

About SkyBridge Associates

SkyBridge Associates convenes invitation-only peer networks for leaders whose time is precious. Executives prioritize our networks because we offer a scarce resource: practical insights and timely, relevant conversations with a community of trusted peers. We also help many to feel less alone.

We're not offended when new members tell us our meetings are "surprisingly substantive" because many have only experienced mediocre gatherings before. We like to mix rich business discussion with a little bit of "let your hair down" fun because that's where authentic relationships thrive. After all, business is personal.

WHAT IS AN EXECUTIVE PEER NETWORK?

In short, executive peer networks are private clubs that meet several times a year for ongoing conversations about shared opportunities and challenges—and maybe a few laughs as well.

There is no fee for network members. Instead, we invite a small number of partners to provide financial support and join each meeting as members of an exclusive club. Sponsors are generally service providers or vendors who appreciate distinctive ways to engage with important clients and prospects.

Peer cohorts sometimes try to meet ad hoc, yet few of these groups endure on their own. Executives rarely have the time, resources, or expertise to identify an appropriate cohort, extend invitations, arrange logistics, lead robust discussions, and sustain the community over time. SkyBridge provides the tools, systems, and personnel to help executive peer networks (EPNs) thrive.

We recognize the intense demands on executives' time. To be a priority, an EPN must offer the most valuable meetings its members attend all quarter—with the right people, the right agenda, the right preparation, and the right setting. And members need to feel invested in the network. It must be something members look forward to. Something they will travel for and adapt their schedule around. Something they belong to, not just something they attend.

		PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE	
		PASSIVE	ACTIVE
PARTICIPANT SCOPE	MULTI-FIRM	CONFERENCE	EXECUTIVE PEER NETWORK
	SINGLE-FIRM	PRESENTATION/ BRIEFING	LEADERSHIP RETREAT

WHAT PROBLEM DO WE SOLVE?

Executives often feel like they are on a lonely mountain peak, where few colleagues see the world as they do. Yet, there is much to be learned from peers who work in similar roles at other organizations. But time is short, and meaningful interactions are few and far between.

There is another way.

SkyBridge Associates believes in the power of strong peer communities, and we create the platforms leaders need to build authentic relationships and share valuable insights with each other. We're about networks, not networking. Trust, not transactions. And conversations, not conferences. Executives don't just attend events; instead, they belong to a select group that meets several times a year for discussions they can't have anywhere else. And, unlike some firms that cater primarily to entrepreneurs and small business owners, we design our networks around executives and the professionals who serve them.

HOW ARE NETWORKS AND NETWORKING DIFFERENT?

As venture capitalist and entrepreneur Rich Stromback observed, "Nobody wants to have a 'networking conversation,' especially those who are at the highest levels of business and politics. They are hungry for real conversations and real relationships. It just has to be authentic, genuine and sincere."

We agree. We don't invite strangers to mingle awkwardly and exchange business cards with prospective connections. We don't organize conferences where participants listen passively to poorly moderated panels. And we don't arrange seminars where experts march through dense PowerPoint decks. Instead, we focus on building distinctive, invitation-only networks, where leaders enjoy ongoing dialogue with actual peers. The kind of great conversations and personal connections that rarely happen on their own

HOW DO WE DESIGN AND DELIVER OUR NETWORKS?

Every SkyBridge network is unique, designed to address sponsors' and members' specific challenges and opportunities. However, our networks all draw on core principles that enhance trust and build vibrant executive communities. These include:

- Limited size, with membership by invitation only
- Regular cadence, with meetings scheduled around members' availability
- Agendas developed with member input to address relevant topics
- Emphasis on active discussion, not passive briefings or presentations
- Clear confidentiality principles to ensure candor

Networks may be regional, national, or international in scope, and members often represent leading firms in an industry or market segment.

Each network is bespoke, and we refine design elements based on sponsor and member input. However, network membership criteria usually include factors such as industry; role/title (including job tenure); organization characteristics (e.g., size, complexity, public/private); geography (e.g., local, regional, national, global); and demographics (e.g., gender, race, nationality, age).

It is crucial to limit membership to foster intimacy and open discussion. The ideal network usually has 18–25 members. These members should respect each other as peers and fellow thought leaders.

Network operation

Since 2004, we have gained a thorough understanding of how to design and deliver distinctive executive networks that consistently engage busy executives. There is little to be gained by cutting corners.

Typical SkyBridge Associates networks	Typical roundtable meeting
Intimate group (12-20 participants)	Large group (30+ participants)
Meetings scheduled around member availability	Meeting date convenient for sponsor
Members strive to attend all scheduled meetings	Extensive invitation list with uncertain attendance
Ongoing meetings and discussions	One-time event
Participants belong to the network	Participants attend a meeting
Participant input sought during meeting planning	Little/no participant input
Members prepare for meetings	Little/no preparation expected
Members set the agenda	Sponsors set the agenda
Agenda tied to members' priorities	Agenda not necessarily aligned with priorities
Discussion orientation; little/no presentation	Presentation format with limited Q&A/discussion
Experienced, professional facilitation	Uneven facilitation
Summary note following the meeting	No meeting summary prepared
Debrief calls for non-attending members	Non-participants are not debriefed
Refined venue, excellent food/wine	Mediocre food, drink, atmosphere
Emphasis on peer relationships	Participants may not be peers
Non-transactional atmosphere	Commercial objectives not far from the surface
Members often interact between meetings	Limited member interaction outside meetings
Members are experts; sponsors listen and learn	Sponsors do most of the talking; members listen
Turnkey solution for sponsors; minimal effort	Significant sponsor effort required

Networks may meet in person, virtually, or in some combination. Networks generally meet three or four times per year, and it is not uncommon for a network to convene for 5, 7, or even ten years. In-person meetings generally last two to three hours in the afternoon, followed by an informal dinner. Videoconference meetings are usually shorter (e.g., 90-minutes).

Before every meeting, we follow a rigorous process to develop an agenda, meeting book, and other materials that lead to lively dialogue and practical insights. We schedule regular calls with network members between meetings to solicit and explore possible discussion topics and help members reflect on critical issues in a private setting before we meet as a group. We often survey members before each meeting to ensure that the agenda addresses members' highest priorities.

Confidentiality and trust go hand-in-hand. Accordingly, networks generally adopt a modified version of the Chatham House Rule, whereby members' names and their company affiliations are a matter of public record, but comments are not attributable to individuals.

In addition to our work planning and delivering distinctive network meetings, we often support benchmarking surveys or other activities upon request. Some networks also enjoy "virtual coffee roulette," a program to foster informal member connections between meetings.

MEMBER VALUE

Most executives intuitively recognize the value of open, ongoing conversations with peers. The world is changing quickly, and leadership is more complicated than ever. Yet few executives spend enough time with those who truly understand their challenges. Time, distance, competitive factors often keep leaders from enjoying the benefits of great peer relationships.

Network members often feel more energized, better informed, more confident, and less isolated. As a result, they deliver more value to their organizations and realize greater career success. As one executive told us: "This is a really important group for me, and the discussions are always enjoyable regardless of the topic."

Over time, network members enjoy:

- Private peer-to-peer dialogue on issues confronting their companies and their industries
- Personal and professional relationship-building with peers
- Opportunities to enhance their reputations and elevate the stature of their role and their organizations
- Non-transactional relationships with service providers, vendors, and other important partners
- Access to proprietary content developed by SkyBridge Associates

SPONSOR VALUE

Sponsors often have limited visibility into clients' challenges, desires, beliefs, and constraints outside their work together. Networks offer an efficient, effective way to gain proprietary market insights and enhance valuable relationships. After all, there are few other ways to spend six hours at a time with important clients, three times a year, indefinitely.

According to one network sponsor, the investment “helped me to see the challenges of [our clients] on a more granular level. [Thanks to the network] we got a deeper, broader view of all of the challenges that they have. That was really refreshing and something that we bear in mind now. It added more depth to [our understanding].”

Sponsoring a network also sends a powerful, unspoken message: “We care about our clients and want to help build a better future.” It is about listening, not pitching. Sponsors offer something of value with little asked in return. They earn trust and generate goodwill. And since clients are likely to convene anyway, network sponsors are guaranteed a seat at the table as a fellow participant in an exclusive club.

Best of all, we allow executives to use their time and resources efficiently. Nobody wants to spend a lot of time developing client engagement programs—yet they want those programs to reflect favorably on themselves and their firm. We respect the value of client relationships and never violate sponsors' trust. And our turnkey approach means that SkyBridge handles nearly all the planning and execution.

Sponsorship fees and considerations

We generally price our work on a flat fee basis, including all SkyBridge professional fees and out-of-pocket expenses.

Sponsorship fees reflect several factors, including program scope (e.g., meetings, surveys, content), SkyBridge effort and expertise, the nature and value of the cohort, and market demand for sponsorship. This is not a commoditized conference branding opportunity. Nor is it a boondoggle emphasizing style over substance. Rather, this is an elite offering for serious professionals, priced accordingly.

With a sole sponsor, we design and convene the network around the specific objectives of a single partner. This partner has complete control over membership and other significant decisions. We often use the sponsor's branding for network materials. With multiple sponsors, co-sponsors split the total fee and share control. We typically use a neutral network branding template that includes sponsors' logos but no other brand elements.

Sponsorship return on investment

As one sponsor told us, “I have continually let our firm know that this was one of the better investments of our money and time, more than anything I've been involved with in the past 8 ½ years.”

We believe in the value of relationships and prioritize long-term value creation over opportunistic, short-term gains. Over time, we often work with our partners to design and launch other networks that support their evolving strategic objectives.

We typically work with market-leading sponsors who already know many of the key players in an industry. Unfortunately, prospective sponsors sometimes evaluate ROI using a single, narrow metric: new client acquisition. This is a mistake. And it often leads to missed opportunities.

Instead of focusing exclusively on new sources of revenue, network sponsors should also consider the incremental value generated through deeper, more trusting relationships with existing clients. Opportunities include:

- **Improved retention.** Sponsors avoid defections by reinforcing their commitment and creating a regular touchpoint to address issues with clients before they escalate.
- **Reduced pricing pressure.** Clients who enjoy close relationships with vendors are less likely to squeeze margins. They are also more likely to give the benefit of the doubt when conflicts arise.
- **Expanded share of wallet.** Clients may not be fully aware of a vendor's capabilities. Sponsors often find new ways to serve client needs with their existing portfolio of products and services.
- **Serving new market needs.** Sponsors may identify new offerings to satisfy previously unknown "jobs-to-be-done." Moreover, sponsors can deploy new solutions across the entire market.

CONTACT

For more information about SkyBridge Associates, please email contact@skybridge.associates.

Executives interested in learning more about the power and design of great peer networks may also enjoy [*Building Bridges: The Case for Executive Peer Networks*](#), available in hardcover, paperback, ebook, and audiobook through major online retailers, including Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Apple iBooks, and iTunes.

APPENDIX: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why would I want to belong to an executive peer network?

While members will sometimes come away from a network meeting with an entirely novel insight, this is not a measure of success. We work with sophisticated executives, and conversations rarely reveal a blind spot that a member hasn't considered before. Instead, our meetings help members develop a more nuanced understanding of various alternatives by sharing their experiences and learning from others. As a result, we are often less focused on "what" and more focused on "so what" and "why."

Who pays for the networks?

Sponsors pay SkyBridge fees and other network costs. These are typically service providers or vendors who want to support important clients and prospective clients.

Why might I want to sponsor an executive peer network?

If you are like most executives, you probably find that client interactions are often narrow and transactional. As a result, sponsors usually have limited visibility into clients' challenges, desires, beliefs, and constraints outside of their work together. Network sponsorship allows you to be a "fly on the wall" as important clients and prospects discuss timely, significant issues with each other. The ongoing meeting cadence will foster deeper client trust and goodwill, and sponsors enjoy nuanced, proprietary insights into market needs, opportunities, and constraints. Moreover, sponsoring a peer network is a great way to show that you care about your clients—and are committed to their success.

How do you convene competitors?

We often work with groups of competitors and find that there are always important, non-competitive issues for executives to discuss. As independent meeting leaders, we can explore executives' individual challenges one-on-one, then design a meeting agenda that steers clear of competitively sensitive topics.

You aren't subject matter experts in my industry. Does that matter?

Not at all. These aren't seminars, and we don't pretend to deliver content ourselves. In many cases, the network members and sponsors are already subject matter experts. However, a skilled, courageous discussion leader with broad experiences will outperform a specialist most of the time. To be clear, we're not advocating "content-lite" facilitation; it's important to be a quick study and do enough homework to help our members lean into the right questions. Still, a generalist mindset can be helpful, as experts are often blind to possibilities that fall outside the narrow confines of their professional box.

Are you just facilitators?

No, although facilitation is, of course, one of many tools we use. As network designers and leaders, we also need to solicit input, listen carefully, synthesize and analyze ideas, design agendas, write clearly, find the “so what” in an issue, build trust, recognize patterns, think creatively, engage participants, and overcome objections.

What is your expertise?

We are skilled at designing and leading distinctive executive-level conversations and enhancing trust within a community of executives over time. As one executive told us, “Your efforts helped form relationships which previously, for the most part, were rivalries.” We take pride in the quality and durability of the relationships that are forged through our networks. This doesn’t just happen by chance.

How do you encourage candor?

We know that candid discussion can feel risky, and we work hard to support open, trusting dialogue. Clear confidentiality principles help network members to speak freely without worrying that others will share their comments outside the group. Our networks follow a modified version of the Chatham House Rule, which states that participants are free to use any information received, without attributing comments to individuals or their organizations.

I am invited to networking events all the time. Why is SkyBridge different?

We’re about networks, not networking. Trust, not transactions. And conversations, not conferences. Executives don’t just attend events; instead, they belong to select groups whose members meet several times a year for discussions they can’t have anywhere else. And, unlike some firms that cater primarily to entrepreneurs and small business owners, we design our networks around the needs of executives—and the firms who serve them.

How much time should I allocate to a network?

We recognize that our members and sponsors are busy, and strive to make good use of their time. We speak with network members before every meeting and offer to debrief members who cannot attend. In-person meetings are usually two to three hours, followed by dinner. Videoconferences are generally shorter. On average, most members will spend less than an hour a month on network activities.

Why is your firm called “SkyBridge”?

The bridge metaphor represents an integral part of who we are. We build (virtual) bridges between people and ideas. And bridges take people and groups from where they are to where they want to be.