



# Catalyzing Networks for Social Change

A FUNDER'S GUIDE

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**If you are looking to deepen your learning and connect with other funders who are working with networks, visit [networksguide.wikispaces.com](http://networksguide.wikispaces.com) or join the conversation on Twitter using the hashtag #netfunders.**



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# CATALYZING NETWORKS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

## A FUNDER'S GUIDE

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WRITTEN BY DIANA SCEARCE

CO-CREATED BY AN INSPIRING GROUP OF  
80 NETWORK PRACTITIONERS

The ideas in this guide were generated by members of a community of practice, called the Network of Network Funders, as well as others linked to our learning community. It was a truly collective effort. Everyone who touched this guide is in the list of contributors below.

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## A LETTER FROM THE NETWORK WEAVER

Funders know they need big platforms with diverse players to tackle the complexity of 21st-century problems. They also know that to do this work well they need to act as conveners, champions and matchmakers, connecting people, ideas and resources — in addition to getting money out the door. This means investing in more than discrete programs and more than individual organizations. It means catalyzing networks.

While grantmakers have deep experience cultivating networks of all kinds — such as coalitions, alliances, place-based initiatives, learning communities — there are few recognized best practices or established measures to prove they've achieved “network effectiveness” and 21st-century approaches to catalyzing networks are still being invented.

In early 2009, Monitor Institute formed a community of practice called the Network of Network Funders for grantmakers that are pioneering approaches to catalyzing networks. Around the same time, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations was hearing from its members about a growing need for grantmakers to be more collaborative, and so the two decided to join forces.

As Chris van Bergeijk, vice president of programs at the Hawaii Community Foundation and early champion of the learning community, put it, “It’s tough working with networks. All the mistakes we’re making are new. We need a place where we can learn from others’ successes and missteps.”

Today the community of practice comprises more than 40 grantmakers from private foundations, community foundations and donor intermediaries, as well as individual donors and growing numbers linked to

the network “periphery.” While their entry points are diverse, they share an interest in making connections that lead to better shared understanding, coordination and access to resources, creating space for collective intelligence and action to emerge and, above all, for scaling impact.

I had the privilege of serving as the weaver of this learning community — helping the group build relationships, facilitating gatherings in-person and online, engaging new participants and capturing our shared learning, which has culminated in this guide.

Of course, the Network of Network Funders’ work did not happen in a vacuum. It evolved alongside and was influenced by a number of parallel conversations in the field of philanthropy about topics such as understanding ecosystems, stakeholder engagement, social media for social change and collective impact.<sup>1</sup> The ideas in this guide are also informed by this growing body of knowledge.

There is still much to learn, but this guide is an early attempt to create a rough map for the many individuals and foundations that are catalyzing networks in order to build and boost the impact of their philanthropy. Think of this guide as a version 1.0. Share it widely. And share with us what *you’re* learning, so that we can broaden our collective knowledge and create the next best practices for catalyzing network impact.

Sincerely,



Diana Scarce  
Monitor Institute

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the following: Paul N. Bloom and Gregory Dees, “Cultivate Your Ecosystem,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2008; J. Courtney Bourns, *Do Nothing About Me Without Me: An Action Guide for Engaging Stakeholders* (Washington, D.C.: GEO; Boston: Interaction Institute for Social Change, 2010); John Kania and Mark Kramer, “Collective Impact,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2011; Beth Kanter and Allison Fine, *The Networked Nonprofit: Connecting with Social Media to Drive Social Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is for grantmakers who are just beginning to explore and experiment with networks and for those who are further along and want to reflect on their practice. The map below will help you find the content that's most relevant to your interests. While most of the guide can be read in small chunks, we strongly urge everyone to begin with the introduction, which outlines the core assumptions on which these practical nuggets are based.

### 1

#### INTRODUCTION PAGE 4

- Why do funders need to understand networks now? p.4
  - What can networks help funders do? p.5
  - In brief: What are networks for social change? p.6
- What's the "secret sauce" for catalyzing networks for social change? p.9

### 2

#### WORKING WITH A NETWORK MINDSET

PAGE 10

A network mindset is a stance toward leadership that prioritizes openness, transparency, making connections and sharing control. This chapter explores what it takes to cultivate a network mindset, which is critical for all grantmakers who want to tap network potential.

- What does it mean to work with a network mindset? p.10
- Why is working with a network mindset challenging? p.11
- What will it take to shift to a network mindset? p.11
- How do I get started? p.12
- In brief: Balancing a traditional and a network mindset p.13

#### CULTIVATING NETWORKS

PAGE 14

Grantmakers have a long history of investing in and catalyzing network action, but it hasn't always been rooted in a deep understanding of the nature of networks. This chapter offers recommendations for how funders can effectively invest in and build the capacity of networks.

- How can foundations cultivate networks? p.14
- What roles can foundations play in networks? p.18
- In brief: What is social network analysis, and when might grantmakers use it? p.19
- Tool: What are the characteristics of a healthy network? p.20

#### ASSESSING AND LEARNING ABOUT NETWORK IMPACT

PAGE 22

Networks are embedded in complex systems, and understanding systems change is tough. This chapter offers principles for getting started and invites grantmakers to share what they're learning so we can build the field with our collective insights.

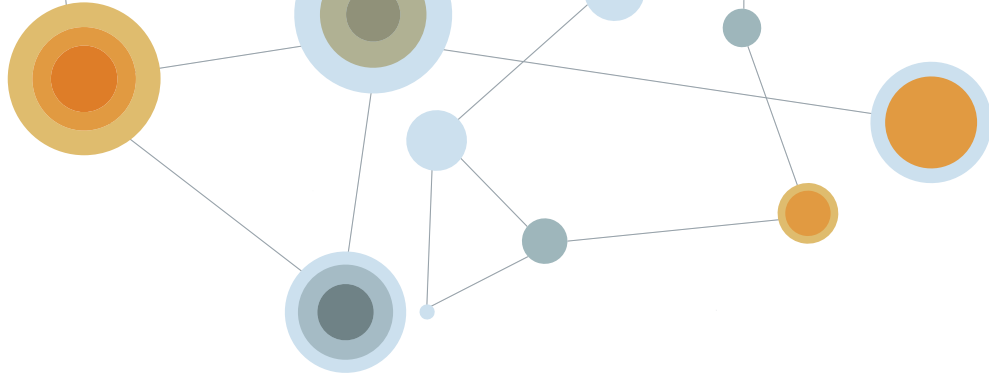
- Why is it difficult to know if networks work? p.22
- What should I keep in mind when assessing and learning about network impact? p.22

### 3

#### CONCLUSION: AN INVITATION TO EXPERIMENT PAGE 26

- Resources p.27
- Glossary of Terms p.28

For a deeper dive go to [networksguide.wikispaces.com](http://networksguide.wikispaces.com). There you'll find responses to frequently asked questions about putting some of these concepts into practice and other related resources.



## INTRODUCTION

Funders and social change makers of all kinds care about tangible progress on tough problems — such as a policy win, more underprivileged youth graduating, fewer people left homeless or cleaner air. Harder-to-measure results are also critical — including less social isolation, better access

to information and opportunities for citizens to make their voices heard. Networks for social change can help on both of these fronts, building new capacity for making progress on complex problems *and* achieving significant measurable results.

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### Why do funders need to understand networks now?

Throughout history, social change has been possible only through the contributions and dedication of many people and organizations connected in tight and loose groups. Developments such as the 911 emergency response system, widespread access to immunizations in poor countries or the civil rights movement in the United States couldn't have happened through solitary or isolated leadership.<sup>2</sup> Rather, citizens, philanthropists and groups of all kinds were linking actions through constantly changing constellations of relationships.

Today, the complexity and scale of many social and environmental problems are growing — from climate change to failing education systems to childhood malnutrition — driven, for example, by global interdependence, turbulent political and economic contexts and constrained public resources. At the same time, there is more opportunity for social change makers to engage and connect using Web 2.0 technologies. But new technologies are creating new pressures as well — such as the need for greater transparency, speed and distributed decision making.

Philanthropists are at a new crossroads of increasing fragmentation and interdependence. On the one hand, we're living in a world where perspectives, practices and action are increasingly fragmented as people and organizations become more specialized in their interests and siloed in their actions. On the other hand, we're living in a world that is becoming more and more interdependent as ideas, money, things and people move across boundaries of all kinds. Simply stated, philanthropists are operating in a rapidly changing, networked world where the pathways to effecting social change are far from straightforward.

There is a growing imperative for funders to combine longstanding instincts toward independent initiative and action with an emerging network mindset and toolkit that helps them see their work as part of larger, more diverse and more powerful efforts. As a recent GEO publication noted, “By embracing a new way of thinking and working that is rooted in shared understanding and an impact orientation to engagement, grantmakers can effectively use the power of networks to grow their own impact as well as that of their grantees.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation “catalyzed and financed 911 organizations across the United States, brought together emergency responders who hadn't previously cooperated and created a national confederation that could easily work with the U.S. government on the details of implementation” [Joel L. Fleishman, *The Foundation: A Great American Secret* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007), 5]. Thanks to the efforts of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (GAVI), more than 288 million children have been immunized and 5 million future deaths prevented in the past 10 years (*GAVI Alliance Progress Report 2010*).

<sup>3</sup> Dara Major, *How Do Networks Support Scale?* (Washington, D.C.: GEO, 2011), 4.

But it's hard to know where to start. Do you go deep and identify a focused concern where you can (relatively) quickly gain traction, or do you go broad and embrace a wide-reaching issue? Regardless of where you put your stake, you'll be dealing with complex, dynamic problems that no one actor can make progress on alone, regardless of its size and influence. Funders will need to broker relationships and build bridges across people and perspectives. They will need to operate with an awareness of the interdependence in which we now live by working to understand the complexity and by acting in concert with others. They will need to coordinate and collaborate with other funders and pool their collective resources and leadership. They will need to participate in and catalyze networks for social change.

### What can networks help funders do?

In recent years, we've experienced the advent and adoption of digital tools that are exponentially extending our ability to share information, connect with new and old colleagues and coordinate action. At the same time, there have been significant advances in our ability to understand complex webs of relationships. We can now visualize the networks we're embedded within — both inside and outside our organizational lives — and channel that knowledge toward positive social returns.

These new tools and knowledge are amplifying the ways in which networks can help with complex social problem solving. As a result, funders and activists are experimenting with innovative approaches to scaling impact, and creating a new network-centric ecology of social problem solving in the process.

Grantmakers and social change makers are harnessing the power of networks to achieve positive social benefits in five key ways: weaving social ties, accessing new and diverse perspectives, openly building and sharing knowledge, creating infrastructure for widespread engagement and coordinating resources and action.

The table below juxtaposes each of these network approaches with a “traditional” approach. The network approaches do not replace current practices but are a way for funders to expand their repertoire. Most efforts to activate networks involve several of these approaches at once. In the end, all are about connecting together actors and resources in order to create greater impact than an individual or organization can achieve on its own.

### Traditional and Network Approaches to Grantmaker Challenges

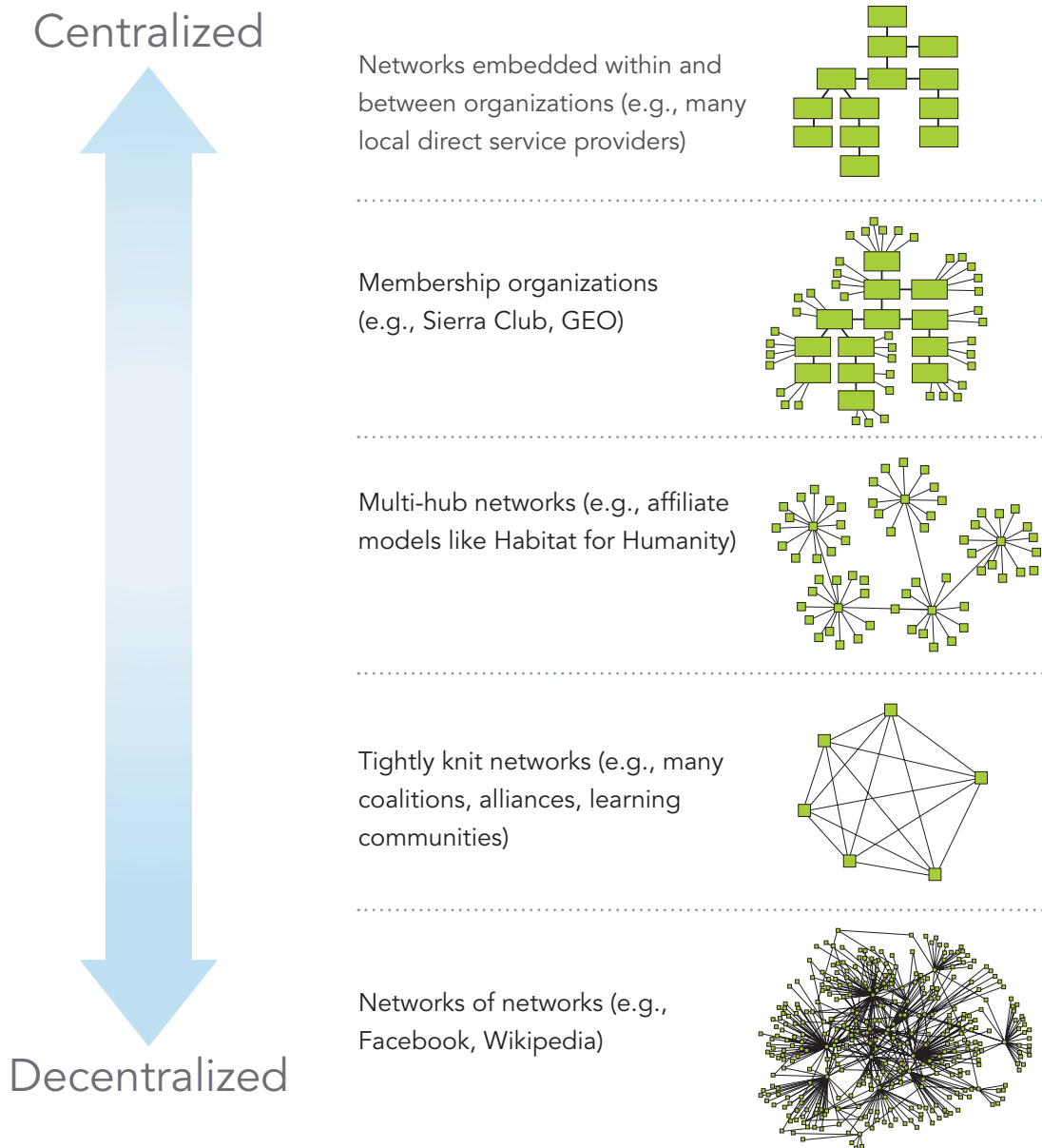
Challenge	Traditional Approach	Network Approach
Build community assets	Administer social services	Weave social ties
Develop better designs and decisions	Gather input from people you know	Access new and diverse perspectives
Spread what works	Disseminate white papers	Openly build and share knowledge
Mobilize action	Organize tightly coordinated campaigns	Create infrastructure for widespread engagement
Overcome fragmentation	Bring players and programs under a single umbrella	Coordinate resources and action

IN BRIEF:

## WHAT ARE NETWORKS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE?

Networks are simply people connected by relationships. They occur naturally and are all around us. They're inside, outside and between our organizations.

These groups of relationships can take on a variety of forms and can be both formal and informal. The model below illustrates the range of forms that networks can take with varying degrees of centralization and formality.<sup>4</sup>



Note: These categories often overlap. Most of the examples fit into multiple categories.

<sup>4</sup> Images adapted from the article "Working Wikily," by Diana Scarce, Gabriel Kasper and Heather McLeod Grant, in the summer 2010 issue of *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.



Network approach #1:

### Weave social ties

Building community and strengthening social capital have long been at the core of neighborhood organizing and revitalization efforts. Now, network weaving is helping community organizers and grantmakers both amplify their place-based efforts and work with communities that span geographies. *Network weaving* is a term coined by June Holley to describe the act of deliberately connecting others in an effort to strengthen social ties.

Weaving community is a core strategy of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's decade-long Making Connections initiative for improving the lives of children and families in many of America's toughest neighborhoods. Built on the belief that a person can get the greatest support through family and friends, the initiative seeks to strengthen that web of relationships and use it as a springboard for long-term community growth. The foundation invested in the Network Center for Community Change in Louisville, Ky., which has created a community network linking more than 3,400 residents from across four tough Louisville neighborhoods with one another and with opportunities such as jobs and support for grade-level reading. Since 2005, there have been more than 1,200 job placements through the network, plus the elementary school performance gap relative to third grade reading proficiency has closed and the local community college has seen a 20 percent increase in retention among students who live in "network neighborhoods."

Weaving community is not always place-based. The Reboot network is connecting leaders and cultural influencers from across geographies who are "rebooting" Jewish culture and traditions. Each summer "rebooters" gather in person for open participant-led conversations about Jewish identity, which typically result in collaboration on projects that help reinvigorate traditional forms of communal belonging. One such project, dubbed the "National Day of Unplugging," encouraged thousands of people to slow down their lives in the spirit of the Sabbath.

Network approach #2:

### Access new and diverse perspectives

Foundation program staff members are often hired for their connections in a given field, which they can draw upon to access potential grantees, advice and inspiration. But there will always be smart people and important perspectives that funders are not connected to, as well as gaps in worldview between grantmakers, social change leaders and grantee constituents. Network connections and social media tools are giving grantmakers and activists access to the ideas and expertise of many more individuals and stakeholders than ever before.

For example, the Wikimedia Foundation — a nonprofit dedicated to encouraging the growth, development and distribution of content from its projects free of charge — engaged its worldwide community in a yearlong process to develop a strategic direction for the Wikimedia movement. All who wanted to help were invited to participate, in the belief that an open process would result in a smarter, more effective strategy and activate the community around common goals. In the end, more than 1,000 people worldwide contributed to the Wikimedia Strategy Project. Furthermore, alignment around a set of five strategic goals by Wikimedians around the world has given the foundation a community-backed mandate for action, paving the way, for example, for a recent decision to increase investment in the developing world.

Network approach #3:

### Openly build and share knowledge

Nonprofits that use a federated or affiliate model have long known the benefits of sharing best practices across their networks. Now others are learning to do the same through communities of practice and other mechanisms that tap into collective intelligence. The Hawaii Community Foundation is weaving both tight and loose learning networks as part of its Schools of the Future initiative, which is helping educators in Hawaii bridge the gap between preparing students for standardized tests and teaching them 21st-century skills. The foundation found that educators from

different schools were struggling with many of the same issues yet addressing them in isolation, and saw an opportunity to create learning networks through which these educators could accelerate individual progress by working collectively. The Community of Learners, a central piece of the Schools of the Future initiative, is a close-knit learning group of educators from the 19 grantee schools. Participants gather regularly in person and connect online through a private space. In addition, there's an open online community for all educators interested in learning more about and teaching 21st-century skills, which has 446 members. Evaluations to date have reflected that participants value the Community of Learners as an opportunity to learn from other schools, a source of professional development and an opportunity to be part of an important effort that is larger than just one school.

Network approach #4:

### Create infrastructure for widespread engagement

Networks and network platforms are also vehicles for motivating people to act and mobilizing collective action on a large scale because activity can spread quickly without being routed through a central authority. By creating infrastructure that enables people to connect with one another and with new opportunities, network platforms can catalyze widespread engagement.

For instance, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation is investing in a number of platforms for igniting greater civic engagement by connecting people with one another and pointing them toward specific actions they can take to make a difference in their communities. DoSomething.org is one such Knight-funded space that connects teens online so they can do “good stuff offline,” such as assisting seniors, teaching cooking classes and donating clothes.

As part of its efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic by 2015, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation was looking for ways to increase its reach from the 100 or so communities that it can directly support to *thousands* of communities. So it created PreventObesity.net, an online infrastructure for connecting, supporting and catalyzing a national network of activists working in areas with the potential to improve nutrition, increase physical activity and, ultimately, reverse the epidemic of obesity among our nation's children. While the effort is still in its early days, its campaigns, map of the movement and widgets that chart user information have thus far registered approximately 50,000 individuals.

Network approach #5:

### Coordinate resources and action

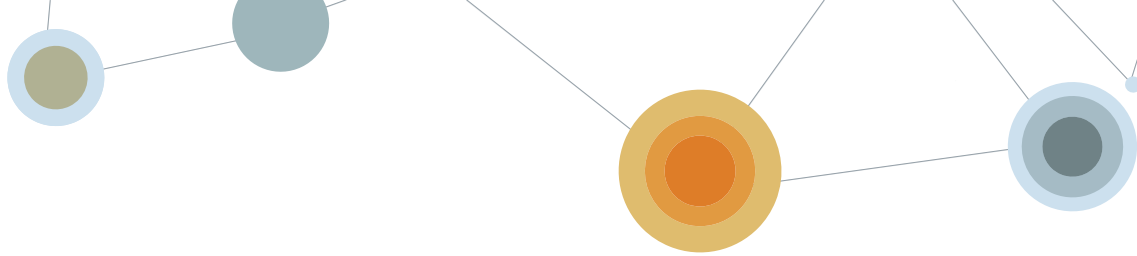
Once groups of people are connected to each other, the opportunity to coordinate resources and action increases exponentially. This might happen through an intentional process with central direction or a less structured and more opportunistic approach.

On the more formal end of the spectrum, the RE-AMP network, a group of more than 125 funders and activists, is coordinating efforts across eight states in the upper Midwest of the United States to reduce global warming emissions by 80 percent by 2050. The group has been intentional about creating a network with collective infrastructure rather than a centrally controlled organization. In just the past few years, RE-AMP has helped legislators pass energy efficiency policies in six states, promoted one of the most rigorous cap-and-trade programs in the nation and halted the development of 28 new coal-fueled power plants. The network has also built the capacity of regional activists, increased funding for its cause, created a number of shared resources and developed stronger relationships between funders and nonprofits.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Heather Grant, *Transformer: How to Build a Network to Change a System — A Case Study of the RE-AMP Energy Network* (San Francisco: Monitor Institute, 2010).





## WORKING WITH A NETWORK MINDSET

To catalyze networks for social change, funders themselves need to work with a network mindset — a stance that prioritizes openness, transparency, relationship building and distributed decision making. According to Tom Kelly of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, “This is the way the world is working ... if you don’t adopt a network mindset as a grantmaker, you are not going to have the impact you intend.”<sup>7</sup>

New social media tools are turbocharging the ways in which funders can work with a network mindset and extend their reach, as well as increasing expectations for all leaders to operate in increasingly transparent and open ways. But working with a network mindset is about more than using the tools. It’s a way of seeing the world and exercising leadership that values connectedness, shared ownership and openness.

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### What does it mean to work with a network mindset?

Working with a network mindset means *operating with an awareness of the webs of relationships you are embedded in*. It also means cultivating these relationships to achieve the impact you care about. The Community Foundation for Monterey County (Calif.) is doing this by “convening diverse interests around issues of common concern.”<sup>8</sup> It’s coordinating a network of social service providers; helping government, nonprofit and school leaders better align their efforts; and building relationships among leaders at the neighborhood level. Across these initiatives, CFMC is actively applying insights from social network theory, mapping networks and engaging local leaders in opportunities to learn about network dynamics and community change. Former CFMC Senior Program

Officer Jeff Bryant explained that understanding networks “gave us a new vocabulary — a new way of articulating and being intentional about what we’d been doing for years.”

Working with a network mindset also means *finding where the conversations are happening and taking part in them* — exercising leadership through active participation. For example, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is listening to and sparking field wide conversations about health and health care. RWJF is intentionally embracing Web 2.0 principles and working in ways that are more collaborative, faster moving, distributed, open and transparent.<sup>9</sup> In practice, this means staff members are engaging in open online conversations and experimenting with new strategies for achieving impact by stimulating distributed activity, like the PreventObesity.net initiative.

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<sup>7</sup> Major, *How Do Networks Support Scale?*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> The CFMC board identified “convening diverse interests around issues of common concern” as a unique and vital function of the foundation at a 2004 retreat. Since then, the organization has integrated coalition and network-building strategies into many of its signature undertakings. Interview with Janet Shing, April 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Larry Blumenthal et al., *Becoming a Web 2.0 Philanthropy* (Princeton, NJ: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2009), <http://slidesha.re/oDktGf>.

As Chief Technology and Information Officer Steve Downs said, the foundation is recognizing that “increasingly, value is created in decentralized ways. How do we disseminate our knowledge in ways that others can then take further and grow?”

Finally, working with a network mindset means *acting transparently by sharing what you're doing and learning along the way*, not just in a final report packaged for public consumption. The organizational effectiveness team at the David and Lucile Packard Foundation is experimenting with being transparent about what it's learning and doing with its “see-through filing cabinet” — a wiki through which the foundation shares resources (such as helpful capacity-building tools and articles), insights from across its grantmaking and research in progress. Now more than a year into the experiment, the foundation is finding that transparency holds it to a “higher level of accountability, quality, learning and vulnerability.”<sup>10</sup>

## Why is working with a network mindset challenging?

Tapping into network connections is becoming the norm for social change makers, whether they're mapping influential relationships for an advocacy campaign, coordinating a protest to fight climate change or spreading an approach to community engagement. For funders, working with a network mindset is a prerequisite for remaining relevant in a world of fast-moving information and ideas, and persistent, complex problems.

Of course, working transparently and sharing leadership isn't always easy. Basic grantmaking structures and mechanics, such as siloed program areas and static application requirements, inhibit working this way. In addition, there are many open questions about how working with a network mindset will mesh with current ways of doing business.

Here are a few common concerns:

- ▶ **Lack of time.** I'm dealing with information overload already. My inbox is packed. I have a backlog of requests from current and potential grantees. How can I possibly find time to make connections for the sake of making connections?
- ▶ **Compliance with communications protocol.** We have a clear set of guidelines for how to talk about the foundation's work and set expectations. I need to work within these guidelines and I genuinely don't want to send mixed messages to grantees. Clear communication is something we take pride in.
- ▶ **Privacy.** I create trusted relationships with grantees and leaders in my field. I don't want to violate confidentiality by getting caught up in the transparency trend.
- ▶ **Misuse of information.** What if information openly shared by the foundation is misused? Will it reflect negatively on the foundation's reputation and my own professional image?
- ▶ **Accuracy and high-quality outcomes.** What if the “crowd” doesn't get it right? Because I openly posed a question, do I have to act on the responses?
- ▶ **Accountability.** If leadership is distributed, what if no one steps up to own the results? Aggregating the input and talent of many people seems like a sensible path to scale — in theory. But how do you know the work is getting done and the results are what we want?

## What will it take to shift to a network mindset?

Although people have been doing work, learning together, spreading ideas and coordinating large-scale action through networks for centuries, our default is to understand networks through an organizational lens. Roberto Cremonini, who pioneered network grantmaking at the Barr Foundation, says it's reminiscent of the early images of flying machines at the turn of century. People understood the possibility of human flight through what they already knew — and therefore envisioned ships held aloft by balloons.

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<sup>10</sup> “Organizational Effectiveness Wiki,” The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, last accessed July 12, 2011, <http://bit.ly/oUoH25>.

Similarly today, it's hard to resist applying our deep knowledge of how work gets done in organizations to our understanding of networks.<sup>11</sup> We need a new mental model for understanding how change happens that reflects network dynamics and may stretch our imagination, like airplanes with propellers and wings must have done to the imaginations of people at the turn of the 20th century.

What will it take to develop a new mental model? As the saying goes, “We need to act our way into a new way of thinking.” This can be challenging, of course, but there is no substitute for learning by doing.

There's no line in the job description of most grantmakers that reads, “work with a network mindset.” Moreover, network efforts are typically considered the domain of the communications staff or, in some instances, the job of a single program person with “network expertise.” These are great starting points. But in order to be sustainable, weaving networks and working openly must become a cultural norm.

Creating this cultural norm will require a change in perception and new understanding of how people and organizations relate, how funders can make a difference and how change happens. For funders, this may not mean dramatic change to grantmaking operations. It's mostly about developing a mindset that prioritizes relationships and embraces the complexity of the networks and the systems in which they're embedded — then applying that mindset to the ways in which grants are structured, impact is assessed and leadership is exercised.

## How do I get started?

1. **Experiment.** Focus less on making the case or creating the playbook and more on doing. Experiment with working transparently. Broker new and unusual connections. Open up and encourage participation from a wide range of people working on the issues you care about.



2. **Cultivate a learning culture.** A learning culture can make it safer for staff to experiment and reinforce that it's okay to start small and fail often. As Rafael López of the Annie E. Casey Foundation said, “There is a very busy culture within foundations... We do not always give ourselves the space and time we need to talk with one another across the many portfolios in which we work. We need to be very deliberate in setting up safe internal spaces for conversation and learning.”
3. **Model and celebrate working with a network mindset.** Model the change you'd like to see in others and across your institution, as top management at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has done by tweeting and commenting on blogs. Also, recognize and celebrate the ways in which people are *already* weaving network connections. In 2009, when Stephanie McAuliffe, director of organizational effectiveness at the Packard Foundation, asked foundation staff, “Which of your grantees are more like a network than an organization?” she found that easily a third of the foundation's grantees fit the bill — a huge base of experience to draw on.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Eugene Eric Kim, “Nouns, Verbs, Hairshirts, and Network Philanthropy,” *Blue Oxen Associates Blog*, April 11, 2011, <http://blueoxen.com/blog/>.

<sup>12</sup> Stephanie McAuliffe, “My Network Effectiveness Journey,” The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Organizational Effectiveness Wiki, last accessed July 12, 2011, <http://bit.ly/oUoH25>.

IN BRIEF:

## BALANCING A TRADITIONAL AND A NETWORK MINDSET

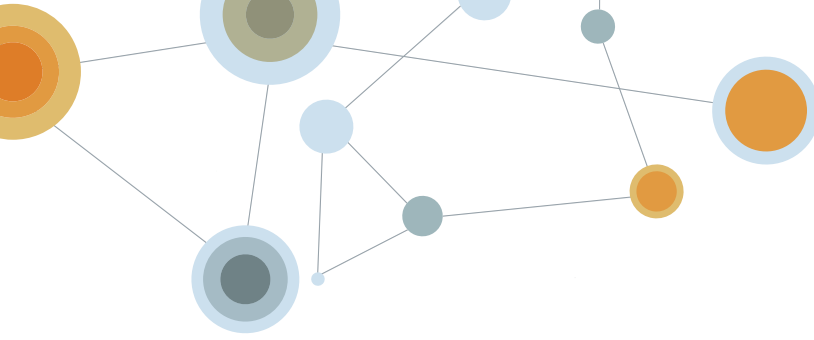
The chart below outlines opportunities to experiment with shifting from a traditional mindset to a network mindset. We've described the extremes; there is a range of possibilities in between. We're not suggesting that the network mindset is always the answer. There are plenty of situations in which, for example, centrally coordinated solutions and individual expertise may be the way to achieve the best results. The art is in figuring out what's appropriate for your situation and challenging yourself to share control and experiment with the network mindset end of the spectrum.

### Traditional Mindset

- Firmly controlled and planned
- Strengthening individual efforts
- Procuring deliverables (e.g., programs)
- Proprietary information and learning
- Decision making concentrated
- Insight from individual, "expert" actors
- Effectiveness linked to concrete outputs (e.g., a policy win, a measurable increase in community prosperity)

### Network Mindset

- Loosely controlled and emergent
- Weaving connections and building networks
- Stimulating activity (e.g., platforms)
- Open information and learning
- Decision making shared
- Collective intelligence
- Effectiveness also linked to intangibles (e.g., trusting relationships, information flows)



## CULTIVATING NETWORKS

Grantmakers large and small are in a special position to cultivate networks for social change. They have a broad view of activity across their field, they're well networked and their influence as funders gives people and organizations an incentive to come to the table. But it's not always easy. Most funders want to broker connections, but they often don't see themselves as full participants or don't want to be at the center of the network. Yet, investing in networks often demands a more hands-on approach, which can require time-consuming participation and result in greater dependence on the funder, at least in the short term.

Furthermore, standard grantmaking practices are set up to serve stand-alone organizations rather than messy, dynamic groups of people

and organizations that may not even have a 501(c)(3) status. This means developing new approaches toward due diligence, determining where the money can go and what type of support is needed and reframing expectations around measuring impact. It also means coming up with creative strategies for engaging boards accustomed to program outcomes and balanced budgets.

The good news is that investing in networks is not uncharted territory. More and more grantmakers, large and small, have experience with supporting networks — and there is emerging insight about where funders can place their resources and how they can do so most effectively.

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### How can foundations cultivate networks?

Funders can invest in a number of ways to foster networks for social change. These funding opportunities are organized around what might be particularly helpful at different stages in a network's life cycle, as illustrated in the diagram on page 15.<sup>13</sup> Because networks are continuously changing and evolving, many of the investment opportunities mentioned for one stage will continue to be relevant in later stages as well.

### Know the network

Social change makers and their constituencies, opponents and allies are all embedded in webs of connection. A first step in catalyzing a network is to better understand the existing relationships, centers of power, intersecting issues and levers for change among all of these parties. Better knowing the network means pausing to understand the context: What existing connections might be tapped? Who are the influential players? Who ought to be involved but currently is not?





<sup>13</sup> The diagram outlines the typical life cycle for networks and the ways in which participants (including funders) can help a network increase its effectiveness. While there is no universal pattern, most networks focused on achieving a goal (versus remaining a loose social group) tend to evolve according to this pattern. The diagram is adapted from Innovations for Scaling Impact (iScale), with input from the work of Valdis Krebs and June Holley. See iScale's *Network Life Cycle and Impact Planning, Assessment, Reporting and Learning Systems* (iScale, 2011), <http://bit.ly/orXMYJ>; and Valdis Krebs and June Holley, "Building Smart Communities through Network Weaving" (2006), <http://bit.ly/osacA4>.

Gayle Williams, executive director of the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, recommends: “Don’t create new networks. Start with existing groups. Invest in networks that are naturally occurring and on the verge of making important strategic connections.” Simply put, know the system in which you’re intervening and look for efforts already under way that you might amplify.

To better “know the network,” grantmakers can invest in the following:

- ▶ **Mapping and visualization.** Network maps can reveal current and potential network resources, providing important insight for all stakeholders into how a project might be organized to maximize existing assets and engage key stakeholders. For example, the Community Foundation for Monterey County is using social network mapping to visualize existing relationships in several local communities, from leaders in the small town of Greenfield to environmental organizations across the county. The maps are then being used to provoke discussion (and related action) about how the groups might better connect and coordinate. Other tools such as systems mapping, emergent learning maps and power analyses are also helpful for “knowing” networks — before or after they are formalized. (For more information, see “What is social network analysis, and when might grantmakers use it?” page 19.)
- ▶ **Assessment using network-specific criteria.** If a network with some degree of formality already exists, then assessing the network’s health is crucial to knowing the network. Assessing network health requires a shift away from typical due diligence considerations and toward asking questions like these: Is information flowing through the network? Are diverse perspectives present? Can new participants easily enter and become productive? (For more information, see “What are the characteristics of a healthy network?” page 20.)

## Knit and organize the network

Once there’s an understanding of the basics — who is in the network, who ought to be and how the players, power and potential interrelate — you can begin to set up an infrastructure to better connect the nodes for sustained work. Here, things can get complicated if there is no clear network hub or 501(c)(3) intermediary that can receive, manage and distribute funds and other resources. If there isn’t one, seek out a neutral trusted entity.

Specifically, funders can provide support for the following:

- ▶ **Creation and maintenance of spaces for weaving the network.** This might be a physical space, like the building where Making Connections Louisville holds its monthly “Network Nights” that bring together residents over food and conversation. It could be a custom-built online space like goodWORKSconnect.org, created by the Lumpkin Family Foundation as a virtual space for the nonprofit capacity-building community to connect, share information and learn from one another. Or it could be an online space created using a standard social networking platform, such as Ning, which was used to build a space for the Hawaii Community Foundation’s Schools of the Future Community of Learners. In each of these cases, establishing environments where network connections can flourish requires investing in infrastructure.
- ▶ **Dedicated network leadership.** To fulfill their potential, networks need dedicated capacity for weaving connections and coordinating participation. These roles might be played by one person or multiple people. In some cases, foundation staff may play these roles. Network weavers knit together networks by introducing people to one another, encouraging new people to join, brokering connections across differences and helping participants identify and act on opportunities. Coordinators keep the network productive by designing and running processes to coordinate participation, engage members and synthesize their input.

► **Network “glue.”** At this stage, modest funds are needed to make things happen. Kathy Reich at the Packard Foundation says that “grantees often tell us how difficult it can be to raise money to work in and through networks, because they feel under pressure to demonstrate their own organization’s impact.” Sometimes what’s most needed is a little bit of “glue money” — funds to support the small things that allow people to participate. For instance, the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation provides core funding for network convenings. It has also helped defray convening coordination costs by acting as the fiscal agent to take in registration money. One word of caution: Be sensitive to the effects of money and start with small, easily absorbed grants, especially when working with relatively informal groups.

## Grow the network

When growing a network, focus on supporting efforts to spread responsibility and leadership and thereby foster sustainability. Think of investments at this stage like “mezzanine funding” in venture capital parlance. This was the role the Jim Joseph Foundation played when it invested in the Reboot network, six years after it was started, by providing support for establishing the infrastructure and systems needed to evolve the network to the next level. When growing the network, funders can focus their efforts on the following:

► **Establish innovation funds.** Make available modest amounts of funding for projects led by network participants who want to get together and collaborate. Lawrence CommunityWorks, a community development corporation in Massachusetts that views community organizing through a network lens, provides funds for resonance testing. Rather than setting up a permanent program with a multiyear strategy, Lawrence Community Works makes small amounts of money available to resident leaders who want to test an idea, such as a new approach to engaging teens in the community.

The idea is tested on a provisional basis; if there’s “resonance” with the community, it gets resourced further.

► **Develop leadership for the network.** Rather than focus on strengthening isolated individuals, foster leadership in and across networks. Peer learning is one effective model for this. For example, the Community Foundation for Monterey County has been facilitating a community of practice for network weavers throughout the county. Participants have the opportunity to reflect on their individual challenges, work on projects with colleagues and connect with other networks.

## Transition the network

Networks are ever changing. Success is not the creation of a group and infrastructure that will exist in perpetuity. Nor is success always about growth. Rather, success is a continuous evolution and adaptation to the needs of participants. A temporary collaboration may be all that’s needed. Or, as is often the case, multiple subnetworks may emerge and spin off into separate projects.

As the network nears a transition point, your investment strategy will change as well. Invest in:

► **Reflection, evaluation and strategy development.** When the Wikimedia Foundation undertook its global strategy process, it was nearing an inflection point. In less than a decade, the Wikimedia movement had grown to include 400 million visitors per month, 95,000 active contributors and more than 700 projects. While its reach was still growing rapidly, the foundation was aware of falling contributions and a lack of diversity among contributors. It was a natural moment for the foundation — and the movement — to pause and clarify a path forward.<sup>14</sup>

What will it take to build the field’s ability to support networks for social change? In addition to supporting the work of discrete networks, there is also a need for investment in field building.

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<sup>14</sup> “Wikimedia Strategy,” last accessed January 19, 2011, <http://strategy.wikimedia.org>.

Specifically, funders can invest in the following:

- ▶ **Spreading awareness of networks and how to tap their potential for social impact.** For example, the Packard Foundation, in its efforts to increase the network effectiveness of its grantees, helps them develop a “greater awareness of the strategic value of networks” and a greater literacy “in what network tools and approaches are and have to offer.”<sup>15</sup>
- ▶ **Building the capacity of the capacity builders to support networks.** The common impulse for many participants and consultants new to networks is to apply what is known about organizational effectiveness to the network context — which can potentially lead everyone astray. The capacity of the capacity builders to support networks needs to be strengthened. To address this need, the Barr Foundation and Interaction Institute for Social Change have been convening a group of consultants that support network effectiveness to share insights from their respective practices, collaborate on small network strategy consulting projects and thereby build the capacity of the capacity builders.

## What roles can foundations play in networks?

Foundations are experimenting with playing a range of roles in networks and trying out a host of staffing configurations to support them. Typical roles that funders play in networks include the following:

- ▶ **Catalyst:** establishes value proposition(s) and first links to participants during the “knitting the network” stage
- ▶ **Sponsor:** provides resources for knitting, organizing, growing and transitioning or transforming the network
- ▶ **Weaver:** works to increase connections among participants and grows the network by connecting new participants (during “knitting” and “growing” stages)

- ▶ **Coach:** provides advice, as needed, once trust is established and power dynamics are well understood
- ▶ **Participant:** participates in the network without assuming a direct leadership role
- ▶ **Assessor:** diagnoses network needs and progress, and recommends next steps

Individual funders and grantmaking organizations can play single or multiple roles in a network. For example, the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation has been integrating intentional support for networks into its foundation structure by transitioning its program officers to a “network officer” position. In addition to a grantmaking or sponsor role, network officers act as weavers and coaches; they have responsibility for making connections among people and information and advising the networks they’re supporting. For instance, one network officer supporting a diverse group of advocates working on constitutional reform in Alabama makes it her job to know who is working on the issues and to broker introductions. Often this means artfully encouraging connections across traditional divides between social justice advocates, on the one hand, and business leaders and judges, on the other. It also means being in constant conversation with the network and asking tough questions like, “What is it going to take to win, and who must be at the table to make this a reality?”

Intermediaries can also be engaged to take on these roles. The Barr Foundation hired a network weaver to make connections among people involved with the after-school community in Boston. The weaver was positioned to be independent of the foundation, acting as a bridge between Barr and the sector. The Barr Foundation’s role was to sponsor and assess the network and coach the weaver.

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<sup>15</sup> The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, “Network Effectiveness Theory of Change,” (2010), <http://bit.ly/nRW2Q4>.

IN BRIEF:

## WHAT IS SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS, AND WHEN MIGHT GRANTMAKERS USE IT?

Social network analysis (SNA) is a technique for helping us understand, map and measure the networks of social relationships that connect people to one another. Rather than treating individuals (people, organizations or other entities) as the sole unit of analysis, SNA focuses on the connections between them.

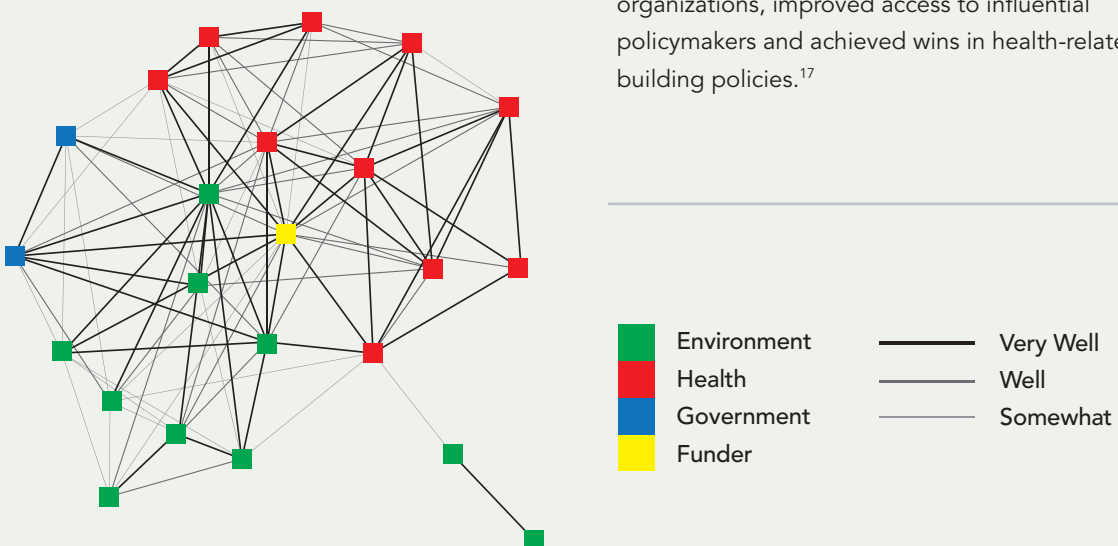
Funders might consider using SNA when developing understanding of a new field or issue area, assessing network health, identifying network needs and opportunities for support, sparking strategic conversation among participants and assessing change in a network over time.

When looking at a network map, meaning is drawn from the relative location of actors within the network. For example, the map below is an early visualization of ties within the Boston Green and Healthy Building Network. For several years, the Barr Foundation had been funding public health organizations that saw unhealthy buildings as a cause of illness and environmental groups that were focused on the ecological impact of buildings. The two groups shared a common policy goal — changes in building codes — but

rarely worked together. In 2005, the parties came together to explore whether they could coordinate their efforts and develop a more unified message for local policymakers. Using information collected at the gathering, Barr developed the network map below.<sup>16</sup>

The map illustrates several common network components. There are *clusters* — groups of people who are closely connected. In this case, one cluster is made up of people from environmental organizations and another encompasses people in public health. There is a network *core* — a highly interrelated group at the center that typically holds the network together. It includes the Barr Foundation as well as a few environmental and health leaders who are bridging the two clusters. And there is a small *periphery* — loosely affiliated people who are not as well connected to the core. Here, people from government are on the periphery.

Seeing the map of this fragmented network moved the group to action. The parties have since strengthened connections and coordination among public health and environmental organizations, improved access to influential policymakers and achieved wins in health-related building policies.<sup>17</sup>



<sup>16</sup> Roberto Cremonini, Baseline Map of the Boston Green and Healthy Building Network (Boston: Barr Foundation, April 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Beth Tener, Al Nierenberg and Bruce Hoppe, *Boston Green and Healthy Building Network: A Case Study* (Boston: Barr Foundation, 2008).

## TOOL:

### WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A HEALTHY NETWORK?

Just as the meaning of *healthy* differs for people depending on factors such as age, gender and genetics, there's no universal picture of network health. However, as with people, there is some consensus about what healthy and unhealthy looks like for networks.<sup>18</sup> Below are a few of the most important attributes of healthy networks, each followed by several related questions to consider when you're assessing what a network needs.

**1. Value.** Effective networks offer multiple doors of entry — a range of value propositions that will resonate with diverse motives for participation. They also outline clearly for participants what can be expected from the network and what will be expected of participants in return.

- ▶ How broad or targeted does the purpose need to be?
- ▶ Is a range of value propositions available?
- ▶ What value do members receive? What do they give? Is the exchange clear?

**2. Participation.** Participants in healthy networks connect with others and engage in network activities. An environment of trust and reciprocity is nurtured through distributed leadership and an established code of conduct.

- ▶ Is there ample trust and reciprocity? Are systems, practices and capacity in place for nurturing trust and reciprocity?
- ▶ What stakeholder groups are present? Are some groups more heavily engaged than others? Who is not participating but ought to be?

- ▶ How porous are the network's boundaries? What are its relationships with other networks?

- ▶ How big does the network need to be?

**3. Form.** A network's form should reflect its purpose. For example, if its purpose is innovation, there should be a large periphery — individuals loosely connected around the edges of the network, who bring in fresh ideas.

- ▶ What form is needed at different stages in the network's life cycle? What is the network's ideal form one year from now? Three years? Five years?
- ▶ How tight or how loose is the network structure? What balance is needed?
- ▶ How important are strong or weak ties? Do some relationships need to be strengthened? Do new connections need to be added to the network?
- ▶ What's the role of the periphery, if any? Is it being optimized?
- ▶ What's the role of the center, or hub, if any? Are information and action flowing through the hub(s)? Are there bottlenecks?

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<sup>18</sup> This tool for assessing network health is based on a diagnostic tool developed by the Philanthropy and Networks Exploration, a multiyear partnership between Monitor Institute and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. Visit <http://j.mp/cgmNXi> for details.

**4. Leadership.** Leadership in healthy networks is shared and distributed widely. Ideally many participants are exercising leadership by weaving connections, bridging differences and inspiring others to recognize and work toward shared goals.

- ▶ What leadership roles are needed in the network? Who convenes it? Facilitates it? Weaves it? Coordinates it? Champions it? Is there ample leadership capacity?
- ▶ How is responsibility shared across the network?
- ▶ How are decisions made?

**5. Connection.** Connectivity throughout the network should be dense enough that the network will remain strong even if highly connected participants leave. Ample, well-designed space (for online and in-person contact) and effective use of social media can facilitate these connections.

- ▶ What are the spaces for network connection? When and where does the network meet?
- ▶ What infrastructure is needed to maintain and strengthen connections?
- ▶ Are there multiple venues for making connections? How are online and in-person opportunities for connection integrated?
- ▶ How open or closed should the spaces for network connection be?

**6. Capacity to tap the network's assets.**

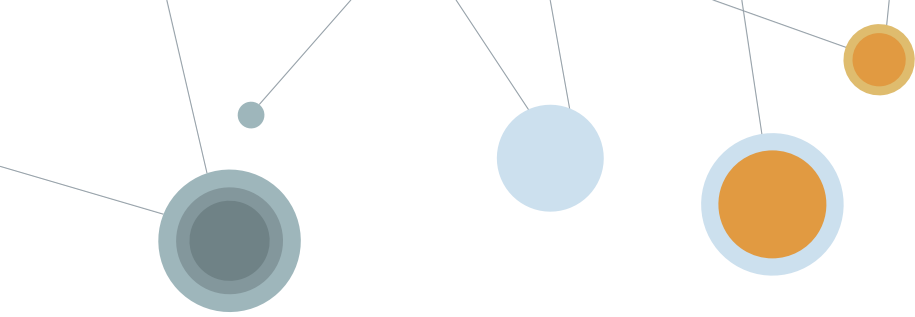
Healthy networks operate on the premise that the assets they need are resident within the network or, if they are not, someone finds what's missing and brings it in. They have systems and habits in place for revealing capacity — such as talent, resources and time — and tapping that capacity.

- ▶ Can the network find and tap assets (e.g., money, relationships, talent)?
- ▶ How quickly does information about network assets flow through the network?

**7. Feedback loops and adaptation.**

Networks are dynamic; what is needed and works today may not be relevant tomorrow. Healthy networks have feedback loops in place that enable continuous learning about what works and what's needed, with input from across the network. Then they adapt and act based on their new knowledge.

- ▶ How does the network know if it's working or not, and how does it make needed adjustments?
- ▶ How does the network listen to its participants?
- ▶ How does the network understand and adapt to its changing context?



## ASSESSING AND LEARNING ABOUT NETWORK IMPACT

Learning constitutes a “process of asking and answering questions that grantmakers and nonprofits need to understand to improve their performance as they work to address urgent issues confronting the communities they serve.”<sup>19</sup>

Contributing to learning and evaluation in a network context means asking questions about what’s working in partnership with others involved in the network, sharing what you’re learning so that others can benefit, adapting your network in response to these lessons learned, and then asking new and better questions.

This does not mean disregarding accountability concerns. If anything, accountability is increasingly important in a network context, where responsibility and action are decentralized.

Focusing on network learning and adaptation is a means of engaging network participants and leaders in a collaborative assessment process, where ownership of insights and recommendations can be shared and thereby motivate collective action and progress toward goals.

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### Why is it difficult to know if networks work?

One of the greatest barriers to grantmaker investment in networks is showing near-term measurable returns. Investing in networks requires patience and a willingness to embrace emergent and unexpected outcomes in addition to the original target. Roberto Cremonini captures the challenge well: “You never know when the value of a network will become clear. This can be difficult for grantmakers that seek a linear return on investment. Yet as networks grow, they build upon many small acts of relationship building, problem solving and knowledge sharing ... The key is patience: Networks may lie dormant for a while, but activate quickly when necessary.”<sup>20</sup>

Although the number of funders investing in and experimenting with networks and network approaches is growing, much of the evidence that networks work is

anecdotal. By developing an approach to assessing and learning about network impact that reflects the nature of networks, funders can set appropriate expectations for the return on their investment and, in the process, help increase the effectiveness of the network.

### What should I keep in mind when assessing and learning about network impact?

Despite these challenges, we’re learning more and more about how to assess network impact. Although there is no easy formula, there is an emerging set of principles that can help inform network learning and impact assessment and, more generally, our understanding of efforts to change complex systems. These principles include considering the context, assessing multiple pathways to impact and enabling ongoing learning and collaboration.

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<sup>19</sup> GEO and the Council on Foundations, *Evaluation in Philanthropy* (Washington, D.C.: GEO, 2009), 5.

<sup>20</sup> Major, *How Do Networks Support Scale?*, 7.



## Consider the context

Start by understanding the environment surrounding the network as well as where the network is in its life cycle.

- ▶ **Recognize the interplay and interconnection between the larger world and the network.** Life happens. There are economic booms and busts. Newly elected leaders come into office. Networks are embedded in these changing contexts: The context changes the network, and the network changes the context. As a result, you can't easily measure network success by comparing one network with another or by positing what might have happened under different circumstances.<sup>21</sup> In addition, it's rarely possible to attribute causality to a single program, to say nothing of a network with many interrelated and constantly changing players and activities.
- ▶ **Calibrate results against what might be expected at a given point in a network's life cycle.** The Campaign to End Pediatric HIV/AIDS is a networked campaign that cuts across six African countries, with coordination at the regional, national and global levels. Its impact assessment process, led by iScale, looked at the degree to which these networks were vibrant and connected, and then weighed this measurement against how far along each network's life cycle was. Understanding the various life cycles helped create a shared understanding of the campaign's current state, challenges and future potential.<sup>22</sup>

## Assess multiple pathways to network impact

Just as networks are most resilient when they are made up of many and diverse connections, the approach to assessment should be similarly multifaceted.

- ▶ **Focus on meaningful contribution toward impact rather than attribution.** Given the complexity of networks and the systems in which they're embedded, causal attribution is difficult if not impossible to assign. In addition, many significant changes can't be measured immediately or in quantitative terms, and what can be measured may not always be what's

most important. Instead, focus on how network participants and projects are contributing toward long-term aspirations. The Barr Foundation has used this approach with the Barr Fellowship program, which celebrates and connects extraordinary nonprofit leaders in Boston. When assessing impact on the city of Boston, rather than trying to establish direct causal links, the foundation's evaluation focuses on gathering stories about the ways in which the network of Barr fellows contributes to community vitality. For instance, Boston recently won a competitive federal Promise Neighborhoods planning grant. Below the surface of that victory is a set of stories about Barr fellows drawing on the social capital they built through the fellowship and coordinating efforts to improve the city.<sup>23</sup>

- ▶ **Look at indicators of impact at multiple levels.**

Assess the following:

**Connectivity.** What is the nature of relationships within the network? Is everyone connected who needs to be? What is the quality of these connections? Does the network effectively bridge and embrace differences? Is the network becoming more interconnected? What is the network's reach?

**Network formation.** How healthy is the network along multiple dimensions: participation, form, leadership, capacity, and so on? Also, what products and services are the immediate results of network activity? (For more information, see "What are the characteristics of a healthy network?" page 20.)

**Field-level outcomes.** What progress is the network making on achieving its intended social impact (e.g., a policy outcome, an improvement in public health, an increase in community prosperity)? How do you know?

For instance, Lawrence CommunityWorks is revamping its approach to data collection so that it's more reflective of what people are doing in the network and therefore informs action. It's gathering data at the individual level (e.g., the different types

<sup>21</sup> Glenda H. Eoyang and Thomas H. Berkas, "Evaluating Performance in a Complex Adaptive System," in *Managing Complexity in Organizations*, ed. Michael R. Lissack and Hugh P. Gunz (Westport, CT: Quorum, 1999), 313–335.

<sup>22</sup> Innovations for Scaling Impact and Keystone Accountability, *Next Generation Network Evaluation*, (June 2010), <http://bit.ly/pmXHAR>.

<sup>23</sup> Barr Foundation internal documents prepared by Barr Fellowship program evaluator Claire Reinelt, May 2011.

of members and their experiences and outcomes in the network), the network level (e.g., how many people are moving in and out of LCW) and the field level (e.g., how LCW's work and practices are making a difference in the city of Lawrence, Mass., and informing practice in other places throughout the country).

▶ **Evolve the evaluation approach with the network.**

Because networks themselves are dynamic and always evolving, it's impossible to fully determine the evaluation design in advance. It will likely shift as the network changes. This is the approach that the Annie E. Casey Foundation took in its ongoing efforts to evaluate the Making Connections initiative over the course of its 10-year duration. The foundation co-evolved its evaluation approach alongside the design of the initiative itself. It would develop new goals, measures, techniques and tools as the initiative grew while also staying focused on overarching evaluation questions.<sup>24</sup>

## Contribute to ongoing learning and enable collaboration

Measurable network results can take a long time to materialize and may differ from a funder's original intent when awarding a grant. Ongoing and learning-oriented assessment can help the network evolve and adapt while also keeping the funder abreast of current and emerging social impact potential.

▶ **Assess often and early.** Recognize that patterns of network activity may be sporadic and spread out over time, and adopt approaches to learning and evaluation that reflect this rhythm. Develop benchmarks and ways to assess interim progress so the network can adapt. Early-stage and regular evaluation can also be a way to find things to celebrate and thereby increase momentum and commitment to the shared work.

▶ **Emphasize learning over near-term judgment, given the long time horizon for many networks.**

Taking stock of what a network has achieved is less about assessing success or failure at any single point in time and more about continuous learning and adaptation in order to accelerate progress toward goals. For instance, a learning community is an important part of the Networking for Community Health program — a joint initiative of Tides and The California Endowment to support the efforts of community clinics to work with both traditional and nontraditional partners. Though the content area, focus and strategy are very different for each of the grantees, they share common challenges regarding how to best forge connections among clinics and other organizations that will benefit health in their community. Since the inception of the program, clinic grantees and their core partners have participated in a learning community to reflect on what works across their efforts.

▶ **Evaluate networks collaboratively.** Engage network participants in developing a system-wide picture of what is being tried and achieved by the various players. If you build a shared vision and theory of the change you'd like to see, it becomes possible to collectively develop shared indicators that you can use to track progress. The Conservation Alliance, a group of nongovernmental organizations working on standards for sustainable seafood sourcing, began to coordinate individual efforts to influence major seafood buyers in 2006 after being connected together by the Packard Foundation. Over the course of two years, the group worked together in-person and through conference calls with Packard's support and the help of a facilitator. In 2008 they arrived at a common vision that was ratified by 16 network participants.

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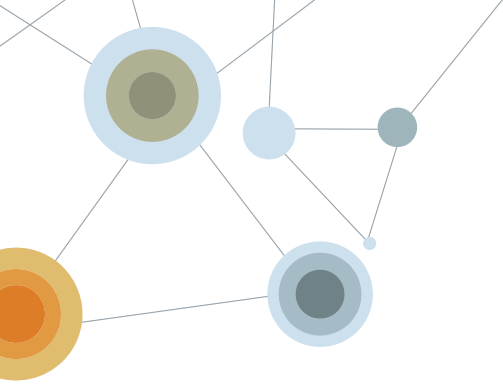
<sup>24</sup> Leila Fiester, *Measuring Change While Changing Measures: Learning In, and From, the Evaluation of Making Connections* (Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010), 16.

▶ **Build capacity for ongoing learning and evaluation.** Because networks are ever-changing and leadership, at its best, is distributed, participants across the network need to be constantly gathering feedback on what works and acting on it, individually and collectively. One way to do this is to invest in feedback loops and learning systems for ongoing assessment that help everyone build understanding together. This ensures real-time feedback, engages network participants in an ongoing strategic conversation and helps strengthen ownership of the network.

▶ **Learn openly and with others.** For many grantmakers, there is little latitude for “failed” grants — investments that don’t achieve their stated outcomes. In the network context, this risk aversion is especially problematic because network participants may decide to take action that’s different from what a funder may have originally hoped for, and groups working through a model of loose network connections can take a long time to evolve and deliver tangible outcomes. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter writes, “Anything can look like a failure in the middle.”<sup>25</sup> Investing in and openly sharing learning can be one way to better understand what’s working, help networks adapt along the way and build a base of knowledge about what works. For grants that really are failures, there is still opportunity. As Chris van Bergeijk of the Hawaii Community Foundation says, “Failures can create fertile ground for other things to happen later. It’s like compost: you throw all kinds of things in there and make sure air comes in ... It’s the compost theory of network grantmaking!”

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<sup>25</sup> Rosabeth M. Kanter, “Column: Cultivate a Culture of Confidence,” *Harvard Business Review*, April 2011, <http://bit.ly/ogO4MZ>.



## CONCLUSION: AN INVITATION TO EXPERIMENT

It's hard to imagine what the world — the critical context for grantmaking — will look like even five years from now, much less in a decade or more. But we can be sure that technologies for connecting individuals and ideas will continue to evolve and spread, that both people and problems will become more interconnected and interdependent, and that those who feel empowered to make a difference will grow in diversity and number. Now and in the future, it will be incumbent on funders to stimulate, harness and support the networks that will arise from this new landscape.

Doing so does not require grantmakers to unlearn everything they know. Far from it. But you will need to unlearn a mindset and way of working that stubbornly defaults toward maintaining firm control, holding tight to information and insight, and investing in social change one organization at a time. Success will require an expanded funder repertoire that includes behaviors and strategies for sharing control, spreading and co-creating information and insight, and creating the conditions to spark collective action.

We hope the ideas, principles and tools in this guide will prove useful to grantmakers who are ready to work at the interface of networked and traditional approaches — those who are eager to

experiment with how to artfully combine the new and old, emergent and intentional, bottom-up and top-down, open and closed, online and in-person. Determining how to do so effectively will require trial and error. But you will be in good company.

Experiment openly. Celebrate and share your successes and failures. Join the learning community of social change makers who are inventing the future of 21st-century problem solving for the greater good.

### What's Next?

While the Network of Network Funders' current phase of work has come to a close, we continue to connect and look forward to the conversations and possibilities that the ideas here may spark. There's still much to learn from existing practice — for example, the many experiences in catalyzing networks in global contexts, which are barely touched upon here. Please visit [networksguide.wikispaces.com](http://networksguide.wikispaces.com) to connect with the learning community, share your insights and access additional resources.

## Resources

### **Connected Citizens: The Power, Peril and Potential of Networks**

Looks at what's working today for citizen-centered networks, what the world might look like for connected citizens as soon as 2015 and pragmatic near-term recommendations for grantmakers. Diana Scarce, Monitor Institute, Spring 2011. ONLINE: [www.connectedcitizens.net](http://www.connectedcitizens.net)

### **How Do Networks Support Scale?**

Explores grantmaker support and engagement in networks as an approach to scaling impact. Dara Major, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, Spring 2011. ONLINE: <http://bit.ly/jFh7UV> or [www.scalingwhatworks.org](http://www.scalingwhatworks.org)

### **Net Gains: A Handbook for Network Builders Seeking Social Change**

Covers the basics on networks — including their common attributes, leveraging them for social impact, evaluating them and analyzing social networks. Peter Plastrik and Madeleine Taylor, 2006. ONLINE: <http://bit.ly/rbGHnn>

### **The Networked Nonprofit**

Offers rich insight about working with networks in an organizational context and examples of how nonprofits are using social media to “power social networks for change.” Beth Kanter and Allison Fine (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

### **Next Generation Network Evaluation**

Scans the field of network monitoring and evaluation to identify where progress has been made and where further work is needed. Innovations for Scaling Impact and Keystone Accountability, June 2010. ONLINE: <http://bit.ly/pmXHAR>

### **What's Next for Philanthropy: Acting Bigger and Adapting Better in a Networked World**

Presents 10 emerging practices that can help funders increase their impact in the coming decade. Katherine Fulton, Gabriel Kasper and Barbara Kibbe, Monitor Institute, 2010. ONLINE: <http://bit.ly/pkGAjl>

### **Working Wikily**

Explores how social media tools are driving more connected ways of working. Diana Scarce, Gabriel Kasper and Heather McLeod Grant, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Summer 2010. ONLINE: <http://bit.ly/n1wqDh>

***There is a growing body of literature on catalyzing networks for social change. For more resources, go to [networksguide.wikispaces.com/Network+Resources](http://networksguide.wikispaces.com/Network+Resources).***

## Glossary of Terms

### **Community**

A group of people who share a common interest, from a place of residence to an issue that cuts across geographic boundaries.

### **Cluster**

Groups of nodes that are closely connected.

### **Core**

A highly interrelated group of nodes at the center of a network, which typically holds the network together.

### **Network, noun**

A group of people who are connected through relationships.

### **Network-centric, adjective**

A way of organizing that is transparent, open and decentralized.

### **Network practice, noun**

Tools and strategies for strengthening, creating or leveraging network connections.

### **Network weaving**

The art of making connections among people in a group in order to strengthen existing ties, bring new people into the fold and bridge divides.

### **Node**

Any component that can be connected together in a network, such as an organization, person, idea or set of data.

### **Periphery**

The collection of nodes that are at the edge of the network and therefore less connected to others than the highly connected nodes in the network's core.

### **Social media**

Online technologies such as blogs, wikis, social networking sites and Twitter. They are social in the sense that they facilitate interaction among people; allow "many-to-many" connections between and among virtually any number of people; and enable communication either in real time or over long periods.

### **Social network analysis**

The analytic process of mapping, understanding and measuring the networks of social relationships that connect people to one another, using specialized software and techniques.

### **Space**

The physical or online venue where the members of a network form and renew their connections.

### **Strong ties**

Relationships in a network that are comparatively deep or binding.

### **Weak ties**

Relationships in a network that are comparatively light or fleeting.



# CATALYZING NETWORKS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

## A FUNDER'S GUIDE

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Are you supporting coalitions, alliances or networks? Can your grantmaking to these groups be more effective?

...

Are the communities and grantees you're supporting working in isolation? Could their work add up to more than the sum of its parts?

...

Do you want to connect people and groups working in the areas you care about so that they can tap into and create new opportunities and resources?

...

Do you want your foundation to make a bigger impact than it can on its own?

...

Are you looking for ways to change systems?

...

**If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, this guide is for you. We hope you come away with a network lens to apply to your grantmaking, a better understanding of work you're already doing to catalyze networks and new opportunities for harnessing network potential.**



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