which they can measure their progress. For example, the WITH network strives for its monthly Legal Quick Hit to be presented by a diverse set of speakers. Similarly, the IP Network last term endeavored to have diverse presenters, including from its sponsor, and actively sought diverse candidates to assume network leadership positions.

10. Identify and collaborate with other chapters and networks

When partnering with a chapter, you may find efficiencies in reaching out to one that operates in a state/city where your sponsor has an office and where it also has a sponsor relationship with the chapter. If the firm can cater to its chapter and its network with one collaborative event, it will be more valuable to your sponsor and more likely to be of interest to the chapter you approach.

When partnering with a network, choose those with whom there is a natural linkage.

For example, the ACC IP Network organized a Legal Quick Hit on name, image, and likeness in college sports, which is also relevant to the ACC Sports and Entertainment Network, so the two collaborated. This happened again when the Sports and Entertainment Network scheduled a Legal Quick Hit on influencer marketing and invited the IP Network to join, turning it into a win-win situation.

In another instance, the ACC WITH Network presented a board governance Legal Quick Hit and the IP Network joined. Members in both networks provide support for corporate governance as well as IP, so the crossover interest for this program was strong.

Another very successful collaboration was between the Real Estate Network and the Financial Services Network that co-sponsored with multiple chapters on Meet The Regulators Roundtables.

Collaboration among networks and chapters is a fantastic way to bring visibility to the network and increase membership. Even this article is an example of network collaboration leading to new projects.

11. Promote your successes on social media

Successful networks, like many companies, incorporate a social media plan into their communication strategy.

For example, the IP Network adopted Twitter this year in addition to LinkedIn. These social media platforms are a great way to communicate to the world outside of ACC.

The network should consider assigning at least one network member to coordinate its social media presence. Ideally, your network could field a team for social media with each team member creating content on a given day each week.

The WITH Network social media co-chairs, Jennifer Spooner and Allison Malin created template social media posts for network events, monthly legal updates, and announcements. The templates are an effortless way for all network members to participate in campaigns by cross-promoting on various platforms in an efficient and coordinated manner.

Using a team approach or templates provides a platform for your network that could generate a steady stream of content without too much burden on individual team members. This “team” social media approach is a great idea if you have sufficient leadership depth.

12. Develop strong co-beneficial sponsor relationship

Schedule periodic calls (e.g., quarterly) with your sponsor and sketch out a calendar showing when certain programming and content should be developed. It’s much easier to identify when projects are off track if you have set milestone dates for the development and completion of tasks.

Also discuss ways to enrich your sponsor’s exposure and ACC sponsorship value. Remember, the sponsor-network relationship is two-way and works best when both see the clear value of continued participation.

Consider asking your sponsor to provide registration capabilities and complimentary CLE credit to network members for at least one virtual program during the year. If you offer CLE, attendees will come.

Communicate with the sponsor managing or relationship partner and thank them for the sponsorship. Add a strategic goal where each network leader schedules one Zoom call with the sponsor attorneys or team. Encourage network leaders to take the time to recognize the contributions of the sponsoring attorneys at meetings with network members or in one-on-one communications with the contributing attorney.

13. Communicate consistently with your sponsor

In collaboration with your sponsor, determine the best means for communication for developing plans and making decisions. Many networks have found that identifying one primary sponsor contact to facilitate communication is a best practice.

Having one sponsor contact provides consistency and efficiency in tracking down firm resources and having any difficult conversations with sponsor attorneys when deadlines are not met. The network sponsor contact will have a holistic view of all the workflows between the firm and your network, which will produce more realistic solutions to identified bottlenecks. This construct minimizes network leader time tracking down firm personnel and will be more effective.

14. Develop a network calendar

Work with ACC to develop a network calendar for leaders and members. It will be easier to communicate with members and keep projects on track when one can view upcoming deadlines and events for the month on a calendar.

Add significant ACC dates to your work calendar so they show up as reminders (e.g., date when Legal Quick Hit topic for the month is due). Ideally, ACC will send leaders important calendar

reminders to complement your own calendaring system.

Schedule periodic (weekly) Zoom calls with your ACC liaison to keep abreast of deadlines and to maintain communication. Include your vice chair where available. Maintain the schedule and keep the calls short (15-30 minutes).

15. Hold monthly leadership calls

Hold monthly leadership calls before the monthly membership meeting. Zoom calls are good vehicles to receive updates on project statuses and to avoid having such operational conversations in front of the full membership, whose preferences are likely programming.

The IP Network keeps its leadership calls to 30 minutes monthly. We've learned over time that members want substantive content so if you can move project management to leadership calls, and keep substantive content for the all-member calls, that's optimal.

A key to efficient calls is distributing an agenda ahead of time and setting the expectation that the leaders should submit written reports before the call. To keep the momentum going, the WITH network identifies specific action items at each of its business meetings.

As chairs, we have found it easier to write our own agendas for both the leadership meeting and the monthly meeting. Also, if your agendas are detailed enough, it makes it easier for the secretary to complete the minutes thoroughly and promptly. This minimizes time as chair making corrections.

We both wish you all a successful start to the new year and trust that these suggestions may aid you in your network journey. Please feel free to reach out to us to continue the conversation.

Join one, or more, of ACC's 21 practice area networks

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Dawn Haghighi is the general counsel, privacy, and compliance officer for the Murcor Real Estate family of companies. She serves on the board of directors and chairs the risk committee for Elevate Services, a global law company. Her career encompasses senior legal positions at global institutions including Princess Cruises, Charter One Bank, NA (RBS), Fireman's Fund/Allianz Group, and Nordstrom. Haghighi is a frequent lecturer before corporate boards, foundations, and professional organizations. As a graduate of the TED Talks ACC Masterclass, she recently delivered her first Ted Talk: Say Hello To Your Better Self Going From The Ordinary To The Extraordinary.

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Casey Mangan is senior program attorney for The Sedona Conference. He previously served as corporate counsel for Allstate Insurance Company. Mangan has been active in the Intellectual Property Network for many years. He concluded his two-year term as chair in October 2021. The IP Network was awarded the 2021 ACC Large Network of the Year.