

## **Networks, Insurance and LVI membership**

Networks have a wide variety of structures but in order to be fair and consistent for the purposes of membership all member types whether groups, individuals, committee or staff count as members.

So in the case of a network with independent local groups the membership component of the LVI fee is multiplied by the number of local groups plus number of committee members plus staff. The membership list should include the network's sub-groups themselves (not including subgroup members), committee members and staff.

In the case of a network with fully merged sub-groups then the LVI membership fee is multiplied by the total number of members across all the sub-groups, plus committee members, staff and where applicable, members of the network direct.

Where local groups belonging to a network are still independent, they will need to be separately insured whether through LVI or someone else as they remain a separate target in the event of a claim.

## **Networks ain't Networks: full merger vs local group independence**

With networks, the two ends of the scale are a) where the local groups are fully merged and b) where the local groups are independent or semi-independent: independence is indicated by separate decision-making processes, committees, members, bank accounts, AGMs, Rules / Constitution or ABN.

Local groups in a network, particularly where they are fully merged, may be called sub-groups, branches, or local area committees.

It is really about the degree of local independence. It seems to take a more sophisticated approach to maintain local connectivity in a fully merged network, as all the energy and resources go to the network, causing people to disengage at the local level. That said, some fully merged networks manage these tensions well and maintain vibrant local sub-groups - but it is something to consider and manage when moving to a fully merged structure.

Some networks mix the two structures, having some fully merged groups and some independent local groups, depending on local needs and preferences.

Independent local groups will largely be responsible for themselves, but Networks need to decide on what basis they are eligible to be members of Networks. Usually this would include being in alignment with network's vision and purposes and being in good standing: i.e. being financial if Networks has fees for these groups, being solvent (i.e. able to pay its debts), having appropriate insurances, and acting in such a way that their membership does not bring Network into disrepute.

Fully merged sub-groups are directly part of the network and as such, the Network's responsibility towards them is the same as to itself. Simply put, to act in the best interests of members for the agreed purposes of the network, to be solvent and to have effective governance to achieve those purposes.

The structure of the fully merged sub-groups is up to Networks to a large degree – they can be formal sub-committees / local area working groups of the network with committees appointed by the network or with sub-elections conducted by the network (in which case the network needs to decide who can vote in the sub-elections). Or they can be informal groupings of people who live in a particular area or work on a particular project run by the network.

Any fees would be paid by members to the Network (not the sub-group as that would mean the sub-group would have its own funds and therefore be independent). Member fees should be set as funding measure for the network to cover, at least partially, its operating costs.

For independent local groups, there should be some recognition of the affiliation on both sides, whether agreement or application. Just because a local group is in the network area it doesn't automatically mean they are a member of the network. It is good practice to formally accept / ratify all members of the network in some way. Networks may choose to set fees for the affiliate groups, once again to fund its own operations.