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Tools

Using Social Network Analysis to Understand the Perceived Role and Influence of Foundations

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Keywords: *Foundations, network analysis, collaboration, evaluation*

Introduction

Foundations play a prominent role in philanthropy, representing nearly $67 billion, or 16%, of giving in the United States during 2017 (Indiana University Lilly School of Philanthropy, 2018). Arguably, more important than the level of giving is the collective impact of foundations working in concert with grantees to address an array of social purposes. The critical relationship between foundation and grantee is complicated due to an imbalance in power and accountability when one party in a relationship is dependent on resources from another. Whereas funders rightfully demand accountability from grantees through evaluations and reporting, grantees have more limited and challenging means of holding funders accountable. These include turning down grant support — an unlikely response for most organizations — or, "they may exercise voice through complaints and efforts to reform their funders" (Ebrahim, 2003, p. 201). More generally, "the power and wealth of private foundations often prevents them from getting good criticism" (Wisely, 2002, p. 163).

This article introduces an emerging tool that complements the information gathered in traditional grantee surveys. Social network analysis (SNA) is used to assess collaboration among organizations in a community and its outcomes. A unique, yet often underemphasized, benefit of this approach is the focus on dyadic relationships between organizations. This presents an opportunity for foundations to better understand their role in collaborative efforts and how they are perceived by the organizations working alongside

Key Points

- Collaboration between foundations and other organizations is critical to the success of foundation-supported initiatives, but the power dynamics among foundations, grantees, and their broader communities can be challenging. Social network analysis is a tool to assess collaboration among organizations and its outcomes. A unique yet often underemphasized benefit of this method of analysis is its focus on dyadic relationships between organizations, which presents an opportunity for foundations to evaluate their role in a network and how they are perceived by the very organizations whose missions they support.
- This article leverages a social network analysis of community partners focused on addressing needs of people experiencing homelessness and housing shortages to illustrate how the results can constructively inform foundations on how they are viewed by community partners along dimensions of trust, value, resource contribution, activities, and contribution to outcomes. The analysis is conducted using an online network survey, analysis, and reporting tool called PARTNER — Program to Analyze, Record and Track Networks to Enhance Relationships.
- The analysis of survey responses captures over 600 unique dyadic partnerships across more than 40 community organizations, including their relationships with participating foundations. The PARTNER tool satisfies the need to evaluate both the impact of collaborative initiatives supported by foundations and foundations' roles in these efforts.

them in support of their mission, including those they support financially.[1]

To demonstrate the use of SNA, we leverage an analysis of a community focused on addressing needs of people experiencing homelessness and housing shortage to illustrate how SNA can constructively inform foundations on their positions within a collaborative. The network analysis is conducted using the PARTNER (Program to Analyze, Record, and Track Networks to Enhance Relationships) platform (Visible Network Labs, n.d.a). Survey responses capture over 600 unique dyadic partnerships across more than 40 organizations, including each organization's relationship with engaged foundations. The tool satisfies the dual needs to evaluate the impact of collaborative initiatives supported by foundations while simultaneously learning where foundations can refine their practices to strengthen roles in the community, enhance trust, and provide even greater value.

Social network analysis is used to assess collaboration among organizations in a community and its outcomes. A unique, yet often underemphasized, benefit of this approach is the focus on dyadic relationships between organizations.

Evaluating Foundations

Foundations are increasingly focusing on the impact of their activities, and the traditional tool to determine outcomes is evaluation. The focus of evaluation is generally the effectiveness of grant-funded programs conducted by external grantees. Nearly 20 years ago, Wisely asked, "[Why] has progress in evaluation in private foundations been so slow and intermittent?" (2002, p. 159). In response, she highlighted the need for a foundation to embrace the feedback of a range of stakeholders about its work and to focus the organization on learning, rather than just demonstrating programmatic successes.

Unlike most organizations, funders experience dual needs for evaluation. First, the expectation to evaluate programs and activities receiving foundation support is strong for accountability and strategic purposes. Second, periodically evaluating the foundation's own performance is necessary but potentially less urgent in the day-to-day operations of a funder. These two levels of evaluation are linked by the grantees, who serve as programmatic partners in achieving foundation goals.

The field recognizes this duality of foundation evaluation activity (Easterling & Csuti, 1999; Kramer & Bickel, 2004; Behrens & Kelly, 2008). Easterling and Csuti classify evaluations as either grantee-focused or foundation-focused, and observe that "evaluation will never achieve its true potential within philanthropy so long as the lens is trained only outwardly" (1999, p. 1). We think of these distinctions as outward- and inward-looking evaluations, respectively. At the heart of the foundation-focused evaluation is the relationship with grantees and community partners.

For funders, mechanisms that provide a candid, inward look at the organization's position and role in society are hard to come by. A notable exception is the Center for Effective Philanthropy's Grantee Perception Report, a survey-based approach to generating information on the funder-grantee relationship used for learning and improvement. Grantee Perception Reports are used by many foundations, and some publicly release their reports to bolster transparency and accountability. A notable benefit of these reports

[1] We recognize the diversity of foundations, including nonoperating private foundations, community foundations, and operating foundations (Guy & Ely, 2018). The tool presented here is applicable to any type of foundation engaged in a collaborative setting. By a collaborative, we mean an intentional effort by a group of organizations to work together to achieve a common goal, solve a problem, disseminate knowledge and innovation, or develop a coordinated system (among other foci).

Social network analysis is the study of the structural relationships among interacting network members and examines how those relationships connect to outcomes.

is the ability to compare a foundation's performance with peer foundations. Other foundations have leveraged the Grantee Perception Report as a piece of a broader foundation evaluation strategy. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is a prominent example: It developed a scorecard that included grantmaking activity and survey-based feedback from a wide range of stakeholders (Colby, Fishman, & Pickell, 2011).

Evaluating foundations by looking inward is an exercise to support continuous improvement, but how do foundations respond to such evidence-based critiques? Anecdotal evidence suggests that some foundations incorporate grantee feedback from surveys into their operations. Buchanan, Bolduc, and Huang (2005), for example, detail how some users of the Grantee Perception Report responded to the results by redesigning grantmaking processes, making administrative burdens proportional for different-sized grants, maintaining valued research staff, and dropping specific programs. Colby et al. (2011, p. 75) describe the "jolting wake-up call" for the RWJF following the initial comparison of its grantee survey results to peers and the resulting establishment of targets for subsequent results.

Behrens and Kelly (2008) highlight SNA as an emerging approach to evaluation. The following section details the potential for SNA to contribute to foundation-focused, or inward, evaluation.

Social Network Analysis

Foundations operate within formal and informal networks. Here, we use the term network to represent more formal partnerships among three or more organizations established to achieve mutually desired objectives. Networks are a prominent strategy for addressing complex societal challenges, particularly efforts that cross sectors, but are less suitable for activities that can be achieved within a single organization (Popp, MacKean, Casebeer, Milward, & Lindstrom, 2014).

Although we conceptualize networks as a group of organizations with a shared or at least overlapping mission, it is important to acknowledge that network partners often have different perspectives on the network (Provan, Veazie, Staten, & Teufel-Shone, 2005). This is especially true for organizations like foundations and nonprofit service providers, which may have very different day-to-day priorities and objectives (Chapman & Varda, 2017; Hogg & Varda 2016). While specific goals may differ by organization, the literature suggests that an effective network attains outcomes unachievable by a network member acting alone (Provan & Kenis, 2008).

Social network analysis is the study of the structural relationships among interacting network members and examines how those relationships connect to outcomes (Scott, 2017). As an evaluation tool, advocates suggest, SNA can serve as a guide for improving network management (Popp et al., 2014). Examining networks using SNA is performed at multiple levels. Frequently, the focus of SNA is on the entire network and its outcomes, but SNA also provides beneficial information for individual organizations within the network (Provan et al., 2005).

Some existing research focused on foundations takes a network perspective in highlighting approaches to strengthen network capacity for systems change (Easterling, 2012) and to evaluate networks (Taylor, Whatley, & Coffman, 2015). Others expressed a desire to expand networks of interest beyond just grantees and funders (Nolan, Souza, Monopoli, & Hughes, 2017), which reflects a key strength of SNA — namely, its capacity to capture a broader group of relationships with foundations compared to traditional grantee surveys.

Social Network Analysis Using the PARTNER Platform

This article describes one tool for conducting SNA and the potential benefits for foundation members of networks. The PARTNER platform, originally funded by the RWJF, launched in 2008 as an online application to help build the capacity of the public health sector to measure and monitor collaboration among organizations (Varda, Chandra, Stern, & Lurie, 2008). PARTNER is used extensively by cross-sector networks to analyze how their members are connected, how resources are exchanged, the levels of trust and perceived value among network members, and to link outcomes to the process of collaboration.

PARTNER includes both a customizable, validated 19-question survey and an analysis tool that allows users of the survey data to create network maps, analyze network scores and other results, and generate reports. The platform was selected for this project for its SNA functionality, relatively low resource demands, and robust reporting capabilities. Although PARTNER developed around public health networks, the functionality is broadly applicable to other collaborative settings, demonstrated by its use in over 4,500 community networks in all 50 states. PARTNER is used primarily to assess the structure and performance of collaborations, but the evaluation and feedback for participating foundations is a secondary benefit on which we focus.

Foundations operate with many partners in distinct networks depending on the breadth of the organization's mission and activities. Prior to administering the PARTNER survey, the first task is to "bound" the network to identify which organizations compose the network of interest, and as a way to allow members to self-define "community." While deceptively simple, this step is crucial to having useful results. The practice of determining who is "in" or "out" of a network is a difficult part of the method, and it is recommended that a collaborative approach be used that includes the network's stakeholders (Visible Network Labs, n.d.b).

This article describes one tool for conducting SNA and the potential benefits for foundation members of networks. The PARTNER platform, originally funded by the RWJF, launched in 2008 as an online application to help build the capacity of the public health sector to measure and monitor collaboration among organizations.

Once the participants in the network are identified, the PARTNER platform is used to distribute an online survey to contacts at each of the network's organizations. The survey recipients respond to questions from the perspective of their organization, as well as relational questions about each of the other organizations in their network. The responses allow for network mapping at multiple levels, including the whole network, dyadic relationships (member-to-member), and specific organizations.

The survey questions in PARTNER capture the perceived success of the network in reaching its specific goals (which are identified prior to the survey dissemination by network members), the outcomes of the collaborative, and the factors contributing to the outcomes. The relational questions are answered separately for each network member with whom the organization has a relationship. For example, if the identified network contains 20 organizations and a member of the network has a relationship with half those organizations, they would answer the relational questions independently for each of the 10 organizations. The relational questions consider the frequency of interactions with partners, quality of activity in the relationship, value of the

We use a recent PARTNER project to demonstrate the potential value of using SNA for understanding foundations' positions and roles in a network. The case study also highlights the sensitive nature of evaluation that looks inward at network members and foundations, in particular.

relationship (based on power/influence, level of involvement, and resource contribution), and the extent of trust (based on reliability, support of the mission, and openness to discussion).

The PARTNER survey also generates traditional SNA network measures that fall into the categories of breadth, density, and centrality.[2] The measures capture the composition of a network's structure — breadth represents the array of partners, density indicates the connectedness of the partners, and centrality identifies the influence of centrally positioned members.

Usefulness of the Tool to Foundations: An Application to a Social Services Network

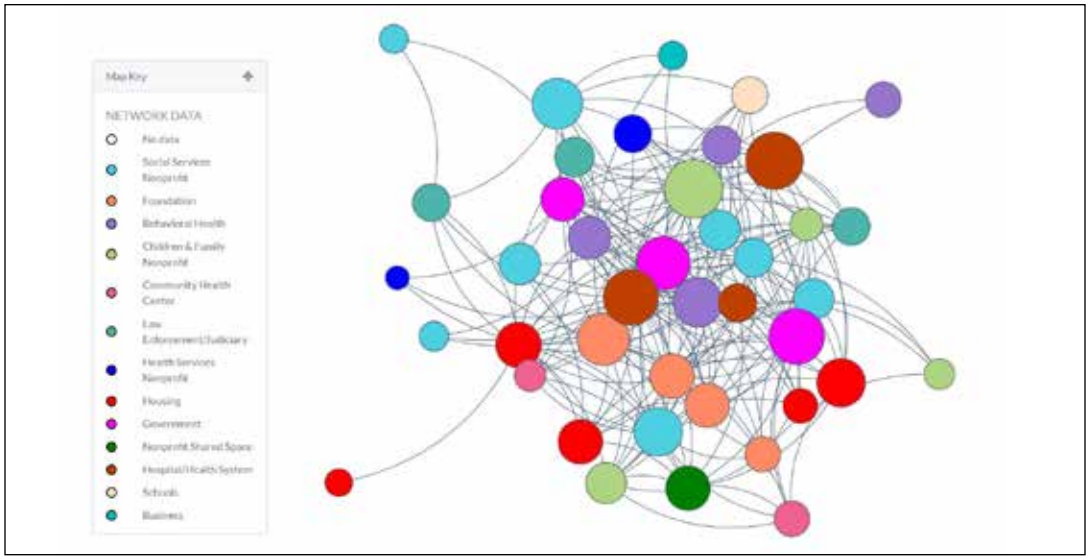
We use a recent PARTNER project to demonstrate the potential value of using SNA for understanding foundations' positions and roles in a network. The case study also highlights the sensitive nature of evaluation that looks inward at network members and foundations, in particular. For this reason, the case is presented at a level of detail intended to preserve the confidentiality of participating organizations. In general, organizations interested in conducting SNA for networks in which they are active need to establish guidelines for the use and distribution of the resulting data. Foremost, such exercises at times require network members, including foundations, to have a thick skin given the presence of relational questions. Closely related is the genuine need for a guarantee that the results are used for improvement at the network and organization levels, rather than for punitive purposes.

Before reviewing the results of the PARTNER survey, we also acknowledge that foundations intentionally play various roles in collaborative efforts. For this reason, the information gained from network analysis must be interpreted through the lens of an individual foundation's goals and objectives. For example, if a foundation entered collaborative work with a goal of being a central/backbone player in the effort, then centrality measures can help gauge whether the position is realized. Alternately, for various reasons a foundation may decide to contribute resources to a collaborative effort but remain disconnected from the day-to-day activities. In this case, low levels of interaction and centrality alongside a high value score may indicate success for the foundation's planned role. In other words, insights from network analysis are context-dependent due to the complex goals of foundations across different settings. The relationships and interactions among direct service providers may be markedly different than with foundations operating in the same collaborative work.

In this project, partnering with a well-connected community-based organization helped us begin the process to bound the network. Additional feedback from key informants in the community finalized the list and defined the boundaries of the community network of more than 40 organizations engaged in collaboratively addressing needs of people experiencing the effects of homelessness and housing shortages. Approximately three-quarters of the organizations completed the PARTNER survey, representing more than 600 distinct dyadic partnerships within the network. Assessing the network's influence on achieving the network's

[2] For greater detail on the signatures and the evidence supporting their use in network science, see Retrum, Chapman, and Varda (2013).

FIGURE 1 Social Service Network Map for Medium-Sized City



goals is the primary focus of the SNA, but the results also shed light on the place and perceived roles of individual organizations in the collaboration. The following section reviews the network structure, with a focus on the network's foundation members, before examining the perceived trust and value, types of activities, and outcomes of network partners. After examining the network broadly, we focus on a single foundation to demonstrate the utility of SNA as a tool for decision-making.

In general, significant differences between the network's foundations and other members are more common among the value and trust measures than the network structure measures. Many of the activities engaged in by network partners differ when engaging with a foundation, which speaks to the different roles typically played by foundations versus other types of community-based or government organizations. Network members believe their partnerships with foundations are significantly more likely to support priority outcomes than partnerships with nonfoundation network partners.

Network Structure

The social service network we surveyed represented 13 different organization types, including four foundations. The size of the icon in the network map reflects the relative number of connections, or relationships, with other organizations. (See Figure 1.)

Visually, the map allows foundations to understand their collectively determined place in the network. Standard network measures are described below and presented for the foundations as a group and compared to all other partner organizations. (See Table 1.) Two-sample *t* tests demonstrate whether the differences in mean scores between the foundations and other network members are statistically significant.[3] We note that the small number of foundations in the network limits the power of the test to detect meaningful differences.[4]

Network Measures

Degree centrality represents the number of connections a member has to other members

[3] Standard tests determine that the assumption of equal standard deviations (variances) between the groups cannot be rejected. The *t* tests, therefore, assume equal variances.

[4] This is particularly true for the network structure and measures comparison. We urge readers to focus on the information that can be conveyed to an individual foundation with these measures.

TABLE 1 Network Structure and Measures for Foundations and Other Partners: Comparison

	Foundations (average, n = 4)	Other Network Partners (average, n = 37)
Degree centrality	24.25	20.57
Closeness centrality	0.73	0.69
Nonredundant ties	14.12	11.52
Relative connectivity	65.3%	52.7%

Note: There are no statistically significant differences in means between foundations and other network partners among these network measures based on a difference-of-means *t* test.

TABLE 2 Value and Trust Measures for Foundations and Other Partners: Comparison

	Foundations (average, n = 4)	Other Network Partners (average, n = 37)
Value Dimensions		
Power/influence	3.37**	2.82
Resource contribution	3.15*	2.77
Involvement	2.55*	3.00
Trust Dimensions		
Reliable	3.66*	3.41
Support the mission	2.99	3.02
Open to discussion	3.42	3.37

Note: Comparison of group means conducted using two-sample *t* tests. ** = p <0.01, * = p <0.05)

of the network. A higher value is sometimes interpreted as a member holding a more central position by being highly embedded in the network. Degree centrality is bound by the size of the network, so the maximum value in this case is 40. The average network member has a relationship with just over half the other network members, with a degree centrality score of 21, while the average foundation has a relationship with 24 members. Regardless of whether a participating foundation views itself as a leader or peripheral player in the community's effort, the degree centrality score provides information to understand its place in the network based on the number of connections it has to other members of the network.

Closeness centrality is another measure representing how central a member is in the operations of the network. Technically, the measure indicates how far each member is from other members of the network based on the number of links (other members) between each member dyad. A score closer to 1 reflects members in a central network position with the shortest distance from all other members and relationships that make it easy to connect with other members. For an individual foundation, this measure of centrality shows how directly (through a long or short path) it is connected to its partners in this initiative. This often helps to illustrate whether a network member can quickly connect with another member, or whether it needs to access others through their common connections.

The analysis also provides visibility into nonredundant ties, which represent the number of

connections between members that are not connected to any other overlapping member. Essentially, nonredundant ties reflect network members that bridge different clusters or groups within the network. Such ties are considered beneficial to aid in the transmission of information throughout the network. The average network member has close to 12 nonredundant ties; foundations average more than 14. An individual foundation can look to this measure as an indicator of whether it serves as a bridge between organizations in the network or reinforces existing relationships.

Relative connectivity is based on measures of value, trust, and the number of connections to other members based on the survey responses. A member gets a high connectivity score when it has many connections with valuable partners who have trust in it. The score is relative to the network's member with the highest number of trusted connections to valuable partners. The average foundation in the network has higher relative connectivity (65%) than the average network member (54%), but the difference is statistically insignificant. Relative connectivity captures an important dimension of the work done by foundations, namely, maintaining trusted relationships with a large number of valuable partners engaged in supporting the network's mission-based activities.

Perceived Value and Trust Among Network Members

We now shift to consider the perceived value and trust of network partners based on the relational survey responses of each of their partners. Using the PARTNER tool, network members are asked to rate their partners, on a scale of 1 to 4, on their perceptions of those partners' value and trust. A response of 1 means "not at all," a 2 means "a small amount," a 3 means "a fair amount," and a 4 means "a great deal." (See Table 2.)

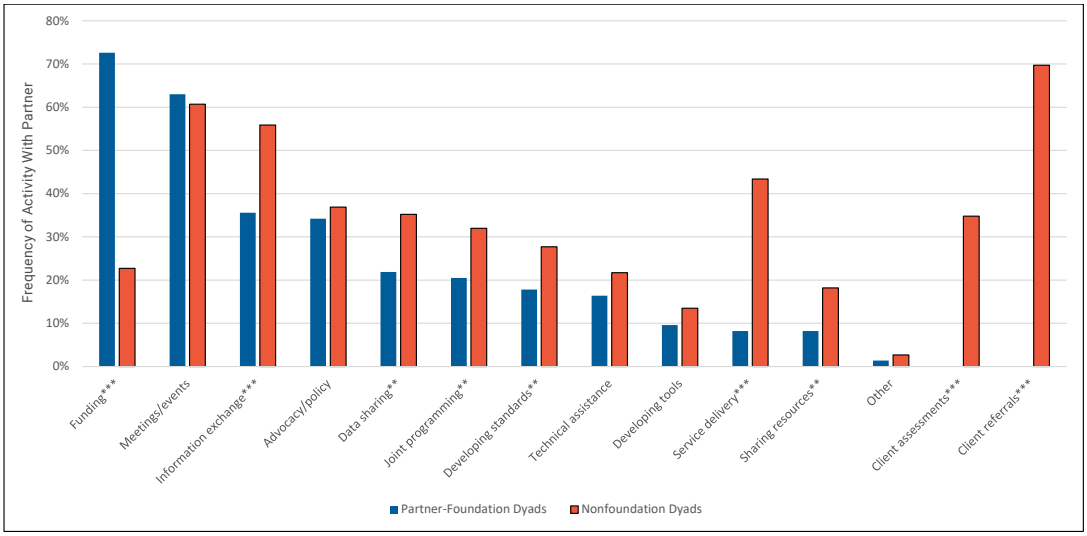
The individual dimensions of value include perceived power/influence in the network, resource contribution to support the network's goals, and level of involvement in pursuit of the network's goals. The foundations are perceived to hold power and influence within the network. The average foundation's power/influence score of 3.37 exceeds the network average and the difference between the two groups is statistically significant (two-sample $t(39) = 2.6$, $p = 0.007$). All of the foundations in the network have power/influence scores greater than the network's average. This is unsurprising given the resources held by foundations, but important to see that foundations exert greater than average influence on the network. The power/influence scores may also suggest foundations play leadership roles in the network, rather than acting as passive funders.

The second element of the value scores is the member's resource contribution to support the network's goals. As expected, the average foundation contributes more resources than the average nonfoundation partner. The magnitude of the perceived difference in resource contribution is statistically significant (two-sample $t(39) = 1.9$, $p = 0.034$). The variation in perceived resource contribution among the foundations is notable, ranging from 2.58 to 3.73. A lower score for resource contribution is not necessarily a bad thing if the network activity being considered is not a foundation's programmatic priority. Yet being aware of the perceived level of support can inform future decision-making or confirm that resources currently align with foundation priorities.

The final value element represents the member's level of involvement in the network. In this network setting, the foundations are perceived as being significantly less involved than the average network member (two-sample $t(39) = 2.1$, $p = 0.022$). None of the foundation scores meaningfully exceed the network average. While those in the field may find these results unsurprising and less involvement by foundations may be preferred by some partners, there is utility for a foundation to know how its involvement in collaborative efforts is perceived by partners.

Trust is a key characteristic of partnerships. Recall that this network is organized around meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness and housing shortage and includes organizations ranging from a police department to a school district to health systems and

FIGURE 2 Frequency of Activities Reported by Network Partnerships



Note: Statistical significance of the difference in reported activities of partnerships is determined using a Pearson's chi-squared test statistic (n = 561 dyads, *** = p <0.01, ** = p <0.05).

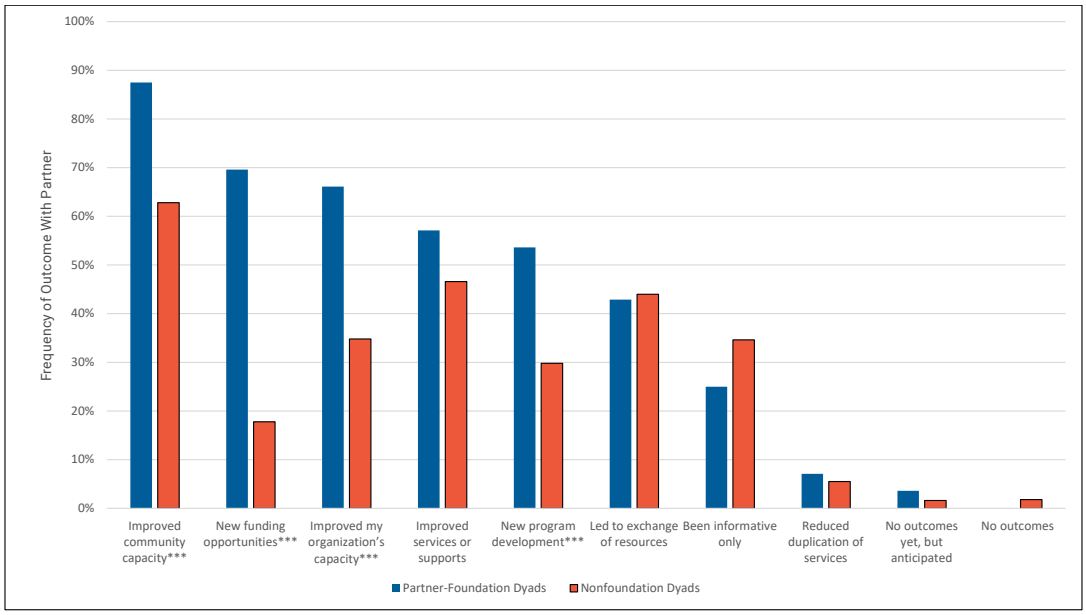
community-based service providers. The individual dimensions of trust captured by the survey responses include whether each organization is considered reliable, in support of the mission, and open to discussion. The foundations, as a group, are perceived to be more reliable on average than other network members, and the difference is statistically significant (two-sample $t(39) = 1.8$, $p = 0.041$). All four of the foundations have higher-than-average reliability scores, suggesting they are viewed as dependable partners.

The remaining trust measures, support of the mission and openness to discussion, are not statistically different between the average foundation and the average network member. The range among foundations' scores "in support of mission" is wide and illustrates the varied perceptions of foundations and alignment with the network's specific mission. Stereotypes might suggest that foundations are less open to discussion than other community organizations, but the survey results counter such a view. At the foundation level, knowing whether the organization is perceived as open to discussion might influence a foundation's engagement strategy or hiring practices.

Quality and Range of Network Partnership Activities

Quality of activities is measured in PARTNER using a four-point scale that captures the types of activities the organizations engage in with each other member of the network. The lowest level of interaction is simply attending meetings together. The second level of quality is cooperative activities, which includes the exchange of information and offering resources to partners. The two highest levels of interaction quality are coordinated and integrated activities. The coordinated level includes cooperative activities with the addition of more intentional efforts to build capacity for partners. Integrated activities include all previous categories as well as the creation of unified centers of knowledge and developing programming that supports common goals. Of those organizations that reported having relationships with foundations, 42% had integrated interactions with foundations, meaning they had the highest-quality collaboration possible. This number is higher than the rest of the network's reported activities, where only 35% of partners reported integrated interactions, although the difference is not statistically significant based on a chi-square test of independence.

FIGURE 3 Frequency of Outcomes Reported by Network Partnerships



Note: Statistical significance of the difference in reported outcomes of partnerships is determined using a Pearson's chi-squared test statistic (n = 429 dyads, *** = p <0.01).

Besides identifying the quality of activities among network partners, the survey also captures the specific activities of this engagement. Foundation activities with network partners are more concentrated than the activities of nonfoundation network partners. (See Figure 2.) Based on a chi-square test of independence, partnerships with a foundation engaged in significantly different activities than purely nonfoundation partnerships. Among statistically significant differences, nearly three-quarters of partnership dyads with foundations have a relationship that entails funding, compared to only 23% of nonfoundation partnerships. This is the only activity where foundations are statistically more likely to engage in an activity with a network partner than nonfoundations.

Network partnerships including a foundation are significantly, and unsurprisingly, less likely to engage in a wide range of direct service activities, including client assessments and referrals, service delivery, and joint programming. The foundations are also significantly less likely to engage in data sharing, developing standards/procedures, developing tools/technologies, information exchange, and sharing nonfinancial resources like office space and staff.

Outcomes of Network Partnerships

The dyadic reporting on relationships using SNA provides evidence on the perceived effectiveness of the network's partnerships. Each responding organization identified outcomes resulting from its partnership with each other organization in the network. (See Figure 3.) The percentages reflect the share of network dyads reporting the given outcome of the partnership between the two organizations. We divide these reported outcomes based on whether the outcomes are being reported by a nonfoundation organization with a foundation partner or by a nonfoundation organization in a dyad with another nonfoundation (comprised only of other nonprofit, for-profit, or government organizations).

The relationship between the presence of a foundation in the network's dyadic partnerships and partnership outcomes are examined using a chi-square test of independence. Partner dyads

TABLE 3 Example Foundation's Ranked Network Measures and Scores

	Rank (n = 41)
Relative Connectivity	4
Degree Centrality	6
Nonredundant Ties	6
Closeness Centrality	6
Value	
Power/influence	3
Involvement	20
Resource contribution	1
Trust	
Reliable	4
Support the mission	1
Open to discussion	5

including a foundation were significantly more likely to improve the capacity of the community to address needs of people experiencing homelessness and housing shortages, lead to new funding opportunities, improve the partner organization's capacity, and lead to new program development.

Nearly 90% of organizations report that their relationship with a foundation in the network has improved the capacity of the community to address unmet social needs, a primary outcome of interest for this network. The most dramatic, yet unsurprising, difference in outcomes for partnerships with a foundation is that the relationship led to new funding opportunities. While 35% of nonfoundation partnerships in the network improved the reporting organization's capacity, this share jumps to two-thirds of partnerships when a foundation is involved. More than half of the partnerships with a foundation resulted in new program development.[5]

Network Lessons for an Individual Foundation: Translating the Data to Practice

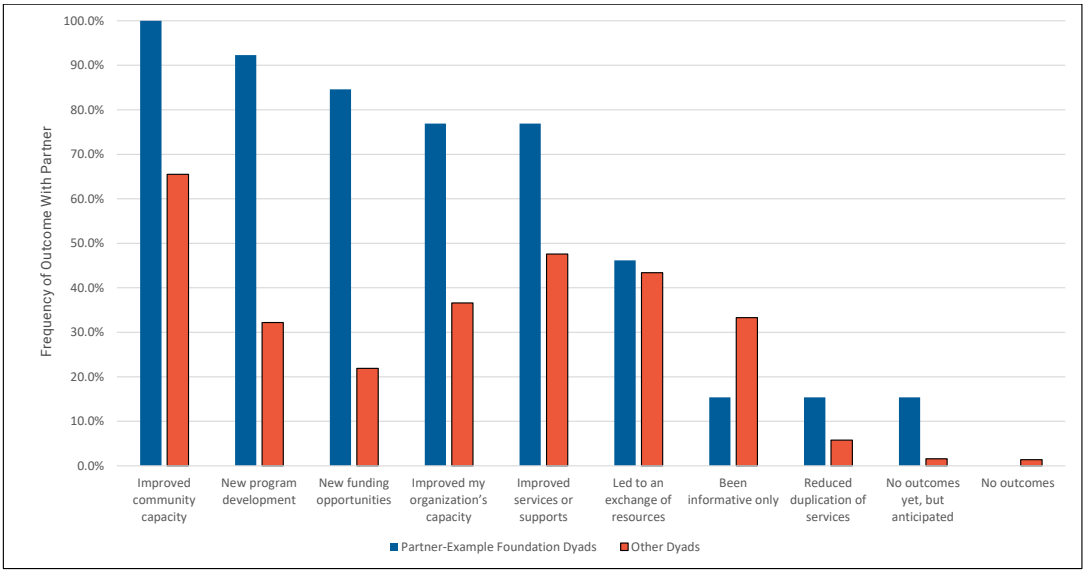
We focus the previous discussion of the SNA results on a comparison between foundations and other organizations in the network. The exercise sheds light on the position and role of the network's foundation partners. Although the SNA results for foundations demonstrate the value of applying SNA as a tool, the real value for foundations is to inform future activities that are typically organization-level decisions. We demonstrate how we translate SNA to practice by briefly reviewing the SNA results for one of the four foundations from the social services network, and discuss the implications of the information. The selected foundation is an active and central network partner. A network member profile, based on the survey and available in PARTNER, can be tailored to an individual foundation and cover its position, value and trust, activities, and outcomes in the network.

Based on relative rankings of the organization compared to network partners, the foundation can better understand the role it plays in the collaborative effort. Beginning with the network characteristics, the selected foundation is in the top 15% of network organizations for relative connectivity, degree centrality, nonredundant ties, and closeness centrality. (See Table 3.) This foundation has a relatively 1) large number of connections to other network members, meaning it is highly embedded, 2) central position in the network's operations based on distance to all members, 3) high number of connections between members who are not connected to any other overlapping member, and 4) extensive connections with valuable partners who trust the foundation.

The selected foundation has similarly high relative scores of value and trust within the network, meaning the organization is considered valuable and trusted. The foundation has the highest reported score among network organizations for resource contribution and supporting the mission, but the involvement score ranks at the median level. Partners overwhelmingly characterize relationships with the selected foundation as consisting of either integrated activities (62.5% of relationships) or coordinated activities (31.3%).

[5] Survey responses about foundations' roles and outcomes may be influenced by social desirability bias, but the variation in actual responses reflect a willingness of partner organizations to provide less socially desirable responses.

FIGURE 4 Example Foundation's Relative Partnership Outcomes



Note: No tests of statistical significance were conducted for the single foundation comparison.

The most common activities engaged in with partners are funding (68.8%), advocacy/policy (62.5%), and meetings/events/trainings (62.5%).

If a goal of a network is to achieve outcomes unattainable by any single organization, then the perceived outcomes of relationships with a foundation are critical measures of impact. All of the partners of the selected foundation reported that the relationship improved the capacity of the community to address unmet social needs. Engaging with the foundation resulted in new program development, led to new funding opportunities, improved the partner organization's capacity, and improved services or supports in more than three-quarters of the relationships representing rates much higher than the average for other network organizations. (See Figure 4.)

How would the foundation's managers benefit from this SNA information? In this case, the data affirm the foundation's influential role in the network, especially the positive outcomes reported by partners around the improved capacity of the community and its organizations. The showcased foundation is a valued and trusted organization within the network, according to its partners, and the foundation's prominent network position is apparent. The foundation's engagement in the network consists of mainly integrated activities, the most collaborative type.

Despite the positive results, managers might still change behavior based on the information. For example: From a network structure perspective, does the foundation play too central a role in connecting network partners? Does that positioning encourage collective buy-in, accountability, and shared facilitation by the network members, which are characteristics of a distributive leadership approach, or, as Varda (2017) examines, encourage dependence that can inhibit sustainability? What will happen to the collaborative effort if the foundation decides to reduce its activity or involvement?

The foundation ranked 20th among the 41 organizations in members' perception of its level of involvement in addressing the needs of the community. The foundation might interpret this as a function of not being a direct service provider, or it might decide to increase involvement in specific ways. Members might view this differently: as a deficiency in involvement of an otherwise

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highly influential member. A "more is better" approach is often not effective in networks, but depending on the foundation's goals and priorities, managers may direct more resources to activities they engage in less frequently with partners like joint programming, data sharing, and technical assistance/training. Similar assessments conducted around other networks with the foundation's involvement may tell different stories about the foundation's role and engagement and inform foundation-level decision making.

Implications for Foundations

SNA using a tool like PARTNER can serve as a hybrid evaluation solution that blends the benefits of traditional grantee-focused evaluations of an initiative with those of foundation-focused evaluations to detail relationships with community partners. Nested within the evaluation of a collaborative effort is information that can inform foundation decisions about enterprise-level behavior, particularly around engaging community partners, as well as traditional funding practices. Social network analysis provides a unique type of feedback on the foundation from the perspective of network partners rather than solely grantees or potential grantees, and allows benchmarking of those perceptions against other members of the network. The specifics of the illustrative case presented here are not intended to be generalizable to other networks involving foundations. Rather, the case demonstrates assessment through SNA can be genuine and reflective of a foundation's performance in the field.

At the same time, a SNA focused on a portfolio of actors working on a specific or broad issue area within a foundation's area of influence can provide an important road map for deepening impact through strategic investments. Because of the position in the community that they serve, foundations have the ability to convene and connect groups, magnifying impact even with relatively small direct outlays of resources. Repeating a network survey over time establishes a valuable record of changes in collaborative efforts and relationships (Provan et al., 2005).

Foundations are regularly criticized for a lack of public accountability (Reich, 2018). Thoughtful, reflective evaluation is one approach to strengthen accountability to the public and develop a more productive feedback mechanism for improving resource stewardship. Social network analysis, such as that conducted here using PARTNER, complements existing tools for foundation-focused evaluation and offers a unique view of how foundations are situated among and perceived by the partners working to support their missions.

As foundations evolve their thinking around the role they play in collaborative, networked approaches that they both fund and engage in, it is critical that they have data and analysis to inform their decisions. By utilizing a novel tool like SNA, they can expand their own perspectives on the appropriate role at the launch, implementation, and conclusion of their investments in these efforts. This type of tool can prompt important discussions and provide the data needed to make informed decisions.

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