

Executive Summary

NETWORK EFFECTIVENESS IN NEIGHBORHOOD COLLABORATIONS

Learning from the Chicago Community Networks Study

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Overview

Federal, state, and local policies focused on neighborhood improvement have long emphasized the need for community organizations to share information, coordinate activities, and collaborate in the delivery of services. These partnerships build “community capacity,” as a way of promoting local problem solving and community well-being over the longer term. But there has been almost no formal measurement of how community organizations work together, whether differences in patterns of collaboration and leadership exist across neighborhoods, and how these patterns are influenced by the nature of the problems being addressed. There has also been only limited research on which patterns of neighborhood networks are most conducive to implementing effective collective work. This report uses social network analysis, drawing from a network survey, and extensive field research to ask how specific patterns of partnership promote better-implemented collaborations that in turn can successfully inform public policy.

KEY FINDINGS

- Networks where well-connected organizations are tightly connected to each other appear better situated to implement successful educational improvement and community housing initiatives. Education and housing networks with a set of well-connected core partners — each bringing their own resources and relationships to the table — appeared better able to develop community-school partnerships, commercial corridor development projects, business improvement districts, and corridor beautification activities.
- Public policy networks with well-positioned brokers can foster broad-based mobilization to inform public and elected officials. These organizations, which tended to be community organizing groups, were often the single conduit to connect elected officials and smaller community organizations. Far from acting as “gatekeepers” who excluded others in the community from participating, these organizations worked to include partners in efforts to change public policy.
- Networks that combine public policy and neighborhood organizing with service delivery appear to create some important advantages. This combination of policy and service delivery may enhance both the quality of services and their ability to attract resources and partners.

The above findings have a qualitative, observable component, making it possible for funders to identify neighborhoods with advantageous structural supports before choosing to invest in that location, and for practitioners to support certain patterns of community activity.

A second report, drawing on a second wave of the study’s survey, will explore how networks changed from 2013 to 2016, and will be released in 2018.

Preface

Community initiatives are notoriously difficult to evaluate. This is because neighborhoods are complex and it is hard to untangle and measure causal outcome drivers among the economic, demographic, and institutional forces that can influence, support, or undermine investments aimed at local improvement. This same complexity also makes it difficult for evaluators to develop a convincing counterfactual, or representation of what might have occurred without the community intervention. Counterfactual comparisons are best established through experimental research designs that ensure that treatment and control groups are alike. But even in the rare cases where neighborhoods, towns, or cities may be part of randomized controlled trials or rigorous quasi-experimental studies, it is unusual to have sufficient numbers of participating communities to reliably determine whether places are truly comparable on average because they may differ in less observable, but still relevant, ways related to institutional factors such as service capacity or political leadership.

MDRC's Chicago Community Networks (CCN) study uses a methodologically innovative approach, known as social network analysis, to develop an extensive understanding of these more intangible features of neighborhood life. Funded by The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the CCN study is one of the most extensive attempts yet to characterize and measure the strength of networks among community organizations and show how they contribute to more successful partnerships for service delivery and political leadership.

Community initiatives — similar to our networked society as a whole — have long emphasized the importance of relationships to accomplish their goals, and practitioners and policymakers have always been aware that the quality of relationships matters for implementing local work. But research needs to take into account not just the presence, absence, or individual quality of partnerships, but how these partnerships or lack thereof contribute to the development of a network infrastructure at the neighborhood level. In this study, core patterns of collaboration, the distribution of network power, and the depth of the relationships are shown to help drive the success of local implementation. Funders, practitioners, and policymakers should all be able to benefit from this approach, which can offer insights about the conditions that may contribute to more effective implementation of local improvement projects and community-based efforts to influence public policy.

Gordon L. Berlin
President, MDRC

Acknowledgments

The team is deeply grateful to our funder, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, for its support and guidance about work in Chicago over time. Craig Howard, Director of Community and Economic Development at the foundation, has brought his sharp insights to the work in ways that have deeply improved it. Our previous program officer, Alaina Harkness, helped shepherd and launch the Chicago Community Networks study and shaped its design and focus. We are also indebted to the Local Initiatives Support Corporation of Chicago for their help designing, testing, and implementing the instrument. In particular, Taryn Roch, Susana Vasquez, Keri Blackwell, and Chris Brown provided valuable insights into the neighborhoods we surveyed, while also encouraging survey participation among local community development groups.

The report also benefited from generous and thoughtful support and review, inside and outside MDRC. Within MDRC, Leslyn Hall's passionate and creative support from the survey unit brought us to our high response goals, and Nandita Verma, James Riccio, Alice Tufel, and Carolyn Hill provided important insights on report drafts. Sonya Williams and Mercy Emelike helped process Wave 1 survey data. Marcia Festen and Amy Nowell contributed early qualitative research. Nikki Ortolani was the project's indefatigable resource manager, and Gordon Berlin, MDRC's president, brought longstanding insights about community development to his review and support of the project. Outside of MDRC, Rob Chaskin, Claudia Colton, Joseph Galaskiewicz, George Galster, H. Brinton Milward, Andrew Papachristos, Robert Sampson, Mario Small, and Chris Walker provided insights from the field and their research in various reviews. We are grateful to have worked with Michelle Kahmann at AbtSRBI, which operationalized and fielded the network survey.

Our deepest gratitude is to organizations across the nine neighborhoods who participated in our study, giving their time to provide insights about their practice and their partnerships. They were the source not just of the raw network and qualitative data, but also of invaluable insights about networks and how they matter for community partnerships and policy action. We are particularly grateful to our partners at Austin Coming Together, Bickerdike Redevelopment Corporation, Brighton Park Neighborhood Council, Claretian Associates, Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation, Enlace, Logan Square Neighborhood Association, Quad Communities Development Corporation, and the Southwest Organizing Project. This research would not have been possible without them.

Finally, we are still indebted to our late colleague, Keith Provan. His intelligence, wisdom, humor, and generosity are missed by all who were fortunate enough to work with him, and he retains a deep mark on this research.

Gloria Tomlinson served as report coordinator, Christopher Boland edited the report, and Ann Kottner prepared it for publication.

The Authors

Executive Summary

Why do some neighborhoods appear able to launch effective local improvement initiatives, while others are more hampered by fragmentation and mistrust? Why can some communities mobilize diverse constituencies to influence public policy, while others cannot? Answers to these questions may be found in the specific patterns of collaboration that form among community organizations, and between these groups, schools, public agencies, and elected officials. Using the tool of social network analysis, this report offers preliminary insights into the conditions for more successful collective action by examining the distribution of power among local actors, the ties between more distant organizations and a core of activity, and the depth of community partnerships.

Federal, state, and local policies focused on neighborhood improvement have long emphasized the need for community organizations to share information, coordinate activities, and collaborate to deliver services.¹ Such initiatives often encourage such partnerships so as to build “community capacity,” broadly defined as the individual, organizational level, and systemic forces that work together to promote local problem solving and community well-being.² By relying on collective approaches to implement policies and programs, funders and policymakers hope to foster enduring partnerships that can address problems that communities face over the longer term, be they related to poverty, violence, or foreclosures.

This report explores one important dimension of community capacity: networks of organizations and their efforts to improve housing, schools, and safety. The study makes two primary contributions to policy and practice. First, it has long been acknowledged that neighborhoods collaborate in different ways, and that programs that operate well in one setting may not do so in another, due to different local patterns of cooperation or local leadership. But there has been almost no formal measurement of how community organizations work together, whether differences in patterns of collaboration and leadership exist across neighborhoods, and how these patterns are influenced by the nature of the problems being addressed. The report provides emerging insights about these questions, so as to improve policymakers’ ability to identify neighborhoods that may be well situated to implement community improvement efforts.

Second, there have been few opportunities to explore *which kinds of local infrastructures* of community networks form a productive local infrastructure for implementing improvement projects. (Infrastructure refers to the overall levels of connectivity in a network, the levels of trust and longevity of the network’s ties, the concentration of network power, and

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1. Aurelia De La Rosa Aceves and David M. Greenberg, “Addressing Challenges in Community-Based Service Coordination: Breaking Down Silos to Promote Economic Opportunity” (New York: MDRC, 2016).
2. Robert J. Chaskin, Prudence Brown, Sudhir Venkatesh, and Avis Vidal, *Building Community Capacity* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2001).

the depth or comprehensiveness of relationships, as described below.) Research from the fields of community sociology and public management has provided some insights as to how distinct kinds of network structures promote successful political leadership or project implementation.³ Relying on a wide array of survey and qualitative data, this report provides additional insights about these issues, and develops theories as to which patterns of neighborhood networks are most conducive to implementing powerful collective work. The report uses social network analysis and draws on extensive field research to address the following questions:

- What is the structure of community partnerships formed to reduce violence, improve schools, and develop affordable housing? How do these partnerships differ across neighborhoods?
- Which community structures appear to promote better implemented collaborations and allow groups to successfully influence public policy? How does the distribution of power among local actors, the ties between more distant organizations and a core of active partners, and the depth of community partnerships support more effective collaborations?

The report complements a web-based series on the MDRC website,⁴ and will be followed by a report analyzing the second wave of the Chicago Community Networks (CCN) survey, conducted in 2016 to understand how networks described in this report evolved or were maintained over the course of three years.

THE CHICAGO COMMUNITY NETWORKS (CCN) STUDY

The site of this research is Chicago, whose neighborhoods offer ideal settings to study community collaborations. The city is well known as a place that emphasizes relationships and connections in the political and business realms and around community development efforts in particular. Chicago’s political culture was once summed up in a statement by a local ward leader, “[w]e don’t want nobody that nobody sent,” showing that connections — for better or worse — are critical to getting work done. With respect to community development, Chicago is a city that has pioneered a more collaborative approach among community organizations to improve neighborhoods. One such program was Chicago’s New Communities Program: Over a 10-year period, The MacArthur Foundation provided more than \$50 million in direct support to the Local Initiatives Support Corporation of Chicago (LISC Chicago), a

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3. When speaking of “network structure,” research has explored qualities of the whole system of relationships, such as how connected or fragmented organizations tend to be on the whole, or whether the network is more or less hierarchical, as described in this report. One particularly important study that the Chicago Community Networks (CCN) study may be seen as complementing is the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods. See Robert J. Sampson, *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

4. Website: www.mdrc.org/chicago-community-networks-study.

citywide community development intermediary, and its local community-based partners.⁵ The initiative fostered partnerships among local organizations under the theory that the whole neighborhood would be better able to advance proactive community improvement projects, as well as respond to external shocks such as budget cuts or recessions.

Funded by The MacArthur Foundation, and fielded in collaboration with LISC Chicago and its local partners, the CCN study is an extensive attempt to characterize and measure the strength of networks among community organizations and show how they contribute to more successful partnerships for service delivery and political leadership. A mixed-methods study, it contains two data sources: (1) a two-wave network survey in nine Chicago neighborhoods, administered to organizations conducting community development activities,⁶ and (2) field research, including interviews with organizations occupying positions within the core and periphery of neighborhood networks. The first network survey, conducted in 2013,⁷ provided quantitative data about patterns of connection among community groups and with public agencies, while the field research helped the study team interpret survey results, associate patterns of network activity with broader outcomes, and trace the processes by which these structures and outcomes were connected. The CCN study is not a formal evaluation of any individual neighborhood improvement effort, but rather it attempts to learn how local partners worked together and to share lessons from this experience with other community-based initiatives around the country that emphasize collaboration.

SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

This study uses social network analysis, a toolkit for the measurement and mapping of relationships among a set of actors in order to describe the underlying patterns, or structure, of local partnerships. This emphasis on structure is important because it has implications related to how quickly information and resources flow, how widely power and influence are distributed among organizations, how well they can collaborate, and how effectively the community can mobilize to address shocks such as deteriorating economic conditions or budget cuts. By connecting these structures to local views about the quality of collec-

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5. For an overview of the New Communities Program, see David Greenberg, Nandita Verma, Keri-Nicole Dillman, and Robert Chaskin, *Creating a Platform for Sustained Neighborhood Improvement: Interim Findings from Chicago's New Communities Program* (New York: MDRC, 2010).
 6. The study team surveyed different kinds of organizations seen as meaningfully participating in community development activities. Groups included large and small social service agencies, community development corporations, public agencies such as police departments and schools, religious organizations, and elected officials. The instrument asked how organizations communicated, coordinated, or collaborated in their work in fields related to housing and commercial real estate development, education, economic and workforce development, public spaces and the arts, public health and safety, and public policy and organizing. Groups did not need to have a formal contractual relationship with each other to communicate, coordinate, or collaborate.
 7. To understand how network structures change over time, a second wave of the survey was finalized in late 2016 and will be the subject of a 2018 deliverable.

tive efforts — such as community-school partnerships, coalitions to revitalize commercial districts, or attempts to change public policy — the CCN study provides preliminary insights about how the characteristics of local networks may support successful project implementation or efforts to change policy.

In that vein, Figure ES.1 illustrates different ways that the structure of local partnerships may influence the implementation of local programs. It begins by describing how an individual organization’s ability to successfully implement a project may depend on a number of factors, starting with the quality of its own program models and resources in terms of money and staff. It then considers how the reach of this group can be extended by partnerships with other community organizations, such as between a youth group and a school or sports club. At the next level, the position of an organization within the network may matter for the group’s ability to help the neighborhood coalesce around policy change. Finally, at the level of the whole network, the figure describes how overall patterns of connection or fragmentation can influence a network’s success.

The CCN study included nine neighborhoods. As shown in Figure ES.2, in the first two panels, four were majority African-American neighborhoods: Auburn Gresham, Austin, Quad Communities, and South Chicago. Three had relatively high proportions of Latino residents: Brighton Park, Little Village, and Logan Square. And two had a more mixed composition of African-American and Latino residents: Chicago Southwest and Humboldt Park. As depicted in the third panel, none was high income, reflecting the study’s focus on network patterns in neighborhoods that community improvement initiatives would have likely targeted. The neighborhoods included some that had been supported for some time by MacArthur and LISC Chicago funding, and some that had not received extensive support at the time of survey fielding.

The CCN study measures not just the presence of local networks, but their specific structural properties, and how they are used to improve neighborhoods and respond to local problems. These structural characteristics differ by neighborhood and by the areas of work they involve, and can help or hinder groups’ collective efforts to preserve affordable housing, improve local schools, and address public safety concerns. The report examines the following aspects of a community network’s structure:

- *Connectivity*, or how frequently organizations communicate, coordinate, and collaborate with each other
- *Trust and longevity*, or the reliability of network ties, and how long they have lasted
- *Power in networks*, or which organizations occupy central positions in a network, whether a few groups dominate the network, or whether ties are more broadly shared among many groups
- *Diversity and comprehensiveness*, or whether networks include different types of organizations, and whether connections span multiple domains of work

Figure ES.1

How Networks Contribute to Community Action

THE ORGANIZATION

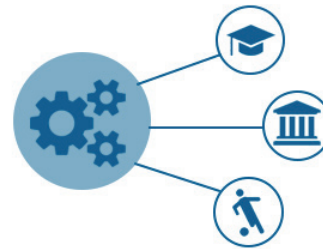
An organization implements a number of community improvement projects. What it can accomplish is influenced by a number of factors vested in the organization itself — the quality of its service models, organizational capacity, resources, credibility in the community, and more.



AN ORGANIZATION

WHO ARE THE ORGANIZATION'S PARTNERS?

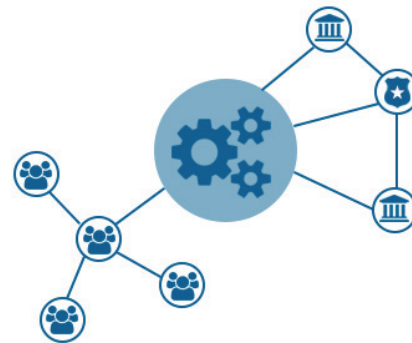
Beyond its own resources and capabilities, the organization's partnerships can influence its work. For example, the partnership between a youth development organization and a local school can expand its outreach to students who need its services. A partnership between it and a sports group can give its young people entrée to more facilities. And a partnership with a city agency can give it access to new tools or resources, such as summer jobs for its clients. In this way, adding more partners can expand its capabilities.



AN ORGANIZATION AND ITS DIRECT PARTNERS

WHERE IN THE NETWORK IS THE ORGANIZATION SITUATED?

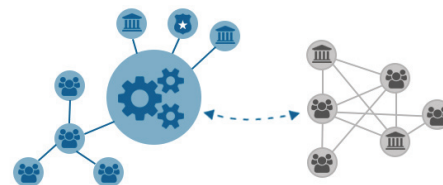
The organization's position in the network can also expand or limit its effectiveness. For example, a community organizing group may be interested in forming a coalition to press the local police department to institute more community patrols. If so, it can wield greater influence by being in the center of the network and acting as a broker among partners that otherwise would not come together. An organization can gain such a position as it provides information to its partners, helps steer their work in the campaign, and generally brings together many stakeholders to press for reform. If its partners are themselves well connected, those connections may further increase the power and reputation of the coalition.



AN ORGANIZATION IN A NETWORK

WHAT IS THE OVERALL NETWORK STRUCTURE?

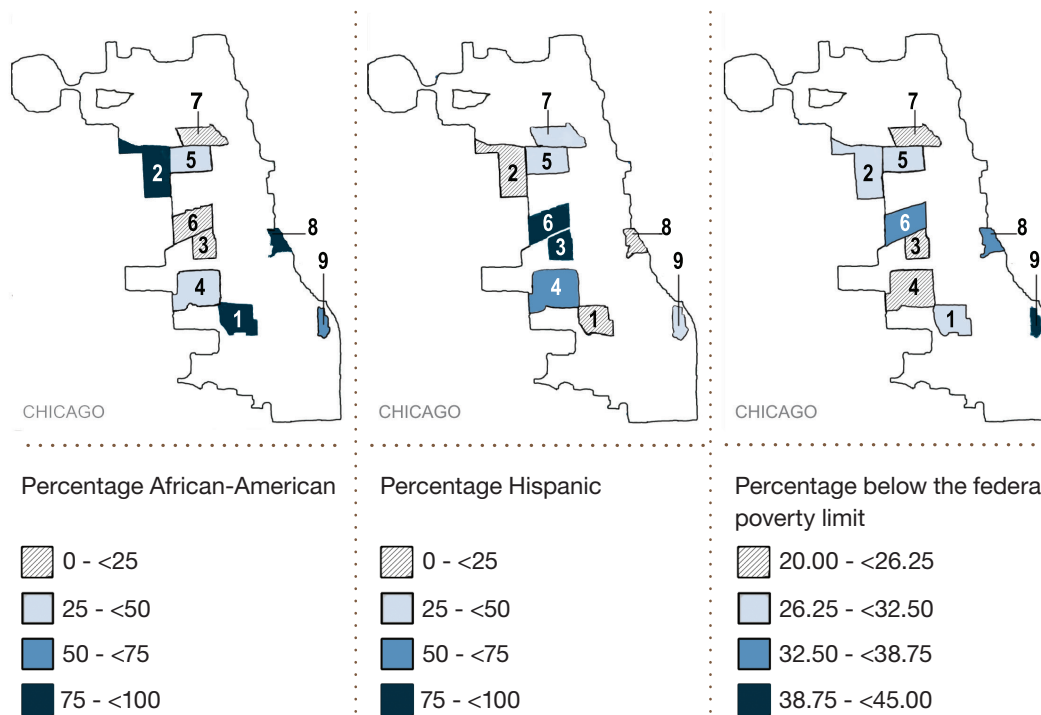
Over and above an organization's position, the entire network structure can influence its capabilities. For example, at right, a fragmented network — containing two sub-networks of organizations that do not interact with each other — may hinder a group's ability to reach the entire neighborhood. For the organizing campaign described above, this fragmentation may make it harder to bring the whole community together.



TWO SUB-NETWORKS OF ORGANIZATIONS

Figure ES.2

Selected Demographic Characteristics of CCN Neighborhoods



NEIGHBORHOOD KEY: 1: Auburn Gresham; 2: Austin; 3: Brighton Park; 4: Chicago Southwest; 5: Humboldt Park; 6: Little Village; 7: Logan Square; 8: Quad Communities; 9: South Chicago

NOTES: Neighborhood-level demographic information was calculated from the 2008-2012 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates at the tract level.

Percentage African-American is the percentage of individuals who are “black, non-Hispanic.”

Percentage Hispanic is the percentage of individuals who are “Hispanic alone.”

KEY OBSERVATIONS

What is the structure of community partnerships formed to reduce violence, improve schools, and develop affordable housing? How do these partnerships differ across neighborhoods?

Some aspects of network structure appear to have differed more by the work that they involved than by the neighborhood in which they operated. This was especially true of the property of connectivity, or how frequently groups communicate, coordinate, and collaborate with each other.

- **Levels of connectivity appear to have been related to the domain of network partnerships, such as education or housing. Overall, education, safety, and public health collaborations were on the higher end of connectivity, while housing collaborations were on the lower end of connectivity.**

In the CCN study, connectivity refers to the overall levels of communication around work domains such as housing or education; the overall levels of coordination, whereby groups direct or focus their efforts in consultation with each other; or the overall levels of collaboration, which indicate the levels of significant and intensive community partnerships in a neighborhood. Connectivity tended to vary not by neighborhood but by the area of work involved in the network's activity. For example, a housing network in Humboldt Park was more likely to be similar in connectivity to a housing network in Auburn Gresham than it was to the connectivity of the education network in the same neighborhood. This finding is especially striking because it tended to hold true despite there being different numbers of organizations across neighborhoods, which would normally influence levels of connectivity.

The finding that connectivity was associated more with area of work than neighborhood context may be related to the fact that housing by nature may require fewer partnerships. In contrast, educational partnerships may involve more interaction between schools and local organizations, as they work together to form youth groups that recruit from classes across buildings, operate on different campuses after school, or conduct outreach to children not attending class regularly. Since a major goal of place-based initiatives has been to encourage connectivity among community groups, this finding suggests that it is important to consider how the domains of work that groups target for action form different starting contexts for these initiatives. For example, federal initiatives such as Promise Neighborhoods focus on education, while Choice Neighborhoods focuses on housing, with potentially different levels of connectivity.

In contrast with connectivity, other aspects of network structure appear to have been influenced by neighborhood environment — both its institutional and demographic characteristics. A network's concentration of power, as well as the diversity and comprehensiveness of local connections, appears to have been associated with the nature of political leadership in the neighborhood. Overall levels of trust, however, appear to have been associated with the neighborhood's racial and ethnic composition.

- **While the majority of network ties were trusting across all neighborhoods, survey respondents in African-American neighborhoods reported trust in their public agency partners less frequently.**

The CCN study asked local groups to report on whether they trusted their public agency partner to carry out their mission in a way that was good for the neighborhood, and across all neighborhoods. Between 70 and 80 percent of ties contained at least one member who indicated trust in the other. However, groups in African-American neighborhoods trusted their partners less frequently, a finding associated with community actors' views of public institutions. Given longstanding views about discrimination by public agencies, and recent highly publicized episodes of police misconduct in Chicago, this finding is not surprising. Network power was more concentrated in neighborhoods where elected officials were more prominent. It was less concentrated in neighborhoods where community organizing groups were more prominent.

In the CCN study, the concentration of power in networks refers to whether most ties are held by a small number of organizations, or whether connections are more dispersed. In contrast to connectivity, neighborhood context was also associated with the concentration of network power. That is, a housing network in Humboldt Park was more likely to have concentrations of power similar to the neighborhood’s education network than it was to a housing network in Auburn Gresham. In contrast with the way that demography was associated with overall levels of trust, the character of local political leadership appears to have been associated with the concentration of network power. Networks where elected officials were more prominent — often operating in tandem with Chicago’s ward-based political system — were more hierarchical on the whole, meaning that a fewer number of groups held more connections. Networks in neighborhoods where community organizing groups were prominent appear to have had less of a concentration of network power, meaning that ties were more broadly dispersed.

- **Neighborhoods where community organizing groups were prominent were more likely to have a greater proportion of comprehensive ties.**

Neighborhood leadership also appears to have been associated with local levels of network comprehensiveness — or, the number of work domains around which groups engaged each other, measured, for example, by whether groups worked together not only on education but also housing or workforce development. Both Logan Square and Chicago Southwest reported the highest levels of comprehensive ties, and the most central organizations in these neighborhoods were highly regarded community organizing agencies — the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) and the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP). These central groups — which focus on mobilizing other organizations around a host of policy issues including education, safety, and housing — may have contributed over time to a dynamic in which groups communicated, coordinated, and collaborated with each other in more than one area. Since Comprehensive Community Initiatives seek to promote connections across domains of work,⁸ it is important to know that neighborhoods with leadership vested in community organizing groups may sometimes possess a greater proportion of comprehensive ties. Funders might therefore choose either to build upon these connections or look to other places where they may be built up.

Which community structures appear to promote better-implemented community collaborations and allow groups to successfully influence public policy?

Insights from the CCN study are a rare opportunity to understand not just that the structure of local networks can influence the implementation of collective projects, but which structural elements appear more beneficial and how so.



8. Comprehensive Community Initiatives are multi-year efforts, typically located in poor, urban communities, designed to improve neighborhood conditions and residential well-being.

- **Networks where well-connected organizations were tightly linked to each other appear to have been better situated to implement successful educational improvement and community housing initiatives.**

Some networks had individual organizations with many partnerships, but these groups were not always connected to each other. This observation about the benefits of a core set of implementation partners differs from previous findings in public management research, which emphasize the positive role of a single organization to coordinate service delivery. In contrast with previous research, networks in the CCN study with a tightly connected core of well-networked implementation partners appear to have been beneficial settings to launch community-school and housing initiatives. For example, Chicago Southwest was a neighborhood where local partners were able to implement a number of successful community-school partnerships, enabled in part by a core group of implementing agencies that each brought complementary resources and relationships to projects. Describing ties between these organizations, a practitioner observed, “to me, the relationship between us... is seamless. That’s what I was trying to communicate to people [here]. When is it [one group] and when is it [ours]? The answer: It’s the community.” Similarly, in Quad Community’s housing network, a concentration of well-connected actors appears to have spurred the completion of successful commercial corridor development projects, business improvement districts, and corridor beautification activities. In Little Village, tight connections between the alderman and a few other well-connected actors involved with business development had positive results for the neighborhood’s main commercial corridor, such as ensuring that a distribution center in the neighborhood adopted a community benefits agreement.

- **Public policy networks with well-positioned brokers were able to foster broad-based mobilization to influence public and elected officials.**

The CCN study measured networks involved with public policy and organizing, and networks that were distinguished by a limited number of well-positioned “brokers” were better able to mobilize local organizations for policy change. (Brokers are defined as organizations that are necessary to “go through” in order to connect to other parts of the network, such as the hub that links two separate spokes of a wheel.) These organizations, which tended to be community organizing groups, were often the single conduit to connect elected officials and smaller community organizations. Far from acting as “gatekeepers” who *excluded* participation, these organizations worked to *include* others in efforts to change public policy. For example, in Chicago Southwest, a neighborhood with a high concentration of “broker-ing” power in its public policy and organizing network, a diverse group of local partners, led by SWOP, responded to local foreclosures by engaging a broad coalition that approached public and elected officials about systemic changes and local actions related to foreclosed and abandoned buildings. In contrast, neighborhoods with a core of political actors who worked closely with each other may have experienced dynamics of mistrust and political stalemate because they operated in an environment with fewer avenues for peripheral groups to access power.

This observation, along with the previous one, suggests that policymakers might look to launch community improvement initiatives in neighborhoods that combine a tightly connected group of well-connected service partners with actors who mobilize broad segments of the community around public policy.

- **Networks that combined public policy and organizing with service delivery appear to have created some important advantages for local partnerships.**

Networks that spanned service delivery and a dimension of public policy and organizing may have had some advantages for both the quality of services and their ability to attract resources and partners. For example, in Logan Square, about 50 percent of ties between groups that related to education also related to public policy and organizing. The advantages of such connections can be seen in the implementation of the Parents as Mentors program, an initiative that both placed local parents in classrooms as aides and offered them a chance to become community leaders and take part in political action around education more broadly. The well-regarded program was first developed by LSNA in the 1990s, and by 2012 LSNA was operating it in nine schools. This finding reinforces the idea that an important component of comprehensive community initiatives may be engagement in both service delivery and public policy, where one lends credibility to the other and vice versa.⁹

CONCLUSION

In recent years, the fabric of community connections has been especially strained in Chicago because of continued gun violence, changes in the public schools, a state budget crisis, and mobilization against police violence. Looking forward, the CCN study will examine the stability and evolution of network structures through analyses of its second survey wave. In the meantime, the present report shows how networks are built and deployed, both to proactively improve neighborhoods and respond to these types of external shocks. Funders and local practitioners will not have access to a social network survey before launching an initiative, but at a broad level, the structural properties described in this report have a qualitative, observable component. In other words, it is possible to understand generally how communities differ before launching an initiative in that location, or how to support positive network dynamics — such as forming a well-connected core of actors for service delivery or taking an inclusive approach to brokering more disparate groups around policy change. In doing so, practitioners and policymakers will approach their tasks with a sharper understanding of neighborhood life, one appropriate to the challenges inherent in the work.

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9. See Robert J. Chaskin and Mikael Karlstrom, *Beyond the Neighborhood: Policy Engagement and Systems Change in the New Communities Program* (New York: MDRC, 2012).

About MDRC

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social and education policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through its research and the active communication of its findings, MDRC seeks to enhance the effectiveness of social and education policies and programs.

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