VisibleNetworkLabs

Methods Brief : How to Collect Network Data

Bounding Your Network

Are you ready use social network analysis to measure your network? If the answer is yes, you are likely very quickly starting to figure out all the steps. And the first, and perhaps the most confusing, is bounding your network.

Why do you need to bound the network?

The first step in conducting a social network analysis is to determine the members of your network that will participate in the survey. In some cases, that is simple – just pull out your list of members. In other cases, it is the first decision you must make – who to include and who not to include. **The decision you make matters because that will end up being the list of people/organizations that you will send the survey to, and the nodes that map up your network maps.**

Getting Started. To get started, you first want to identify which organizations (or individuals if you are administering an interpersonal network study) are members of the existing network of organizations. If your own organization plays a role in the network, that means you too!

## Who do I include in my network survey?

Tips & Advice for Bounding Your Network:

- The organizations you choose to include as you bound your network will be the entities that show up in the network maps representing your network. Each person/org you include must have a unique node label or they will be redundant in your survey.
- Each org will also need to include a specific contact to respond to the survey.
- It is critical that the process of bounding your network be both collaborative and intentional. If you are not sure who to include in the network, be sure to reach out to key informants to ask them which organizations they consider to be part of your network. Keep doing this until you get a list that you feel is comprehensive and covers all perspectives you want to include.
- Next, think about who is not currently considered part of your network but maybe could or should be involved. It is

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What is PARTNER?

[Program to Analyze, Record, & Track Networks to Enhance Relationships]

Doing a Social Network Analysis can be hard. PARTNER was developed to make it easy and intuitive to collect and analyze network data. Accessible tools, good measures, and support to interpret and traslate to practice. www.partnertool.net
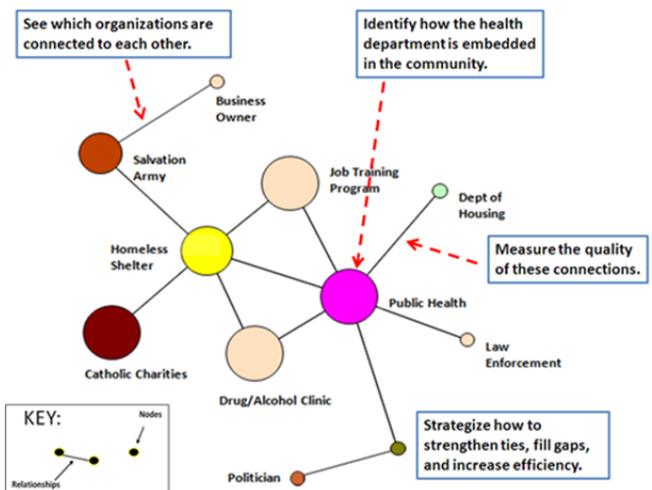
PARTNER

important to seek input from many partners as a first step because they have a view of the network you may not have.

- You should include specific contacts who have "sat at the table" and can answer the survey questions about the network itself, along with questions about the specific partnerships their organizations maintain with other groups.

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Should I include people/orgs not in my network to take the survey?
There may be people or organizations that you want to include in the network but not have them answer the survey, and that is okay. It is important to include those organizations in the list. A good tip to keep in mind is to include groups that may not already be formal partners as well as unusual suspects that may not always sit at the table but also play a role in the system like major employers and the faith-based community.

So how do I make choices about who to include after I get input from others?
Narrowing the list of members is important for two important reasons:
1) You need to be sure to include all perspectives that are important to answering your questions.
2) The list cannot be so long that people will not respond because of the burden (longer lists mean longer times to take the survey).

TIP: Don't include multiple people from the same organization. Have them work together to answer the survey. If you do include multiple contacts from one group, add a title or department to differentiate between them.

That means that after you get input, you have to make hard choices to balance these priorities. Here are our tips:
- Your initial list should include some "VIPs" chosen by key informants. These VIPs are already highly engaged in the network and obviously the most integral contacts to the network.
- Then select those most mentioned by others, and that you know are known to be active in the network. Look for redundant mentions of these people.
- Then add the unusual suspects and organizations that are strategically beneficial to the outcome of your network but may not be as active.

At this point your list should be pretty extensive and include many perspectives.

It is important that the key members of the network contribute their perspective on the array of organizations that are a part of the network. Collectively, these informants will have a comprehensive view of the landscape that will be essential to ensuring all organizations involved in the network are included and that the appropriate contact for those organizations is selected.

Is this the only option?
The alternative to bounding your network is to use a "name generator" approach. In that approach, you ask people to "list" others and then answer questions about them. If that is what you need, we recommend you separate that questioning from your network survey (and get that information ahead of time), in order to get a clean, bounded list to include in the survey. **The reason**: you will have to do a lot of data cleaning once you get your name generator list, and that can be unreliable and very difficult. The tips provided here can help you do that.