

toolkit for network building

Why Networks?

Given the complexity of social problems and the unrelenting pressure to reduce the cost of creating and implementing solutions in the face of limited resources, networks offer a way to weave together capacities and build power that can achieve greater impact. Networks, coalitions, alliances and other forms of interorganizational collaboration are seen as more effective strategies for building power to affect broader systems and policy change. Organizations working through networks can have a greater impact on social change than could be achieved by acting alone. Cross-issue movement networks create a force larger than the sum of their parts.

“Networks are not social movements;
but social-justice movements need
networks”

What are Movement Networks?

The simplest definition of a network is that it is a set of “nodes and links,” of things that are connected to each other. Networks link many individuals and organizations to develop *collective* goals in order to produce collective gains.

The purpose of a movement network is to meaningfully analyze, understand, and foster the development of a movement by working with and for others in the network. Robin Katcher¹ describes four essential roles of movement networks:

- 1 **multi-organizational:** movement networks link independent organizations and activists to one another and through a central hub organization;
- 2 **movement oriented:** movement networks intentionally contribute to a broader social movement;
- 3 **focused on the long term:** movement networks stick together for the long haul and join to advance interests that extend beyond a single- issue campaign; and
- 4 **porous:** movement networks have more flexible boundaries than a normal organizational structure.

Movement networks help members view their work for justice as fundamentally linked to that of others and as part of the larger movement. Members work together to understand, integrate, and contribute to a shared vision; align on shared values and principles; and deepen a sense of trust, belonging, and identity. From this foundation, networks facilitate and support coordinated action and engage in policy change campaigns. Winning a specific campaign or policy change is not the end goal for networks, but rather a means to the ultimate end that gets one step closer to the movement’s long-term vision. The strength and power of networks comes from aggregating the strength and power of members.

Weaving a Network

Building and maintained a network is hard work. Gray (1989) describes the early stage of network development as the “problem setting phase”. In this phase, like-minded individuals and groups are

¹ Katcher, R. (2010). Unstill Waters: The Fluid Role of Networks in Social Movements. *Nonprofit Quarterly*, (Summer), 52–59). Retrieved from <http://www.nonprofitquarterly.org/governancevoice/21571-unstill-waters-the-fluid-role-of-networks-in-social-movements.html>.

convened that ideally represent a wide variety of the community, are perceived as being legitimate stakeholders, and begin to identify that their actions and outcomes are dependent upon the actions of each other. A first step is simply to better understand the existing relationships, centers of power, intersecting issues, and levers for change among all of these parties (Krebs & Holley 2006).

As part of forming a network, stakeholders must agree that their shared goals are important enough to outweigh the costs of such a collaborative effort. Developing a shared identity, shared goals, shared decision-making, and strengthening trust are all important aspects of early stages of network development. Important core tasks that take place in the formation stage therefore include the establishment of an organizational structure and processes that guide network communication, decision-making, and conflict resolution.

Many also stress the importance of a legitimate and skilled convener or lead organization with existing relationships within a community and strong “process capacity”. Lead organizations require the capacity to connect across organizational, sectoral, cultural and geographical boundaries, guide vision and strategy, foster a collective sense of identity, and create a separate holding environment for knowledge sharing, innovation, and development of collective action.

Tool: Building a shared theory of change

Three Ways to Think About Quality of Networks

The conceptual work of The Center for Evaluation Innovation in their 2014 *Framing Paper: The State of Network Evaluation* offer a useful lens for thinking about the quality of networks. In this framework, they suggest that any assessment of networks should focus on three factors:

1. **Network connectivity:** this normally has two dimensions that can be assessed: (a) membership, *or the people, or organizations that participate in a network* and (b) *structure*, or how connections between members are structured and what flows through those connections. To these two dimensions we add a third that consists of (c) mapping the relationships that network member organizations have with decision makers and other power holders who are considered outside of the network. For example, relationships with county commissioners or their staff.
2. **Network health:** there are two aspects of network health: (a) *infrastructure*, or the internal systems and structures that support the network (e.g., communication, rules, and processes); (b) *trust*, both in the members’ trust in the “system” that is the network – norms, roles,

procedures, forward progress - and trust in the form of confidence in the honesty, reliability, and integrity individual actors and organizations that are members of the network.

3. **Network results:** Ultimately, movement networks want to positively affect change in communities. Understanding the community change results that can be attributed to the network is difficult, but can be achieved by looking for: (a) *interim outcomes*, or the results achieved as the network works toward broader impact, and (b) *broader impact*, or evidence of changes in policy, engagement, decision-making processes, shifts in power, etc that can be attributed in some way to the network.

Evaluating the Quality of Networks

As you are building a network and considering the three quality factors, ongoing evaluation is critical to network development.

1. **Evaluating Network Connectivity:** Social Network Analysis (SNA) can provide network leaders with an important facilitative tool that can assist them in their efforts to form and build stronger networks (Provan et al. 2005). Joint analysis of SNA and other forms of data collection can help create informed decision-making processes, which are characteristic of successful and capable lead organizations.

Tool: Using Social Network Analysis to map network connectivity

2. **Evaluating Network Health:** Simple questionnaires distributed via online survey then analyzed with network partners can help network leaders understand the current strengths and weaknesses of your network and inform capacity building efforts.

Tool: Using questionnaires to evaluate the health of a network

3. **Evaluating Network Results:** As mentioned above, understanding the community changes that result from network activity is very difficult.

Tool: Building a shared theory of change

Tool: *Using social network analysis to map network connectivity*

Tool: Using questionnaires to evaluate the health of a network

In this section you'll find two resources to help you evaluate the health of a network:

- **The Network Health Scorecard**
- **The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory**

These resources can be the most useful when network members analyze the results together to determine what can be learned from the process and what the results mean for action.

How to use these resources:

1. Ask each network member to fill out an individual questionnaire either online or on paper.
2. Enter individual scores in a collective table, indicating the number of members selecting particular scores to tabulate network results.
3. Together consider the results. What patterns do you see? What results need further discussion? Over time, what has improved? What hasn't? Why? What should we do to strengthen our network?



network health scorecard

Looking for a way to assess
the health of your Network?

Answer these questions for a basic network diagnosis of strengths and areas of growth. Refer back regularly and you can use your score to identify and track progress in key areas of network development. (We suggest quarterly.)

How to use this scorecard:

- Ask each network member to fill out an individual scorecard.
- Enter individual scores in a collective table, indicating the number of members selecting particular scores to tabulate network results.
- Together consider the results. What patterns do you see? What results need further discussion? Over time, what has improved? What hasn't? Why?

NETWORK PURPOSE

	Not so much			Totally!	
	1	2	3	4	5
1. All members share a common purpose for the network.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Together, members have identified strategic goals and objectives for the network.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Network plans reflect network goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

NETWORK PERFORMANCE

4. Members are working jointly to advance network goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Members are adding value to each other's work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Members are creating new knowledge or insights together.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. The way the network communicates with stakeholders builds support for the network.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. The network is creating value for the constituents it serves.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. The network is able to attract additional network funds, as needed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



network
health
scorecard

Not so much		Totally!		
1	2	3	4	5

- 10. Members honor their commitments to the network.
- 11. The network is meeting its strategic goals and objectives.
- 12. Members are achieving more together than they could alone.

NETWORK OPERATIONS

- 13. Decision making processes encourage members to contribute and collaborate.
- 14. The network anticipates, surfaces, and addresses conflict when it arises.
- 15. The network's internal communications systems are serving it well.
- 16. All members are contributing time and resources to the network.
- 17. The work of the network is attuned to the comfort and energy levels of members.
- 18. Members reflect on network experience and adjust network practice accordingly.
- 19. The network has mechanisms in place to promote accountability among members (e.g., agreements, understandings).

NETWORK CAPACITY

- 20. As a network, members have the material resources needed to advance network goals.
- 21. As a network, members have the skills they need to advance network goals.
- 22. As a network, members have the connections they needed to advance goals.

YOUR ADDITIONAL CHECK-UP QUESTIONS HERE

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The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory

Name of Collaboration Project _____

Date _____

Statements about Your Collaborative Group:

Factor	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral, No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
History of collaboration or cooperation in the community	1. Agencies in our community have a history of working together	1	2	3	4	5
	2. Trying to solve problems through collaboration has been common in this community. It's been done a lot before.	1	2	3	4	5
Collaborative group seen as a legitimate leader in the community	3. Leaders in this community who are not part of our collaborative group seem hopeful about what we can accomplish.	1	2	3	4	5
	4. Others (in this community) who are not a part of this collaboration would generally agree that the organizations involved in this collaborative project are the "right" organizations to make this work.	1	2	3	4	5
Favorable political and social climate	5. The political and social climate seems to be "right" for starting a collaborative project like this one.	1	2	3	4	5
	6. The time is right for this collaborative project.	1	2	3	4	5
Mutual respect, understanding, and trust	7. People involved in our collaboration always trust one another.	1	2	3	4	5
	8. I have a lot of respect for the other people involved in this collaboration.	1	2	3	4	5
Appropriate cross section of members	9. The people involved in our collaboration represent a cross section of those who have a stake in what we are trying to accomplish.	1	2	3	4	5
	10. All the organizations that we need to be members of this collaborative group have become members of the group.	1	2	3	4	5
Members see collaboration as in their self-interest	11. My organization will benefit from being involved in this collaboration.	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to compromise	12. People involved in our collaboration are willing to compromise on important aspects of our project.	1	2	3	4	5
Members share a stake in both process and outcome	13. The organizations that belong to our collaborative group invest the right amount of time in our collaborative efforts.	1	2	3	4	5

Factor	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral, No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
	14. Everyone who is a member of our collaborative group wants this project to succeed.	1	2	3	4	5
	15. The level of commitment among the collaboration participants is high.	1	2	3	4	5
Multiple layers of participation	16. When the collaborative group makes major decisions, there is always enough time for members to take information back to their organizations to confer with colleagues about what the decision should be.	1	2	3	4	5
	17. Each of the people who participate in decisions in this collaborative group can speak for the entire organization they represent, not just a part.	1	2	3	4	5
Flexibility	18. There is a lot of flexibility when decisions are made; people are open to discussing different options.	1	2	3	4	5
	19. People in this collaborative group are open to different approaches to how we can do our work. They are willing to consider different ways of working.	1	2	3	4	5
Development of clear roles and policy guidelines	20. People in this collaborative group have a clear sense of their roles and responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5
	21. There is a clear process for making decisions among the partners in this collaboration.	1	2	3	4	5
Adaptability	22. This collaboration is able to adapt to changing conditions, such as fewer funds than expected, changing political climate, or change in leadership.	1	2	3	4	5
	23. This group has the ability to survive even if it had to make major changes in its plans or add some new members in order to reach its goals.	1	2	3	4	5
Appropriate pace of development	24. This collaborative group has tried to take on the right amount of work at the right pace.	1	2	3	4	5
	25. We are currently able to keep up with the work necessary to coordinate all the people, organizations, and activities related to this collaborative project.	1	2	3	4	5
Open and frequent communication	26. People in this collaboration communicate openly with one another.	1	2	3	4	5

Taken from *Collaboration: What Makes it Work 2nd Ed.* by Mattessich et al. Copyright 2001, Fieldstone Alliance. All rights reserved, used with permission. www.FieldstoneAlliance.org

Factor	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral, No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
	27. I am informed as often as I should be about what goes on in the collaboration.	1	2	3	4	5
	28. The people who lead this collaborative group communicate well with the members.	1	2	3	4	5
Established informal relationships and communication links	29. Communication among the people in this collaborative group happens both at formal meetings and in informal ways.	1	2	3	4	5
	30. I personally have informal conversations about the project with others who are involved in this collaborative group.	1	2	3	4	5
Concrete, attainable goals and objectives	31. I have a clear understanding of what our collaboration is trying to accomplish.	1	2	3	4	5
	32. People in our collaborative group know and understand our goals.	1	2	3	4	5
	33. People in our collaborative group have established reasonable goals.	1	2	3	4	5
Shared vision	34. The people in this collaborative group are dedicated to the idea that we can make this project work.	1	2	3	4	5
	35. My ideas about what we want to accomplish with this collaboration seem to be the same as the ideas of others.	1	2	3	4	5
Unique purpose	36. What we are trying to accomplish with our collaborative project would be difficult for any single organization to accomplish by itself.	1	2	3	4	5
	37. No other organization in the community is trying to do exactly what we are trying to do.	1	2	3	4	5
Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time	38. Our collaborative group had adequate funds to do what it wants to accomplish.	1	2	3	4	5
	39. Our collaborative group has adequate "people power" to do what it wants to accomplish.	1	2	3	4	5
Skilled leadership	40. The people in leadership positions for this collaboration have good skills for working with other people and organizations.	1	2	3	4	5