



# Advocacy Toolkit for Women in Politics

## 5 Networking Tools – Strength in numbers

“The value of networks is the diversity of people you can reach and connect with.”

**N**etworks are increasingly important at every level in today’s society. Being connected to others is how word gets out about you (referrals), how you find out about and meet people who share similar values, aims or objectives and how you share information or collaborate by pooling human and other resources.

Networking has long been used in the business sector where it is considered one of the most cost effective ways of generating business compared to advertising or public relations. It depends more on personal commitment than money. It is about building strength in numbers and getting to know people who can help you personally and professionally.

For women in the political arena, where being known and getting your voice heard counts towards votes and influence in decision making, networking is critical. By networking you increase the opportunities to make your advocacy campaign message heard more widely and be echoed and supported by others.

### Useful social online networks

<http://www.iknowpolitics.org>

<http://www.facebook.com>

<http://www.linkedin.com>

<http://www.twitter.com>

### Personal one on one networks

Personal networks usually develop where people share common interests or goals or as a result of knowing the same people. This includes networks of family and friends. Each one of us already has a personal network – like a small community – people we can call upon personally and professionally and who can call on us.

But networks have to be worked on. As a politician you need to cultivate a wide network of people with different specialist skills and knowledge. We come across such people in our day to day lives and sometimes in unexpected places. Don’t miss the opportunity to get to know them. If you are introduced to someone interesting or meet someone on your travels, ask for their business card or contact details. Give them yours and ask if you can contact them to further discuss your area of common interest. Follow up with an email or phone call to let them know you would like to keep in touch. Keep a file of your contacts with a little note to yourself so you remember what their specific skill, profession or area of interest is. You can refer back to it later when you need information or assistance in your advocacy work.

Within your personal network there are certain types of people you should have who are most critical to your success. These include:

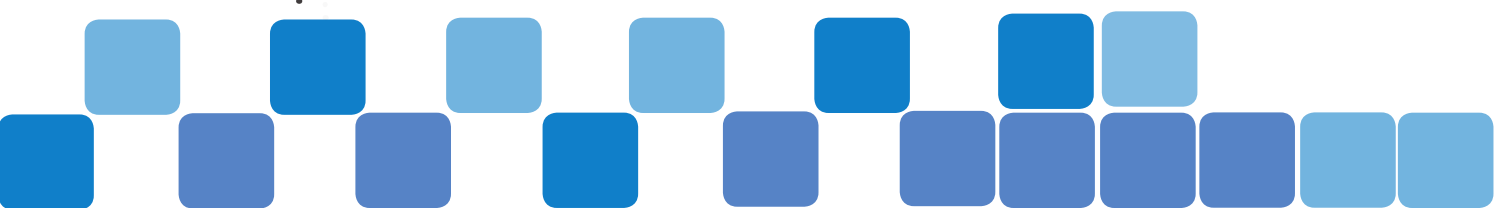
**A Mentor** – someone who has reached the level of success you aspire to. A mentor does not have to be someone in your chosen field of work. Learn from their success and their failures and seek their wisdom and knowledge. You may already have such a person in your life who you have known for a long time. But unless you recognise them as a mentor you will not be able to make the best use of them by seeking their guidance regularly.

**A Coach** – this is someone who comes into your life at different times to help you with critical decisions and changes and who offers an objective viewpoint.

**An Industry Insider** is someone in your chosen field, in this case politics. This person will have expert-level information or access to it and can keep you informed of what’s happening now and in the future. Use them to sound out your ideas and they will let you know how well the idea fits within the current political environment.

**The Connector** is someone who has access to influential people, resources or information. As soon as they come across something related to you, they will contact you. Connectors find unique ways to make connections, get resources and opportunities that most people would otherwise not recognise.

**The Visionary** is someone who



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- inspires you to achieve your goal.
- One personal encounter with a visionary can powerfully change the direction of your thinking and life.

- **The Mentee** is someone you can mentor by guiding and helping to shape them based on your own experiences. Having someone to mentor helps you to get through your own obstacles and challenges because you know that someone is watching and learning how you do it.

- With the exception of the Industry Insider, these key people can be from any sector or community and not necessarily involved in your line of work. They may be religious or business leaders, village elders, humble women and men who are inspired to help others or anyone at all who you connect with.

- **Professional and special interest networks**

- These are groupings of people around a professional area or special interest that are already established or which you and others could establish. An example would be a network of women in politics that would bring together seasoned and aspiring women politicians.

- Professional networks are aimed at building strength in numbers. It is a way of bringing together people whose paths would not otherwise cross at a social level but who work in the same sector or have the same special interests. An example of a common professional network would be a businesswoman’s network. By coming together regularly, members of such a network are able to share and learn from each other’s successes and failures, connect for business transactions and referrals to other businesspersons and networks.

- There are many networks dedicated to a special subject of interest, ranging from environmental protection, arts and culture, volunteerism to hobbies

and many more. The great thing about special interest networks is that the membership is so diverse. One special interest network can have a membership that includes industry leaders, students, media workers, politicians, religious leaders and development workers, amongst many others from the cross sector of society. An example is Rotary Club, which is about volunteerism and service to the community. Having access to such a wide range of contacts is invaluable professionally and the work such networks do is highly regarded locally and internationally. Because networks like Rotary are huge and international in scope, your membership will open you up to other people globally who you may not otherwise have a point of connection with.

Membership to professional or special interest networks is something you should mention in your Profile as it highlights your commitment to leadership and public service as well as illustrating your personal brand.

The value of networks is the diversity of people you can reach and connect with. As such, don’t limit yourself only to your profession. You are a politician but you may also be a businesswoman or a church member and there is much to be gained and to contribute in terms of ideas, perspectives, resources, knowledge and information by connecting with others.

**Social on-line networks**

Social on-line networks offer the benefits of diversity because the Internet gives individuals from all around the world access to social networking sites. This means that although you are in Mozambique or Swaziland, for example, you could develop an online friendship with someone in Denmark or India. Not only will you make new friends, but also you just might learn from how they do things. One of the best special interest social networking websites available is International Knowledge

Network of Women in Politics. IKNOW Politics is an interactive network of women in politics from around the world who share experiences, access resources and advisory services, and network and collaborate on issues of interest. <http://www.iknowpolitics.org/>

While there are a many social networking websites that focus on particular interests, others do not. Usually, anyone can join these networks. Once you are inside this online community, you can begin to create your own network of professionals or friends.

Among the most useful networking websites are LinkedIn, a professional networking website, and Facebook, an open social website that also allows you to develop your own special interest or professional network once you have joined.

Facebook can be a helpful tool in your advocacy work as it allows you to post new information, photos or links on your advocacy area, regularly update members of your network on new developments in your advocacy campaign and receive comments and input from your online network.

Twitter allows you to post and receive regular updates, comments and very brief information (such as links to a news report) in short message service (sms) format known as “tweets” to your network. It is especially valuable in this modern age where busy people want to receive and send information quickly and in brief. It is especially popular because it is accessible on many of the modern mobile phones so many more people can access Twitter instantly.

As with any other kind of networking, there are dangers of online networking. As long as you are cautious to not give out too much personal information and are aware of who you are talking to, you should be able to safely enjoy social networking online.