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This document summarizes:

Provan, Keith G., Mark A. Veazie, Lisa K. Staten, and Nicolette I. Teufel-Shone. "The Use of Network Analysis to Strengthen Community Partnerships." *Public Administration Review* (September/October 2005) 603-613.

"The Use of Network Analysis to Strengthen Community Partnerships," discusses how community leaders can use networks to strengthen relationships between public and nonprofit organizations. Networks made up of public and nonprofit organizations are necessary because they allow community organizations to take advantage of a broad range of resources and expertise. Such networks, however, are difficult to establish and sustain for numerous reasons, for example, each participant can view the network from the perspective of his or her own organization thereby limiting the objectives of the network as a whole.

Studying networks can help leaders understand and overcome some of the challenges. Network analysis is a way to collect data on how multiple organizations and individuals interact with each other. It is possible to collect data on the number of links, the types of interactions between organizations, and even the level of trust exhibited between organizations.

The central point of the article is to help community leaders understand how they can use the results of the network analysis to help them build partnerships. The authors offer eight questions that community leaders should use to guide them in the process.

- **Question 1: Which community agencies or groups are most (and least) central in the network, and are these agencies or groups essential for addressing community needs in a particular problem area or domain?** This question can help community leaders understand the importance of centrality in an organization. For example, if an organization that everyone knows is critical to addressing the needs of the network is not central, than that may explain some of the weaknesses of the network as a whole.
- **Question 2: Which core network members have links to important resources through their involvement with organizations outside the network that might benefit other network members?** This question can provide knowledge of the inventory of outside resources that an organization can bring to the network.
- **Question 3: Are the critical ties among agencies in the community based solely on personal relationships, or have these ties become formalized so that they are sustainable over time?** While personal relationships may initially

enhance the bond between two organizations, the relationship is not sustainable over time if one or both of the key players leave.

- **Question 4: Are the relationships among agencies in the network strong or weak? If they are weak, should these relationships be maintained as is, or should they be strengthened?** Leaders should assess strength using the concept of “multiplexity,” which is defined as the number of different types of ties maintained by pairs of partner organizations.
- **Question 5: Which groups of organizations within the network currently have strong working relationships? How can these groups be mobilized to meet the broader objectives of the network?** In large networks it is common for “clusters” to form. These small groups of organizations within the broader network can increase overall efficiency and can help achieve the goals of the network as a whole.
- **Question 6: Based on comparative network data over time, has reasonable progress been made in building community capacity through developing stronger network ties?** Unlike the first five questions, this question addresses the progress of a network. Leaders of mature networks should look at the issue of progress along with issues addressed in questions 1-5.
- **Question 7: What is the level of trust among agencies working together, and has it increased or decreased over time? If it has declined, how can it be strengthened?** Though analyzing trust is extremely complicated, it is a factor that is important for building close relationships between various organizations.
- **Question 8: What are the benefits and drawbacks of collaboration, have these changed over time, and how can benefits be enhanced and drawbacks minimized?** Each participant may have different expectations about benefits and drawbacks, and it is important to both understand these expectations and evaluate how the expectations have changed over time.

These eight questions provide community leaders with a way to increase the chances of successful deployment of networks for public purposes. Depending on the needs and organizational structure of the network, officials involved in structuring the network may choose to focus on a select few of these questions. For example, questions 6 through 8 are most relevant to more mature organizations. Though some communities may need convincing that network analysis can help them, and often the data collection can be an arduous process, the analysis can still be a valuable tool to help community leaders and members understand the structure and process of the network.