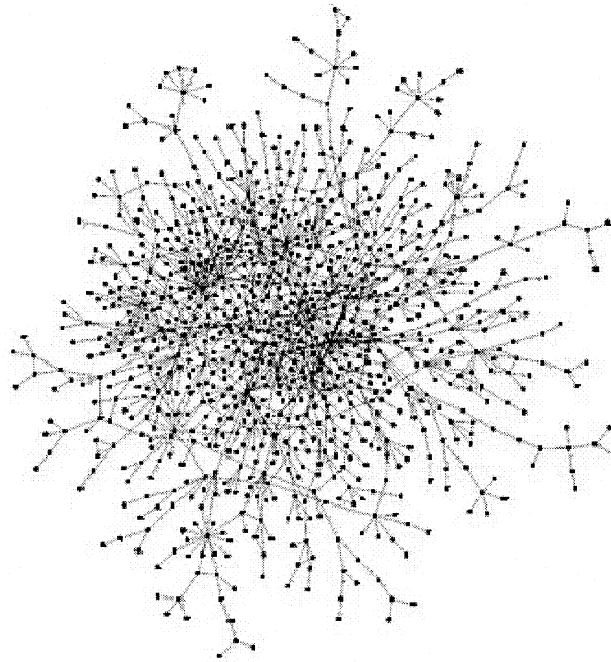


Community Foundation for Monterey County

Social Network Support Project Evaluation



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Executive Summary

This report provides insights for the Community Foundation for Monterey County (CFMC) and a learning opportunity for other foundations interested in establishing, supporting, and expanding effective community improvements through the synergy of networks. The Social Network Support Project (SNSP) Theory of Change described two intended outcomes of successful project implementation: (1) community nonprofits would increase their efficiencies through the use of networked capacities and resources, and (2) the CFMC would increase its knowledge of how the impacts of social networks might transform its grant making and program development.

Three evaluation questions were used to test each of the intended outcomes; the conclusions and recommendations are summarized below:

Community Nonprofit Outcomes

1. Were Monterey County service providers' awareness of and capacity for networking improved through the Community Foundation for Monterey County (CFMC) Social Network Support Project?

Results: Eighty-four percent (84%) of aggregate network members who responded to the network utilization survey felt their network membership was beneficial; 92% felt it would be beneficial in the future. 76% wanted to influence policy makers, decision makers, and elected officials through networked activities. 66% wanted more network focus on mutual concerns, priorities, and tasks.

Recommendations: Support Network Weavers in moving their networks from the formation and focus phases into the action and sustainability phase by capitalizing on network communication, cohesion, and priorities. Network Weavers may be additionally supported through community leadership education and development training.

2. Are the three networks that participated in the Social Network Support Project self-sustaining?

Results: Twenty-two (22) network members were identified as potential Network Weavers; 14 completed 11 hours of interactive training. 86% felt the training somewhat or significantly increased their openness to working with a network mindset. 86% of trained Weavers requested continued support through the Network Weaver Learning Community; 30% requested more training sessions.

Recommendations: Provide Network Weaver training sessions for another 12-16 Weavers to better insure network sustainability. Provide Network Weavers with a comprehensive weavers' handbook and direct networking opportunities to exchange effective weaving strategies. Help Weavers recruit other weavers and delegate tasks to address concerns for time commitments.

3. Do network measures for function and lifecycle phase indicate that networks can more efficiently promote community improvement?

Results: Based on survey results, the three networks were found to be at different functional stages. The Adult Literacy network appeared to straddle the “focus and growth” and “productivity and sustainability” life cycle phases. Network members appeared ready to work together but had not yet focused on specific, common concerns other than professional development activities.

Recommendations: Support Adult Literacy Network Weavers in focusing attention on unifying opportunities that address network concerns. Support Network Weavers in developing the network and engaging network members in purposeful participation.

Results: The Greenfield Community network appeared poised to move more solidly into the action/productivity life-cycle phase. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of surveyed network members indicated their readiness of action. Members appeared enthusiastic about the power of networking and a number of specific, common concerns have been identified.

Recommendations: Support Network Weavers in focusing network attention on common concerns, priorities, and tasks. Support Network Weavers in establishing initial goals that are achievable to inspire even greater momentum.

Results: Survey results indicated the Environment network to be in the formation phase of an action-oriented life-cycle, although the small size of the survey sample should be considered when interpreting the results. Survey responses suggest that network

members may gain greater appreciation of network power with further support and examples of successful network accomplishments.

Recommendations: Additional supports may help newer network members understand the value, benefits, and ways of networking as an effective means of community improvement.

CFMC Outcomes

1. Has CFMC gained knowledge for implementing, building, and sustaining social networks through lifecycle phases?

Results: CFMC staff and evaluators collaborated on developing theory and measures to examine the development of sustainable networks. Network member utilization survey results yielded next steps needed to move each of three networks into their next phase of development. Comparing developmental differences between the three networks provided additional insights, such as:

- one network that existed primarily for internal information exchange will need to conduct a refocusing process before community improvement activities can be expected, and
- the three networks have differing preferences for the use of internet-based networking tools.

Survey instruments used in the study can be applied at a later date to measure longitudinal changes. CFMC staff and evaluators agree that training and support for more Network Weavers is likely a key to network sustainability.

Recommendations: Network Weavers should participate in sharing the network development theory, measures, and analysis with networks to obtain their input and generate consensus for

next steps. Individual network culture should be considered when facilitating next steps. Network members may need hands-on training to facilitate the use of new communication technologies.

2. Has CFMC gained knowledge of how the impacts of social networks might transform grant making and program development?

CFMC has learned about the impacts of network development from its philanthropic peers. By the fall of 2010, the Greenfield Community and Environment networks submitted funding proposals to CFMC's General Endowment fund. CFMC has gained valuable knowledge about the potential effects of funding network projects; substantial results will be seen over time among these and additional networks.

Recommendations: Continue participating in networking communities of practice with other foundations and philanthropic organizations. Continue connecting with social network thought leaders and professional associations that promote networking in the human services fields.

3. Can CFMC provide other foundations and philanthropic funders with insights for developing and sustaining service provider networks?

Results: CFMC evaluators presented study findings at the 2010 American Evaluation Association conference. Study authors have been invited to submit an article about theory and measuring tools for publication in *The Foundation Review*.

Recommendations: Continue to share findings with the Network Weaver Community of Practice, Network of Network Funders, the American Evaluation Association Social Network Analysis topical interest group, and other practitioners.

Introduction

What the world needs now is more social connections, because social networks are fundamentally related to the spread of goodness.

Nicholas Christakis

Social networks have been defined as individuals, groups, or organizations working together to advance shared interests in ways that may create greater impacts than by working independently. Christakis believes that social networks are critically important to transmitting ideas, kindness, information, and goodness; and if society realized how valuable networks were, we would focus far more of our time, energy and resources into helping these networks to flourish.¹ According to other leading social researchers:

Everyone participates in networks. The study and practice of multi-stakeholder engagement, collaboration, and organizational development are also well-established disciplines that inform our understanding of networks. What's different now is that a wave of new technologies—from conference calls and e-mails to blogs, wikis, tags, texts, and tweets—allow people to more easily visualize, communicate with, and act on existing personal and professional networks, and to forge strong connections with new ones. These tools make it possible to link with any number of people (irrespective of geographic distance), to access a greater diversity of perspectives, to accelerate the sharing of information, and to drastically reduce the costs of participation and coordination. That makes them well suited to facilitating progress on complex social and environmental challenges that require people and organizations to coordinate their efforts across traditional boundaries and sectors.²

Purpose and Opportunity: The Community Foundation for Monterey County (CFMC) supported the networking of local nonprofit organizations by mapping three networks,³ encouraging communications, building mutual capacity, and providing a forum for imagining greater possibilities to “produce change far beyond the success of any single grant, grantee, or donor.”⁴ With a grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and planning support from the Monitor Institute, CFMC launched the Social Network Support Project (SNSP), beginning with creating an awareness of network benefits, network mapping, and supportive assistance to foster a network mindset. As of August 2010, three networks addressing Adult Literacy, the Greenfield Community, and Environmental issues had been launched and mapped, and functioned at various development phases. This report provides insights for CFMC and a learning opportunity for other foundations interested in establishing, supporting, and expanding effective community improvements through the synergy of networks.

Theory of Change: Evaluators use a graphic display called a “Theory of Change” to clarify approaches and assumptions for making complex societal changes by generalizing outcomes that are expected to occur as the result of an intervention.⁵ The SNSP Theory of Change provides outcomes that benefit (1) the nonprofit community’s efficiencies through the use of networked capacities and resources, and (2) the CFMC by increased knowledge of how the impacts of social networks might transform grant making and program development.

Figure 1: Social Network Support Project Theory of Change

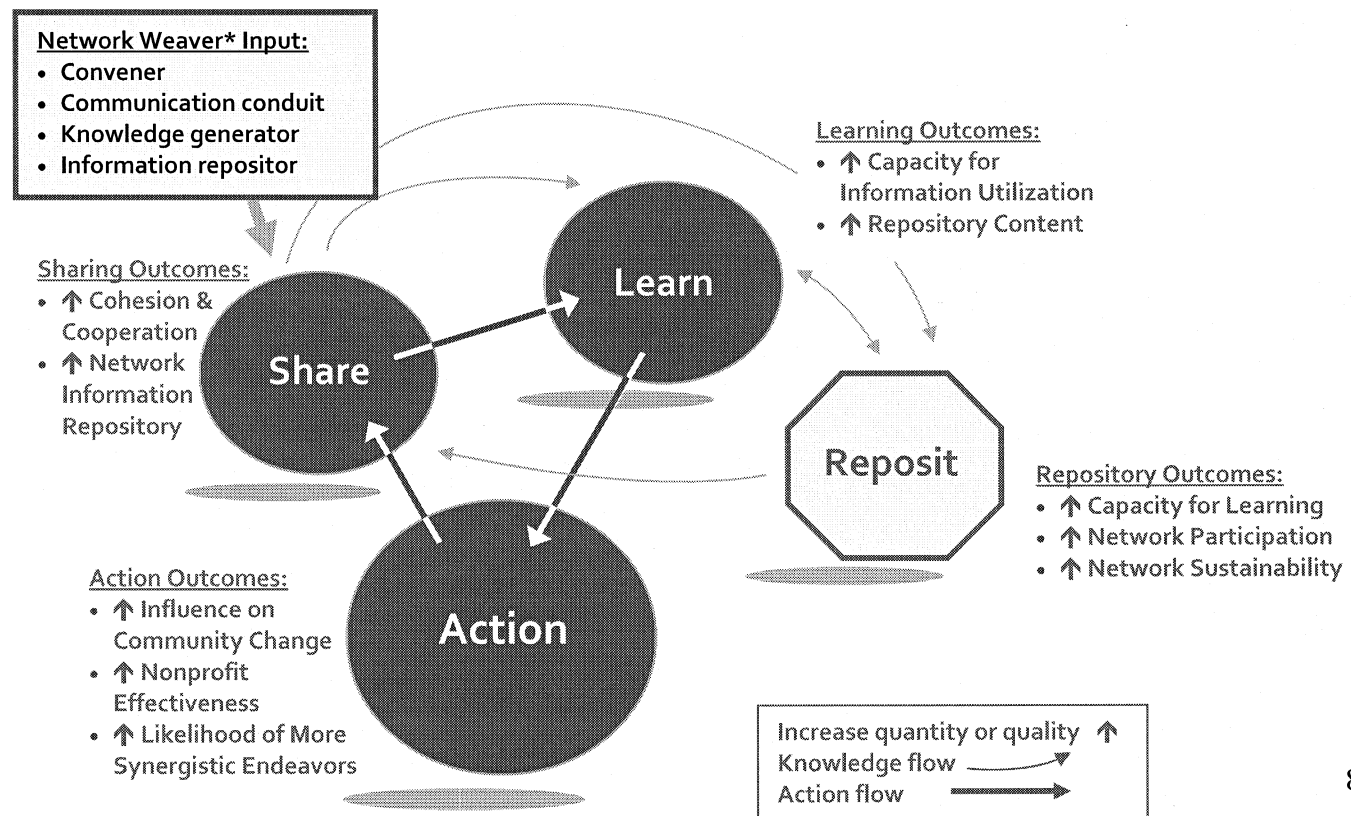


*CFMC is The Community Foundation for Monterey County

Section I. How Social Networks Function

Operational Functions: Networks can be described as having a “hub and spokes” or “collaborative” operating structure, with the first type having member relationships with a central coordinator (Network Weaver*) but not each other, and the latter type having shared communication and peer-to-peer leadership that facilitates a flow of sharing, knowledge, and capacity-building functions between network members.⁷ According to these definitions, SNSP uses a modified collaborative structure in that the Network Weaver assumes the role of providing input (as convener, knowledge generator, a communication conduit, and manager of the information repository) with the intent to share this role with developing Network Weavers. Networks have been shown to benefit from having a coordinating entity among a variety of network roles.⁸ Given the functional operation of networks (1. sharing, 2. learning, 3. repositing information and ideas, and 4. group action), the Network Weaver provides the network with stability to address membership attrition, reliability to reinforce network functions, and encouragement to foster network performance.

Figure 2: Social Network Support Project Operational Functions



**Network Weavers are leaders who actively take responsibility for building interactions between and among people, groups, and entities. They also weave new and richer connections between among networks.*

Lifecycle Phases and Characteristics: As network characteristics (interactions and productivity) evolve so do the roles of Network Weavers and Members. Borrowing some elements from network researchers in the international development and public health fields,^{9,10} a network life-cycle system may be described in the following four phases: (1) forming, (2) growing and focusing, (3) productivity and sustainability, and (4) decline or renewal.

Lifecycle Phase	Phase Characteristics and Roles of Network Weavers and Members
Formation (sharing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the formation phase, <u>Network Weavers</u> work to convene and inspire members, teach benefits and power of network efforts, analyze network connections, provide communication methods and means - in general, act as leaders, educators, and strategists to effectively support the network. • <u>Network members</u> during the formation phase share information with each other, learn from each other, and establish relationships, but work independently with little collaboration. They may seek ways to collaborate while continuing to protect their independent interests. They may gain productivity as a result of the information repository, but not necessarily through joint activities. The work of individual members may be aggregated to demonstrate "network" activities.
Focus and Growth (learning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the focus and growth phase, <u>Network Weavers</u> flex between leader and facilitator roles as network members begin to explore issues, voice their preferences, work through decision-making processes, and develop a strategic plan against which network activities and accomplishments can be measured. • During the focus and growth phase, <u>network members</u> plan and work collaboratively with joint purpose and goals. Network activity – such as knowledge contributions and communications – and productive relationships become apparent.
Productivity & Sustainability (action)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the productivity and sustainability phases, <u>Network Weavers</u> foster a "collective leadership"¹¹ that assumes coordination of network sharing, learning, repositing, and use functions. Network Weavers keep a focus on productivity, assures activities are relevant, and guards against stagnation. • Relationships mature as network members become group oriented; network productivity increases as <u>network members</u> jointly reach outside of their individual agendas. Network activities and accomplishments should be measurable and readily acknowledgeable, as successes fuel future endeavors.
Decline or Renewal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of <u>Network Weavers</u> may be filled jointly or by a succession of leaders who reflect the changing composition of the network membership, however, the Weavers' consistent role is to encourage working together to advance shared interests, lead efforts to update a strategic plan, and reinforce value-added ways that networks can create greater impacts than organizations working independently. • Membership attrition, fluxuation, and additions will change <u>network member</u> dynamics. Some relationships become long-term, combinations and re-combinations of members will form to address specific issues, influences and impacts will become apparent, and the value of the network is regenerating.