NETWORK EVALUATION

CULTIVATING HEALTHY NETWORKS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE
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GETTING STARTED
Network evaluation is underdeveloped in both theory and practice. Typically, networks are assessed according to the same models of evaluation used in traditional organization or program settings. While these models may be adequate for immediate evaluation needs or commitments, they do not account for the unique character of network structures.

They often fail to provide data that can truly enhance our understanding of networks and lead to their improved health and impact. It is therefore necessary for those with a stake in the success of networks to become better at adapting traditional evaluation methods and to seek out new approaches.

In June 2007, the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation and the Centre for Social Innovation convened a diverse group of social change practitioners for a series of meetings on network evaluation.
The group included representatives from a wide range of organizations in the private, volunteer and para-public sectors, as well as members of the funding and academic communities. Many of us rely on networks for making change in the world, but have struggled to identify strategies for assessing their performance and success. The series of meetings was designed to help provide some answers.

Over the course of one year, our think tank jumped straight into the challenges we were facing. We wanted to develop a series of tools and strategies for network evaluation that were better aligned with network theory and practice. Working together, we managed to provoke new ways of thinking about our challenges, address some common concerns, and propose a framework for moving forward.

What follows is our contribution to the emerging field of network development and evaluation.
Evaluation is a rich field with a multitude of perspectives, purposes and methodologies. Applying the concept of networks to the field of evaluation adds a complicating layer. As network enthusiasts – and not evaluation practitioners – it was necessary to establish common ground and delimit our exploration, so as not to be overwhelmed by the scope of the task.
Three areas of common ground helped us to quickly move the discussion forward and establish a sense of trust.

A) SOCIAL CHANGE

Within the group, there was a general assumption that networks can be effective ways to support social change.

B) COMPLEXITY THEORY

There was also a shared understanding that complexity theory could be a useful lens for understanding how networks operate.

C) LISTENING TO NETWORKS

The idea of network evaluation was replaced by the notion of listening to networks. Attunement and development were prioritized over summative or conclusive analysis.
CORE QUESTIONS
There are innumerable ways of defining and understanding networks. For our purposes, networks were understood simply as interconnected systems. More specifically, networks are systems of relatively autonomous actors that are working in concert to achieve shared goals or pursuing individual goals within a shared system.
We clarified several questions to focus our exploration:

- Are we evaluating networks, or specific networks?
- What are the units of analyses?
- What would we do differently if we had answers to our questions about our networks?
- Which networks are germane to exploration?
- Who is the evaluation for?
- How do we dialogue with funders?
Are we evaluating networks, or specific networks?

We were not evaluating networks as they compare to other organizational structures; our goal was not to determine the relative merit of networks vis a vis other models. Our goal was to evaluate specific networks. Concretely, we focussed on how to determine the health and impact of our networks.
What are the units of analyses?

While our primary unit of analysis was the network, we were also interested in the formation, health and performance of sub-networks, also known as constellations. Networks are not uniform structures, but are instead composed of substructures which emerge and dissolve through the networks’ lifespan. We wanted to better understand these constellations, as well as the behaviour and impact of individual actors who comprise the network’s membership.
What would we do differently if we had answers to our questions about our networks?

We were persistently faced with the purpose of our assignment, explicitly articulated in the question noted above. The group felt that failing to effectively answer this question would raise the question of why resources should be spent on evaluations at all. This was critical. Our focus was not on evaluation for its own sake – or for the purposes of external inquiries – but as a tool to understand and modify our networks in service to their missions.
Which networks are germane to exploration?

While networks exist in all variety of sectors for all variety of purposes, the group had a particular interest in networks operating within “civil society.” Our focus was on networks that pursue some form of social change.
Who is the evaluation for?

The exploration and any resulting products would be primarily oriented to *network stewards* or *hub* organizations, rather than to participants. While the lessons contained herein could be well used by network participants, academics or funders, the focus would be on practitioners who generally assume responsibility for the network.
How do we dialogue with funders?

We recognized that communicating evaluation findings to funders is one of the key drivers of network evaluation in the nonprofit sector. However, a focus on this issue threatened to limit our creativity. We therefore agreed the question should be temporarily set aside.
A UNIQUE TASK
We started with a simple question, but our journey took us down increasingly complex and interesting paths.

How can one better understand the health and impact of networks?

We realized that evaluating networks meant more than applying existing tools and frameworks to a unique organizational form; it meant devising a new form of “network evaluation” whose methods and metaphors were aligned with the subject matter.

There are different ways of thinking about networks and the roles they play in our lives and work. As the conversation unfolded, a productive tension emerged. We came to realize that the different ways of thinking about and experiencing networks applied not just to networks themselves but also to how one views network evaluation.
Formative evaluations help a program become an effective and standardized model. For example, suggesting more work be done in understanding the member’s goals within the network or organization.

Summative evaluations make overall judgments about the merits of a standardized program. These judgments are then used to inform critical decisions about the program, such as whether to scale it up.
The cause and effect logic model suited to more classical approaches to evaluation does not effectively account for the fluidity, multi-directionality, and indeterminacy of networks.

The very techniques that enable evaluation in more linear, structured forms of organization—standardization of inputs, consistency of treatment, uniformity of outcomes and clarity of causal linkages—are unhelpful, and even harmful, when examining networks. Cause and effect logic models fail to produce a complete picture of how a network is working.
This suggests the need for a different approach to evaluation – the need to evaluate in a network way. We wanted to explore what network evaluation could be, identifying the tools, approaches and strategies which are themselves appropriate instruments for network evaluation. Networks are a unique organizational structure that deserve their own unique evaluation lens.
These are several characteristics of networks that distinguish this structural form. Of course, many existing organizations or programs contain some of these elements—but not to the same degree, and not as inherently, as network structures.

These characteristics pose a challenge to traditional evaluation frameworks and methodologies. We too often apply ill-suited lenses to our network evaluation or we simply fail to attend to network evaluation at all. For example, our typical approaches to evaluation set the expectation that we will produce a single evaluation from a single point of view.
But what about the multiplicity of perspectives that is inherent to networks? How do we capture the variety of interpretations of a given network’s health or impact?

One member’s experience may be very different from another’s, and yet very different still from the hub or stewardship organization. Our instincts are to consensuate our findings in evaluation; to produce a singular narrative and over-arching set of findings. This approach is simply ill-suited to network evaluation.
CAN A NETWORK EVALUATION EMERGE WHICH NOT ONLY ACKNOWLEDGES, BUT CELEBRATES AND LEVERAGES A MULTIPlicity OF NARRATIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS?

CAN THIS APPROACH BECOME ACCEPTED AND LEGITIMIZED PRACTICE?
Evaluation designed to uncover the dynamics of a network will allow a better understanding of that network and develop a fuller picture of its functioning. This perspective could, in turn, be used to support programmatic evaluations aimed at specific change objectives.
PARADOXES
PARADOXES
During our discussions of network evaluation, the notion of competing tensions or paradoxes emerged. We observed that networks have contradictory aspects, such as being open or closed, individual or organizational, formal or informal, etc. These were often the source of challenges or choices which were hard, if not impossible, to resolve. Framing these paradoxes as pairs of complementary tendencies rather than as either/or choices proved to be helpful. The group came to believe that dealing with these paradoxes was not about choosing between them but rather seeing what emerges from the dynamic†.

What follows is a list of some of the paradoxes or complementary elements of networks that were identified during our exploration.

† Our approach was influenced by the work of Scott Kelso and David Engstrøm. See *The Complementary Nature*, 2008, The MIT Press
Networks exist in a balance between chaos and order. They tend to be more chaotic than other linear forms of organization, and yet a degree of order must exist throughout the network to give it some form and structure. Different networks have different degrees of balance between chaos and order, and the degree of balance may vary over time. Moreover, different segments of the network may occupy different places at any given moment.
The roles of network participants shift between learning and teaching. Networks enable the exchange of information across vertical, horizontal and spatial boundaries; hence, at one moment network members may be receiving knowledge, while at the next moment they may be offering some of their own wisdom.
Stewardship stems from the notion that network members are often stimulating the development of a network in some way that furthers a specific mandate or mission. At the same time, networks must encourage a sense of ownership and agency among network members as a means to maintain the network’s vibrancy, health and potential for innovation.
Many networks are based on connections between organizational members—but it is really individual members who participate as representatives of their organizations. This impacts on a network in several significant ways. What happens when a key individual network participant leaves an organization? How restricted are participants by their organizational contexts? How does a healthy network navigate this tension?
Through networking, one connects with others, shares information, makes introductions and maybe even collaborates on specific initiatives. The aggregate of this activity among many people is what creates a network. This distinction between networking (an activity) and network (a structure) is an important one.
There are both formal and informal networks. That is, one may be explicitly part of a network, and thus subject to specific requirements and benefits, or one may be connected in an unstructured way with others. A network itself may have formal and informal components, while individual members may also have formal or informal roles within it.
Is a heterogeneous network healthier than a homogeneous network, or does it depend on the context? Does a homogeneous network achieve more sooner, while a heterogeneous network produces more innovation by exposing members to new ideas? Some networks intentionally occupy a specific space within this spectrum based on their missions, while others default into a space based on the limitations of their connections.
Complementary pairs are a useful way to identify apparent tensions in a neutral, non-judgmental way. Asking what role each pair plays in contributing to network coordination may help provide insights and explore new approaches to network evaluation. Does the pair need to be present if the network is functioning well? To what degree might some aspect of a pair be tilted in one direction or another? What could this indicate about how well a network is functioning?

Investigating a pair of complementary factors and their associated coordination dynamics may help to identify opportunities to explore unknown or previously unknowable aspects of network health and functioning. Seeing an apparent paradox or tension and reframing it as a set (or sets) of complementary pairs opens up rich territory for network evaluation.
EVALUATOR’S TOOLBOX
There are a wide variety of research methods in the evaluator’s toolbox. The strategy is to know which tools to employ in which situation. We identified several common methods that could be useful in network evaluation, and uncovered other, network-specific tools. But we also identified some inherent limitations with the evaluator’s toolbox, suggesting that some new methods would be required for effective network analysis.

**Listening and participating** in network activities enables one to understand what is going on and to adapt and change the network based on what one experiences. Participation in a network provides ample opportunity for data exposure and for modification based on new information. The best way to evaluate, we agreed, was to be in the middle of it all.

There are some data which networks naturally generate—for example, email exchanges, meeting minutes, listservs and discussion boards. It is worth thinking about what other kinds of data might naturally surface within a network and exploring ways to better access and harvest that information. Network events and the convening of network members (physically or electronically) are ideal moments for accessing information about a network.
**Story telling** is a particularly apt tool for data collection in networks, giving voice to network member experiences. The question of how to bring out stories is a difficult one, particularly when an activity may be unknown to other elements of the network. How does one seek out the stories which are relevant, but which are not what one expects to see?

**Network Mapping** produces a graphical representation of a network that shows the nodes within it and the links between them. Mapping can be done manually or with the aid of software. Mapping is a particularly good lens for measuring connectivity within a network, and for measuring characteristics typically associated with social network analysis, such as centrality, position, reciprocity, and efficiency.

Our group also saw a role for **common qualitative and quantitative evaluation techniques** such as surveys, focus groups, interviews, case studies and observations. These approaches, typically employed in non-network evaluation practices, have their place in network evaluation when appropriately used.
Many existing tools were created for other structures and were hence too cumbersome, foreign or artificial for a network context. We were therefore particularly interested in the concept of “organic evaluation”.

Given the apparent natural and organic qualities of networks, members felt that there were yet-to-be-discovered tools and strategies that would work more seamlessly in a network environment. These new tools would also need to capture information at the network’s peripheries. The expansive and emergent properties of networks suggested the need for tools that could circulate information from the edges to the core, and which would be sufficiently nuanced and flexible to capture unanticipated outcomes.
Network evaluators themselves require a unique set of skills and an overall sensitivity to the dynamics of networks. In particular, we noted the following skills:

1. Being present in the network
2. Being an active listener
3. Recognizing patterns, synthesizing information
4. Seeing power dynamics and their impacts
5. Seeing simultaneously through multiple lenses
6. Identifying different forms of leadership
7. Giving people a voice to tell their stories
How do you intentionally create organic space?

How do you capture information in an organic way?
As the group explored various approaches, there was a strong sense that setting the right conditions was just as important as specific evaluation techniques, if not more so. The process of listening to what is happening within a network requires the evaluator to be active and find ways to enable a system to be listened to. Embedding evaluation processes in an organic way is a key point; it is also vital to think about the incentives necessary to easily generate evaluation data.

Often the evaluator of a network is someone with a stewardship role within that network. For such an individual, the ability to make rapid interventions (try, test and adjust) and quickly obtain feedback is invaluable.
EVALUATION FRAMEWORK
Building on our exploration, we created a tool to help network stewards better understand their networks. The process was not easy! We wanted to create a framework that would lead to insight and set the conditions for real change, and yet wanted to ensure that the framework was sufficiently flexible to apply to a wide variety of situations.

Focussing on our assignment, we identified three distinct but interdependent Arenas worthy of consideration in network evaluation.

ECOSYSTEM

PROCESSES

OUTCOMES

A Framework was then created to guide practitioners in developing and implementing some form of network evaluation.
EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

the three arenas

E

P

O
The Framework is broken into three sections based on the three Arenas: Ecosystem, Processes and Outcomes. Within each Arena are a series of Characteristics, and each Characteristic contains two exercises. The first exercise is primarily a descriptive exercise, while the second is primarily an evaluative exercise.

The Descriptive Questions are intended to ground the evaluation. Given the multiplicity of network configurations, some basic questions must first be answered before delving into more exploratory evaluation. Network members may never before have answered these questions, so the elucidation of a basic description can itself prove to be a worthwhile exercise.
This approach has been adopted for several reasons. The Characteristics were the group’s first efforts to develop a list of all the features and variables of a network. This list was meant to stimulate thinking about the extraordinary array of features that exist within a network.

The **Evaluative Questions** are the heart of the evaluation and are intended to encourage deep reflection and exploration. This often requires referring back to the Descriptive Questions and comparing intended and actual results.
The exercises themselves include quantitative assessments, fill-in-the-blanks, drawings and more. They are intended to be provocative, playful and probing. They are not, however, intended to be exhaustive. You may be interested in other exercises of your own creation, or in employing more traditional methodologies to collect and explore data about your network. We encourage you to do so.

Given the variable nature of networks, and their evolution over time, you may consider the relative value of different questions at different points of the networks’ life cycle. A single network can and should be evaluated at different points in its evolution, and the emphasis placed on different questions should be guided by its stage of development.
This is a work in progress. Indeed, the variable nature of networks suggests that no “final” Framework could be developed that would apply equally to all situations; some questions would inevitably be better suited to different network configurations or to different stages of network development. You should feel comfortable when using the Framework to diverge from it where appropriate, and we encourage you to join the ongoing conversation by providing feedback and helping to enrich our understanding of the network evaluation process.
Some points of consideration and advice based on previous experience include:

» Consider one specific network you are working with and try to answer the questions one by one.

» Do not limit yourself to the specific questions posed, but instead think about each Characteristic as you interpret it and as it applies to your case. Use the questions as starting points for your own exploration.

» Consider completing this with a colleague or with a group, discussing your answers in advance, or comparing your responses. Use any differences in your responses as an opportunity to discuss the meaning and importance of your different interpretations of the network.
Consider ways that this Framework can be used to solicit feedback/observations from multiple points of the network. The nature of networks suggests that there can never be a single, correct or final perspective or evaluation. Think instead about strategies for facilitating the multiplicity of perspectives, such as:

» Having the Framework completed by members in different parts of the network (based on geography, connectivity, centrality, etc.).

» Comparing the evaluation results of people in the hub with the results of an evaluation completed by other members.

» Completing the Framework in a group setting to compare and contrast perspectives, and then identifying the points of convergence and divergence as opportunities for discussion and action.

Ultimately, there is no correct way to use this Framework. It is a tool intended to produce insights that will help improve network operations and impact. It is not intended to produce a conclusive assessment. Use as much or as little as you want, in whatever manner you see fit, to help you along the journey of network evaluation.
ARENA 1

ECOSYSTEM
The first arena of analysis is the Network Ecosystem. Loosely defined, this refers to the environment in which network activities take place, as well as the ideas, values and approaches that bind the network together. In other words, it has both an internal and external component, referring to the ecosystem that is the network and the ecosystem in which the network exists.

An improved understanding of the Network Ecosystem will help to clarify the purposes of the network, identify the structures and beliefs which bind its members together and articulate its relationship to its external environment. Evaluation in this Arena could reveal inconsistencies or challenges that, if remedied, will lead to improved network operations.

This section begins with internal characteristics of the network ecosystem and ends with external characteristics of the ecosystem.
NETWORK STRUCTURE
DESCRIPTIVE

WHAT IS THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE NETWORK?

☐ Organization  ☐ Hub & Spoke
☐ Individuals  ☐ Shared Leadership
☐ Sprawling
☐ Other __________________

DRAW THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR NETWORK:
ECOSYSTEM
QUESTION 1 OF 13

HOW HAS THE STRUCTURE CHANGED OVER TIME?

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DRAW THE IDEAL STRUCTURE OF YOUR NETWORK:
NETWORK GOALS
DESCRIPTIVE

WHAT ARE THE GOALS (IMPLICIT OR EXPLICIT) OF THE NETWORK?

#
1
2
3
4

REMEMBER THESE NUMBERS, YOU’LL USE THEM IN UPCOMING EXERCISES!

WHAT NEW GOALS HAVE EMERGED?

WHAT GOALS HAVE BEEN DROPPED?
IS THERE A COMMON PERSPECTIVE ON GOALS AMONG MEMBERS? ARE COMMON GOALS NEEDED?
ARE THE GOALS MAINTAINING THEIR RELEVANCY?
IS THERE SUFFICIENT ROOM FOR NEW GOALS TO EMERGE?
WHAT TYPES OF MEMBERS MAKE UP THE NETWORK?
DESCRIBE THEIR ROLES IN THE NETWORK:

MEMBER

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MEMBER

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MEMBER

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MEMBER

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IS THE NETWORK MEMBERSHIP APPROPRIATELY DEFINED?
IS IT APPROPRIATE TO THE GOALS AND STRUCTURE?

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ECOSYSTEM
QUESTION 3 OF 13

63
NETWORK SIZE
DESCRIPTIVE

A) IS THE NETWORK...

☐ Growing
☐ Static
☐ Shrinking

B) ARE DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE NETWORK...

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☐ ☐ ☐

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☐ ☐ ☐
WHAT DOES THIS SAY ABOUT THE NETWORK?

Now

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...in 5 years

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..in 10 years

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**NETWORK DIVERSITY**
*DESCRIPTIVE*

**HOW DIVERSE OR HOMOGENEOUS IS THE NETWORK?**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOMOGENEOUS</th>
<th>DIVERSE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MEMBERSHIP</strong></td>
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<td><strong>SKILLS</strong></td>
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<td><strong>RESOURCES</strong></td>
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<td><strong>PERSPECTIVES</strong></td>
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IS THE DIVERSITY (OR LACK) SERVING THE NETWORK’S PURPOSE? SHOULD MEASURES BE TAKEN TO FOSTER/STIFLE THE DIVERSITY?
WHAT IS THE THEORY OF CHANGE OF THE NETWORK?

As a network, we believe that by and our work will lead to , which will benefit and .
DOES THIS THEORY OF CHANGE HELP TO GUIDE THE WORK OF THE NETWORK?
HOW CLEAR IS THIS THEORY OF CHANGE TO NETWORK MEMBERS?

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**NETWORK VALUES**

**DESCRIPTIVE**

A) WHAT ARE THE VALUES THAT BIND MEMBERS TOGETHER?
B) ARE MEMBERS EMBRACING THESE VALUES?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REJECTED</th>
<th>EMBRACED</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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**EG. COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES, DEMOCRATIC DECISION-MAKING, ETC...**
EVALUATIVE

ECOSYSTEM

QUESTION 7 OF 13

CAN YOU SHARE A STORY OF HOW MEMBERS REJECTED OR EMBRACED THESE VALUES?

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71
NETWORK RESOURCES
DESCRIPTIVE

WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE OR REQUIRED BY THE NETWORK AND ITS MEMBERS?

Resource

GOT IT

NEED IT

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HOW DO YOU PLAN TO GET THE RESOURCES YOU NEED OVER THE NEXT 18 MONTHS?
# Stakeholders

**Descriptive**

**Who has a stake in the network?**

**Is the network sufficiently engaging these stakeholders?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Disengaged</th>
<th>Engaged</th>
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FOR THOSE STAKEHOLDER WHICH ARE NOT ENGAGED,
HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ENGAGE THEM OVER THE NEXT 18
MONTHS?

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HOW IS THE NETWORK FINANCIALLY SUPPORTED?
DRAW A PIE CHART OF YOUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT:

CURRENT:

IDEAL:
WHAT ACTIONS CAN BE TAKEN TO REACH THE IDEAL FUNDING ENVIRONMENT?

Now

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...in 6 Months

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..in 24 months

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WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT THAT MAY HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE NETWORK?

A

B

C

EG. GOVERNMENT CHANGES, STAFF POSITIONS, CUT-BACKS, ETC...
HOW SHOULD THE NETWORK ATTEND TO CHANGES IN THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT?

Now

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...in 6 Months

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..in 24 months

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ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT
DESCRIPTIVE

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE ECONOMY THAT MAY IMPACT THE NETWORK?

A

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B

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C

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EG. FINANCIAL CRASH, JOB LOSS, OUTSOURCING, HOUSING MARKET, LOW INTEREST RATES, ETC...
HOW SHOULD THE NETWORK ATTEND TO CHANGES IN THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT?

Now

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...in 6 Months

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..in 24 months

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SOCIO-CULTURAL ENV.
DESCRIPTIVE

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE EXTERNAL SOCIO-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT THAT MAY HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE NETWORK?

A

B

C

EG. LOCAL MOVEMENT, TECHNOLOGY TRENDS, ART MOVEMENTS, RELIGIOUS DYNAMICS, ETC...
HOW SHOULD THE NETWORK ATTEND TO CHANGES IN THE SOCIO-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT?

Now

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...in 6 Months

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..in 24 months

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The second arena of analysis is Network Processes. Loosely defined, this refers to the operations of the network and includes such things as the activities, energy, communications and relations of the network and its members. Attention to network processes helps to better understand the overall health and vitality of the network. Evaluation in this arena could reveal particular strengths or weaknesses in network operations and identify strategies for improving the effectiveness of how the network functions.
# NETWORK ACTIVITIES

**DESCRIPTIVE**

**WHAT ACTIVITIES IS THE NETWORK DOING TO ADVANCE ITS GOALS?**

**TO WHAT DEGREE ARE THESE ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING THE NETWORK’S GOALS?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>LOW</th>
<th>HIGH</th>
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</table>

SEE NETWORK GOALS SECTION TO MATCH THE ACTIVITY TO THE CORRESPONDING GOAL NUMBER.
WHAT CHANGES NEED TO BE MADE SO THAT THE NETWORK ACTIVITIES BETTER SUPPORT THE NETWORK GOALS?
COMMUNICATION
DESCRIPTIVE

WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF FACE TO FACE COMMUNICATION THAT THE NETWORK IS CURRENTLY DOING?

☐ Meetings
☐ Conferences
☐ Workshops
☐ Lectures
☐ Parties
☐ Rallies
☐ Field Trips
Other ____________________

WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION THAT THE NETWORK IS CURRENTLY DOING?

☐ Email
☐ Workspace
☐ Wiki
☐ Repository
☐ Instant Messaging
☐ Social Network
☐ Publication / Blog
Other ____________________
DOES INFORMATION MOVE IN THE NETWORK AS INTENDED?
WHERE ARE THE BLOCKAGES AND THEIR SOURCES?
DOES THE NETWORK LISTEN TO ITS MEMBERS,
STAKEHOLDERS...?
WHAT GOVERNANCE OR DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURE IS IN PLACE FOR THE NETWORK?

☐ Board of Directors
☐ Advisory Group
☐ Formal Procedure
☐ Informal Understanding
☐ ______________________

DRAW THE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OF YOUR NETWORK:
**HOW DO DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE HELP OR HINDER NETWORK ACTIVITY?**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>HINDER</th>
<th>HELP</th>
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</table>
NETWORK ROLES
DESCRIPTIVE

IDENTIFY 3 ROLES IN THE NETWORK AND DESCRIBE EACH:

Role are responsible for
Activity so that Outcome

Role are responsible for
Activity so that Outcome

Role are responsible for
Activity so that Outcome
ARE THE CURRENT ROLES SERVING THE NETWORK EFFECTIVELY?
ARE THE ROLES CHANGING?
transparent, reciprocal, interconnected, inactive, authentic, trustful, dense, sparse, engaged, supportive, removed, responsive, incumbered, rigid, flexible, fluid, respected, known, creative, innovative, promising, valuable, deep, global, local, young, established, cherished, mysterious, tense, distrustful,
LIST STEPS THAT CAN BE TAKEN TO BUILD HEALTHIER RELATIONS AMONG NETWORK MEMBERS:

Now

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...in 6 Months

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..in 24 months

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ARENA 3
OUTCOMES
The third arena of analysis is Network Outcomes. Loosely defined, this refers to the anticipated and unanticipated impact of network activities and the degree to which the network meets its stated and emerging goals. An improved understanding of Network Outcomes helps to understand whether the network is achieving its stated goals and can be seen as the ultimate determinant of network effectiveness.
# NETWORK OUTPUTS
**DESCRIPTIVE**

**A) WHAT HAS BEEN PRODUCED BY THE NETWORK?**
**B) HOW SUCCESSFUL HAVE THE OUTPUTS BEEN IN SERVING THE GOALS OF THE NETWORK?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNSUCCESSFUL</th>
<th>SUCCESS</th>
<th>Output</th>
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- eg. art show, information piece, lecture series, rally, conference, research report
HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR APPROACH TO OUTPUTS?

Now

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______________________________

...in 6 Months

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______________________________

______________________________

..in 24 months

______________________________

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TO WHAT DEGREE HAS YOUR NETWORK HAD AN IMPACT ON ITS GOALS?

See network goals section to match the activity to the corresponding goal number.
OUTCOMES

QUESTION 2 OF 3

HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT 12 MONTHS?

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IMPACT ON MEMBERS
DESCRIPTIVE

LIST POSITIVE(+) AND NEGATIVE(-) IMPACTS THAT PARTICIPATION IN THE NETWORK IS HAVING ON MEMBERS:

+ ____________________________________________________
+ ____________________________________________________
+ ____________________________________________________
+ ____________________________________________________
+ ____________________________________________________
+ ____________________________________________________
+ ____________________________________________________
+ ____________________________________________________

- ____________________________________________________
- ____________________________________________________
- ____________________________________________________
- ____________________________________________________
- ____________________________________________________
- ____________________________________________________
- ____________________________________________________
- ____________________________________________________
IS PARTICIPATION PROVIDING VALUE TO NETWORK MEMBERS?
IS THE NETWORK HAVING ITS INTENDED IMPACT ON MEMBERS?
HOW CAN THIS IMPACT BE INCREASED?
REFINING OUR THINKING
FURTHER QUESTIONS

REFINING OUR THINKING

SPIRIT OF NETWORKS
POWER DYNAMICS
EXISTING STRATEGIES
The group identified several questions to further refine thinking about network evaluation:

» Do the three Arenas (ecosystem, processes, outcomes) further thinking about network evaluation? Do they sufficiently capture the full spectrum of network activities? Are they sufficiently clear and developed?

» What are the methods, tools, strategy, lenses, etc., that can best be employed at each of the three levels in order to better understand the health and effectiveness of networks? How can the three levels be connected?

» What is the connection with existing evaluation strategies at the community, network and individual member levels? Is there a way to integrate the approaches? Is it important to do so?

» How can the dynamics of power be better understood? In what ways is power manifested within the network and its activities? In what ways does power influence the evaluation?

» What new methods, consistent with ‘spirit’ and ‘nature’ of networks, can help us collect and analyze data regarding the health and impact of our networks?
This document reflects the outcome of our initial investigation. But in many ways this learning journey has just begun. Dozens of avenues raised in the discussions still need to be pursued. Group members are now eager to sink their teeth into new projects that extend and advance current thinking. One member is looking at the impact of relational practices with funding bodies. Another is exploring the “shadows and ghosts” of networks—the intangible forces of culture and practice and their relationship to structure and purpose. And yet another is looking to better understand the intersection of network thinking, philanthropy and the philosophies emerging from the open source movement.
This document is intended to serve as the starting point of a new exploration. As networks and their accompanying literature continue to proliferate, we want to focus attention on network evaluation. We want others to become enthused about it, to stretch their current thinking and to identify tools and strategies for evaluating networks in ways that are consistent with their nature.

As networks become increasingly prevalent, it will become even more important to understand their health and impact. We hope this document serves as a meaningful step on this journey.
We would be delighted to hear your reflections on this paper and your experiences conducting network evaluation. This field is only just emerging and there are no experts – we look to each of you to help contribute to this practice.
Please send us your thoughts at networkevaluation@socialinnovation.ca. We would love the opportunity to add your contributions toward the development of a framework for network evaluation.
GROUP PARTICIPANTS

APPENDIX A

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Chad Lubelsky
Megan Thom

Centre for Social Innovation
Eli Malinsky
Tonya Surman

Community Foundations of Canada
Barbara Oates-McMillan

Meal Exchange
Dave Kranenburg

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Santropol Roulant  Jane Rabinowicz
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TD Canada Trust Scholarships  Jane Thompson
Telecentre.org  Mark Surman
University of Toronto  Katherine Reilly

Jamie Gamble, Imprint Consulting, provided facilitation support to this initiative. His specialty is developmental evolution in support of social innovation.
WHY THIS PROJECT?

APPENDIX B

The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation and the Centre for Social Innovation share a common reality: We are surrounded by, immersed in, and confronted with networks in almost all aspects of the work we do. We have also invested time and money in the development of networks that are essential to our mandates and to our success.

Our organizations have also been faced with a common set of questions: How do we really know if our investment in our networks is worth it? And how could we make our networks better?

We knew the issues we faced with regard to networks and network evaluation were not ours alone. To an increasing degree, those working for social change in all variety of sectors were in the very same predicament. And our own work was leading us to conclude that networks were increasingly essential to social innovation.
So we decided to collaborate on a strategy that would begin to answer these questions. We knew we needed to convene a diverse group with deep experience and interest in the topic. We agreed that we would have to create an environment that would stimulate the creation of new knowledge and that would be founded upon both sound evaluative principles and participants’ expertise. We also agreed that the people invited to participate should, where possible, represent a variety of network-focused activities and run the gamut from academics to practitioners. Finally, to ensure appropriate follow-through and rigour, we agreed that it was important to hire an expert facilitator with a broad range of experience.

We settled on an approach that proved a perfect fit for the group and the topic, and which subsequently proved to be a promising model for future explorations. We would meet in person three times over one year, for two consecutive days each time. Between meetings we would share readings, ideas, and conversations.

Having laid the groundwork, the Foundation and CSI issued invitations to participants. The inaugural meeting was held on June 27-28, 2007 in Toronto.
RECOMMENDED READING

APPENDIX C


This book was designed by The Movement, as part of our effort to work with people and groups who are doing better. Working with social entrepreneurs and innovators, we use the power of design thinking & doing to give form to complex ideas. We’re a network of committed people ready to tackle complex problems, and a studio dedicated to delivering results. We work openly with groups, on challenges that matter.