Small Foundation Network Partner Evaluation Toolkit:
Network Evaluation for Network Coordinators

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This Toolkit

This Toolkit presents an approach to **network evaluation that is designed for network coordinators**.

This Toolkit provides guidance for network coordinators on how to:

- More effectively use information they are already collecting as part of their routine coordination duties;

- Collect other useful data that would support their network's health and development;

- Integrate network evaluation tasks into network activities, like convenings, to streamline the process;

- ***Use data to effectively coordinate, grow, and sustain their networks.***

The Toolkit also provides examples of surveys, questionnaires, and dashboards, as well as tips for easy implementation.

Goals of Network Evaluation

Network evaluation is about **network improvement**. Evaluation results can serve the network partners, coordinators, and participants when data are used to inform practice, make adaptations to existing efforts, and plan for next steps. Incorporating network evaluation can help network coordinators:

- Monitor network progress and track any changes over time;

- Identify what is working well, which can help networks capitalize on their strengths, foster success, and support the development of best practices;

- Identify what is working less well, which can help network coordinators target additional support to improve network functioning and therefore increase the value of the network for participants;

- Systematically gather feedback from participants and create a feedback loop whereby participants can inform network development;

- Tell the story of their network's progress and impacts over time.
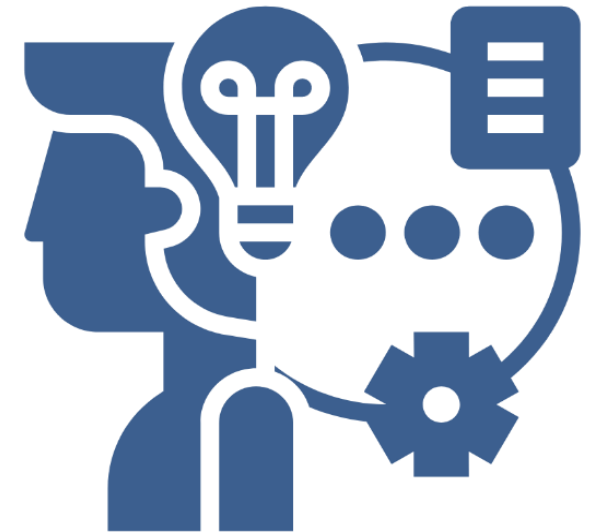
Evaluating Networks

As networks progress, they move from connection to collaboration, toward impacting their stated purpose.

To evaluate how well a network is progressing, it is helpful to assess four underlying dimensions of network development: **connectivity**, **network health**, **interim outcomes**, and **longer-term impacts**.

When networks are well-connected and healthy, they lead to positive interim outcomes (i.e., benefits for participants and their organisations) and, later, to longer-term system impacts.

Network membership and operations provide the context for overall network development.
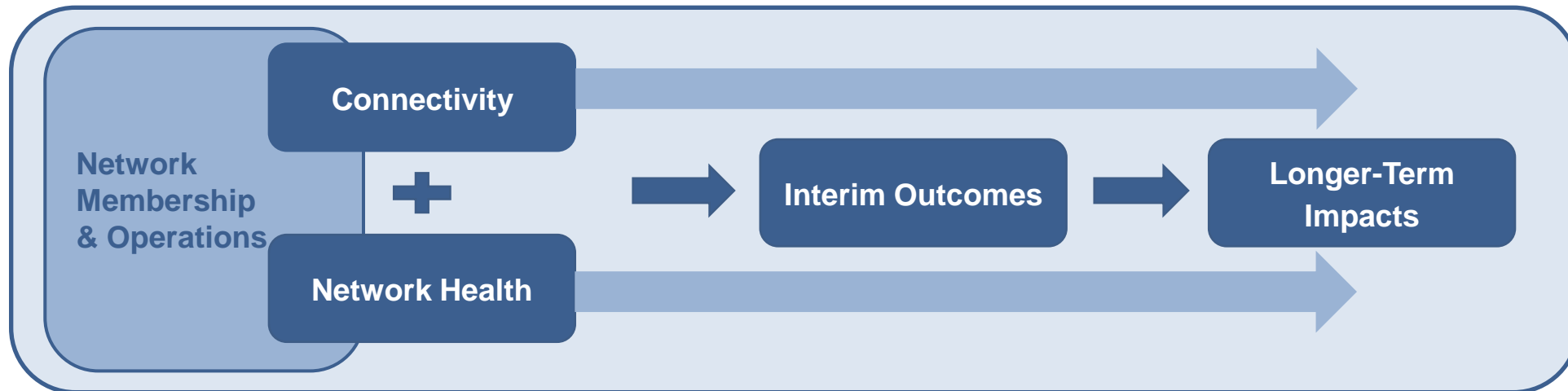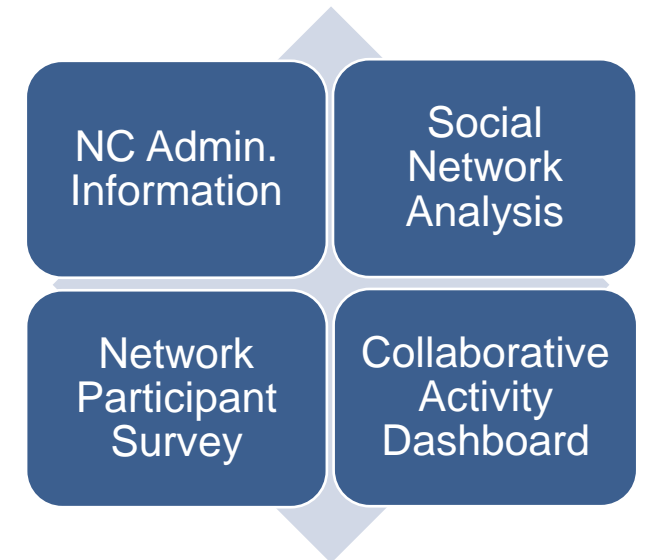
Network Evaluation Dimensions

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1. **Network Membership & Operations –** Network membership includes its size and representativeness. Network operations include network convenings (number of convenings, frequency, attendance), ongoing governance, and time-limited working groups dedicated to accomplishing internal network tasks.

2. **Connectivity.** The first and most necessary step in network development is connecting participants to each other. Networks with a higher density of connectivity—that is, more participants who are connected to each other—entail a more robust structure to support collaboration.

3. **Network Health.** Building a healthy network requires purposeful cultivation in seven areas: (1) Purpose & Principles, (2) Participation & Engagement, (3) Relationships & Trust, (4) Structures & Agreements, (5) Coordination & Communication, (6) Adaptability & Resources, and (7) Benefits & Impacts.

4. **Interim Outcomes.** Participants may increase skills, knowledge, meaningful relationships, and professional effectiveness. organisations may amplify their impact by coordinating activities with other participants.

5. **Longer-term Impacts.** Through emergence, innovative ideas are sparked and new collaborations begin. Working together in this way enables revolutionary solutions—leading to true systems change.

Network Evaluation Tools

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This Toolkit centres around four main evaluation tools:

(1) Network Coordinator (NC) Administrative Information. Information collected as part of routine coordination and management tasks, such as data about the network membership, convenings, and attendance.

(2) Social Network Analysis (SNA). SNA estimates how connected the network participants are to each other and provides a map to understand where connections are robust and where they need to be woven.

(3) Network Participant Survey. Participants share their perspectives on the network's health and their experiences with the network, including any benefits they or their organisations are receiving from participation.

(4) Collaborative Activity Dashboard. The Dashboard tracks the emergent collaborative projects occurring among network participants–important information that network coordinators are always tracking.

NC Admin. Information	Social Network Analysis
Network Participant Survey	Collaborative Activity Dashboard

Network Evaluation Tools and Dimensions

Each of the evaluation tools collects data to reflect one or more of the network dimensions.

All four tools are necessary to construct a full picture of the network. No one tool can tell the full story.

The tools are complementary. It is possible to deploy some of them jointly.

Tools	Network Dimensions				
	Membership & Operations	Connectivity	Network Health	Interim Outcomes	Longer-term Impacts
NC Administrative Information	√		√		
Social Network Analysis		√			
Network Participant Survey			√	√	√
Collaborative Activity Dashboard		√		√	√

NC Administrative Information

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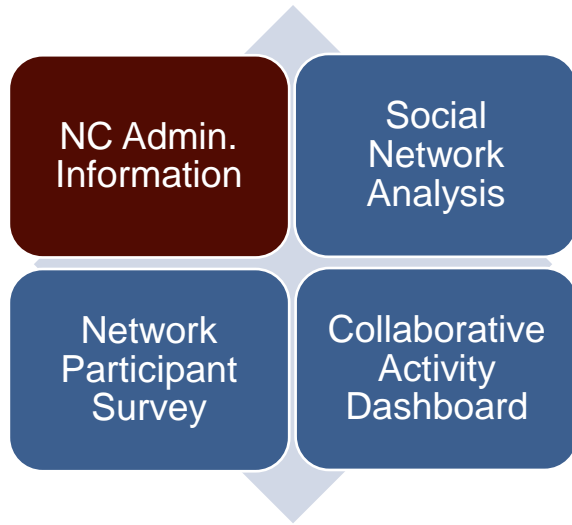
This tool collects information about:

- *Network membership,* such as number of current participants and their affiliations, number who left the network, and number who newly joined

- *Network convenings,* such as dates, in person or virtual, attendance, major topics discussed, and any decisions made by the network

- *Activities between convenings,* such as calls/meetings

- *Network working groups,* such as number of groups and purpose

This information is helpful because:

- Ongoing monitoring of these basic network characteristics enables network coordinators to identify potential issues with membership or engagement early and then intervene as needed to get things on track.

- This information also helps network coordinators answer the basic question, "Who is part of your network and what does it do?"

NC Admin. Information | Social Network Analysis
Network Participant Survey | Collaborative Activity Dashboard

NC Administrative Information

This information is the bedrock of network coordination and network evaluation. It's critical!

Network coordinators can collect this information using a method that works for them, provided it is**:**

- Standardized, so that the same information is collected in the same way throughout the year;

- Organized and easily accessible, so that network coordinators can efficiently report and use it.

➤ **Example templates, using Excel, are shown on the following pages.
These Excel workbooks are available from Small Foundation.**

NC Administrative Information

Worksheet to track **membership**:

Worksheet to track **convenings**:

NC Administrative Information

Worksheet to track **monthly network calls**:

Worksheet to track **work groups**:

NC Administrative Information: Tips!

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Do:

✓ Use a standardized format for this information over time.

✓ Enter data as network activities happen. Make data entry part of your typical workflow after convenings, calls, etc.

✓ Create a new workbook for each year. This creates a good historical record of network progress.

✓ Share results with network participants and the network governing council.

Don't:

▪ Collect information sporadically or incompletely.

▪ Delay data entry. Generating a backlog of data to enter increases the burden of entering it and reduces the usefulness of the worksheet in real time.

▪ Write over existing information. Keeping historical data can be helpful to show change over time or answer questions at a later date.

Social Network Analysis

NC Admin. Information

Social Network Analysis

Network Participant Survey

Collaborative Activity Dashboard
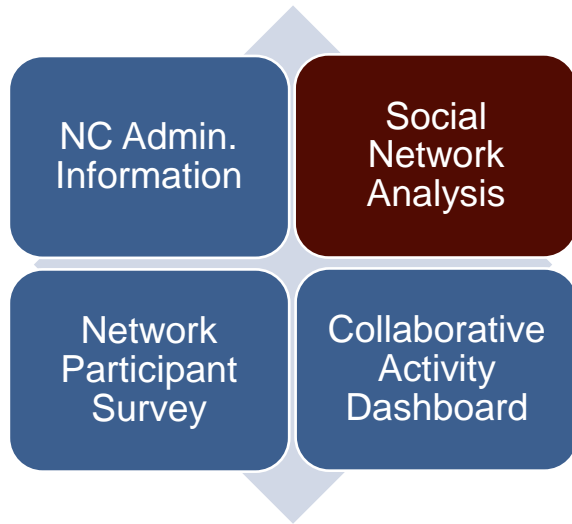
SNA collects information from network participants about their connections to other members of the network.

- Most often, SNA surveys ask participants to indicate the members with whom they have actively collaborated or communicated or shared information.

- The SNA report provides a map of the network's connections and a host of helpful metrics to assess the network's connectivity.

This information is helpful because:

- SNA results provide an index of how strongly participants are connected to each other.

- SNA results help network coordinators target their efforts to strengthen the overall network structure. For example, they can use the SNA map to understand the connections throughout the network and identify opportunities for weaving participants and integrating different sub-groups within the whole.

Social Network Analysis

Conducting SNA involves two steps:

1. Collecting survey data from network participants, and

2. Analysing these data.

Two online applications can be used to collect and analyse the data: **SumApp** and **Kumu**.

➢ **Small Foundation staff can provide assistance setting up these applications.**

Conduct SNA on a regular basis:

• Monitoring SNA results over time is the best way to assess how a network's connectivity is changing and what adjustments might be helpful.

Example **SNA map**:

71	494	0.2	1	2	13.92	1.82
ELEMENTS	CONNECTIONS	DENSITY	RECIPROCITY	DIAMETER	AVG DEGREE	AVG PATH LENGTH
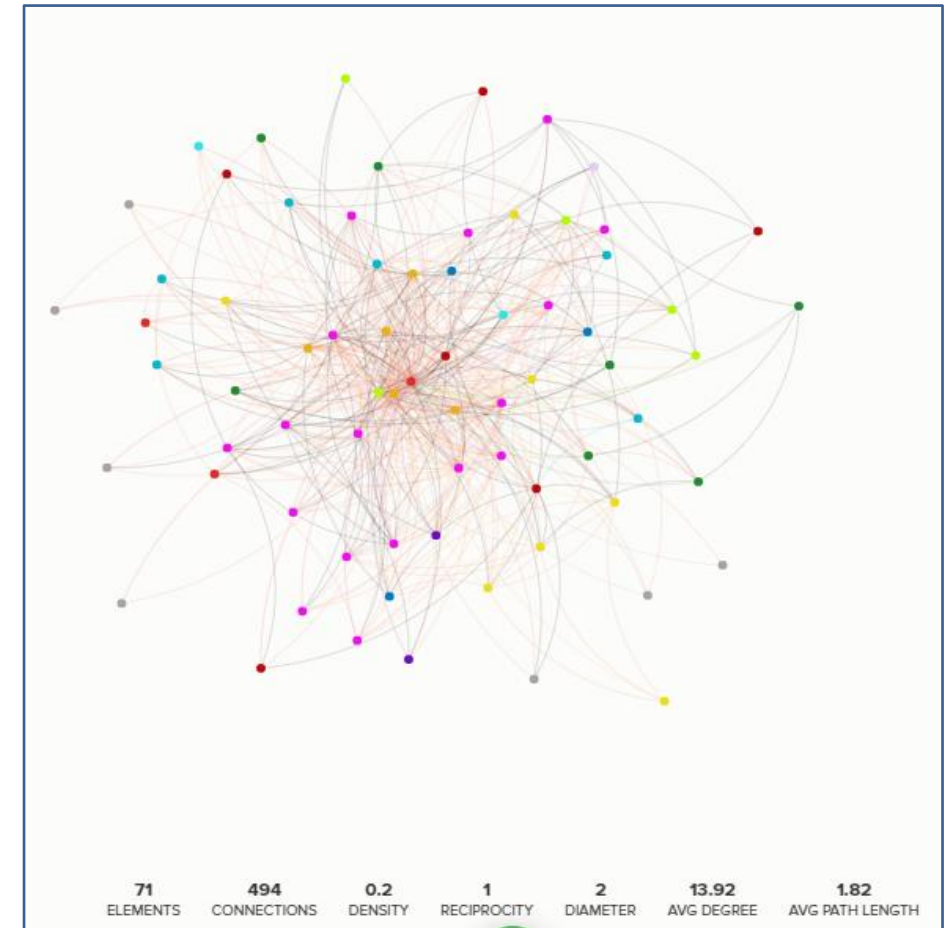
Social Network Analysis: Tips!

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Do:

- ✓ Administer the survey online using SumApp (instead of paper) whenever possible.
- ✓ Provide reminders to complete online surveys to **ensure a response rate of 75%.**
- ✓ Use Kumu to analyse the data and produce an SNA map and report.
- ✓ Consider administering the SNA survey in conjunction with the online Network Participant Survey to minimize data collection burden on participants.
- ✓ Share results with network participants and the network governing council.
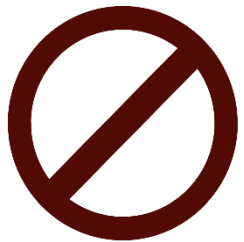
Don't:

- ▪ Use the regular SNA survey with very large networks with 100+ participants.
- ▪ Delay data entry. Generating a backlog of data to enter increases the burden of entering it and reduces the usefulness of the worksheet in real time.
- ▪ Forget to provide reminder to participants who are slow to complete an online survey. (High response rates are very important for your SNA to produce valid results!)

Network Participant Survey

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NC Admin. Information	Social Network Analysis
Network Participant Survey	Collaborative Activity Dashboard
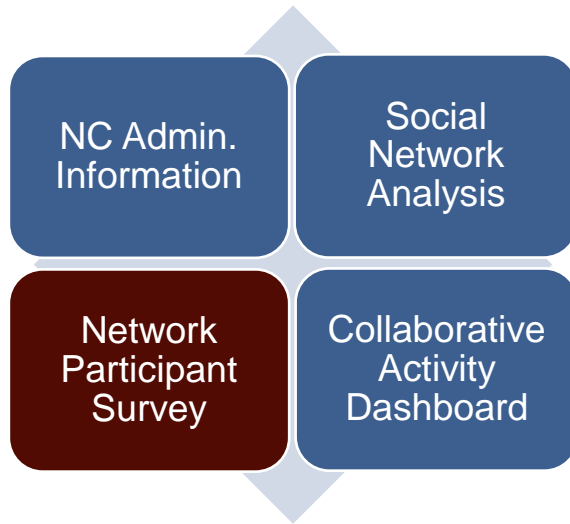
This tool collects information from network participants about their perceptions of and experiences with the network, including:

- An overall assessment of the **seven aspects of network health**:

  - o Purpose & Principles
  - o Participation & Engagement
  - o Relationships & Trust
  - o Structures & Agreements

  - o Coordination & Communications
  - o Adaptability & Resources
  - o Benefits & Impacts

- **Interim outcomes,** such as how network participation has impacted participants and their organisations:

  - o *Participant level outcomes*: increased knowledge, skills, and system awareness; increased professional effectiveness; increased meaningful relationships with other participants

  - o *organisation level outcomes*: increased coordination of existing efforts; amplification of reach/impact of existing efforts; increased organisational effectiveness.

Network Participant Survey

This information is helpful because:

- To really understand a network, it is necessary to gather information directly from participants. Their feedback reflects the core elements of network health and several interim outcomes.

    - *Conducting a Participant Survey enables all network members' voices to be included.*

- It takes a healthy and connected network to set the stage for participants to collaborate and innovate. Conducting a participant survey on a regular interval provides network coordinators with steady information regarding network health and progress.

- This information can highlight areas of strength (what is working well) and identify areas that would benefit from additional attention or support. These data can help network coordinators identify potential problems early on and target resources appropriately.

Network Participant Survey

Conduct the survey on a regular basis:

- Having a current snapshot of participants' perceptions gives network coordinators the necessary information to manage the network appropriately.

- Monitoring survey results over time is the best way to assess changes in network health.

The survey can be administered via **an online survey engine or paper/pencil.**

- Online survey engines provide easy, automated ways to analyse the data once collected.

➢ **An example Network Participant Survey instrument is shown on the following page.**

➢ **Small Foundation staff can provide assistance with this instrument and with setting up an online survey.**

Network Participant Survey (Example)

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Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The purpose of the network is clear to me.					
2. The network's activities are in alignment with the network's purpose.					
3. The network is making progress towards its purpose.					
4. The network includes the right people to achieve the network's purpose.					
5. Network participants overall honour their commitments to the network.					
6. Network decision-making is inclusive.					
7. Network participants address controversial issues related to the network.					
8. I feel heard when I raise a different perspective in the network.					
9. Network participants are developing relationships built on trust.					
10. Network participants account for shared interests when they take individual initiative.					
11. I can find out what the network is up to at any given time.					
12. I feel comfortable using the network's communication tools (e.g., Slack channel, GoogleDrive).					
13. I am able to make time for my participation in the network (attending convenings, staying updated on email, etc.).					
14. My participation in the network is integrated into my organisational priorities.					
15. My direct supervisor (board, CEO, etc.) values my participation in the network.					
16. My direct reports (executive team, staff, etc.) value my participation in the network.					
17. My participation in the network benefits my organisation.					
18. Through the network, my organisation has developed at least one new collaborative project with another organisation.					
19. My organisation can have a greater impact because of the relationships with other network participant organisations.					
20. My participation in the network benefits me professionally.					
21. I have gained new skills or knowledge by participating in the network.					
22. My participation in the network helps me do my job better.					
23. My participation in the network benefits me personally.					

Network Participant Survey: Tips!

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Do:

✓ Administer the survey in conjunction with a network convening and allocate time in the convening agenda for participants to complete it.

✓ Provide reminders to complete online surveys to **ensure a high response rate (goal=80%)**.

✓ Use an online survey engine to analyse the survey data.

✓ Consider administering the online participant survey at the same time as the online SNA survey to minimize data collection burden on participants.

✓ Add or adapt survey items to collect information that is relevant to the network.

✓ Share results with network participants and the network governing council.

Don't:

▪ Delay data entry. Generating a backlog of data to enter increases the burden of entering it and reduces the usefulness of the worksheet in real time.

▪ Forget to provide reminder to participants who are slow to complete an online survey. (High response rates are very important for your survey to produce valid results!)

Collaborative Activity Dashboard

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NC Admin. Information	Social Network Analysis
Network Participant Survey	Collaborative Activity Dashboard
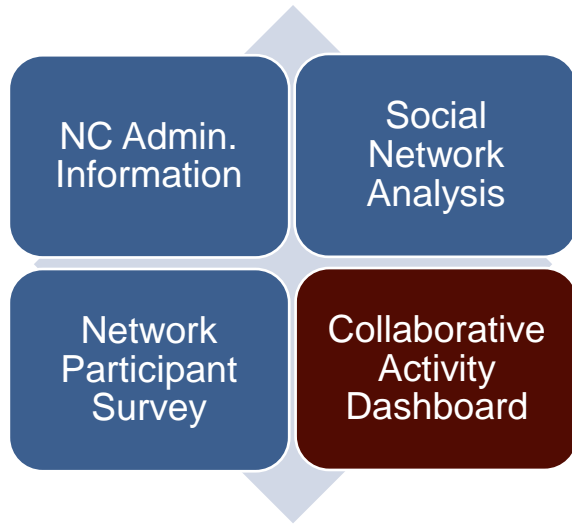
This tool collects basic information about each of the collaborative activities occurring among network participants, including:

- Name and purpose of the project,

- Names of the collaborating participants,

- Date the project started,

- Any outcomes to date.

This information is helpful because:

- The true magic of networks lies in their emergent outcomes—specifically, the collaborative projects that are sparked among participants, the innovative ideas, and impacts of these projects. This information is key for the network coordinator to track the emerging opportunities within the network, facilitate these collaborations, and tell the story of the network to a broader audience.

Collaborative Activity Dashboard

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This information is necessary to understand a network's emergent outcomes. It's essential! Network coordinators are "in the know" regarding network developments, burgeoning partnerships between members, new and existing collaborative projects among network participants, and potential innovations in the making. Formally tracking the collaborative activities among network members can help the network coordinator stay abreast of network progress and accomplishments and can foster fuller engagement among participants and more efficient collaboration.

Network coordinators can collect this information using a method that is**:**

- Standardized, so that the same information is collected in the same way throughout the year;

- Organized and easily accessible, so that network coordinators can efficiently report and use it.

➢ **An example template, using Excel, is shown on the following page. This template is available from Small Foundation.**

Collaborative Activity Dashboard (Example)

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	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	**Collaborative Activity Dashboard 2020**							
2	**Project Name**	**Purpose**	**Participants**	**Status**	**Started**	**Ended**	**Outcomes**	
3	**Libraries for Justice**	Collaboration between county library, nonprofit legal services, and farmworkers' advocacy organization. Library will provide space and advertising for legal aid attorneys to offer free workshops about immigration and citizenship for farmworkers and their families	Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, Particpant D	Active	Jan 2020		First workshop had 150 attendees, more than double what was expected.	
4	**Court-based Childcare Initiative**	Collaboration between nonprofit legal services organization, childcare center, afterschool program, and county court. Many low-income parents miss their immigration court hearings because they cannot afford childcare and they lose their chance for citizenship. The court will provide space for the childcare center and afterschool program staff to offer on-site childcare services for parents who are waiting for a court hearing.	Participant A, Participant F, Participant H, Participant I, Participant J	Active	Apr 2020			
5	**Science and Students Project**	Collaboration between industry scientists, local secondary schools, and afterschool programs to provide immigrant students access to information about science careers, internships in laboratories, and opportunities to job shadow with professional scientists. Collaborators will sponsor a science fair at the high school, host a contest for the best science experiment, and create a science-based summer camp for interested students from immigrant families.	Participant E, Participant F, Participant G, Participant H	Active	May 2020		Registration for summer camp has exceeded expectations. Project plans to expand to two more school districts next summer.	
6	**Lobbying for Policy Changes**	Collaboration among many sectors to lobby the County government to change the policy requiring the county superior court to cooperate with the federal immigration enforcement for unsubstantiated cases. Proposed policy changes will better protect undocumented county residents, with no criminal record, who are presenting at court for a scheduled hearing.	Participant B, Participant C, Participant D, Participant E, Participant F, Participant G, Participant H, Participant J	Active	May 2020		Media coverage: Two mentions in local newspaper, one radio interview.	
7	**Community Health Fair**	Collaboration between nonprofit organization, community clinic, family advocates, and farmworkers' association to provide a health fair in a community of migrant workers who otherwise lack access to medical care. Fair included all Spanish-speaking health educators and healthcare providers.	Participant B, Participant E, Participant J, Participant K	Complete	Feb 2020	Aug 2020	First Spanish-language health fair delivered to migrant worker community. 500 physical exams completed. 300 dental exams completed. 450 pediatric exams completed.	
8	**Universal Childcare**	Brainstorming about the possibility of universal childcare for all children under the age of 5 in the county, including children of migrant farm workers who reside in the county temporarily. Identifying the resources needed, possible partners, and scope of effort.	Participant A, Participant D	Emerging				
9								
10								
11								
12								

| | ... | Convenings | Monthly Calls | Work Groups | Work Groups2 | **Dashboard** | + |

Collaborative Activity Dashboard: Tips!

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Do:

✓ Use a standardized format for this information over time.

✓ Gather information from participants on a regular basis—no less than quarterly.

✓ Update the dashboard in real time. When you learn of a new collaborative project, enter it in the dashboard. Do a thorough data collection and update quarterly.

✓ Create a new workbook for each year. This creates a good historical record of network progress.

✓ Make the dashboard accessible to network participants.

Don't:

▪ Collect information sporadically or incompletely.

▪ Delay data entry. The dashboard is most useful when it is current.

▪ Delete older entries. Keeping historical data can be helpful to show change over time or tell the longer-term story of the network activities.

Using All Four Tools

A full picture of a network's progress and impact requires data collected regularly using all four tools.

However, Small Foundation understands that some network partners may require additional time to build up the capacity to fully engage in the evaluation process and that each network has its own unique operational context, which could influence how data are collected.

➢ *Each network partner, with their Small Foundation Relationship Manager, will develop an evaluation plan that meets the network's informational needs, available resources, and capacity.*

Note! Network coordinators will already be using two tools—**NC Administrative Information** and the **Collaborative Activity Dashboard**—as part of their coordination and management duties.

Use of the other two tools—**Social Network Analysis** and **Network Participant Survey**—will be discussed with the Relationship Manager. For example, partners with limited initial capacity might conduct SNA in the first year and then incorporate the Network Participant Survey in the next period.

Avoid Partial Use of Tools

There is flexibility in the choice or circumstances under which an evaluation tool is selected.

However, when a tool is implemented, <u>network coordinators should ensure that it is implemented thoroughly</u>.

Implementing a tool irregularly or collecting only partial data will not provide all of the information needed to adequately understand the network or make decisions about next steps.

For example, if conducting Social Network Analysis, it is important to conduct that method as completely as possible, namely sending out surveys to all network participants, providing multiple reminders to boost response rates as high as possible, and analysing all of the data gathered. This comprehensiveness will ensure that the data reflect the entire network and provide useable information.

If just 50% of the network's participants complete the SNA survey, the results will calculate the connectivity for just half of the network—that is, half of all possible connections will not be accounted for.

Partial results such as these are difficult to interpret, can be misleading, and often lack actionable direction.
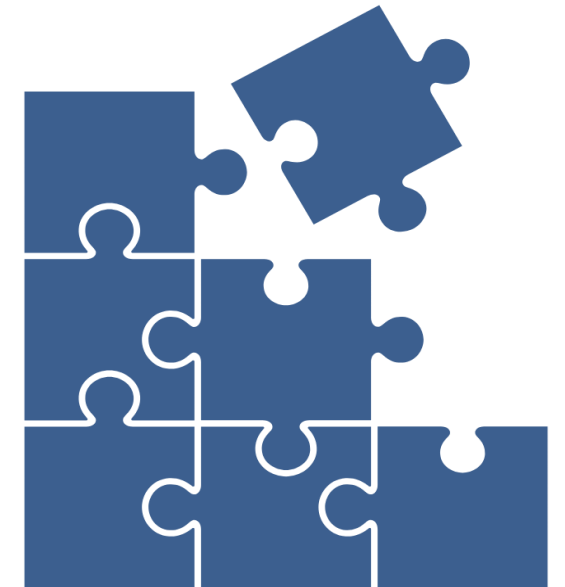
Important Things to Remember!

When implementing these evaluation tools, keep in mind the importance of:

- **Response rates!** High response rates are essential for valid data. Be sure to monitor the completion of online surveys and provide plenty of reminders to participants who have not yet responded.

> **Target response rate for SNA: 75%!**
>
> **Target response rate for Network Participant Survey: 80%!**

- **Feedback loops!** Reporting the evaluation results back to network participants can strengthen the network. It can help foster a better understanding of members' network experiences, facilitate discussions about network strengths and weaker areas, support transparent communication and information sharing, and bolster collective data-driven decision making.

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Using Evaluation Results

The information collected with the four evaluation tools can be:

✓ **Used to inform your network coordination!**
For example, SNA findings may highlight connections that can be woven, or results from the Participant Survey may highlight areas where participants are experiencing challenges. These results will help you know where to put your efforts to improve network functioning.

✓ **Shared with network participants and stakeholders!**
For example, sharing the results with network participants can support transparency, good communication, and shared decision-making processes. The information can also be helpful to present to other audiences, such as potential participants and funders.

✓ **Reported to Small Foundation!**
Network coordinators will be asked to report any available evaluation data to Small Foundation. This reporting will enable Small Foundation to stay informed about major network developments, to offer assistance in a timely fashion, and to learn with its network partners as they are doing the work.

Appendix:
Seven Aspects of Network Health

Seven Aspects of Network Health

1. Purpose & Principles
o Network partners have identified and are aligned around a relevant high-level purpose.
o Network partners have identified and are aligned around a set of shared values and/or principles.
o Network activities are effective at advancing the network's purpose.
o Network activities are designed and implemented in alignment with the network's principles.

2. Participation & Engagement
o Network partners include a broad cross-section of people and organisations that are well suited to address its purpose.
o Network partners have the authority, autonomy, resources, and experiences necessary to contribute effectively to the network.
o Network partners are engaged with and contributing to the network.
o The network engages with important external stakeholders.

3. Relationships & Trust
o Network partners seek to develop strong, meaningful relationships with one another.
o Network partners share information with one another as appropriate, in a manner that is open and timely.
o Network partners are able to acknowledge and address important conversations about the network and its future.
o Network partners are able to engage in and resolve conflicts with one another.

4. Structures & Agreements
o The network has defined a governance structure that meets network needs.
o The network has defined agreements clarifying how partners can engage in the network.
o Network partners make decisions through a process that is inclusive and transparent.
o Resources and power within the network are shared equitably.

5. Coordination & Communication
o The network has adequate coordination support to thrive.
o Network coordinators serve the network as stewards, letting the network lead, nurturing its growth, and constantly anticipating its needs and challenges.
o Information about network activities is timely, effective, and easily accessible by all network partners.
o Network partners are equipped with and use the network's communications tools effectively.

6. Adaptability & Resources
o The network is responsive to changing internal developments (e.g., changes in membership, desires of partners).
o The network is responsive to changes in the external environment.
o Resources are adequate to sustain network activities.
o Funders let the network lead; they do not seek to control the path of the network.

7. Benefits & Impacts
o The network is making progress in alignment with its purpose.
o The network is creating value for constituents served by members' organisations.
o Network partners are benefitting personally and professionally from participation in the network.
o Network partners' organisations are benefitting from participation in the network.