

# Scottish Communities Climate Action Network

## How We Work + Purposes for Circles v5, December 2022

**Our Purpose:** To support community-led action in Scotland to address the climate and nature emergency and work for a just, thriving and resilient Scotland.

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## Introduction

Early on in the development of SCCAN, we agreed that finding different, more creative ways of working together, which actively encourage diverse perspectives and good deliberation, review, reflection and feedback was a key part of the transformation we are working for. To this end, we are experimenting with **Sociocracy** as an approach to use for meeting processes and in creating a decentralised structure that disperses power and gives autonomy to those implementing different aspects of our work. We see this as a key part of the transformation that we are working for. See also [SCCAN's Values statement](#)

We are happy to acknowledge that we are still experimenting and making mistakes and part of what we are trying to do is to ensure that we create space for honest feedback as we try to find better ways of working together.

We have organised the work that we do into sociocratic '[circles](#)' or working groups, which take care of specific aspects of achieving our [overall purpose](#). Each circle has its own agreed **aim** (as a key component of achieving our overall purpose) and the autonomy to make decisions in their defined area (**domain**), without reference to the General Circle (or other parent circle) first provided it does not also conflict/overlap with the purpose/domain of another circle and is in line with sccan's values. Within each circle, every member has an equal right to consent or object to proposals and to take part in role selections.

All of the circles are connected by the **General Circle**, whose role is to provide overall coordination, a forum for communication between each of the working circles and to take any decisions not mandated to the working circles themselves.

For SCCAN to work effectively, it is important that all members of all circles are as familiar with sociocratic meeting practices as possible. As a minimum, we strongly recommend that all circle members attend some basic [sociocracy training](#) and encourage everyone to also sign up to [Effective Collaboration Training](#).

## Some Basic Principles

### ***Decentralised Authority***

Our sociocratic structure is intended to spread responsibility and share leadership. We do this by trying to ensure that each circle has clarity about its **aim** (a description of what it is trying to achieve), and **domain** (a statement of what they are responsible for and have authority over).

Domains are held collectively as a circle for making [policy decisions](#). Smaller parts of a circle's domain may also be given to one person in an operational role. That way, the circle has time to think about the wider perspectives and how everything in their domain fits together, whilst individual members in roles hold the small pieces safely. Who is

responsible for delivering individual tasks within each circle's domain is defined by the circle's work-plan which is a living document that should be regularly reviewed and updated at circle meetings.

The General Circle decides who decides -giving authority and responsibility to our working circles. The General Circle makes sure that everything aligns and fits well and picks up any decisions that don't (yet) have a place within the domain of one of the working circles.

With General Circle approval, any working circle can decide that their domain has become too big, with too many details to attend to, and may choose to pass a part of their domain onto a sub-circle of theirs which they create. That sub-circle then becomes the decision maker on that part of the parent circle's original domain.

## ***Double Linking***

Each working circle has a **Lead Link** and a **Delegate** - which double link to the parent circle. These process roles ensure that the needs of each circle, and the wider needs of SCCAN are always being kept in mind: the lead link represents the parent circle on the sub-circle and the delegate represents their circle on its parent circle. They each contribute to decisions in both circles. Through having two people's perspectives, double linking seeks to ensure flow of information, understanding and transparency in both directions. It also makes sure there is no "power-over" because two individuals as members of both the parent and sub-circle have consent rights in each circle.

## ***Process Roles required for each circle***

There are four main process roles needed to make Sociocracy work well. These are:

1. **Lead Link** – the person who holds the overview of the circle's aim, ensures that the work of the circle is being done and reports on decisions taken by the General Circle. The Lead Link also supports their circle to use sociocratic processes and ensures that new circle members are inducted, assigned a buddy and invited to the relevant SLACK channel and shared folder in GoogleDrive.
2. **Delegate** – the person who reports up to the next level (usually the General Circle).
3. **Facilitator** – the person who supports the group processes during circle meetings, ensuring equivalence of voice (eg. by using [rounds](#)). They may reflect back what someone has said in order to make sure it is fully understood. Having a facilitator means the group can relax into the process for calmer, more focused meetings. The facilitator also prepares the draft agenda in conjunction with the Lead Link.
4. **Secretary** – the record keeper who takes notes of actions and proposals (including review periods) that have been consented and ensures the circle logbooks, including a list of current actions, are kept up-to-date and sends out meeting links.

These roles are all crucial to the smooth working of each circle and we recommend that each circle should [select](#) one of their members into each of these roles for a period of time. We also strongly recommend that a **Timekeeper** and a **Heartkeeper** should be agreed for

each meeting. The Timekeeper ensures that the group allows sufficient time to cover the most important agenda items whilst the Heartkeeper keeps an eye on the group's energy level or tensions that are arising and can offer ideas such as energizers, guided meditations, a stretch or break and so on. and ensures things don't get heated.

General Circle has agreed the policy (for review in Nov.'23) that any non-staff member who is selected to a circle role should be able to claim payment for their time (Half-day for facilitator, time spent attending meetings for other roles) at the current freelancer rate (£32.14/hr).

### ***Selection Process for Role-holders***

Before selecting someone for any role, the circle first creates a role description, which includes the responsibilities, the qualities needed and a term of office. Nomination occurs in two rounds.

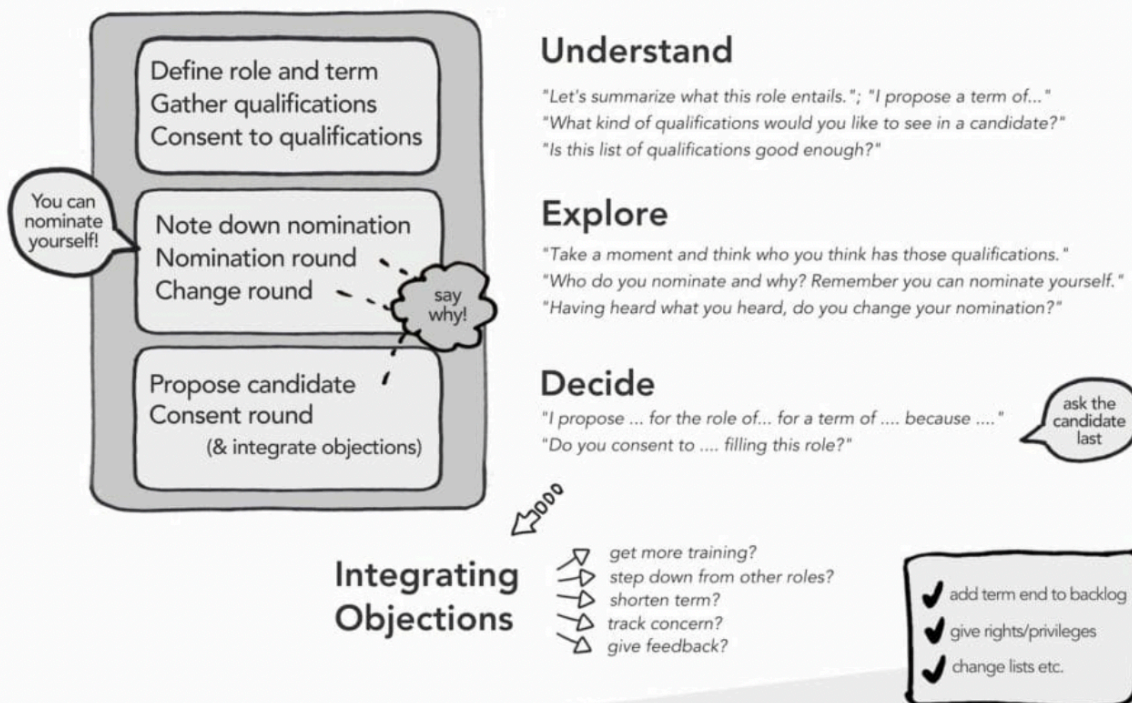
Each person reflects on who might best fill a role, and why, and writes that name down. Anyone is welcome to nominate themselves if they wish. We then go around, each member saying who they have nominated and the reason why they will best fill that role. The person facilitating writes these nominated names down in one column beside each participant's name.

After the first round there is an opportunity for anyone nominated to indicate any limitations they might work under. Then in a second round participants either confirm their initial choice or change to another person because of the reasoning they have heard from others. The person facilitating writes these names down in a second column. What happens then is that typically a name emerges who has widespread support for that role.

The facilitator then makes a Proposal and takes a round to check for any objections. If there are objections, then the proposal will be revised until there is consent. This makes sure that people in roles will be accepted by everyone in the group.

If no clear name emerges then, as with any other proposal, there are various ways to get to a viable proposal. See more on [developing proposals here](#).

# Selections ELECTIONS IN SOCIOCRACY



Sociocracy For All



2019

## Feedback

Feedback is prioritised in many ways in Sociocracy: meeting evaluations, role improvement and policy evaluations are some of the examples. Regular 1:1 support meetings and performance reviews for staff, plus buddying for volunteers, are ways that we currently seek to incorporate personal feedback.

Feedback is valuable data: it tells us both what is working well and also what needs adjustment. In challenging and emotionally difficult times, shifting from a frame of criticism to a frame of constructiveness and curiosity means we can learn from each other and from the data we observe or measure. Over time, we can evolve, grow, self-repair and get better at supporting each other ... if we can build trust so as to be able to give and receive feedback.

## Transparency

Sociocracy is not only a way of working together, it helps reduce inequality through transparency. We work openly. Everyone should have access to all relevant information. Salaries and freelance rates are open and transparent. Meeting minutes and budgets are accessible to all members of all circles unless relating to personal / confidential (e.g. HR) information.

## Circle Membership

We depend on members of SCCAN contributing to the running of the network through joining one of our circles. Our circle structure creates many niches for members to get involved in strategic decisions as well as operational tasks, depending on their skills, interests and time available. Circle membership requires a certain level of commitment which needs to be made clear before joining. Circles may recruit new circle members from their personal contacts or from the database of members who have completed this [‘expression of interest’](#) form on our website or by advertising on our social media channels or external platforms, as deemed appropriate. Existing circle members must give their consent to new circle members joining.

## Routine Processes for Meetings

See more on [Sociocratic Meeting Format](#) (from Sociocracy for All)

In Sociocracy, there are two basic frames for decision making:

- Operational Decisions
- Policy Decisions

Operations are tasks performed to deliver on the circle’s purpose, often outside of a meeting and by anyone to whom the circle has given authority to make that decision. Operational decisions are case-by-case decisions, interpreting the purpose and policy and making choices to complete the task.

Policy decisions are made to frame, guide and support operations and are made by the circle for itself, by consent of all circle members.

	Operational Decisions	Policy Decisions
Basis	Current policy	Previous policy; new needs
Made by	Circle members/roles	The Circle, by consent
Scope	Case by case basis	Long-term

Some circles are operations-heavy (e.g. Events) whilst others are policy-heavy (e.g. General Circle).



## ***Record Keeping***

Each Circle must maintain a meeting log, in the circle's folder in SCCAN's shared GoogleDrive, with a record of membership of the Circle, meeting agendas and notes, a current list of outstanding actions, a logbook of consented proposals and review dates plus a link to the Circle's current work-plan. For transparency, this document's sharing settings should make it accessible to all members of all circles (with the exception of confidential e.g. personal HR information, which may require sharing to be restricted).

## ***Checking in at the start of a meeting***

At the start, before any agenda item, everyone in the group "checks in" by briefly saying how they are doing/feeling. "What do I need to say to be fully present in the meeting?" This is so that we can share what is affecting us (tired / distracted / buzzing) so that we can be honest in how we are and can then contribute as best we can and so that, by sharing a bit about ourselves, we get to know each other and can work better together as our 'whole selves'.

## ***Consent to the Agenda***

A week before each meeting, the Facilitator – with input from the Lead Link – should prepare a draft agenda (with estimated timings) and circulate it to circle members for their comment and input. At the start of the meeting, the Facilitator presents the agenda and asks for comments, any other business and the circle's consent to a final meeting agenda.

Because what is and is not being talked about – and decided on – involves power, the Facilitator pays attention to what needs to be talked about; but ultimately, participants decide on the agenda. That way, equivalence and transparency can be supported in making decisions on what is relevant to spend time on and how much time is devoted to each item.

For efficient meetings, it is important to be clear about the category of any particular agenda item:

There are **three distinct categories of agenda items**:

1. [Reports](#)
2. [Explorations](#)
3. [Decisions](#)

## ***Using Rounds to draw people in***

To encourage all voices much of the meeting process is done by going round the participants to hear their contribution. The Facilitator might choose one person in the circle to start – and that person then chooses who to pass to. People don't interrupt or

cross-talk, and each tries to be concise, to not wander from the point in hand and not to repeat what others have already said.

Rounds are simple and yet powerful: everyone gets to speak; and all get a chance to listen. You move gently as a group, like a flock of birds, always knowing where other group members are at. People who feel truly heard do not have to repeat themselves.

### ***Proposals for decision***

Proposals can be brought to a meeting by an individual, a circle or generated in a collaborative way during a meeting using a process called [picture forming](#). This [proposal template](#) (make a copy before completing it) should be used where possible.

Any proposal should start with a clear statement that explains the issues it is trying to resolve: the situation, its effect on SCCAN and SCCAN's needs. Good decisions on proposed actions or policy are based on research, are supported by everyone in the group, incorporate input which responds to objections, cover all the relevant issues, specify a term after which they will be reviewed and a performance indicator for measuring their effectiveness wherever possible.

Collaborative (consent) decisions maximise buy-in, accountability and information sharing. Evaluating such decisions periodically enables members of an organisation to dynamically adjust their policies according to the feedback that they measure and thus ensure they fulfil their purpose. See more on [developing proposals here](#).

### ***Understand, Explore, Decide***

The 'Understand, Explore, Decide' cycle is fundamental to the sociocratic process for any discussion. For example, to collaboratively generate a proposal, every member of the group must first **understand** the context and the issue that needs to be addressed so that they can then collectively **explore** ideas for addressing the issue (and this is where a diverse group who each bring different experience and perspectives can be really helpful) and then go on to synthesise and **decide** an agreed proposal. By separating out these steps, much more focussed, efficient, effective and creative collaboration becomes possible.

### ***Consent process in rounds***

It is crucial to understand that we are not aiming for 'consensus', in which everyone is in full agreement with all decisions. Instead, we are aiming for 'consent' i.e. for decisions that everyone can live with or tolerate, even if they don't align with their personal preference.

The consent process has five parts:

1. Opening presentation by the proposer or by the Facilitator
2. Clarifying questions round (to ensure that everyone fully **understands** the proposal)
3. Reactions round(s) (to **explore** everyone's responses)
4. Objection round to **decide** if the proposal conflicts with the purpose of the circle / SCCAN



5. Consent round to confirm agreement by all for a “good enough for now and safe enough to try” decision.

Each part of the process contributes to equivalence, effectiveness and transparency, which are the guiding principles of Sociocracy. Instead of jumping straight to hearing people’s opinions, we first try to understand the context and what the proposal actually is. In the reactions round (or rounds), we get a sense of where the group is at. Sometimes several rounds will be helpful as people build on what they have heard. It is also the place for small “tuning” improvements that are in line with the proposal. Consent decisions ensure equivalence: a decision is made only when no one has an objection.

### ***Objections to Proposals***

Objections are concerns in response to a proposal. In Sociocracy, objections are seen as gifts to the group which ensure the best possible outcome. As such, and contrary to many groups’ normal practice, objections are actively encouraged.

Objections should be made when: “carrying out this proposal is against the purpose of this circle / SCCAN or would interfere with my being able to do my work”. Assuming everyone wants to work effectively, objections are valuable input. For that reason, we want a way to incorporate that information into the proposal. More on [objections](#).

### ***Range of tolerance***

We generally try to use a test: “Will consent to this Proposal assist the purpose of this Circle / SCCAN – or does it conflict with that purpose?” “[Range of tolerance](#)” is a concept that differentiates between personal preference / what I really want to happen and what I am able to work with. Is this proposal “good enough for now and safe enough to try?”

Too often, we get caught up in personal preferences. To be truly collaborative and effective in our decision-making, we widen our options by not going for everyone’s preference but only for their range of tolerance. That way, we can find common ground more easily and avoid getting stuck.

By agreeing a term after which the decision will be reviewed, circle members can feel safe that any concerns that they have will be revealed by feedback gathered from trying out the proposal in practice.

In the event that a proposal is not consented, the options for achieving consent are:

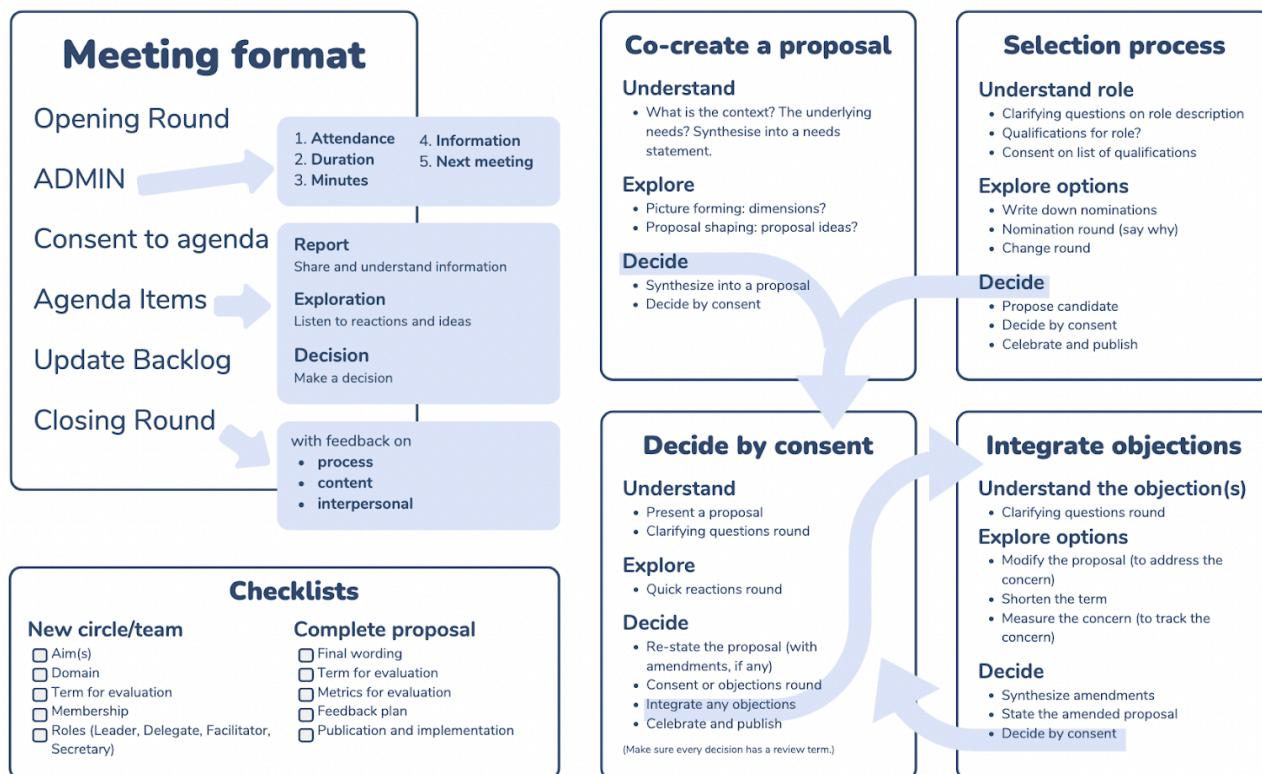
- To shorten the term so that the proposal will be revisited sooner
- To ‘measure the concern’, that is to put in place a way of measuring the actual impact of the proposal in practice (instead of speculating about the risk of what *might* happen)
- To modify the proposal so as to integrate the objection (this may require further work to develop a modified proposal to be brought to a future meeting)

## Meeting evaluation

Meeting evaluations/check-outs or 'reflection rounds' are a simple process: at the end of every meeting, we evaluate how the meeting went. "What went well and what could have been better?"

Too many organisations are stuck in the same ways. Establishing simple, small feedback loops ("how are our meetings working for us?") should increase each circle's effectiveness over time.

## Meeting Facilitation and Decision Making Sheet



## Internal Communications

We currently use **SLACK** for most internal communications. It is important that all circle members are invited to the relevant circle channel within SCCAN's [Slack Workspace](#) by the circle Lead Link. Any circle member may also access any other circle's channel (see [transparency](#)). Please note that our free version of SLACK only gives access to the past 90 days of messages/up to 10,000 messages for private messaging. All files should therefore be created/stored in our Google Workspace and not from within SLACK.

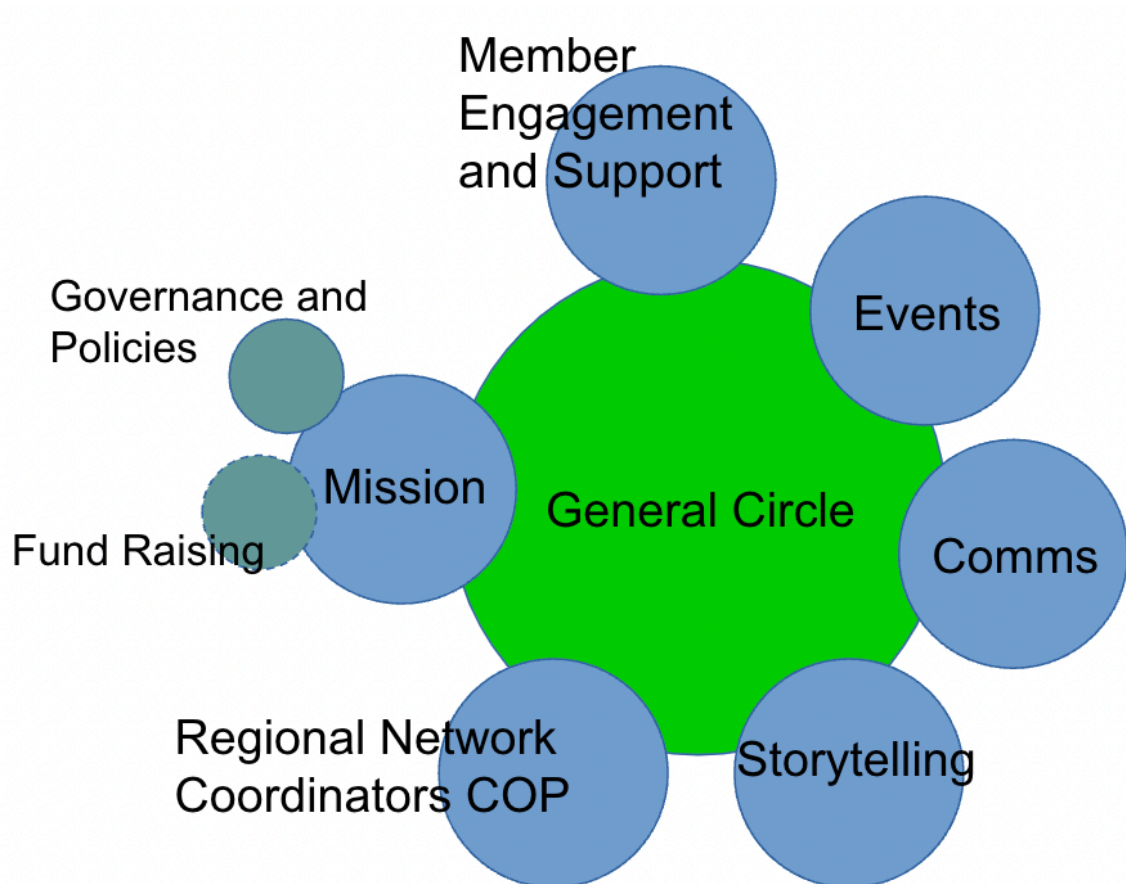
Our **Google Workspace** is where all shared files are stored. Each Circle has a folder within our main SCCAN Shared Drive and all circle members should be given access to this folder by their Lead Link or Secretary. Staff should create work documents from within Google Workspace and file them in their 'My Drive' or in one of the shared drives, as appropriate.

We have two GoogleGroups, one for all circle members (incl. staff) and one for staff. These groups are used sparingly for any messages that are relevant to all. Circle Lead Links should ensure that Laura is informed as membership of their circle changes.

### 3D Framework

In collaboration with the Transition Together project we are working towards using the [3D Framework](#) for strategic planning and for monitoring and evaluation of SCCAN's work. This well researched framework is intended to support the development of networks that have transformative social impact. The framework considers how we can widen our impact and influence, deepen and embed the changes we are working towards and ensure that these changes persist in the longer term.

### Current Circles



### Mission Circle

**Aim:** *To serve as the board for SCCAN Community Interest Company (ensuring good governance and efficient administration of the legal entity that enables SCCAN to function) whilst planning, overseeing and coordinating external collaborations and partnerships and ensuring ongoing reflection and scrutiny of how well SCCAN is fulfilling its [purpose](#)*

**Domain:**

- Recruitment, line management, and other HR functions
- Administrative support for sub-circles incl. financial administration, management, monitoring and reporting -incl. to funders, CIC Regulator and Companies House
- Ensuring legal compliance, fulfilment of contractual obligations and good governance in line with our values
- Planning, overseeing and coordinating key external collaborations and partnerships
- Representing SCCAN on external bodies
- Supporting ongoing review and reflection on the achievement of SCCAN's overarching purpose

**Governance and Policies Circle**

**Aim:** *To advise on sociocratic governance and propose necessary policies and procedures for effective operation of SCCAN*

**Domain:****Member Engagement and Support**

**Aim:** *To make membership more desirable, diversify membership, and to actively listen and find out more about our members' needs and find ways of ensuring their needs are met through SCCAN's activities. Including welcoming new members into SCCAN, developing and delivering training, skillshares, workshops and networking events, and allowing members to share their expertise and support each other.*

**Domain:**

- provide channels for members to communicate their needs
- respond to member's needs through:
  - providing ways of linking members with others with relevant experience
  - creating skill-share and ongoing mentoring opportunities
  - designing and running tailored training workshops
  - hosting regular member information sessions and networking events
  - proposing member events to Events Circle
  - creating and supporting use of the VIVE digital networking platform
  - mapping groups by activities/skills/experience/aspirations etc.
  - attending to issues of diversity and inclusion, collating data in [EDI form](#)
  - creating pathways for members to become involved in SCCAN circles and ensuring a high quality experience for such volunteers (see [guidance for other circles](#))
  - communicating unmet member needs to other circles



- membership administration, data compliance, Mailchimp etc.

## Events Circle

**Aim:** *To ensure efficient planning and running of SCCAN events for SCCAN members and to attract a wider audience*

**Domain:**

- Design and develop SCCAN events in collaboration with other circles
- Undertake practical organisation of SCCAN events including:
  - Define agenda, contributors, venue, date, etc.
  - Targets / aspirations for size and income generation
  - Ensure timely notice, targeted advertising, effective promotion
  - Manage event bookings and budgets
  - recruit helpers
  - gather feedback, evaluate & report back.

## Storytelling Circle

**Aim:** *To share storytelling skills and to promote and use the power of stories - told through a range of media - to initiate transformational change, illuminate the power of community-led action and to inspire and engage a wide public.*

**Domain:**

- Searching out and telling stories of inspiring community action across Scotland through a range of media.
- Promoting and distributing these stories through a range of channels to reach as wide an audience as possible.
- Supporting the development of a SCCAN storytelling 'community of practice' to develop and spread relevant skills across the membership and more widely.
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## Comms Circle

**Aim:** *To serve other circles by creating accessible and effective external communications to promote SCCAN events and activity and to inspire, support and raise awareness of community-led climate action*

**Domain:**

- Publish monthly e-newsletters.
- Manage the SCCAN website and publish blog posts.
- Manage social media Facebook (page and [group](#)), [twitter](#), [Linkedin](#), [instagram](#), [youtube](#), slack. Handle: @Scotccan
- Publish relevant and engaging information
  - Generate and share news and stories of SCCAN members' activity and achievements

- Share other news, information and ideas relevant to community-led climate action and systems change
- Grow the network - helping people understand what a climate action group is and why they should join SCCAN
- Ensure that our public facing communications uphold SCCAN's values
- Research, trialling and promoting the most effective methods of communicating about the climate crisis and climate action (e.g. challenges, contests, questions, petitions, hashtags, campaigns)

## General Circle

**Aim:** *To uphold SCCAN's Vision, Mission and Aims and to ensure effective coordination of all SCCAN activities.* This circle comprises the lead links and delegates from each of the linked circles and is the ultimate decision making body for SCCAN.

### Domain:

- Provide a forum for sharing information and ideas between all circles
- Agreeing the 'Aims' of the GC primary circles and regular review and agree division of responsibilities ('domains') between all the circles where there is a potential overlap
- Review and update SCCAN Strategic Plans and Activities ([using 3D Framework](#))
- Coordinate fundraising, income generating activity and budget allocation

## Network Coordinators COP

**Aim:** *To provide a 'community of practice' that ensures good communication and sharing of learning within the team so as to support the development of strong regional networks*

## Proposed New Circle

**(Fundraising Circle -** *To ensure that SCCAN has the financial resources required to meet its aims.*)

## Useful Links

[New Staff Member Checklist and Volunteer Handbook](#)