

Network Training Course - Unit 2: Identity

Key Scriptures

Refer to Network Development Reflections P 22 –33 (Day 5-9)

Commonality: What Brings us Together: Acts 2:40-47

Preserving Identity: Who and Whose: Genesis 37:12-36; Genesis 45:7-8

Registration: Why it Matters: Malachi 3:16-18; 3 John 1:11-12

Individuality: What's in it for Me? Psalm 33:1-22

Boundaries: The Power of Focus Matthew 13:44-52

Main Themes

Having a strong identity means that:

- Network members know why they are committing to the network, what they are working towards and how their efforts are contributing to a bigger purpose
- The network activities are relevant and have a positive impact on children and churches
- Onlookers understand what the network is doing, see the value of the network brings and want to support the network

In this section, we will look at how the network can create a **strong identity**. We will cover the following four areas:

- **Mapping:** Discovering those who are working with children and the needs of children
- **Defining the vision and purpose** of the network
- **Building strong relationships** with Viva and other partner networks
- **Communicating Effectively**

2.1 Mapping: Knowing the situation and needs of children, those that are responding and the types of responses.

A network can be implementing and supporting many different activities but to be credible it needs to be concentrating its work in accordance with research and analysis. To understand the situation of children, their needs, the current responses from different groups, what is working and what is not, the gaps and the opportunities. This can all be done through a situational mapping exercise.

The *Viva Situational Mapping Handbook* provides details of how you can undertake a mapping exercise in your network locality. There is also a template for a shorter version or update too.

Steps in a situational mapping exercise

1. Define the Networks Geographical Boundaries

Decide whether your network covers a number of streets, a district or the whole city. Once you know the area that you are covering, you will be able to measure the change that takes place in that area, as a result of network activities.

2. Map churches and organisations working with children in the network boundary

Find out which organisations and churches are working with children and what their focus is.

3. Map the needs of children

Understand the context and needs of children in the network location through desk research and gathering information from reports written by other agencies, authorities, and local communities, key views of informants and children themselves.

4. Produce a Situational Mapping Report

Data collected from mapping or surveying churches and organisations together with the needs of children can be analysed to produce a situational mapping report. This gives an assessment of children's needs, gaps in care and recommendations for where the network could focus to work collaboratively on a priority issue facing children in the network boundary.

5. Use your findings to create a directory of services for children and or a database of existing and potential network participants.

This resource can be used to identify who is best placed to respond to the needs of a child. It can help those working on similar issues to work together.

Creating a directory and a situational mapping report helps the network develop a strong identity with NGO's, authorities and the general public, as a key player in the provision of services for children.

2.3 Defining the Vision and Purpose of the network

Christians are particularly 'vision-led'. If we agree and believe the vision, then we will commit and serve it through all sorts of obstacles. Part of creating a strong network identity requires network members to be inspired to work together by defining a common vision and purpose, while held together by shared values.

Follow these headings or use Viva's template that will assist you in writing down your Vision, Mission and distinctives.

Most networks that we work with have a vision to improve the situation of vulnerable children in their location and their values are based on a desire to serve God and to work in unity for the benefit of these children. Often these can be quite general in order to be inclusive but that should not excuse a lack of thought and consideration.

From Unit 1 we studied some of the foundational principles on which Viva is based. We would recommend that you convert the principles that you think are the most important to you and motivate you. As well as liking vision we are also highly moved by passion.

Develop a new or updated **Network Vision Statement** - a description of a desirable future situation for the network and children within the area based on your foundational principles and your passion. This task is not easy as everyone thinks something different and often any compromise loses the edge, but please do persevere as it is really important that we gain consensus particularly amongst the network leadership and ideally key leaders in the network. The final statement may take a while to solve but the final version needs to attract members to join, and to communicate to the outside world the essence of what you want to achieve and why they should support you.

Network Values are things that network members hold dear, including beliefs attitudes and principles. The foundational principle and 'heart' statement may be sufficient but here you can define additional values that describe how you want people to behave and how network members will work together

The following prompts could be used to help network to articulate their values

- This network seeks to...
- This network is...
- This network believes...

A Network Mission Statement is a declaration of the networks purpose and focus. Some people are keen on having separate vision and mission statements, while others feel they can be combined. We

are not prescriptive as long as you can demonstrate clarity on the following points either in headline statements or in a series of subpoints:

<p>Your mission statement should potentially say</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who you are • Who or what you support • What you do • Why you do it • How you do it 	<p>The mission statement may include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target group (children) • The problem the network is addressing or the change it wants to see for children • The values of the network • The services the network offers • The network's future focus
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Network Distinctives: This is something Viva is more keen to see considered and articulated. It is a summary of what makes the network **unique** and what the network can **add** to the good work happening in the network location for vulnerable children.

Think of it a different way – why should someone invest in your network rather than a large active agency (maybe World Vision) in your city – what advantages does the network have. Similarly what are the advantages of working collectively rather than separately.

Having clear answers, preferably written down, is an essential part of selling the networks story and vision to bot potential members and potential supporters

Having a clearly defined vision statement, mission statement, values and distinctives makes it clear why the network exists and who it exists for. These components make up the ‘identity’ of the network.

2.4 Building Strong Relationships (Viva and other partner networks)

As a network, you will have a unique and supportive relationship with Viva. This strong relationship helps the network to grow and develop a strong identity.

Tools used in this section:
Partnership Agreement
Network Health Check

Each network is assigned a Viva Network Consultant or Facilitator who works closely with the Network Co-ordinator and steering groups to help plan, implement and fund network programmes. This is achieved through mentoring and coaching.

A Viva network Consultant brings

Tools: Tried and tested tools to build a network that tackles the root causes of problems affecting children.

Training: Network development training for network leadership

Coaching: supporting encouraging and inspiring as a personal trainer and cheerleader

Quality: ensuring quality of programmes, assurance on financial and governance standards

Global Picture: Connections with other networks regionally and globally building a global response to the needs of children

The Consultant does not take responsibility for the management of the network. This is the role of the network co-ordinator, the steering group and network members. Instead the Network Consultant brings experience of network development and a range of tools to help the network improve sustainability, impact and effectiveness.

The relationship between a network and its consultant should be based on trust and openness, with good communication that leads to the beneficial sharing of ideas. As the network develops, this relationship becomes more critical as skills are required to help the network increase its capacity to raise funds, gain membership commitment and connect with external actors. Sometimes Viva supports

the network in detailed programme manage where they have been responsible for securing external funding.

Partnership Agreement

To ensure that everyone is clear on the nature of the relationship each network must sign a **partnership agreement** with Viva. This defines the commitments of both parties. Initially this follows a standard agreement format but at later stages the partnership will be mutually developed and tailored. In addition separate agreements will be produced to cover each funding transaction between Viva and the networks.

Network Health Check (NHC)

As part of the agreement, each year the network completes the **Network Health Check (NHC)** so that the network can track areas of success and improvement. The NHC also enables networks to gather in one place a record of all their achievements over the year. The network is encouraged to think about how it can use the findings to grow and develop, promote the network and increase its support.

Network Consultancy schedule

The Network Consultant works with the Network Co-ordinator through regular online and face-to-face meetings, to analyse the Network Health Check results. Together they produce an **annual consultancy schedule** for how Viva can best support the network to achieve its goals. The consultancy schedule defines targets for the year, fundraising needs and network strategy to achieve them along with target dates for completion.

Annual Regional Network Gatherings

To facilitate shared learning across regions, Viva, when possible, organises annual regional network gatherings. These are a great opportunity to help networks to connect across countries and regions, to share experiences, support and envision each other. We encourage you to attend these meetings to learn and share and benefit others

2.5 Communicating Effectively

Clear communications can strengthen the network's identity by building network engagement, increasing external support for the network and encouraging new churches and organisations to join the network.

Internal communication. For a network to achieve a strong corporate identity, everyone must feel valued and have a relevant contribution with a clear understanding of their role. For this to happen networks must communicate effectively to ensure that their members feel engaged. All network members need to know and buy into the vision, mission and values of the network and be able to celebrate in its achievements.

Internal communication can take place through meetings, events, written communications, emails, phone calls, visits, newsletters or annual reports

External Communication: At the same time, supporters and external actors should be informed of network achievements. It is a good idea to communicate achievements through stories as well as factual data. It is essential that the sites where this information is stored can be easily found on search engines using the obvious search names and not on hidden or obscurely named locations.

Any interested party will automatically look up the public face of the network and check out what it says about itself – if they cannot find the network they will assume that it is not significant or credible enough to pursue.

Similarly if they do find the site and the information is old or does not correspond with what they have heard or with the request that they have received then again the network will be marked down in terms of reliability and credibility.

Information and achievements must be easily found and be up to date.

External communication can take place through meetings, events, websites, reports and newsletters and a variety of social media.

Communications Plan: Clear and effective communication requires appropriate timing of the release of information and consideration of what methods you will use to communicate your message. These considerations do not just happen by chance they take concerted planning and commitment to deliver them. This process is accelerated best by a more structured review and consideration of the leadership team or subcommittee, resulting in a written communications plan. The network should develop one communications plan with a potentially different approach to communicating with network members and another communicating with external supporters.

Refer to Viva’s Communications Plan template

To reach Viva’s Benchmark you should have the following in place

Identity and the Viability and Sustainability Benchmark

Benchmark Criteria 1: Understand child needs and current response

- Situational mapping report produced and/or updated in the last 5 years

Benchmark Criteria 2: Clear Purpose and vision

- Vision and/or mission statement

Benchmark Criteria 4: Strong relationship with Viva and other partner networks

- Signed partnership agreement with Viva
- Yearly plan for consultancy from Viva to the network
- Attendance at Viva annual regional gatherings
- Network development training and/or taking part in the Network Training Course

Benchmark Criteria 10: Active Fundraising

- Communications plan

Reflective Questions

1. Describe the journey that your network has taken to establish its core identity? Do you think that it is as clear as it could be? What would help network members be clearer on the network’s identity?
2. What difference do you think it makes if you can articulate your ‘heart’ and ‘passion’ for the network? How can you help others to do the same?
3. How can the relationship with Viva help you to develop and grow the network? Can you think of any specific examples?
4. How could you improve your communications with network members and those outside the network?

Action Plan

- What actions do you need to put into place as a result of this unit, particularly to achieve the required benchmark criteria?