

A review of the evidence on developing and supporting policy and practice networks

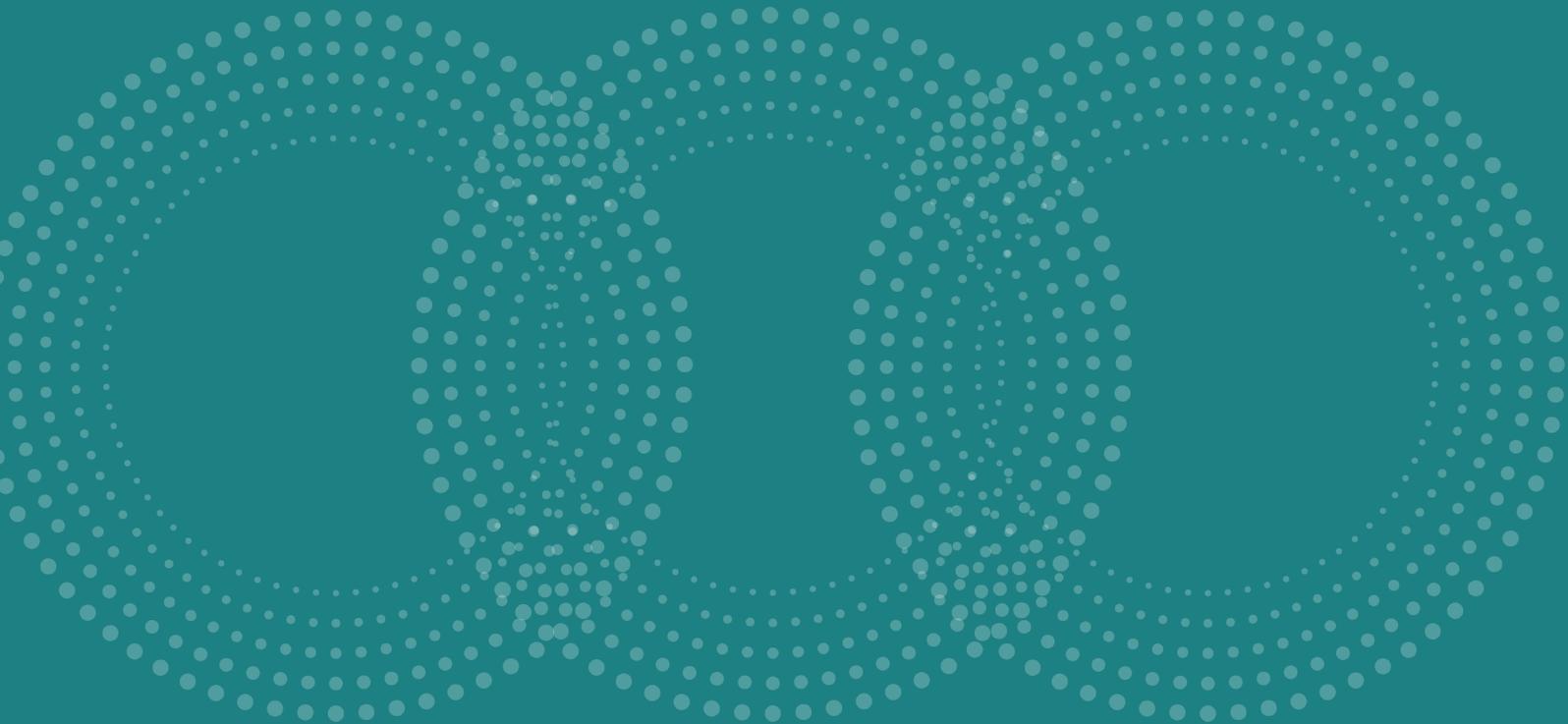
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Summary

'Networks' and 'networking' are widely used (and often under-defined) concepts. This rapid desk-review takes a more focused look at networks, specifically those that support policy and practice development, from the point of view of charitable organisations that may want to foster them as a way of achieving social change. Accordingly, the first part of the paper investigates some basic questions such as what a network is and when it's best to develop and foster one in order to achieve a goal (as opposed to using other means). The second part discusses learning from charitable foundations' experience of working with policy and practice networks.

Making sense of networks

- Networks can be a valuable way of working with others for better ideas, stronger connections and greater impact. Networks are usually formed around specific issues, or a set of values. It is crucial that those thinking about fostering a network are able to clearly articulate its purpose and role.
 - A network is not a universal tool; whether a network or something else (such as a project or a hierarchical organisation) will work best in a particular instance depends on the function(s) it is meant to perform. The broad categories of network functions are: knowledge management; amplification of voices and advocacy; convening; community building (e.g. promoting shared vision, increasing trust) and mobilising resources.
 - A network is fundamentally different from a hierarchy and this is reflected in its structure. It can benefit from a supporting entity (such as a secretariat or co-ordinator), which which may have its own hierarchy. However, a supporting entity should not be confused with the network itself.
- The relationships and interactions between its members form the substance of the network. Networks can be fostered, supported, galvanised, even transformed, but they cannot be created without regard for their relationships-aspect.
 - Networks are usually resource-intensive for members (and for the supporting entity); membership must offer value and would-be members must be willing to participate in a formalised network.
 - Collaborations (which are networks aimed at creating or achieving something) come in different forms, essentially determined by their purpose. Certain forms may support some features more fully, for example, networked collaborations may support community action, whilst coalitions and mission-oriented collaborations may support local and national policy change.
 - Network leadership is substantially different in many respects from being a leader of a hierarchical organisation. It is about 'serving' the network, being a role model and an inspiration, preserving trust, facilitating and empowering others to contribute, appreciating different viewpoints and helping to identify breakthroughs. However, network leaders have leverage over how effective a network is in achieving its goals, most significantly by designing its features.

Charitable foundations' role in supporting networks for social change

- Charitable foundations have a range of tools at their disposal in pursuit of impact, including convening and using their own voice, or amplifying others'; they should be intentional in their decisions as to which tools to use or not to use in a given situation. Foundations should also be willing to learn from failure.
- Campaigning directly for social change as a funder involves higher risks, costs and involvement than supporting grantees to do so, or working with other funders, but it comes with a greater degree of control too. Such work may require long-term commitment and it may take a long time for others in the policy field to shift their perceptions of funders that move from a funding role into an advocacy role.
- Emerging insights suggest that cause-related networks of charitable foundations offer increased collective impact, rapid diffusion of ideas and learning, greater resilience and ability to adapt. Formulating a value proposition is key to such networks' success. Networks of this type also come with risks, for example disproportionate influence on funding and on ways of thinking about a cause.
- Charitable foundations are also seen as key partners in collective impact collaborations that take a cross-sectoral approach to solving social and environmental problems on a large-scale. They enhance such collaborations by being flexible contributors, catalysts and funders of backbone support. These forms of collaborations are at present less common in the UK.
- When charitable foundations want to catalyse networks for social change,

they are advised to adopt a 'networks mindset' (akin to the qualities of network leadership). Other key ingredients to success are thought to be relationships, trust, integrity and relevance. Catalysing activities will differ during the life cycle of a network (e.g. mapping early on, then connecting, strategising and evaluating later).

- It is not easy to know if networks 'work', particularly in the short term. Organisations with experience of catalysing networks recommend assessing multiple pathways to impact (including looking for meaningful contribution rather than attribution) and considering indicators of impact on the network itself, as well as on its social purpose.
- Philanthropic organisations are thought to be increasingly enmeshed in 'networked governance', moving into agenda setting, providing a service, advocacy and other roles. Critical voices call for reflection on the politics and power implications of this change. They also point out the lack of independent evidence to support claims of being innovative, impactful and thought-leader.

There is no doubt that policy and practice networks have a place among the various ways of working to achieve social change, and that sometimes they are the best (or indeed, only) option. Networks come with their own risks, however, and they can be resource-intensive to develop and maintain. Charitable organisations should consider carefully whether a network is the best vehicle to achieve a goal before committing themselves. At a practice level, a lot remains to be learnt from examples of when, how and why a network has been successful (or not) and how this has been affected by charitable organisations' contributions.

1. Making sense of networks

The purpose of this section is to shed light to some basic questions on developing and supporting networks: what is and isn't a network, how to decide whether it is a network or something else that is the best way to pursue a goal, in what forms networks come, what qualities distinguish network leaders from leaders of hierarchies, what leverage they have over the functioning of a network and what practical tools are available to work through these questions.

Much of the discussion in this section is based on pieces of work the Overseas Development Institute published in 2011. Although CUKT focuses primarily on the UK and Ireland, in my view international development can be considered a relevant field to look for learning because, similar to CUKT, it is chiefly concerned with enhancing human wellbeing, it often works in a cross-sectional way and with the involvement of independent actors.

In the paper I refer to specific types of networks at various points, distinguished mostly by their particular function or form, such as: knowledge networks; innovation networks for public good; business peer-support networks; cause-related networks; mission-oriented and collective impact collaborations; communities of practice and networked governance. I chose them because they offer particular learning points relevant to the discussion.

What is a network and is it the right approach for the purpose?

In its broadest sense, a network is 'a collection of objects or actors that are connected to each other through some kind of relationship'¹.

In a more specific (and from CUKT's perspective, more relevant) sense, in the network.

- the relationship is between actors (not things),
- it is a distinct form of organisation (from hierarchies or finite projects),
- it is formed around specific issues or a set of values (as opposed to locations or events),
- its members intend to interact around a specific purpose and
- it is mostly facilitated or supported by an identifiable entity (secretariat, coordinator, steering group or stewards).²

An 'ideal' network will have fundamentally different properties compared with a hierarchy:

- it is constituted through voluntary association of individuals or organisations,
- the relationship between members is essentially a social contract,
- members engage to the extent they trust that others will reciprocate,
- networks are fluid and organic; their trajectories and results are not easily predictable,
- informal structuring of relationships between members is more important than formal (although there can be different types or levels of membership),
- alongside considerable self-organisation, networks normally benefit from co-ordination or a secretariat (as above).³

Importantly, networks can be confused with the mechanisms that support them, or those that connect its members, such as secretariats or online platforms.

1 Hearn, S. and Mendizabal, E. (2011), *Not everything that connects is a network*. ODI Background Note, Overseas Development Institute <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/6313.pdf> [Accessed 22 April 2021], p1, citing Newman, M.E.J. (2003) 'The structure and function of complex networks', *SIAM Review* 45: 167-256.

2 *Ibid.*

3 Ramalingam, B. (2011) *Mind the network gaps*. Overseas Development Institute, <https://www.odi.org/publications/5736-mind-network-gaps> [Accessed 14 October 2020].

This is why the network can be mistakenly perceived as a hierarchical entity or a project. It is in this sense that sometimes when people talk about 'setting up', 'initiating', or 'developing' a network, what they really refer to is the support structure (which can indeed be a finite project or a hierarchical organisation). The interactions and relationships between its members, that form the substance of networks, have existed before and will exist after an initiative. This is why networks can be fostered or facilitated, but not directed in the same way as a project or a hierarchical organisation. Once this is established, it is clearer what expectations can be set:

"Our experience tells us that all we can hope for in fostering networks is to identify existing or potential relationships and enhance, add value to, expand, formalise or otherwise transform them. This is what it means to develop a network."⁴

This means that if fostered well, networks can be put to good use. However, a project or an organisation may sometimes be a better way to deliver on an objective.

Network Functional Analysis (NFA), originally developed to help facilitators, supporters and actors of humanitarian networks to aid strategic reflection on their work, is one way of assessing the suitability and likely effectiveness of a network.⁵ The four key components of the revised NFA approach are summarised in Box 1.

Box 1. Key components of the (revised) Network Functional Analysis⁶



Purpose: the objective of a network that justifies its existence. It can be long-term, instrumental (e.g. delivering goods or services) or fluid (e.g. improving a policy debate).

Key question to ask: 'why are we supporting or working as a network?'



Role: the way the network adds value for members to achieve their purpose. At one end of the spectrum the role is to provide support to independently acting members to increase their effectiveness, at the other is members co-ordinating efforts to act as a single agent of change (it is usually somewhere in-between).



Function(s): what the network does to achieve its purpose. The often overlapping broad categories of network functions are: knowledge management; amplification of voices and advocacy; convening (e.g. building bridges, fostering consensus); community building (e.g. promoting a shared vision, increasing trust); mobilising resources. Learning is implicit in all categories of function. Members and the supporting entity may carry out different activities to fulfil the network's function(s).



Form: structural and organisational characteristics that should fit with the functions of the network, such as: scope (thematic, geographical); governance (e.g. degrees of formality); membership (potentially different depths); relationships (how close they need to be); organisational arrangements (e.g. degree of centralisation, adaptation to members' needs over time); stewardship (leadership and facilitation); resources.

4 *Ibid*, p2.

5 Ramalingam, B., Mendizabal, E. and Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop (2008) *Strengthening humanitarian networks: Applying the networks function approach*. ODI Background Note, <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/831.pdf> [Accessed 16 October 2020].

6 Based on Hearn and Mendizabal (2011), *Not everything that connects is a network*. *op. cit.*

It is key that those thinking about developing a network are able to clearly articulate its purpose and role. But it is the assessment of the anticipated functions of the network that will help decide whether a network or another type of organisational form is required. The table developed by ODI authors (reproduced in Table 1) breaks down the five broad categories of function within the NFA approach, distinguishing also between what network members and a supporting entity such as a secretariat would do.

Establishing whether the purpose is best achieved by a network is all the more important as networks can be highly resource-intensive both for members (for example in time and attention), and for the supporting entity. Further, members take a relationship-risk when they interact with other members, so they must be willing to support the network. If they are not willing, it is better to choose a different approach. It is always better to work with an already existing network than to try and generate a new one. When there is no network in a given field, it should be asked why. Depending on the answer, it may be

Table 1. The five functions of networks in the Network Functional Analysis Approach

Function	Purpose	How does the network carry out this function?	How does the supporting entity support this function?
Knowledge management	Identify, filter and share important people, events, facts and stories; stimulate learning; mitigate information overload	Sharing information through websites; contributing to or editing a journal or newsletters; diffusion of ideas; storytelling; mentoring	Editing websites, publications and newsletters; moderating mailing lists; passing on relevant/useful information
Amplification and advocacy	Extending the reach and influence of constituent parts - members, ideas, initiatives	Hosting conferences, running campaigns, publishing targeted material, providing extension services, ripple effect	Disseminating publications, newsletters; managing campaigns; coordinating field work; representing the network
Community building	Building of social capital through bonding, building relationships of trust; consensus and coherence; collective learning and action among homogeneous actors	Hosting learning, networking or social events; creating opportunities to collaborate with others; providing space for open discussions	Organising events facilitating internal introductions, coordinating projects or initiatives
Convening	Building social capital through bridging; stimulating discourse, collective learning and action among heterogeneous actors	Hosting formal multi-stakeholder meetings or discussion/decision-making events, enabling reputation by association, identifying and connecting new or emerging ideas	Organising events, maintaining contacts, facilitating external introductions, representing the network
Resource mobilisation	Increasing the capacity and effectiveness of members, stimulating knowledge creation and innovation	Offering training, grants, sponsorship, consultancy and advice; providing access to databases and libraries	Brokering training opportunities and consultancies; advice, managing grants and sponsorship programmes, administering database/library access

best to either use a different approach, or to try to address the factors that get in the way of a network forming.⁸

As to when it might be a good idea to consider working in a network model, clues include the absence of a central authority and the involvement of many fairly autonomous actors (people or organisations), or many stakeholders in large initiatives. Initiatives with various and/or competing objectives may also be better-suited to operate as a network. In addition, initiatives can be deliberately designed to operate as networks from the very beginning.⁹

As already discussed, the relationships and interactions between members are at the heart of networks. This helps to explain that they have life cycles: they can emerge and dissolve organically, but can also be fostered when some functions would help members achieve a shared purpose. Networks have to keep members' interest and continue to add value for them. This can happen, for example, through introducing new perspectives, helping to maintain relationships or form new ones, or through building broader support. Networks adapt to external and internal factors and can also come to an end, for example when their purpose has been achieved, or when their members split into further groups.¹⁰

Network forms and attributes

Having articulated the *purpose* and assessed *functions* to decide whether a network approach had, on balance, the best chance of working, it is helpful to think next about *forms* that could best support a network (see Box 1).

Collaborations, in the sense of '*the act of working together with other people or organisations to create or achieve something*'¹¹, fit within the broad definition of networks.¹² Dartington Service Design Lab and Collaborate CIC recently developed a synthesis of seven different forms of collaboration, according to their key attributes such as governance; communications between partners and with their audience; evaluation and learning; sharing of resources; membership (closed or open, bottom up or top down) and sector diversity/representation (see Appendix 1).¹³

The synthesis also drew together some features that different forms of collaboration support better or less well (reproduced in Table 2). It should be noted that the classification is offered up as an *aid to discussion* rather than a definitive analysis, and that the different forms can be blended to support the collaboration's specific priorities.

8 Ibid.

9 Ramalingam, B. (2011) *Mind the network gaps*, *op. cit.*; quoting Davies, R. (2008) *Network models and Social Frameworks*, <https://mande.co.uk/special-issues/network-models/> [Accessed 20 October 2020].

10 Ramalingam, B., Mendizabal, E. and Ed Schenkenberg von Mierop (2008) *Strengthening humanitarian networks: Applying the networks function approach*, *op. cit.*

11 <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/collaboration> [Accessed 17 October 2020].

12 An inspiring alternative definition of collaboration by Georgina Wilson of *Business Under Development* is "a fusion of ideas and skills and networks that turn into something new and beautiful". <https://www.unlockingnetworks.org/case-studies/the-power-of-collaboration-for-leaders/> [Accessed 18 October 2020]

13 Dartington Service Design Lab and Collaborate CIC (2019) *Forms and features of collaboration: A synthesis for the Collaboration for Wellbeing and Health*. <http://wordpress.collaboratei.com/wp-content/uploads/Forms-and-features-of-collaborations.pdf> [Accessed 7 October 2020].

Table 2. How fully some key features are enabled by different forms of collaboration¹⁴

Form	Community Voice	Dissemination / Democratisation of Evidence	Diversity of Partners	Local and National Policy Influence	Public Awareness	Community Action	Responding to complexity
Networked Collaboration	4	4	3	2	4	5	3
Decentralised Collaboration	4	3	4	5	4	4	4
Collective Impact	4	5	4	3	2	4	3
System Connectors	4	5	5	4	2	3	5
Catalyst Collaborators	4	5	4	4	3	2	4
Coalitions	2	4	3	5	3	2	3
Mission-Oriented Collaborations	3	4	5	5	2	3	4

The report highlights, however, that ‘collaboration is an art, not a science’, and underlines the key message conveyed in the ODI’s work that, at the core of all collaborations are

“the strong relationships required to carry the weight of the task. The form becomes the infrastructure that pulls you towards the collaboration”.¹⁵

The role of network leadership

The key role of leadership is clear from literature on different types of networks. In general, network leadership is deemed to be substantially different in many respects from being a leader of hierarchical organisations. First and foremost, network leadership is distributed across the network, leaders are said to ‘serve’ the network rather than direct it, they preserve trust within the network, facilitate and empower others to contribute, help to identify breakthroughs and appreciate different viewpoints. They support self-organisation and tend to stay in the background.¹⁶

Evidence points to leaders and facilitators of knowledge networks¹⁷ being able to use their leverage to ensure their network achieves its goals, particularly in designing aspects of the network.¹⁸ For the most successful network leaders, design was dynamic and kept the structural aspects of the network consistent with the strategic ones. Such leaders were also change agents and role models, inspiring, inclusive and active in discussions. In order to connect inputs and impacts of network activities over time, leaders of knowledge networks are recommended to keep a map that shows pathways of achieving impacts, and to reward and further incentivise members’ performance quickly (for example through formal or informal recognition).¹⁹

14 Ibid. p55. The classification has been developed through interviews with research participants and desk research.

15 Ibid p5.

16 For a fuller discussion of leadership within peer-to-peer networks see The Social Change Agency and Shared Assets (n.d.) *Devolving power and leadership in networks handbook* <https://www.unlockingnetworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/handbook-Devolving-power-and-leadership.pdf> [Accessed 18 October 2020].

17 Although knowledge networks are a specific type of network, learning and knowledge management benefit other types of networks too, for example through developing professional skills and a shared code of ethics, promoting peer-to-peer mentoring, facilitating more effective collaboration and helping to develop a common language. See: The Social Change Agency and Shared Assets (n.d.) *Knowledge management in peer networks handbook*, <https://www.unlockingnetworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/handbook-Knowledge-management-in-peer-networks.pdf> [Accessed 18 October 2020].

18 Pugh, K. and Prusak, L. (2013) *Designing Effective Knowledge Networks*. MIT Sloan Management Review, Vol 55. No 1., <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/designing-effective-knowledge-networks/> [Accessed 2 October 2020].

19 Ibid

The prime role of skilled and trusted network leadership is also borne out in research on innovation networks for public good. One key aspect of such leadership is successfully *navigating the tension* between diversity that fosters innovation and ability to establish common ground for collaboration.²⁰

Resources to help develop networks for social change

The Social Change Agency and Shared Assets set up a two-year peer network programme (2016-2018) to support 13 community business peer support networks. The initiative was funded by the independent trust Power to Change. The handbook, toolkit, case studies and other resources gathered together by the programme are available online.²¹

The resources address themes already touched upon in this paper (e.g. purpose; power and leadership; value; infrastructure and resources) by providing a primer, practical advice, examples and tools on each theme.

For instance, on formulating a statement of purpose, the resources discuss:

- key questions to bear in mind when drafting the statement (who is the network for? What problem is it working on? What type of collaborative activities will it undertake?),
- how to make the statement clear and compelling so that it will attract members,
- who should generate the statement (it should not be imposed from 'above', either by the network builder or the funder),
- what type of statement is best suited for what kind of network (e.g. a 'mission' works best for a social good or environmental improvement and an 'idea' for '*generative thinking for innovation, problem solving or advocacy*'²²),
- the need to identify both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that drive people to join networks (intrinsic motivations can be a passion for the purpose or a sense of fulfilment, examples or extrinsic ones are knowledge acquisition and access to funding),
- the appeal of joining a network and not something else; most significantly, members identifying with the *positive values* a network embodies, such as acceptance, appreciation, giving and sharing (compared with their memberships of other everyday groups and organisations).



20 Torfing, J., Cristofoli, D., Gloor, P. A., Meijer, A.J. and Benedetta Trivellato (2020) Taming the snake in paradise: combining institutional design and leadership to enhance collaborative innovation. *Policy and Society*, DOI: 10.1080/14494035.2020.1794749. Key leadership roles in innovation networks for public good include the steward that upholds the integrity of the collaboration, the mediator that helps to resolve conflict and/or turns it into constructive discussion and the catalyst that encourages thinking outside the box.

21 See <https://www.unlockingnetworks.org> ,[Accessed 22 March 2021]

22 The Social Change Agency and Shared Assets (n.d.) *Identity, purpose and values handbook*, <https://www.unlockingnetworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/handbook-identity-purpose-and-values.pdf> [Accessed 18 October 2020].

Box 2. North East Together: a network adapting to COVID-19 times²³

The North East Together is a network of leaders in the North East of England. Leaders from voluntary and community organisations, social enterprises, private and public sector organisations are brought together to tackle social injustice and create positive social change. The network aims to facilitate inspiration, collaboration and mutual support among leaders. It holds whole-membership events, maintains a platform for self-organising thematic working groups, and offers pathways into coaching and coaching practice development. It has been in existence since 2014 and has a large membership. It is led and hosted by Yes We Can Community CIC, in collaboration with Newcastle University Business School and other network members.

The 19th network event took place online for the first time in June 2020, with the participation of about 50 members. Understandably, the central theme of the event was learning in, and responding to, a world changed by COVID-19. Members were introduced to the 'rapid learning environment', a method of understanding and adapting to a new world of uncertainty and fast change. The method includes observing, collective reflecting and sense making, then documenting and sharing learning.

The network continues to meet online, with a second event in November 2020 and several more planned for 2021 around the theme of leading in a time of uncertainty.

In addition to a written resource to help members experiment with the rapid learning environment in their own settings, the network also put together a COVID-19 recovery programme. The programme is aimed at connecting people to grow relationships and creating time and space to think. By March 2021, the programme has provided free online coaching to support 18 people through COVID-19 times, 'your time to think' action learning sets (four sessions) for 18 members, and 'randomised coffee trials'.



23 Sources: North East Together (2020) *North East Together 19: Learning together for a better future* (June 2020). <https://medium.com/northeasttogether/north-east-together-19-learning-together-for-a-better-future-june-2020-50b8bd46ed9f> [Accessed 14 October 2020], <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/kite/social-renewal/north-east-together/#about> [Accessed 18 October 2020] and personal communication.

2. Charitable foundations supporting networks for social change

This section highlights some findings specifically on what charitable organisations can do to support networks and other forms of collaboration as a means of advancing social change. It also discusses what is known about the effectiveness of such work, but overall, independent evidence in this field seems fairly limited.

In pursuit of impact: the toolbox available to charitable foundations

Stronger Foundations, the recent 'excellent practice' initiative led by the Association of Charitable Foundations, invites foundations to consider '*the whole toolbox in pursuit of impact*' and to be deliberate in their decisions about which one to use or not to use, and why. Decisions about tools to use should come with a willingness to learn from failure, not only from success.²⁴

Such tools include:

- 'funding plus' or 'grants plus': including providing peer networking opportunities for grantees,
- convening: brokering new relationships, amplifying voices, providing platforms and being a strategic agent for change,
- social investments and mission-aligned investing,
- foundations using their own voice for policy change and advocacy, commissioning and sharing evidence,

24 Association of Charitable Foundations (2020) *Impact and learning: the pillars of stronger foundation practice*. https://www.acf.org.uk/downloads/publications/Impact_and_Learning_Report_FINAL.pdf [accessed 1 October 2020]. Impact is defined as '*the positive and negative effects of a foundation's resources, activities and behaviours, and the extent to which these effects contribute to its charitable mission*' (p8).

amplifying marginalised and underrepresented voices,

- underwriting or supporting others to undertake strategic litigation.

The various ways in which foundations and trusts can fund and/or become involved in influencing (advocating) for social change has also been examined by New Philanthropy Capital, funded by the Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales.²⁵

Four main pathways have been identified:

- supporting grantees in their advocacy work,
- encouraging grantees to campaign,²⁶
- campaigning by the funder,
- influencing other funders.

These pathways carry different degrees of risk, involvement, costs, skills and capacity, as well as issues of legitimacy. A typology of how these factors play out when using approaches within the different pathways is reproduced in Appendix 3. As a general rule, campaigning directly as a funder involves higher risks, costs and involvement than either through supporting grantees or working with other funders, but it comes with a greater degree of control.

The typology makes no judgement on which pathways work better than others, as this depends on how well they are undertaken, alongside external factors

25 Carrington, O., Kail, A., Wharton, R. and Brian Lamb (2017) *More than grants: how funders can use their influence for good*. NPC and Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales <https://www.thinknpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/More-than-grants.-How-funders-can-use-their-influence-for-good.pdf> [Accessed 18 October 2020]. The research focused on the work of funders particularly outside the UK.

26 The word 'campaigning' is used here in a way that is consistent with the notions of influencing or advocating; to describe working with others to achieve and sustain positive social change (in policy and/or in behaviours).

such as momentum and receptiveness for the issue. The research also notes that there was relatively little evidence on 'what works', especially on the comparative efficacy of different approaches.

A UK-based case study of the Corston Independent Funders' Coalition (CIFC) serves up several useful learning points.²⁷ CIFC had been formed by 22 funders to undertake direct advocacy to reduce the number of women in prison and in the criminal justice system. CIFC had to find its niche in a crowded policy arena: it had to be careful not to undermine the service providing and campaigning efforts of not-for-profit organisations and also not to be seen merely as a source of funding by the government. The case study questions whether CIFC still acted within the transient 'policy window' that opened up after the conclusion of the government-commissioned Corston review. Also, it is not clear to what extent the CIFC's assumption had come true that its members' identity and legitimacy as individual funders within criminal justice would transfer to the Coalition's advocacy role.

The long-term, complex nature of change when finding solutions to an entrenched social problem and the difficulty of charitable foundations' moving into a policy, rather than grant making, role are highlighted by the fact that more than 10 years on CIFC still finds itself acting as a 'safety net' funder to precariously funded Women's Centres that provide statutory (non-custodial) services.²⁸

Cause-related networks and charitable foundations

Cause-related networks of charitable organisations can be a platform for philanthropists to share knowledge, but can go further and facilitate collaboration, identify priorities and gaps, or co-ordinate resources.²⁹ The networks vary in form: some but not all have a large membership (e.g. Ariadne, a European network focusing on human rights and social change has over 550 members, whereas others have as few as 20); some have other members alongside funders (such as the Science Philanthropy Alliance); some can be more centralised and directive, others are member-led (e.g. the Philanthropy Club).³⁰

Insights from qualitative interviews suggest that the advantages of this form, from a network point of view, lie in increased collective impact, rapid diffusion of ideas and learning, greater resilience and ability to adapt to changes both in the cause and in the funding environment. In line with other literature, the NPC research recommends that cause-related networks articulate a clear value proposition. Such networks can also carry risks to the cause, for example disproportionately influencing funding decisions and ways of thinking, and unintentionally encouraging siloed working. They may place burdens on charities and beneficiaries too, for example through requiring that they engage with the network.

WEAll, the example in Box 3, is a cause-related global network. Although it is much broader than a network of philanthropists, it has philanthropic members and it had initially been funded by philanthropy. WEAll focuses on human wellbeing and collaboration.

27 Jung, T., Kaufmann, J. and Jenny Harrow (2014) 'When Funders Do Direct Advocacy: An Exploration of the Corston Independent Funders' Coalition'. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, Vol. 43(1), 36-56.

28 Women's Budget Group (2020) *The Case for Sustainable Funding for Women's Centres*. <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WBG-15-Womens-Centres-Report-v4.pdf> [Accessed 22 April 2021].

29 Mann, M., Boswell, K., Dingle, K. and Giulia Todres (2020) *Collaborating for a cause*. NPC <https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/networks/> [Accessed 2 October 2020].

30 The research reviewed 62 such networks worldwide, including 34 in the UK. Most commonly they were concerned with law, human rights and advocacy, followed by medical research. There was no cause-related network found that concentrated on animal welfare, disabled people, education, elderly people, hospitals and hospices, or sport and recreation.

Box 3. A cause-related alliance where collaboration is at the centre of the vision

WEAll, the Wellbeing Economy Alliance, was formed in 2018 and describes itself as 'the leading global collaboration of organisations, alliances, movements and individuals working together to transform the economic system into one that delivers human and ecological wellbeing.' Its vision document highlights collaboration and togetherness as values defining the alliance's *destination* as well as its journey. The Alliance sees itself as the 'connective tissue' between the elements of the movement.³¹

WEAll envisions economic system change, to one that supports collective wellbeing and where humanity determines economics, rather than the other way round. To achieve this, WEAll argues, three things need to be worked on simultaneously: positive and empowering new narratives, a strong and coherent knowledge and evidence base and a power base that encompasses all levels, sectors and geographies and creates a movement with a critical mass of people and organisations. WEAll sees its role as *catalysing* the process of multiplying collective impact.

WEAll has a global membership of more than 180 organisations (including alliances and collaborations) and includes more than 100 leading academics. It has a Global Council and 21 ambassadors, an 'Amplification Team' of eight, it operates hubs in six countries, with several more on the way. WEAll Scotland, one of the hubs, is established as a charity and has a funding partnership with an investment company. WEAll also operates an online Citizens' Platform for 'connecting, collaborating and doing', a collaboration

for national and regional governments (for sharing expertise and experience) and a youth network.³²

Until November 2019 the alliance had been supported by individual donors and foundations. At this point, it launched a funding campaign for public donations, describing the previous model as 'necessary but not sufficient' to maintain and expand its work.³³ By January 2020, WEAll had raised \$1.5million in total.

Partnering in collective impact collaborations

Collective impact has emerged over the past decade, originally in the US, as a '*disciplined, cross-sectoral approach to solving social and environmental problems on a large-scale*'.³⁴ Even though it was not a brand new idea, it created a shared framework and language for collaborations. The five main conditions that collective impact collaborations embody are mostly familiar from earlier discussions in this paper: a common agenda; shared measurement adopted by partners; mutually reinforcing activities; continuous, open communication and backbone support (by funded, dedicated staff) as well as a 'mindset shift' to a collaborative way of working.

Charitable foundations are deemed to be critical partners in such cross-sectoral collaborations, not only as funders, but as partners that can provide a 'stable platform for success'. They do this by contributing in a way that balances partners' varied needs and motivations;

31 Wellbeing Economy Alliance (2021) *Our vision for a movement to bring about economic system change: bold, vital – and entirely possible*. https://wellbeingeconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/WEAll-brochure_2021Update_FINAL_Feb17.pdf [Accessed 26 March 2021].

32 See <https://wellbeingeconomy.org/#movement> [Accessed 20 October 2020].

33 <https://wellbeingeconomy.org/the-wellbeing-economy-alliance-is-asking-for-public-donations-for-the-first-time-heres-why> [Accessed 20 October 2020].

34 Kania, J., Hanleybrown, F., and Jennifer Splansky Juster (2014) 'Essential Mindset Shifts for Collective Impact' in *Collective Insights for Collective Impact*. Collective Impact Forum and Stanford Social Innovation Review, <http://stanford.ebookhost.net/ssir/digital/29/ebook/1/download.pdf> [Accessed 22 October 2020], p2.

catalysing (or convening) connections without dictating the agenda and funding backbone support. In order to be an effective partner, foundations must be willing to share power and decisions, be flexible and prepared to commit for the long term.³⁵

Some collaborations in the UK have adopted a collective impact approach (for example the *West London Zone*), but so far perhaps fewer than the initial level of interest might have indicated. There are many reasons for this, including the wider range of public services in place in the UK, the length of time it takes to build relationships, 'egos', competitiveness and power dynamics. Funding to cover the costs of such collaborations also needs to be put on a long-term footing.³⁶

What can foundations do to catalyse networks?

The *Network of Network Funders*, a community of practice uniting over 40 US grant making organisations, had been prompted by a similar realisation that had originally shaped the collective impact approach: tackling complex problems requires big platforms and diverse players. Foundations need to be conveners, champions and matchmakers, connecting people, ideas and resources.³⁷

The Network's guide to funders argues that *in addition to* 'traditional' methods, grant makers can harness the power of networks to achieve positive social change. The five key ways in which this can happen are reproduced in Table 3. On top of this, a 'network mindset' is a prerequisite for adopting such an approach, which means '*a stance toward leadership that prioritizes openness, transparency, making connections and sharing control*'³⁸, qualities already

Table 3. Traditional and network approaches to grant maker challenges³⁹

Challenge	Traditional Approach	Network Approach
Build community assets	Administer social services	Weave social ties
Develop better designs and decisions	Gather input from people you know	Access new and diverse perspectives
Spread what works	Disseminate white papers	Openly build and share knowledge
Mobilize action	Organise tightly coordinated campaigns	Create infrastructure for widespread engagement
Overcome fragmentation	Bring players and programs under a single umbrella	Coordinate resources and action

35 Bartczak, L. (2014) 'The Role of Grantmakers in Collective Impact' in *Collective Insights for Collective Impact*. Collective Impact Forum and Stanford Social Innovation Review, <http://stanford.ebookhost.net/ssir/digital/29/ebook/1/download.pdf> [Accessed 22 October 2020]

36 Anderson, T. (2016) *What can collective impact offer in the UK? Part two: ways to make it work*. The RSA Blog <https://www.thersa.org/blog/2016/05/what-can-collective-impact-offer-in-the-uk-part-two-ways-to-make-it-work> [Accessed 22 October 2020].

37 Monitor Institute and Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (2012) *Catalyzing Networks for Social Change: A funder's guide*. https://jimjosephfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Catalyzing_Networks_for_Social_Change.pdf [Accessed 18 October 2020].

38 *Ibid.* p3.

39 Source: *Ibid.*, p5.

familiar from the discussions on network leadership earlier in this paper. The additional ingredients in the 'secret sauce' in catalysing networks are thought to be relationships, trust, integrity and relevance.

Organised around a network's life cycle, what foundations can do to catalyse a network will differ from stage to stage:

- *Knowing* the network – at first, mapping the issue and the stakeholders,
- *Knitting* the network – connecting and engaging stakeholders, nurturing leaders, opening up different entry points for members,
- *Developing* the network – beginning to work together, forming strategies, shared structures and processes (if helpful), developing systems for ongoing learning and adaptation,
- *Growing* the network – growing and diversifying participation, building trust and connectivity, decentralising functions, spreading, deepening and diversifying strategies,
- *Transforming or transitioning* the network – evaluating effectiveness and impact. For transformation: reconsidering the value proposition; for transition: distributing usable assets, including knowledge. After this stage, the cycle returns to 'knowing'.⁴⁰

Foundations can play different roles, or a combination of them, during the life cycle of the network, such as:

- catalyst (during the 'knitting' stage) - playing a role in value propositions and linking stakeholders,
- sponsor (throughout the cycle) - providing resources,
- weaver (during 'knitting' and 'growing') - increasing existing and brokering new connections,
- coach (once the network is established) - providing advice,
- participant (without taking on a leadership role),
- assessor - diagnosing network needs and progress, making recommendations.

The guidance warns that it is difficult to know if networks 'work', particularly when it comes to showing short-term returns, but progress has been made in learning more about how to assess impact. This learning includes considering the context; assessing multiple pathways to impact (including looking for meaningful contribution to the impact rather than attribution) and looking for indicators of impact on the network itself, as well as on its social purpose; finally, making learning on-going and collaborative.⁴¹

40 A somewhat different, but in essence similar, take on this is that networks concerned with social change should go through a fundamental process of clarifying purpose, convening the right people, cultivating trust, coordinating actions and contributing generously. In Ehrlichman, D., Sawyer, D. and Jane Wei-Skiller (2015) *Five Steps to Building and Effective Impact Network*. Stanford Social Innovation Review. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/five_steps_to_building_an_effective_impact_network [Accessed 19 October 2020].

41 This is only a skeleton summary of a much fuller discussion in the Monitor Institute and Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (2012) report.'

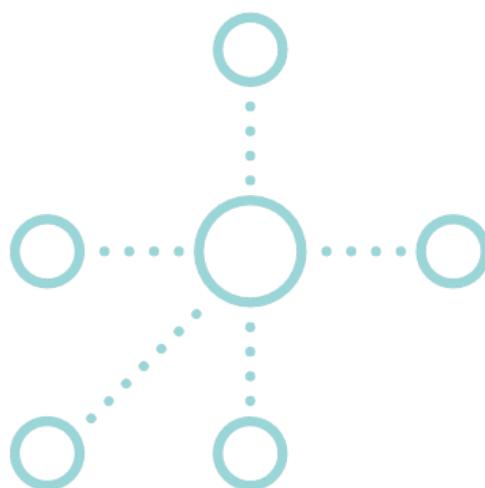
A critical perspective on philanthropy in networked governance

Philanthropy around the world is seen to be increasingly enmeshed in networked governance, where governments draw in a multiplicity of stakeholders in solving pressing social problems of the day. Philanthropic organisations are seen to be becoming autonomous agenda setters, stakeholders, public service providers, advocates and challengers. Critics argue that this shift has not been accompanied by critical reflection on the politics or the power implications involved. One of the aspects that has not been subject to much study is philanthropic organisations' (individually and in collaboration) becoming increasingly embedded and powerful 'hyperagents' in previously public sector arenas, such as health and education.⁴²

Philanthropic organisations' 'self-ascribed' claims to being innovative, impactful and thought-leaders were also questioned, partly on the basis of there being little independent evidence to support these claims. Further, the few studies looking at collaborations between philanthropic foundations and governments on aspects of social policy (such as education) found mostly 'ameliorating' and 'legitimising' practices that, while fulfilling 'a social desire for reform', don't actually bring about sustained change.⁴³

Concluding comments

Overall, there is no doubt that policy and practice networks have a place among the various ways of working to achieve social change, and that sometimes they are the best (or indeed, only) option. Networks come with their own risks, however, and they can be resource-intensive to develop and maintain. Charitable organisations should consider carefully whether a network is the best vehicle to achieve a goal before committing themselves. At a practice level, a lot remains to be learnt from examples of when, how and why a network has been successful (or not) and how this has been affected by charitable organisations' contributions.



42 Jung, T. and Harrows, J. (2015) *Philanthropy in networked governance: treading with care*. *Public Money & Management*. 35(1): 47-52. Pre-publication copy available at https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Tobias_Jung3/publication/269285726_New_development_Philanthropy_in_networked_governance-treading_with_care/links/57305f4a08ae3736095cd516.pdf [Accessed 19 October 2020].

43 Ibid.

Appendix 1: Forms and features of seven types of collaboration

- **Networked collaboration:** loose collaboration between individuals/autonomous organisations which differ in structure, focus, working culture and many other aspects but connect and/or work together on issues of shared interest. Networked collaborations work best over the long-term and with a degree of flexibility built in from the outset.
- **Decentralised collaboration:** loose collaboration between autonomous actors/organisations from all levels, with heterogenous structures and content. They operate with flat hierarchies and promote transparency among all members.
- **Collective impact:** tight collaboration between defined actors/organisations who share a common agenda and are supported by a backbone organisation to facilitate the collaboration.
- **System connectors:** systemic collaboration focusing on involving a wide eco-system of partners to address complex challenges. The approach appreciates the multi-faceted nature of many problems and brings together different parts of the system to collaborate for change.
- **Catalyst collaborations:** systemic collaboration in which partners think and act systemically and see long-term, quality relationships as a core enabler of change. Partners work around a common vision or purpose. Learning and democratic access to information are viewed as core enablers of achieving the vision.
- **Coalitions:** a form of classic collaboration. Coalitions usually operate a fixed membership model, and the partners tend to be at a similar level of seniority in their own organisations. The work of Coalitions is focussed around a common goal or problem. Processes supporting the collaboration are formal and established.
- **Mission-oriented collaboration:** a form of visionary collaboration, where a number of multi-sector partners have identified an ambitious mission that others haven't yet attempted or addressed. It is reserved for missions that are audacious, can be measured, and are viewed by many as risky.

Appendix 2: Models of collaboration for knowledge sharing

Model	Description
Internal knowledge management networks	<p>Exists within an organisation.</p> <p>The network purpose is to maximise the application of individual knowledge to meet organisationa; objectives.</p>
Strategic alliances	<p>Common in the private sector.</p> <p>Long-term, purposeful arrangements that allow organisations to gain or sustain competitive' advantage using those who are outside the network.</p> <p>Share 'real value' e.g. money, time, influence.</p>
Communities of practice	<p>Primary purpose is to build capacity.</p> <p>Participation may wax and wane depending on the level of interest.</p> <p>CoPs attract participants willing to share expertise in exchange for gaining skills.</p>
Networks of experts	<p>Bring together people more than organisations. The invitation to join is based on expertise in a particular area.</p>
Information networks	<p>Provide access to information supplied by network members, sometimes organised thematically.</p> <p>Passive in nature, users must come to the network - physically or electronically - to benefit from the work of the network.</p>
Formal knowledge networks	<p>Tend to have a narrow focus, generally cross-sectoral and cross-regional.</p> <p>More outward-looking than communities of practice.</p> <p>Productive and seeking to impact decision-makers.</p>

Source: The Social Change Agency and Shared Assets (n.d.) *Knowledge management in peer networks handbook*, <https://www.unlockingnetworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/handbook-Knowledge-management-in-peer-networks.pdf> [Accessed 18 October 2020], p7. Adapted from Willard, T. and Creech, H. (2002) *Strategic Intentions: Managing knowledge networks for sustainable development*. The International Institute for Sustainable Development <https://www.iisd.org/publications/strategic-intentions-managing-knowledge-networks-sustainable-development> [Accessed 18 October 2020]

Appendix 3: Key considerations for funders deciding on influencing approaches

Approach	Risk	Involvement	Costs	Skills and capacity	Questions around legitimacy
 <i>Supporting grantees: Grant funding for advocacy partners on a broad range of topics</i>	Very low	Low	Low	Very low	Very low
 <i>Supporting grantees: Grant funding for advocacy partners targeted on a specific topic</i>	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
 <i>Supporting grantees: Building capacity for advocacy</i>	Very low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Very Low
 <i>Encouraging grantees: Using communications and prizes to showcase grantee work</i>	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Medium
 <i>Encouraging grantees: Motivating grantees to campaign</i>	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium
 <i>Campaigning as a funder: Commissioning research and disseminating it</i>	Very high	Very high	Very high	Medium	Low
 <i>Campaigning as a funder: Collecting evidence</i>	Medium	Medium	Very high	Medium	Medium
 <i>Campaigning as a funder: Litigating for change</i>	Very high	Very high	Very high	Very high	Very high
 <i>Campaigning as a funder: Raising public awareness on an issue, offering quality marks and standards</i>	Very high	Medium	Medium	Medium	Very high
 <i>Campaigning as a funder: Convening roundtables and debate with influencers</i>	Very high	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
 <i>Campaigning as a funder: Creating a mission driven organisation or initiatives without the use of third parties</i>	Very high	Very high	Very high	Very high	Very high
 <i>Influencing other funders: Match funding and collaboration</i>	Very low	Low	Low	Very low	Very low
 <i>Influencing other funders: Promoting funder advocacy</i>	Very low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Very low

Source: Carrington, O., Kail, A., Wharton, R and Brian Lamb (2017) *More than grants: how funders can use their influence for good*. NPC and Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales <https://www.thinknpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/More-than-grants.-How-funders-can-use-their-influence-for-good.pdf> [Accessed 18 October 2020] p19.

The Carnegie UK Trust works to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and Ireland, by changing minds through influencing policy, and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work. The Carnegie UK Trust was established by Scots-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1913.

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