



The State of Network Evaluation

GEO 2015 Learning Conference

Boston

June 10, 2015

Network Impact serves social-change agents with a mix of strategies, tools, research, and consulting expertise to design and use networks for increased impact www.networkimpact.org

Social Impact Network

People and/or organizations who connect in a deliberate way to advance a change agenda

- Shared purpose
- Member-driven
- Flexible
- Voluntary
- Decentralized

At Your Table..

- What kind(s) of network is your organization currently supporting/interested in supporting?
- What is your top network evaluation question or challenge?

2014 Network Evaluation Project

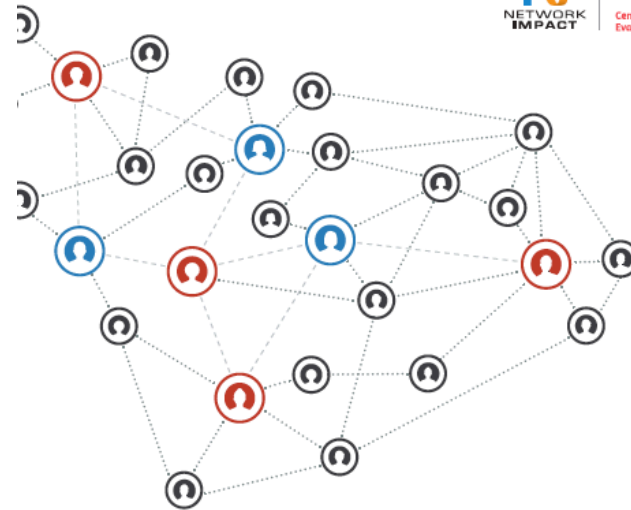
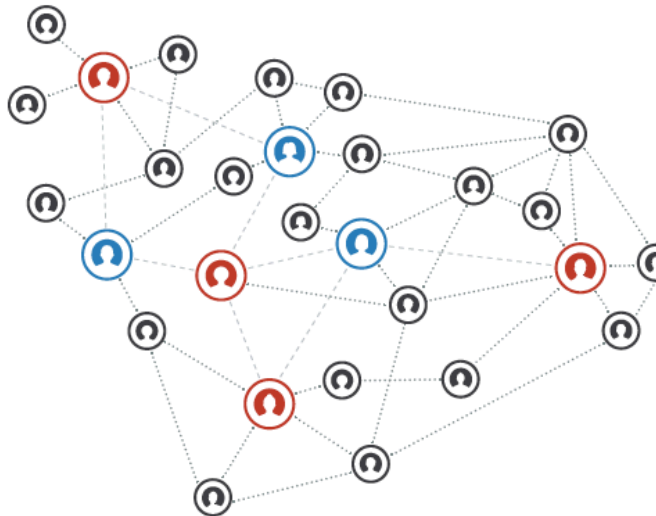


Part 1 of a Guide to Network Evaluation

Framing Paper: The State of Network Evaluation

Network Impact and Center for Evaluation Innovation

July 2014



Part 2 of a Guide to Network Evaluation

Evaluating Networks for Social Change: A Casebook

Madeleine Taylor, Peter Plastrik, Julia Cottman and Anne Whalley

Network Impact and Center for Evaluation Innovation

July 2014

Characteristics of Networks that Matter for Evaluation

- Networks have numerous players, many of whom enter and exit the network
- Networks are dynamic “moving targets” that adapt to changes in their context or changes among their membership
- It takes time to organize networks effectively and show results
- Networks have a “chain of impact”
- Network shape and function matter

Evaluation Focus

Connectivity

- *Membership* or the people or organizations that participate in a network
- *Structure* or how connections between members are structured and what flows through those connections

Health

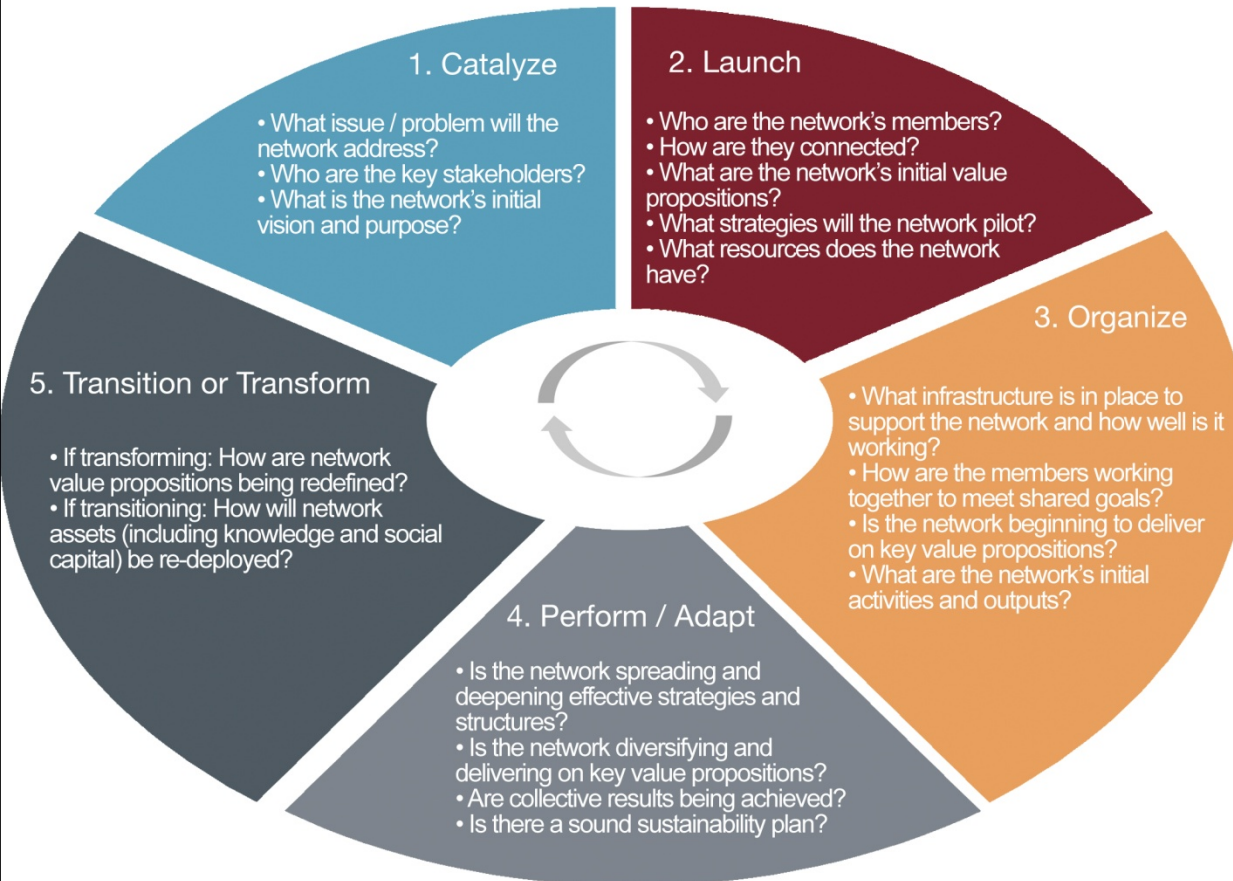
- *Resources* or the material resources a network needs to sustain itself (e.g., external funding)
- *Infrastructure* or the internal systems and structures that support the network (e.g., communication, rules and processes)
- *Advantage* or the network's capacity for joint value creation

Results

- *Interim outcomes* or the results achieved as the network works toward its ultimate goal or intended impact
- Achievement of the *goal or intended impact* itself (e.g., a policy outcome was achieved, a particular practice was spread, the community or its members changed in a certain way).

Evaluating Through a Network Lifecycle

Stages of Network Development with Evaluation Questions



Evaluation Methods and Tools by Stage

- System mapping of the focus issue or problem and/or important system players
- Interviews and/or focus groups with key stakeholders
- Draft network theory of change
- Network connectivity mapping
- Survey of members' value proposition satisfaction
- Analysis of network documents (statement of purpose, budget, business plan, etc.)
- Network health survey
- Interviews and/or focus groups with members
- Observation of network activities/meetings
- Survey of members' value proposition satisfaction
- Analysis of network documents
- Adapting the theory of change as needed
- Network health survey
- Survey of members' value proposition satisfaction
- Analysis of network results or impacts
- Survey of members' value proposition satisfaction
- Interviews and/or focus groups with network members

Network Evaluation Purposes and Intended Users

Support strategic learning and continuous improvement.

NETWORK STRATEGY

Ensure accountability for the use of resources.

Examine network results or impact.

Network Evaluation Design

Accountability

Holding networks accountable to strict plans and timelines is not likely to yield useful findings since network strategies and anticipated outcomes are likely to evolve

Strategic Learning

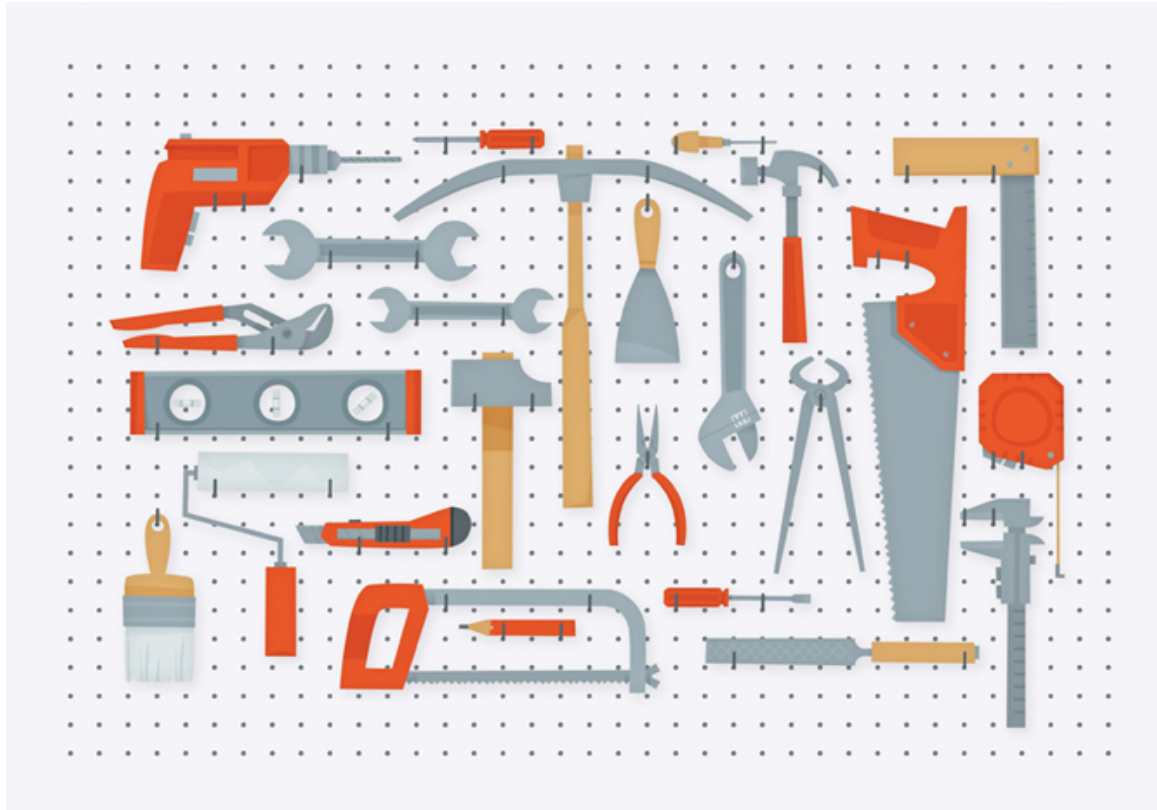
Designs for assessing complex systems or processes of social innovation, such as developmental evaluation or the application of systems thinking to the evaluation particularly can be useful

Results

Most designs are necessarily non-experimental because of the complexity and evolving nature of the “intervention”

Questions?

Network Evaluation Tools

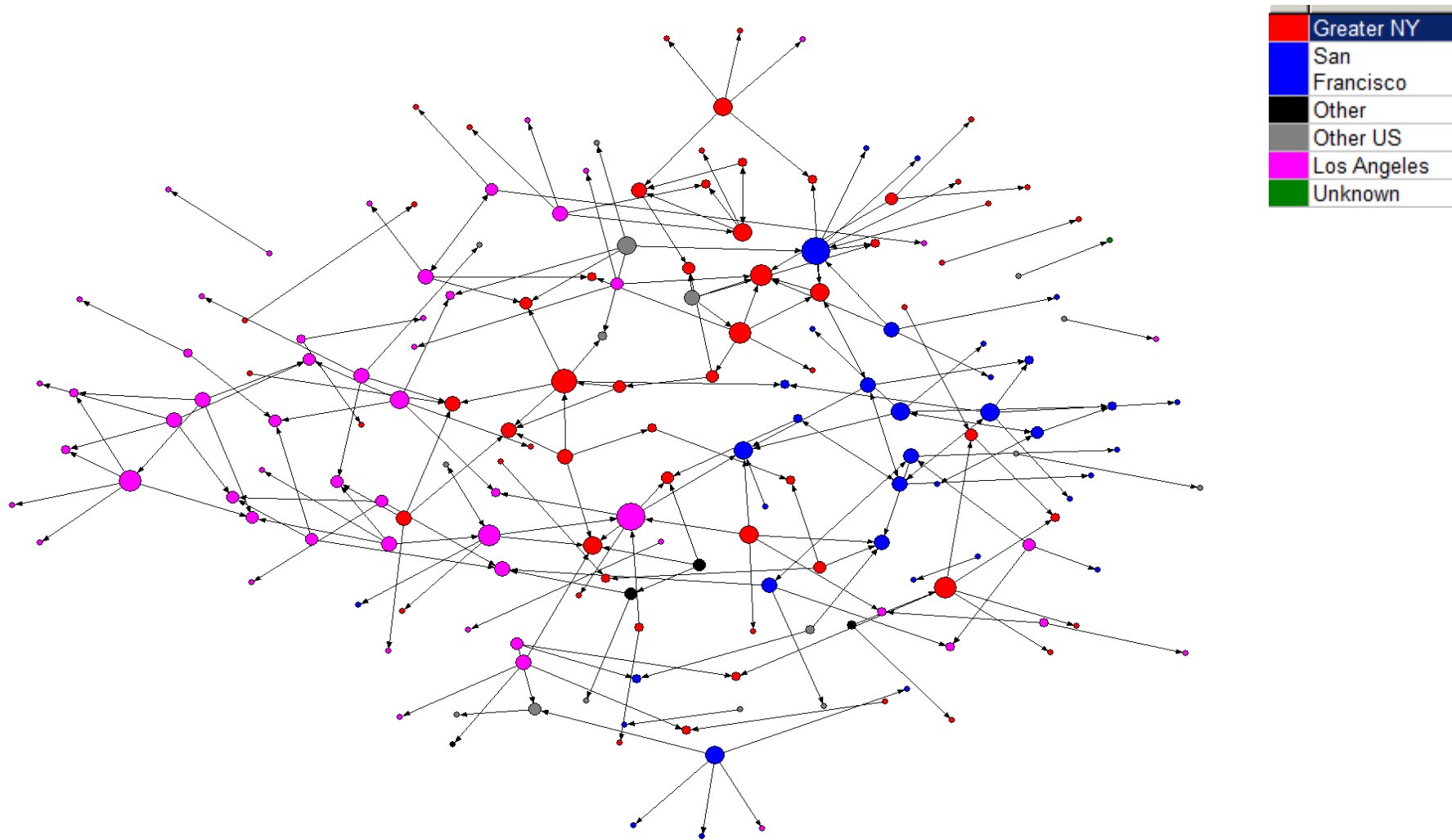


SNA and Network Visualization

Social Network Analysis (SNA) is set of theories, tools, and processes for understanding the relationships and structures of a network

- Social relationships in SNA are represented as connections or links between “nodes”
- Nodes = people or organizations
- Nodes may also represent ideas, issues or events

Rebooters Connecting Within and Across Places



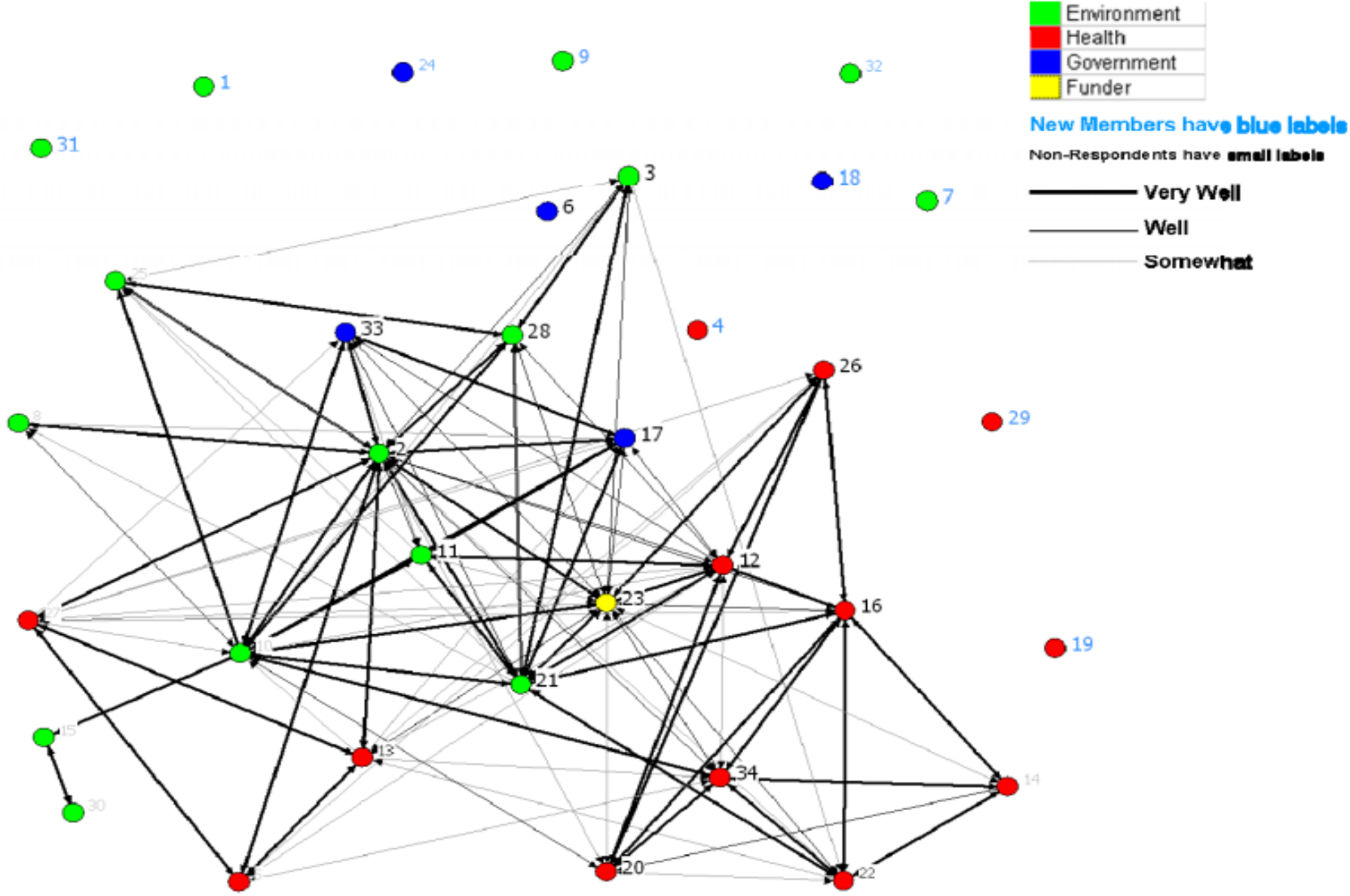
Larger nodes have greater number of connections

Use in Network Assessment

Understand and evaluate patterns of network connectivity that are difficult to decipher by other means:

- Who is connected to whom and how? Who is not connected but should be?
- Has the network assembled members with the capacities needed to meet network goals (experience, skills, connections)?
- What is flowing through the network—information and other resources?
- How efficient are the connections the network makes?
- *Changes over time*

Nonprofits Connecting Within & Across Sectors

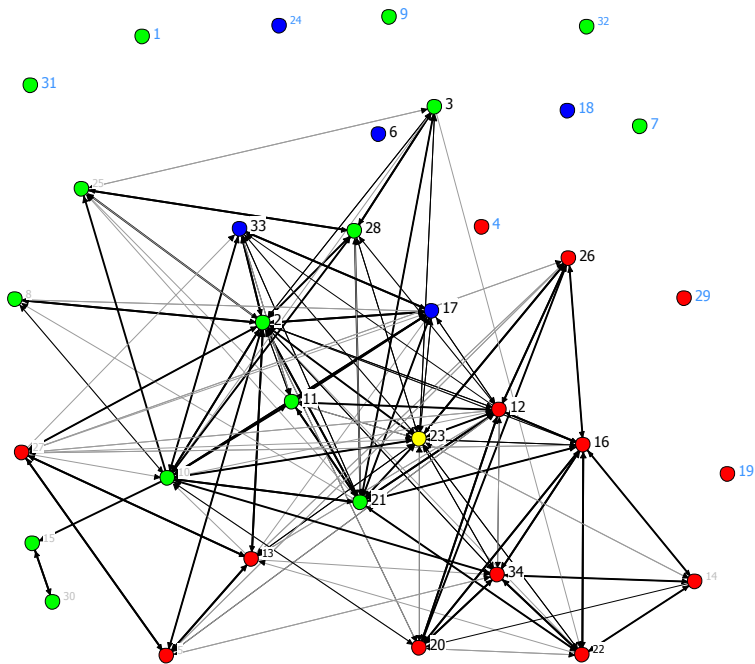


Width of line indicates tie strength.

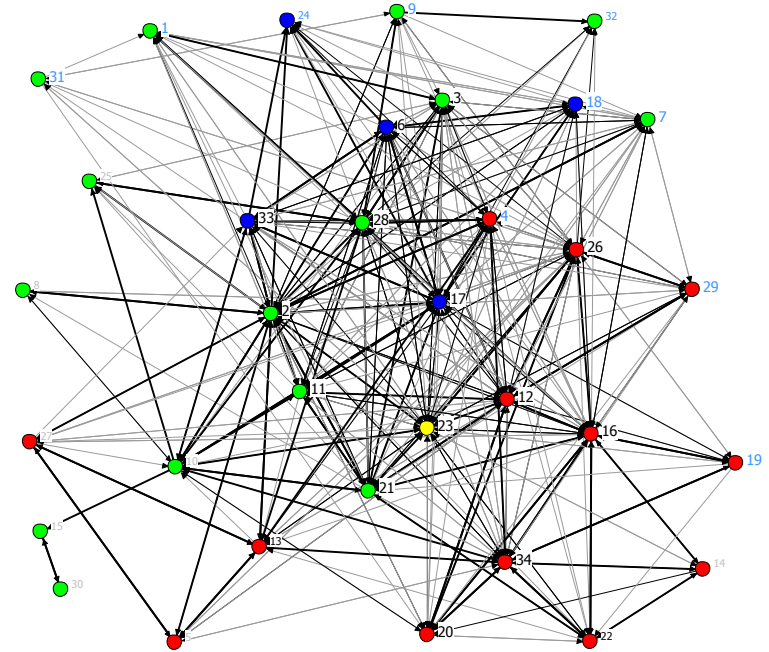
Measuring Changes Over Time



2005

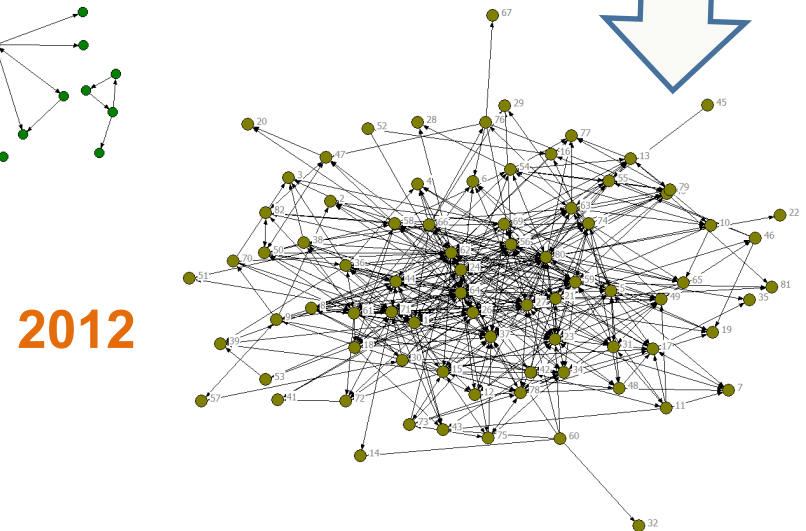
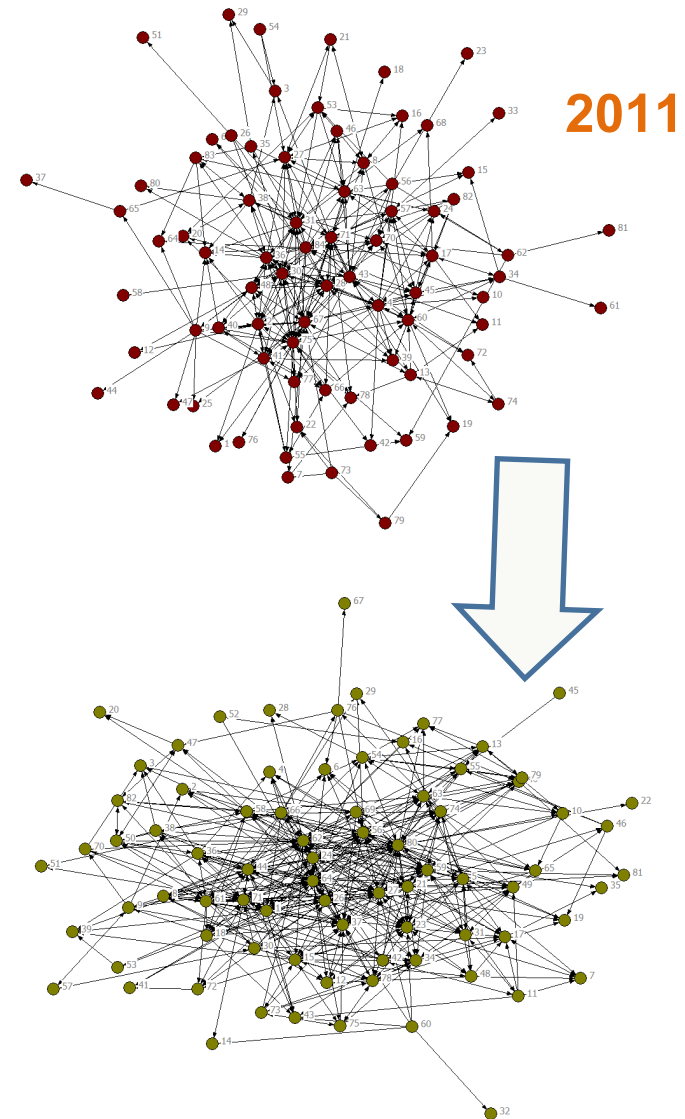
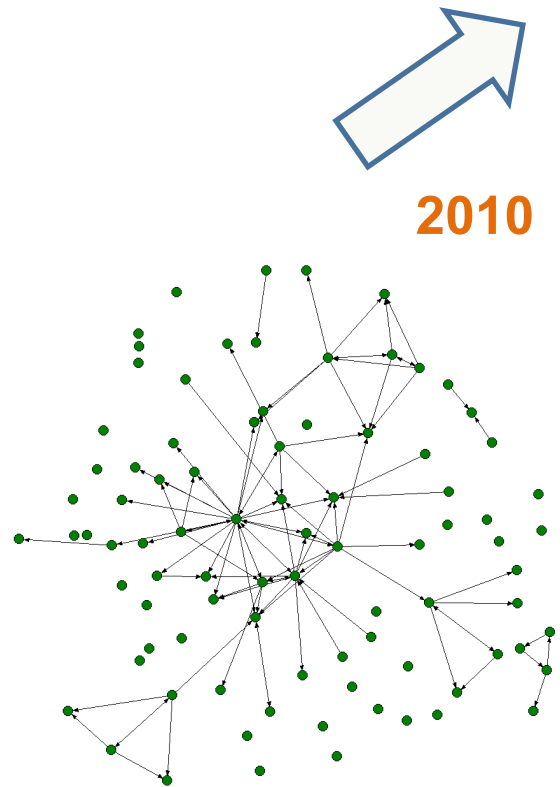
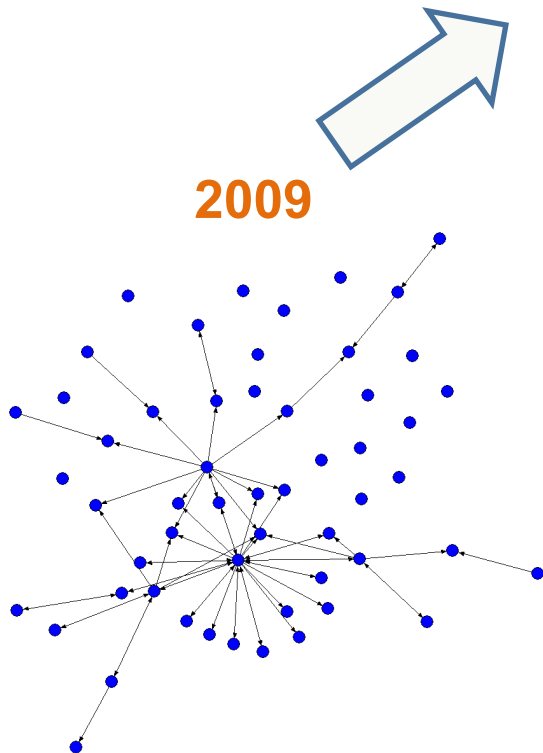


2007



Metrics Can Enhance Interpretation of Maps

Year	#	Density	Avg # ties
2009	55	2.2%	1.2
2010	90	2.7%	2.4
2011	85	5.3%	4.5
2012	82	8%	6.88



Other Uses of Network Mapping



"It's interpret-your-own-test-results day today."

Resources

Who does this work?

- SNA specialists in academic settings
- Independent consultants
- Designers of SNA and network visualization software packages
- Networks practitioners

No-cost resources for network practitioners (and others):

- **NodeXL** : a free, relatively easy- to-use network mapping software that works within Microsoft Excel
- **Netdraw and UCINET**: used by academics, free but a little harder to use
- **Gephi** : a more recent entrant into the field of no cost network visualization tools

Diagnostic Tools: Network Effectiveness and Health

- Provide practitioners with an overview of network conditions to inform internal adjustments
- Help guide technical assistance and professional development opportunities
- Triangulate other evaluation data

Characteristic	Desired Attributes	HIGH	MED	LOW	Notes on Overall Performance	Potential Actions to Strengthen the Network
Value	Clearly articulated give and get for participants					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage network participants in framing network purpose and goals Clearly articulate value the network aspires to deliver to participants Regularly test the network value with participants and refine / update as needed Ensure that the network is accountable to the community it seeks to serve
	Delivers value/outcomes to participants					
	Network value propositions are aligned and evolve with participant demand					
Participation	Participation includes the necessary diversity knowledge, skills and capacity to achieve purpose					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map the network --to determine who is in the network and how connected they are, and identify new participants and strategies for engaging them Determine network boundaries – who is in and who is out. Determine how porous these boundaries should be Welcome and orient new participants, develop a standard process for doing so Hire a network weaver to bring the right participants into the mix and increase connectivity throughout the network Create workspaces that invite community building and participation—online and in-person Identify ‘open triangles’ and close them – identify two people who you know and who would benefit from knowing each other and introduce them Encourage small collaborative projects among just two or three network participants Codify a code of conduct, share it broadly, and live by it
	New participants can quickly become productive within the network					
	High voluntary engagement in the network					
	Participants have a formal or informal code of conduct and high level of trust with one another					
	Participants regularly interact and collaborate with one another without going through a central hub					
Form	Network has a concept of its structure, how it suits its purpose, and how it might evolve (e.g. from hub and spoke to multi-hub structure)					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map the network in order to visualize structure, diagnose strengths and weaknesses, and identify strategies for growing the network Facilitate an open strategic conversation that encourages participation from across the network; solicit the ‘wisdom of the crowd’ Grow the number of people on the periphery of the network and create opportunities for their fresh ideas to flow into the network Create an innovation fund – a dedicated resource for cutting edge work that creates a mandate for risk-taking
	Balance of top-down and bottom-up strategies for doing the work of the network					
	Network spaces invite self-organized action					

Network Health Scorecard

22 questions to build a basic network diagnosis of strengths and areas of growth.

www.networkimpact.org



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

Network Performance

Network Operations

Network Capacity

	Not so much			Totally!	
	1	2	3	4	5
NETWORK PURPOSE					
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"/>

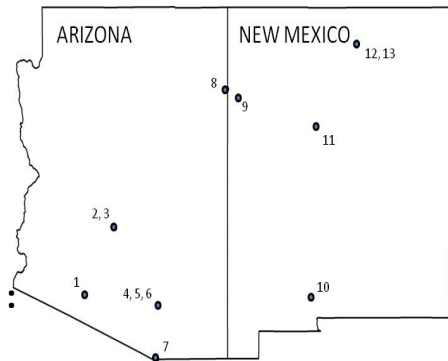
The Evolution of a Regional Network

Overview

The Southwest Rural Policy Network (SWRPN) has been in development for over six years. Thirteen organizations representing the states of Arizona (7), and New Mexico (6) were funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation through an initiative called Rural People, Rural Policy (RPRP). RPRP's specific purpose was to energize and equip rural organizations and networks to shape policy that will improve the vitality of rural communities and the lives of their residents.

The SWRPN has made great strides over the years in the development of its operational processes and performance. Through the use of a "network health scorecard", the SWRPN has been able to track its evolution relating to the purpose, performance, operations, and capacity around network activities. (*Arbor Consulting and Cause Communications)

Location of Network Members

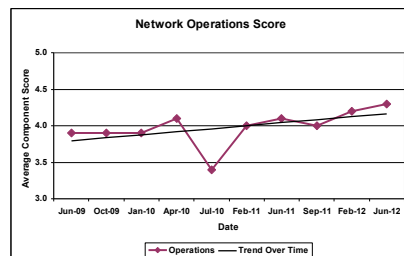
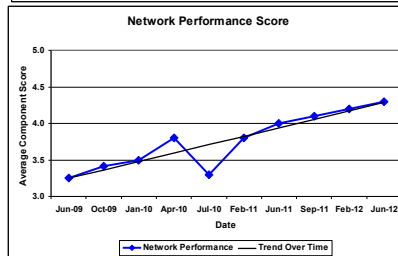
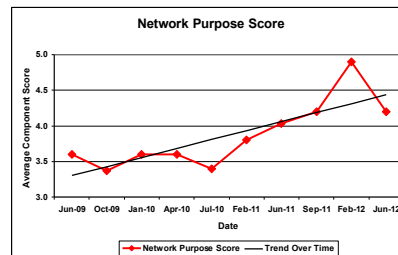


Joyce A. Hospodar, MBA, MPA, PI and Jennifer Peters, BA, Co-PI

Evaluation Method

- Distributed the "network health scorecard" at each quarterly face to face meeting to each person attending the meeting.
- Collected data starting in June 2009 until June 2012 yielding 10 data points for each of the 22 statements.
- Ranked each statement using a 5 point Likert Scale -1 being 'Not so much' to 5 being 'Totally'.
- Statements categorized as follows: Network Purpose (3 statements); Network Performance (9 statements); Network Operations (7 statements); Network Capacity (3 statements).

Results

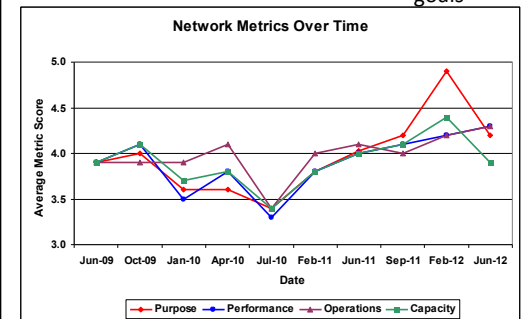
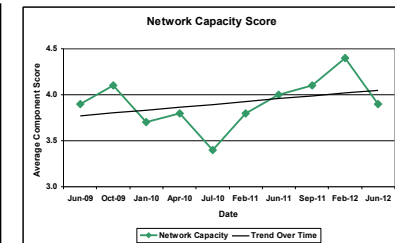


- Strategic Plan developed
- Three Action Teams formed
- Project Funds received

- Value added by working together
- Inability to attract needed funds
- Network communication with stakeholders needs to be enhanced

- Competent and Stable Network Coordinator
- Quarterly face-to-face meetings/other ongoing communication
- Unequal contribution by existing members

Results



- Member skills present to advance goals
- Member connections help to advance goals
- Lack material resources to attain goals

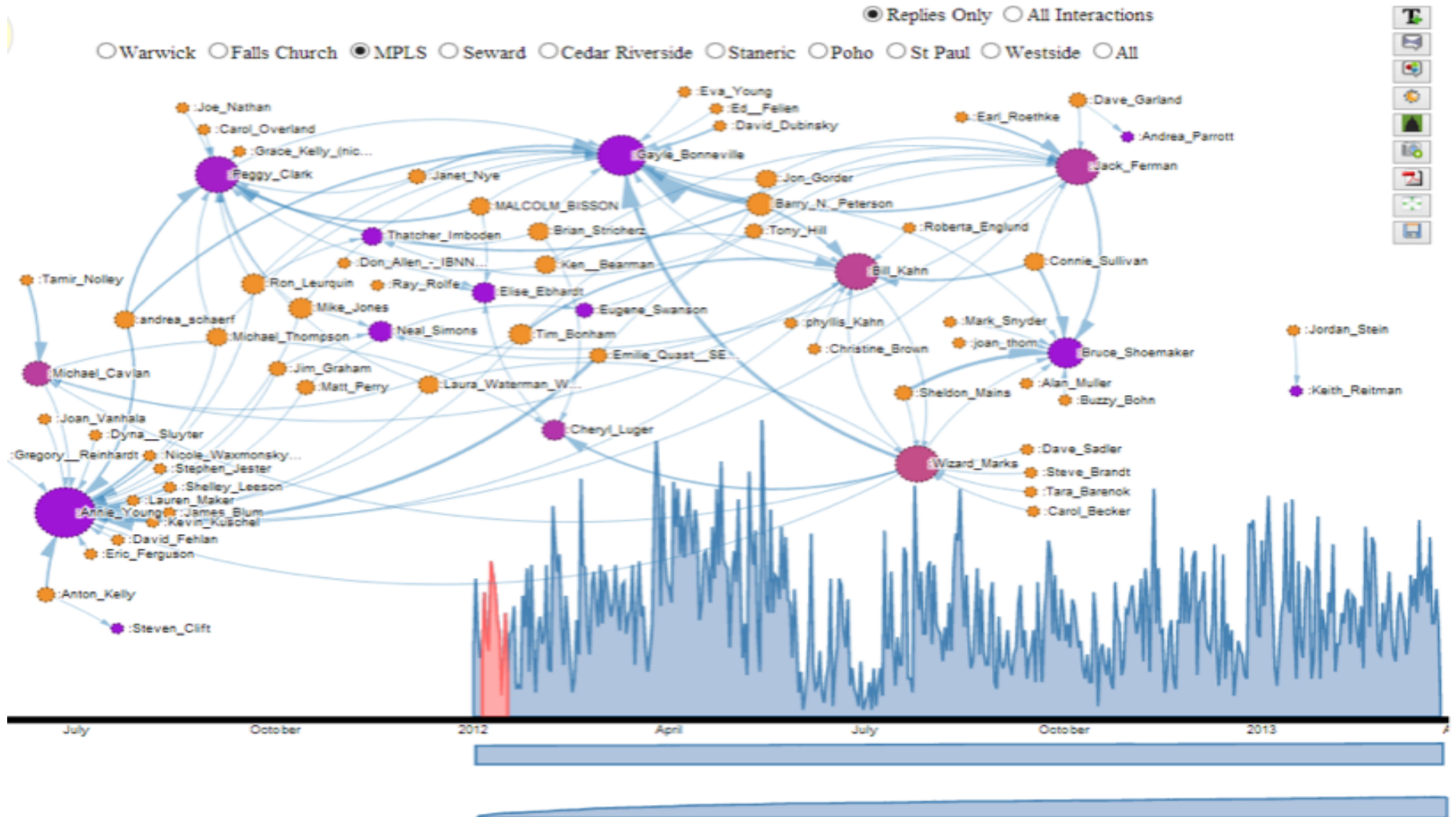
Advancement in the Network Purpose made great strides over the past 2 years. Small funding support for specific projects helped members begin to focus directly on policy work. Coordinator turnover stabilized Network Operations. Network Performance and Network Capacity continues on a positive trajectory.

Conclusion

Establishing a network made of up very diverse organizations takes time. There are many factors to consider that need to be monitored and addressed going forward if there is to be a sustainable and effective operating network.

Over the past six years, the SWRPN has been able to focus on policy efforts around economic development, health care, and the environment. The Network used the results of the scorecard to monitor its progress and work on areas needing improvement. All 13 organizations are committed going forward to have an impact on policy priorities affecting the rural communities of Arizona, New Mexico, and beyond.

On the Horizon...



Questions?

Other tools?