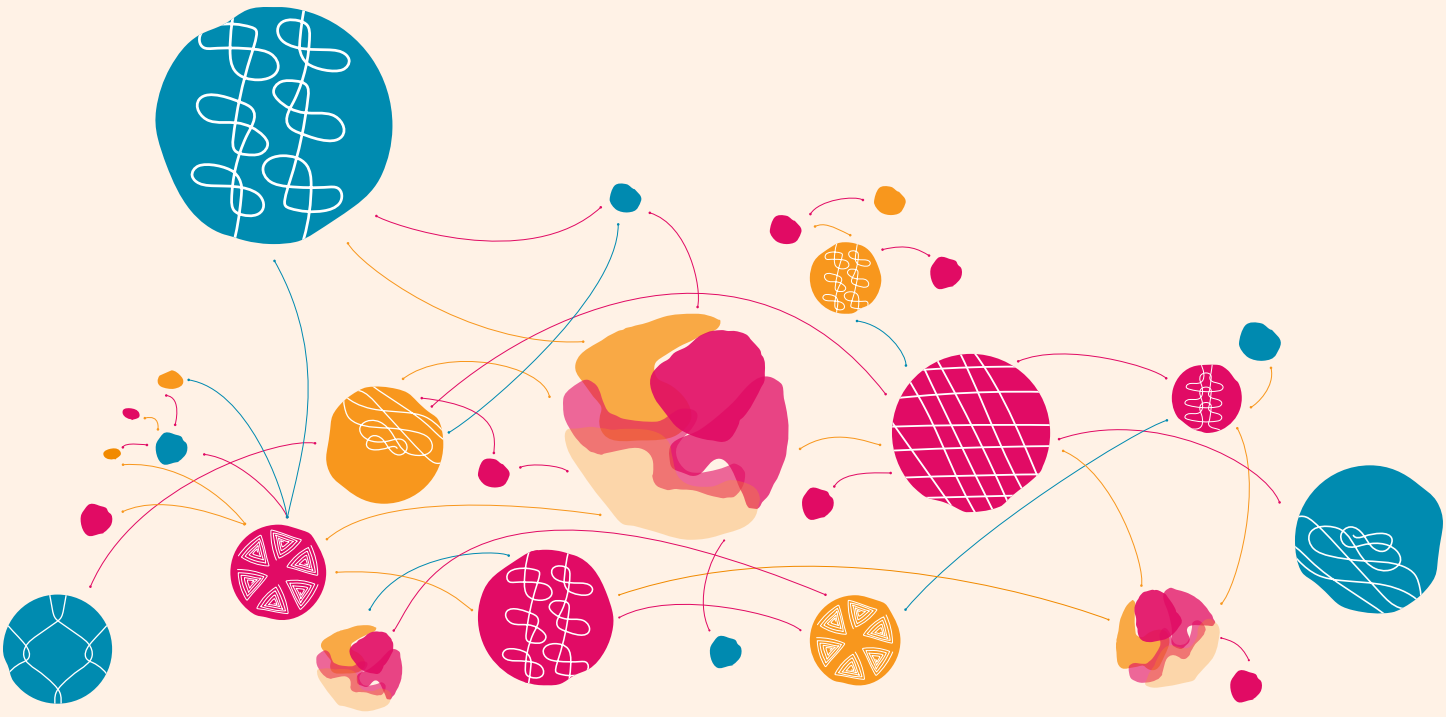
W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION

JULY 2023

LEADERSHIP PROGRAM ALUMNI NETWORKS

Catalyzing Learning and Action for Equitable Systems Change



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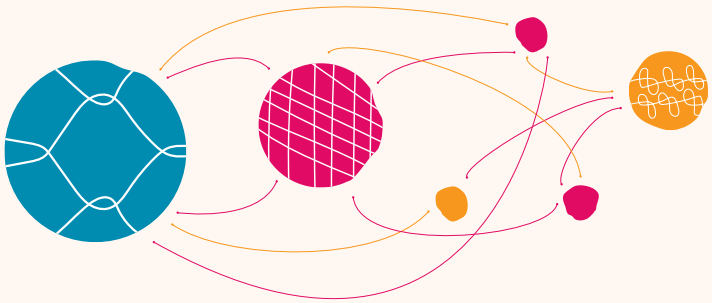


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With tens of thousands of alumni of nonprofit leadership programs all over the globe, the potential is great for connecting these change makers for social impact. But how?

Purpose and Scope:

This publication shares the findings of research commissioned by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to explore the question of how to connect thousands of graduates of its own leadership programs to leverage alumni wisdom and actions to advance racial equity and racial healing. The Leadership Learning Community, the foundation's research partner in this effort, interviewed 23 funders, reviewed 25 articles and books, and engaged 85 funders, network consultants and alumni of leadership programs, focusing on three areas of inquiry:

1. *What are the pros and cons of different ways that funders are organizing leadership program alumni and the extent to which funders drive this work?*
2. *What is unique about an alumni network approach? What are the benefits, and what would it require?*
3. *What can be learned from other foundation-sponsored alumni networks about power dynamics, how to center equity, decision-making realms and governance, structures, processes, communications and resources?*

Why and How Funders are Supporting Alumni Connections:

There are a number of reasons that funders decide to invest in connecting the alumni of their leadership programs. These fall into two basic categories:

- ***To provide ongoing support and opportunities***
- ***To leverage action toward systems change*** by connecting alumni around a shared purpose, increasing their capacity to tackle unjust problems together, supporting leadership in the context of on-the-ground action and increasing peer learning and joint action on social justice issues.

The administration of these alumni support efforts can take different forms:

- ***Foundation administrative support:*** Funders allocate internal staff time and resources, often at the request of alumni, to provide convening and connecting support.
- ***Alumni associations:*** Often led by alumni, this form is based on shared identity and structured to serve members' needs like convening, education and professional advancement.
- ***Alumni networks:*** Based on principles of self-organizing and collective action, networks connect people and organizations across multiple issues with a shared social impact purpose.

Because each of these forms is suited to different purposes and outcomes, it is important to be clear on your reasons for wanting to invest in connecting leadership alumni. Start with your why.

A Closer Look at Alumni Networks

This report focuses primarily on the use of network approaches, because, while they have proven effective in systems change work, little has been shared to date about their use in connecting and activating leadership alumni for social impact. A number of funders are experimenting with activating intentional networks for alumni because of their capacity, elaborated in this report, to: catalyze peer learning and action across organizations and issues; foster experimentation and innovation; respond quickly and adapt to crises; mobilize to a cause; support policy wins; and influence public discourse.

There are defining characteristics of networks that lend themselves to results not easily achieved by organizations.

- Networks are made up of people and organizations, drawing from diverse experiences and expertise.
- Relationships are foundational in networks, creating and strengthening catalytic connections that advance the work.
- Equity-centered networks (at their best) operationalize equity in all aspects of the work: purpose, processes, resource allocation and leadership.
- Leadership and decision making in networks are distributed so that those closest to the work have more decision making authority.
- Strategy in networks emerges as members sense opportunities, initiate actions to support the network purpose and learn and iterate from multiple experiments.

Getting Started with Network Design

- ***Assess readiness:*** Do the intended members agree with the approach based on an understanding of how networks function and their value proposition? Within the foundation, is there internal support for changes that will be required to support a network?
- ***Identify the membership:*** Alumni, the primary audience, should have a strong voice in conversations about defining the initial membership and whether to expand to include others, such as current leadership program participants.
- ***Clarify roles and authorities:*** There are benefits and challenges to funder-driven and alumni-driven networks and a continuum for how to approach the co-design process. Get clear upfront about the roles and authorities each group will have in respective areas of decision making, and be prepared for this to evolve, as networks may grow to become more member-driven over time

Doing the Culture Work

Network values are expressed in behaviors that challenge euro-centrism and white supremacy culture, which refers to "the false belief that the white race is superior to other racial and ethnic groups and that white people should have control over people of all racial groups. This includes the social, economic, and political systems that collectively enable white supremacy to maintain power over people from other races." Network values are not intuitive to people used to working in organizations. These values — relationality, learning by doing, sharing power and promoting equity, transparency and openness, and self-organizing — need to be constantly practiced and reinforced in networks to avoid defaulting to old ways of working. Network values and behaviors are reinforced by tapping a core of early adopters in the network to model the culture by providing training and being explicit about how these values are operationalized; cultivating network capacity in the leadership program itself; and staying focused on the network's common purpose and potential.

Network Development Strategies

Strategy in networks differs from the centralized, top-down approach of many organizations.

- ***Emergent strategy:*** Encourage members to initiate small actions to increase learning, iteration and innovation on the network's purpose to evolve strategy.
- ***Engagement:*** Create multiple tiers and entry points that meet members where they are, offering different types of experiences, development and paths for increased commitment. Network mapping, a visual picture of connections, helps members intentionally weave new connections based on shared interests.
- ***Self-organizing:*** To encourage self-organizing in networks, continually challenge ideas about power and authority that are rooted in white supremacy culture, train members to coach others who want to initiate projects and consider providing small grants to incentivize and resource self-organized projects.

Network Scaffolding

The ways that people organize work in networks, anchored in network values, are quite unlike those in organizational structures.

- ***Organizing the work:*** Networks form workgroups around the purpose-driven work of the network, and around key network-building planks like engagement, communications, training and network culture. Each of these workgroups has planning and decision-making authority over their work. A coordinating body can, without exerting control or power-over a workgroup, help facilitate communication and coordination among workgroups, so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
- ***Communicating:*** Networks need to support multidirectional communication to encourage self-organizing (e.g., so members can pitch ideas to each other) and to share across workgroups. For this to happen, networks use collaborative tools and technologies and reinforce a cultural shift that means members are responsible for lots of communication with one another.
- ***Governing:*** Networks are exploring what governance could look like beyond the dominant power structure models of who decides and how decisions are made. Centering values like transparency and equity, some networks are using an advice process that elicits and incorporates feedback from everyone who will be impacted. Some networks are using consent, a process in which all members impacted are asked whether a decision is outside of their range of tolerance with the expectations that serious concerns about risks will be addressed.
- ***Assessing impact:*** Assessing network effectiveness typically focuses on network connectivity, health and results. It entails engaging members in a learning process where they determine what results they are interested in and choose the evaluation methods that best align with what they want to learn.
- ***Resourcing the work:*** Funds matter and are needed for staffing, equity funds, technology, training and operations. To optimize emergent strategy, networks need flexible funds to respond to needs and opportunities as they arise. Funding should be calibrated to the needs of a network in different stages of its development; too much funding too early on can stress relationships as members develop participatory budgeting processes, while too little can stall momentum. It is important for members to have a voice in the allocation of resources since they are closest to the work and the needs of the network.

Conclusion

Funds matter and are needed for staffing, equity funds, technology, training, and operations. To optimize emergent strategy, networks need flexible funds to respond to needs and opportunities as they arise. Funding should be calibrated to the needs of a network in different stages of its development: Too much funding too early on can stress relationships as members develop participatory budgeting processes, while too little can stall momentum. It is important for members to have a voice in the allocation of resources since they are closest to the work and the needs of the network.

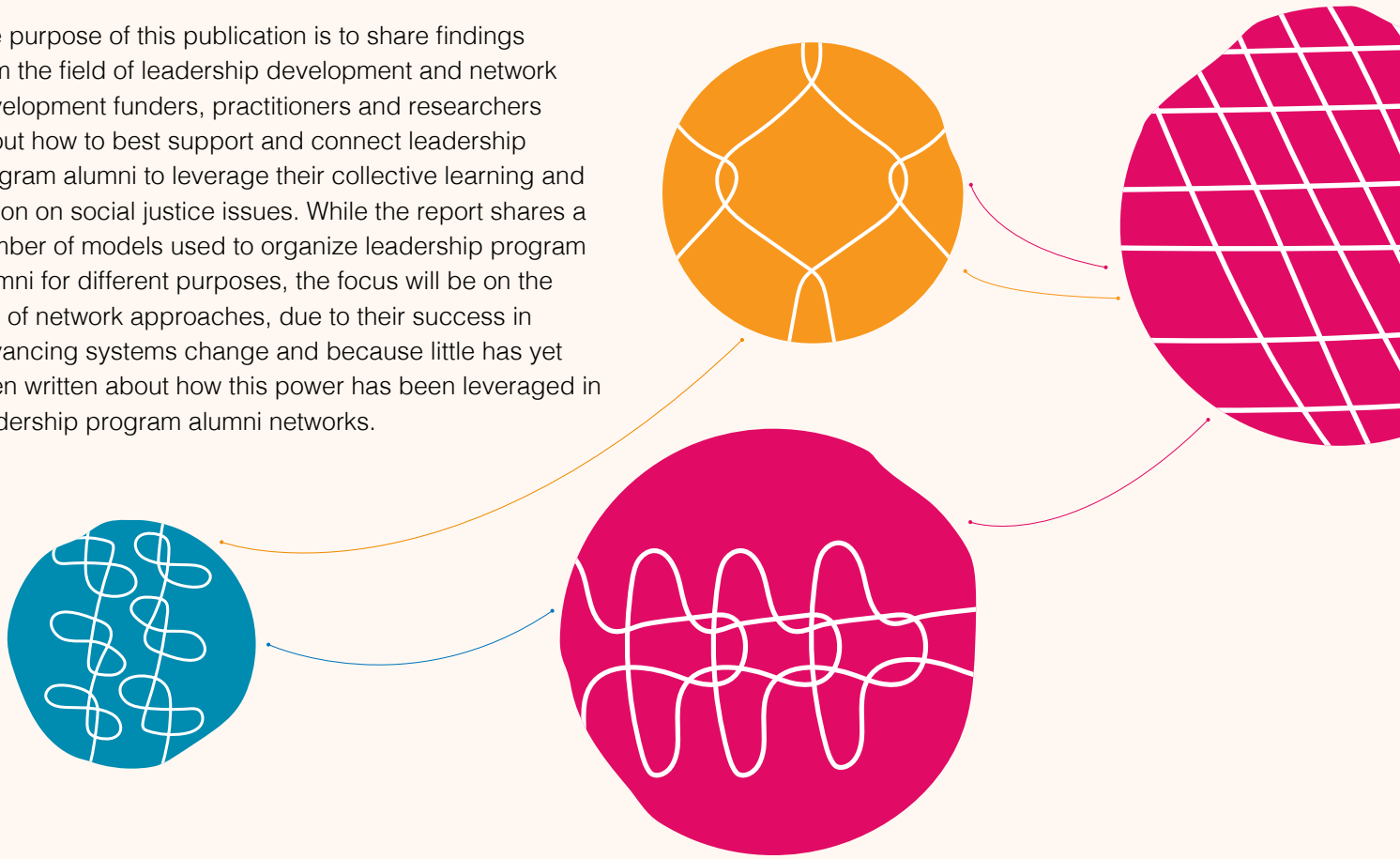
PART I: ABOUT THIS REPORT

A Note to Readers

Since its inception , the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) has invested in the leadership of thousands of individuals and groups leading across multiple disciplines, sectors and geographic regions. Many other foundations have similarly invested in developing leadership in the nonprofit sector for decades. WKKF is not alone today in asking, "How can the committed, skilled, and diverse graduates of these programs be connected to leverage their wisdom and actions to support systemic change and advance racial equity and racial healing?" This report is the culmination of research supported by the foundation in partnership with the Leadership Learning Community to answer this question, in the spirit of Will Keith Kellogg, who believed that "through cooperative planning, intelligent study, and group action," communities could develop powerful solutions for the well-being of children and families.

Report Purpose and Utility

The purpose of this publication is to share findings from the field of leadership development and network development funders, practitioners and researchers about how to best support and connect leadership program alumni to leverage their collective learning and action on social justice issues. While the report shares a number of models used to organize leadership program alumni for different purposes, the focus will be on the use of network approaches, due to their success in advancing systems change and because little has yet been written about how this power has been leveraged in leadership program alumni networks.



- ***Who this publication is for:*** In the United States alone, hundreds of leadership programs support tens of thousands of individuals and groups with a desire to lead in the nonprofit sector and social justice movements. (These numbers are conservative estimates and may well be higher, were data to be systematically collected.) There is a tremendous opportunity, often unrealized, to nurture enduring connections among program alumni that can be a source of moral support, peer learning, and joint action on critical social justice issues. This report encourages leadership program staff, funders and participants to consider this opportunity and offers practical advice for those interested in experimenting with or strengthening existing alumni networks.

  The working models, experiences, and lessons offered in this report are important for leadership program staff, because optimally engaging alumni does not begin when the program ends. A leadership program and curriculum can be proactively designed and delivered in ways that foster post-program network building, innovation, and action. This publication is useful for funders because of their potential role in continuing to support both leadership programs and their alumni networks. Finally, leadership program participants can learn from this report how they can take initiative during their program to connect with other participants to envision and build an enduring network. This report shares the experiences, advantages, and limitations of different models for consideration by all those interested in experimenting with or strengthening existing alumni networks.

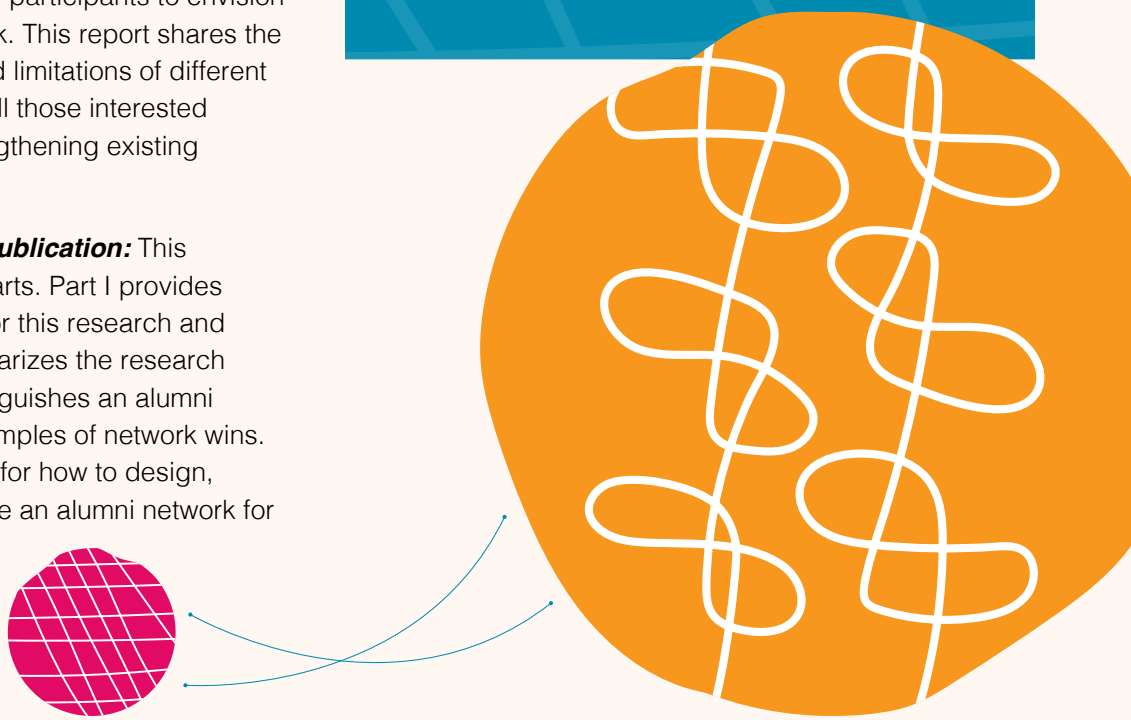
- ***How to use and apply this publication:*** This report is presented in three parts. Part I provides background on the impetus for this research and its methodology. Part II summarizes the research findings, including what distinguishes an alumni network model and some examples of network wins. Part III offers practical advice for how to design, activate, support, and evaluate an alumni network for social impact.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Global Fellows Network was launched in November 2022 to bring together more than 1,100 participants and alumni from 17 of its signature leadership programs across the United States, Southern Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean for:

- **Connection between members and with the foundation to share ideas, resources and inspiration;**
- **Collaboration and continuous learning, as well as the chance to engage in multi-generational and cross-cultural partnerships; and**
- **Action — with and independent from the foundation — on important issues impacting communities around the world.**

Blending in-person and virtual learning and networking, the Global Fellows Network is a continuing investment in leaders working to transform systems, policies, and practices that create conditions for thriving children, working families, and equitable communities.

For more information about the Global Fellows Network, visit globalfellowsnetwork.org



Research Methodology

In 2020, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation conducted a year of learning and listening sessions with alumni and current participants of its multiple leadership programs. These programs represent 40 years of leadership investments across 40 countries. As the foundation digested and synthesized what it had heard, it sought also to learn what others in the field, especially other foundations, were doing to support the alumni of their leadership programs. WKKF reached out to the Leadership Learning Community to partner in this research to gather more information to both share with the field and inform the design of its own recently launched Global Fellows Network. (See sidebar at right.)

Research questions: The research project was anchored in these three areas of inquiry:

1. *What are the pros and cons of different ways that funders are organizing leadership program alumni and the extent to which funders drive this work?*
2. *What is unique about an alumni network approach? What are the benefits and what would it require?*
3. *What can be learned from other foundation-sponsored alumni networks about power dynamics and how to center equity, decision-making realms and governance, structures, processes, communications and resources?*

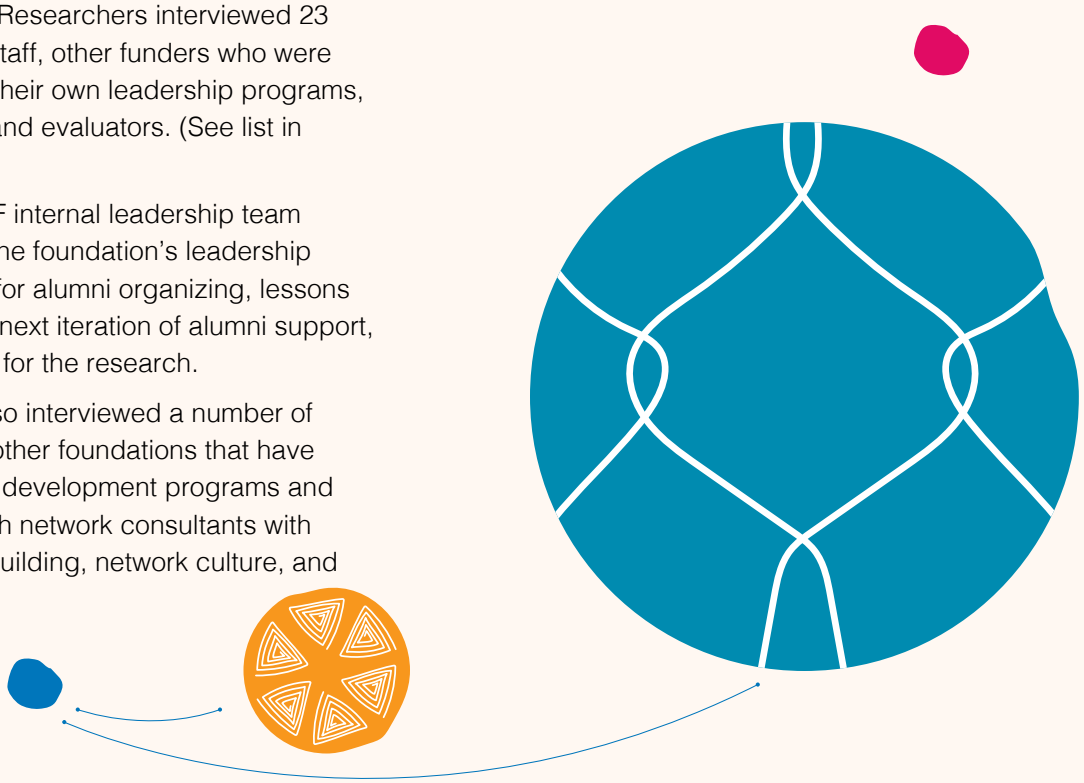
Stakeholder interviews: Researchers interviewed 23 people, including WKKF staff, other funders who were investing in the alumni of their own leadership programs, and network consultants and evaluators. (See list in Appendix A.)

- Members of the WKKF internal leadership team shared the history of the foundation's leadership investments, support for alumni organizing, lessons learned, goals for the next iteration of alumni support, and priority questions for the research.
- The research team also interviewed a number of representatives from other foundations that have supported leadership development programs and their alumni, along with network consultants with expertise in network building, network culture, and network evaluation.

Engagement strategies: The researchers used various engagement strategies to learn from leadership program alumni and from network consultants, as well as to engage the interviewees in testing and making meaning of these findings. Findings were validated and expanded with feedback from 87 participants in these engagement sessions.

1. ***Coffee chats:*** The research team held two coffee chats with 70 alumni of WKKF leadership programs to hear first-hand about their vision for an alumni network, what they hoped to accomplish, and what would draw them to participate.
2. ***Funders' virtual session:*** A virtual session was held with nine funders who participated in the interview process to engage them in making meaning of the data, testing and refining the findings shared in this report.
3. ***Network consultants:*** A virtual session was held with eight network consultants to discuss common thorny issues emerging across a number of networks and to tap their wisdom and learning about how to troubleshoot these issues through informed action.

Literature and website review: The literature scan drew from 25 books, articles, case studies and blogs. (See list in Appendix B.) The researchers also drew knowledge about existing leadership alumni programs from the interviews, virtual engagement sessions and a review of websites.



PART II: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Current Approaches to Organizing and Activating Alumni

Funders support efforts to connect the alumni of leadership programs for a variety of reasons, and with different ends in mind. Sometimes the impetus comes from program alumni themselves who see advantages to remaining connected to each other, the program staff, and funders that supported their leadership development. Leadership program staff have also advocated to funders for continuing alumni support. Funders themselves often see an opportunity to leverage their investment beyond the impact of the program, as in the words of one funder interviewed: "We want to continue to build on the investments we made in them (program participants) by helping them maintain a relationship with each other." Several funders were more explicit about social impact goals. One shared, "We recognized that networks are important for tackling the biggest and thorniest problems, like affordable housing." Another explained, "Supporting a network is a way to support leadership in the context of action work. It's all about the 'to what end.'"

Reasons for supporting alumni connection: As noted above, funders' reasons for investing in leadership program alumni range from responding to requests for additional support to leveraging the connections among alumni for action on social impact goals. The chart below illustrates this range with specific examples that were shared in the interviews. While many funders would describe their alumni approaches as having both a service and action orientation, being clear about whether the purpose is to organize alumni toward social impact is important for determining the best structure to achieve that goal.

Different alumni organizing structures: Just as there are many reasons for connecting leadership program alumni, there are multiple approaches to how to support alumni connections. The adage that "form follows function" is relevant in connecting alumni, as the best results occur when the purpose and structure are aligned. Below are the three models of support surfaced by the research—two are traditional forms of providing alumni support and the third is a network strategy. (Examples of each, created by aggregating the research findings, are provided in Appendices C and D.)

- ***Foundation-administered support:*** As an example of form following function, one interviewee explained, "Alumni asked foundation staff to help them remain connected for the purpose of peer learning and moral support." One foundation described this as "a unique gap that we could fill." They allocated staff time to support alumni convenings and serve as the "go-between" to help alumni find one another. Other funders also interviewed allocated small amounts of staff time and resources to alumni programming, often with specific roles for alumni themselves.
- ***Alumni associations (alumni or leadership program administered support):*** Alumni associations are a familiar structure, often associated with educational institutions and also used in some cases to connect the alumni of nonprofit leadership programs. This model is most often administered by the leadership program staff in partnership with alumni, or as a self-administered alumni initiative that is supported with grant funding and/or membership dues.

Examples of reasons for investing in alumni connection	
When the goal is to provide supports:	**When the goal is action toward systems change:**
Offer continued learning opportunities	Seed collaboration on systems change work
Hold alumni convenings	Connect alumni action around shared purpose
Host cohort reunions	Build capacity to tackle thorny problems together
Give back to their program as mentors, trainers or reviewers	Support leadership in the context of action
Provide career or consulting opportunities	Help alumni leverage each other's networks
Enable moral support and peer learning	Learn from each other and expand what works

- ***Leadership alumni networks:*** Some funders interviewed believed that building a network of program alumni could, in the words of one interviewee, "support those at the level of action driving change in a way that connects them to each other, and other activists, so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." The funder who said this chose to experiment with a network approach as the best way to support self-organizing and collective action among hundreds of alumni. Within this network approach, there are examples that are being driven by funders, by alumni themselves, or with some combination of responsibility and authority.

Assessing the right strategy for your alumni work: One of the strongest pieces of advice from stakeholders interviewed was: **"Be clear on your purpose."** This is essential because the best results will occur when the purpose and strategy are aligned. This is also why one of the aims of this research project was to answer the question, **"What are the pros and cons of different ways that funders are organizing leadership program alumni and the extent to which funders drive this work?"** The alumni association and alumni network approaches described above each have their advantages, as outlined in the chart below.

The purpose for connecting leadership alumni is the most important place to start in planning.

An association is a simple structure that has a lot of efficiencies conducive to hosting events or providing continuing education. Alumni networks are a strong choice if the goal is for alumni to leverage their learning, resources, and relationships to tackle complex problems. For example, one funder who chose a network approach appreciated the quick pivots it made possible during the COVID-19 pandemic: "Networks can be a mechanism for change. They are more flexible and responsive and are connected at key points that spark action. The value is that there are solutions out there, and people with similar and complementary ideas who would not connect with each other if it were not for networks."

Focusing on equity-centered networks: For those who are excited about the potential impact of alumni networks, the remainder of this report will **address getting started, network building strategies, network scaffolding, and common challenges and solutions.** To help readers explore the potential of network approaches, this publication will focus on alumni networks that are focusing on equity and systems change, for several reasons:

- Many funders and alumni are interested in how networks can increase the impact of participants on social justice goals, and there is strong evidence of networks effectively taking on systemic issues.

- Associations are better understood as an established organizational form, while the use of alumni networks is relatively new to the sector, with a strong learning curve regarding how to initiate, support, and sustain such models.
- An exploration of networks, the "why and how," could be helpful to current alumni efforts interested in expanding their social impact.

Associations are better understood as an established organizational form, while the use of alumni networks is relatively new to the sector, with a strong learning curve regarding how to initiate, support, and sustain such models."

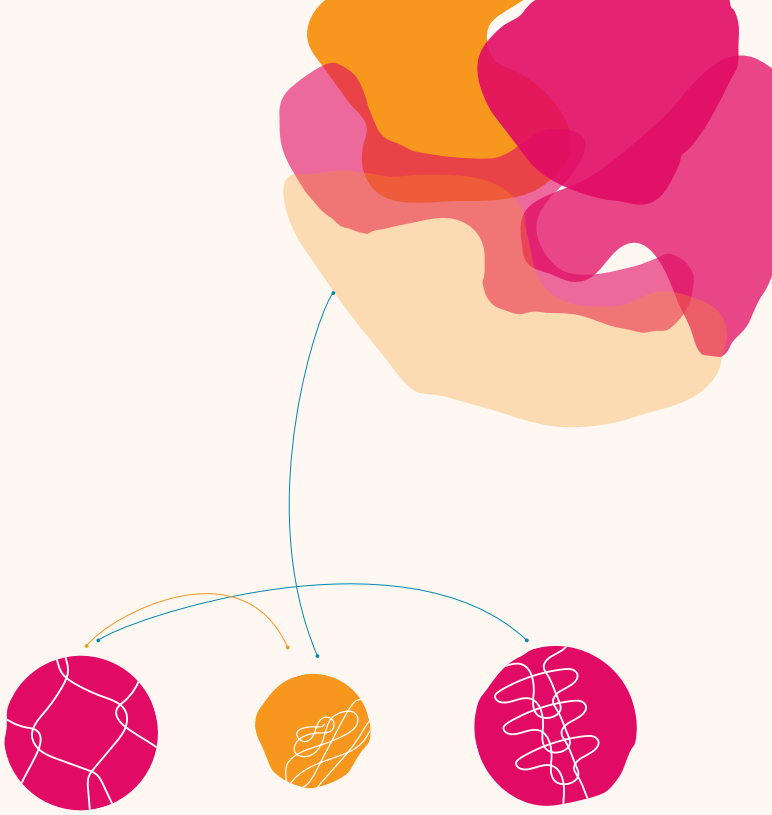
	Benefits and features of an alumni *association* approach	Benefits and features of an alumni *network* approach
Purpose	Can **provide support, connect members as resources** to the sponsoring program or foundation, and/or maintain alumni relationships for moral support, career opportunities, and education	Can **catalyze systems change** by connecting the learning and actions of people and organizations working across diverse issues, organizations, and identities
Members	Primarily defined by shared identity as program graduates who expect to **receive support and member benefits;** focus is on serving all members with support	Primarily defined by **commitment to the network's social impact purpose,** with energy focused on those attracted to the values, purpose, and potential impact
Decision-Making	**Decisions are made by a directing leadership group** with greater authority over priorities and services for members; decisions are made expediently without broad deliberation	Transparent decision making structures **distribute decisions to those engaged** in specific work areas; consent processes are used to create better decisions and buy-in
Strategy	Efficiencies of centralized planning from a **leadership team that sets strategy** for the association	Innovation from emergent strategy as **members initiate actions** aligned with purpose, reflect and revise
Structures	Straightforward **top-down structures** are familiar to most nonprofit leaders and concentrate leadership authority in a small group	**Distributed workgroups** give more leadership to those on the front lines of the work who can make the best decisions
Communications	Can **provide support, connect members as resources** to the sponsoring program or foundation, and/or maintain alumni relationships for moral support, career opportunities, and education	**Multi-directional communications** encourage members to talk to each other and share information

Understanding Networks

- Equity-centered networks (at their best) operationalize equity with high levels of transparency and communication about: how decisions are made and who gets to decide; how power is operating in the network; how resources are allocated; and how the work advances equity
- Leadership and decision making responsibilities in networks are distributed. Unlike the centralized and hierarchical structures of traditional organizations, in networks, those closest to the work have more decision making authority and lead their respective areas with a high level of communication and coordination across work areas.
- Strategy in networks emerges through action and reflection as members sense opportunities, initiate actions to support the network purpose, learn from multiple experiments and do more of what works. This is different from the centralized planning and strategy that characterizes most organizations.
- Self-organizing is encouraged, as network members look for opportunities to initiate action together toward their common purpose and share what they learn, rather than adhere to a top-down plan for the work.
- Communications in networks are multidirectional and distributed, not hierarchical and centralized. Members are encouraged to talk to each other, share information, and explore opportunities to initiate work.

In their book "Connecting to Change the World," authors Peter Plastrik, John Cleveland, and Madeleine Taylor describe generative networks for social impact as "networks of individuals or organizations that aim to solve a difficult problem in the society by working together, adapting over time, and generating a sustained flow of activities and impacts." This definition is highly relevant for leadership program alumni networks aspiring to systems change.

What networks can accomplish: Those working for systems change know that solutions require people working and connecting across multiple issues. For example, achievement gaps cannot be resolved by schools alone without addressing multiple factors that influence children's success, such as family economic security, transportation, access to dental/health care



and food security. The diversity of perspectives brought together in networks makes such multidimensional thinking possible. In the Leadership Learning Community publication, "Leading Culture and Systems Change," the authors point out that, "for tackling large-scale change, building and supporting networks can create the conditions for diverse and inclusive social groups to explore their interdependence, and opportunities to align their efforts around issues such as climate change and racism."

Networks are certainly not the only solution to every problem, but as the pace of change increases and problems become more complex, networks can provide:

- A means to organize peer learning and collective action across organizations, sectors, and geographies;
- A chance for many individuals and organizations to experiment with different approaches to achieving a collective purpose at a scale that seeds more innovation;
- Better diffusion of new ideas and information;
- Opportunity to anchor the network purpose in equity, reshape culture, and experiment with governance structures that operationalize equity;
- Resilience to bounce back from adversity and bend without breaking; and

The nature of networks has been compared to a murmuration of starlings that are connected in ways that enable them to learn, respond to each other and move loosely together.

- Adaptability to evolve with changing conditions and to respond to disruptions or opportunities.

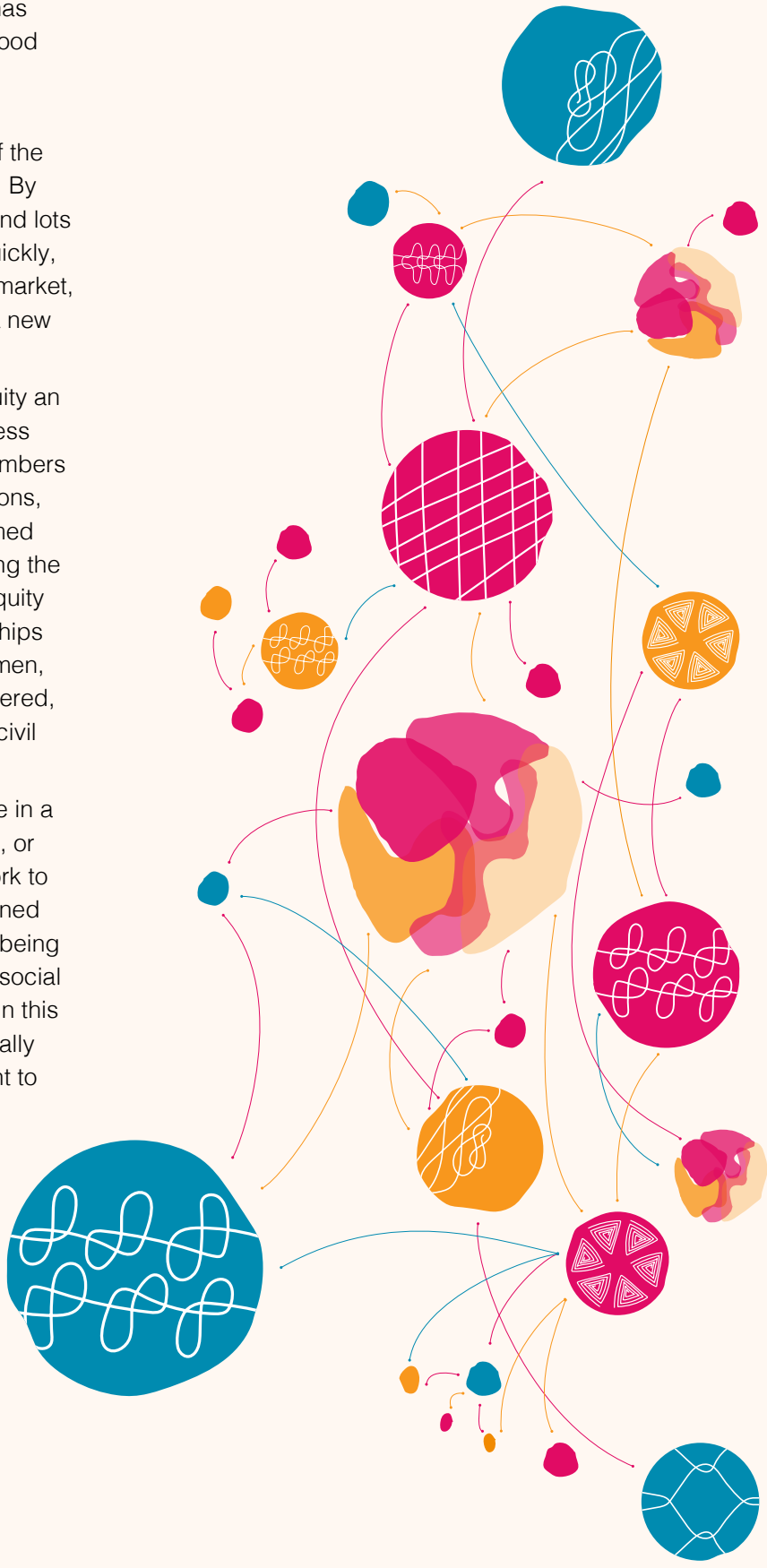
Examples of network wins: Networks are being recognized for their ability to:

- ***Create a rapid response and mutual aid:*** Networks have the capacity to respond quickly and mobilize resources in ways not available in large bureaucratic institutions because members who are close to their communities have a better sense of what is needed and the autonomy to self-organize a response without having to move ideas up a chain of command for approval. For example, in response to COVID, mutual aid efforts were organized in neighborhoods across the country as groups quickly self-organized to get food to seniors, raise funds to respond to economic hardships (especially in communities disproportionately affected), and tackle internet access issues.
- ***Mobilize to a campaign or cause:*** Election campaigns successfully use networks, tapping supporters to take initiative to organize their friends and neighbors to canvas and host dinners, events, fundraisers, etc., on behalf of their candidates. Election campaigns using social media have leveraged online networks to mobilize small donations from millions of donors to raise large sums of money, reducing the overreliance on large donors. Social justice movements also leverage the power of networks. Black Lives Matter has mobilized quickly in response to police killings using social media channels and informal networks to organize local and national demonstrations around redefining community safety.
- ***Transform systems:*** In the environmental movement, networks like the ReAMP Energy Network have mobilized people, public opinion and resources to support big policy wins in auto emissions legislation and green energy. MomsRising, started by a handful of moms organizing other moms, has grown into a national network of a million moms who have influenced care infrastructure policies, including paid family/medical leave, child care, and fair pay for care workers.
- ***Catalyze community organizing:*** Lawrence CommunityWorks (LCW) is a network that mobilizes community members to drive change in Lawrence, Massachusetts. As a Community Development Corporation, LCW was floundering until it began using a network approach, building neighbor-to-neighbor relationships through dinners where people

shared and organized around common concerns, such as bus stops and park improvements. LCW has now grown its membership to 5,000 and has generated over $110 million in new neighborhood investments.

- ***Spur innovation:*** In the "Network Weavers Handbook," June Holley describes the work of the Appalachian Center for Economics (ACE Net). By encouraging collaboration, experimentation, and lots of small actions, ACE Net was able to learn quickly, iterate, and start a kitchen incubator, farmers market, community gardens, a youth enterprise, and a new loan fund.
- ***Center equity:*** One alumni network made equity an explicit part of its values and purpose to address inequities in health and well-being. BIPOC members were strongly represented in leadership positions, and the network's commitment to equity informed its grantmaking. The network also shifted during the COVID-19 pandemic to make low-threshold equity grants to members facing the disparate hardships of the crisis. It made small grants to Black women, recognizing the additional burden they shouldered, in general and specifically, in the wake of the civil uprising.

Many networks evolve organically, as when people in a neighborhood organize to swap childcare support, or when congregants develop a transportation network to help seniors get to church. As more has been learned about how networks operate, these principles are being applied to intentionally designing and developing social impact networks. Lessons and recommendations in this report are drawn from the experiences of intentionally designed networks because they are most relevant to initiating alumni networks.



PART III: HOW TO DESIGN AND ACTIVATE AN INTENTIONAL ALUMNI NETWORK

Getting Started in Network Design

There is strong agreement among network consultants about key decision points in network design that are important to success. These include: determining readiness; the membership and value proposition for them; the purpose and values of the network; how the network will govern itself (who will have what roles and authorities in the network and how they will make decisions); operations (often referred to as scaffolding, or organizing principles and structures for doing the work of the network); and learning and assessment.

Assessing readiness: While a network may be the approach that aligns with what you are hoping to achieve, you may not get the desired results if there is not strong buy-in from your potential network members and the funding organization(s).

- ***Participant readiness:*** As stories continue to emerge about impressive results being achieved by networks, foundations and organizations have become interested in using network approaches to work on specific systemic issues. This enthusiasm may not be shared by leadership program participants who are primarily working in organizational settings and who have had little exposure to networks. Do the leadership alumni want a network approach?

  In an equity-centered network of leadership program alumni, it is important to hear from the alumni who are most impacted by the problems/issues the network is tackling (or are closest to those who are). This could require dedicated discussions about networks to make sure that potential members see the benefit of the structure and are welcoming the support and partnership of funders and/or any network consultants. This would involve transparent conversations about power and who will have what authorities during different phases of network building. Building these relationships and shared understandings can take time, but the investment upfront will pay off in the long run.

- ***Funder readiness:*** As funders consider investing in network strategies, it may be important to lay the groundwork for changes that will be required internally. As one funder shared, of their own experience: "The foundation doesn't want a traditional alumni network, but we have to justify doing something different and still have a sense that we have to prove it to ourselves. It reflects organizational culture and the dysfunction of philanthropy: simultaneously wanting to hold power close but also trying to let go."

Advice From Funders and Consultants

Both funders and network consultants who are advocates for the power of networks offer suggestions about how to prepare for the issues that need to be navigated in the network development process.

Advice From Funders:

Interviews with funders investing in networks, and a review of network case studies, generated some practical advice for funders considering network approaches.

Interviewees said:

"Be really clear on your purpose!" (There was a lot of consensus around this.)

"Invest in a robust set up. Staffing is key, as is hiring the right staff with a knowledge of networks (with the caveat that overstaffing can inhibit participant contributions)."

"Buckle up! Don't underestimate the need for really good systems of communication. Have a comprehensive internal approach for building support and alignment."

"Let people know that there will be a lot of trial and exploration and that things won't be perfect. Ask for grace."

"We have to think differently. The ways we have been doing things are not working."

Lessons from case studies included:

"The foundation has aimed not to overplay its role, focusing on emergence and connection among fellows rather than pushing for or funding tangible initiatives and outcomes."

"By starting and staying focused on relationships and on building social capital, funders can help unleash a potent catalyst, accelerator and force for long term stewardship of positive change."

"We were explicit in our facilitation about the power differential between funders and other participants. We focused on relationship building to create a space where participants could also help in naming power or discomfort."

Advice from Network Consultants:

A group of experienced network consultants was convened to explore common pitfalls in networks and potential remedies. A synthesis of these conversations fell into several categories of advice:

Formation: **In the process of deciding to invest in the development of a network, there should be conversations with the people who would be network members, and they should be inviting the foundation and/or consultants into the work. They need a strong voice and a central role and may require financial support.**

Outcomes: **Network outcomes need to include both external impact and internal processes (like learning and culture change), as well as openness to an emergent strategy for achieving social impact. For example, the group may be forming around a complex social justice issue without knowing what is possible without doing lots of experimenting. This is not how grants are generally written and will require creative approaches to valuing experimentation and learning as a critical outcome.**

Funding Timelines: **The funding cycles for most grants do not allow sufficient spaciousness for building relationships of trust, engaging network members, and learning by doing. Increasing the duration of grants can help mitigate the challenge of frequent renewal deadlines that put a lot of pressure on new relationships as members are practicing emergent thinking and experimenting with new forms of equitable decision-making.**

Funding Allocations: **In equity-centered networks, the use of creative funding strategies, like equity funds, allow the network to resource individuals to ensure equitable participation among those most impacted.**

Internal/Personal work: **Everyone (funders, consultants, network members) needs to be engaged in learning and unlearning to resist defaulting to ways of working that reinforce white supremacy culture.**

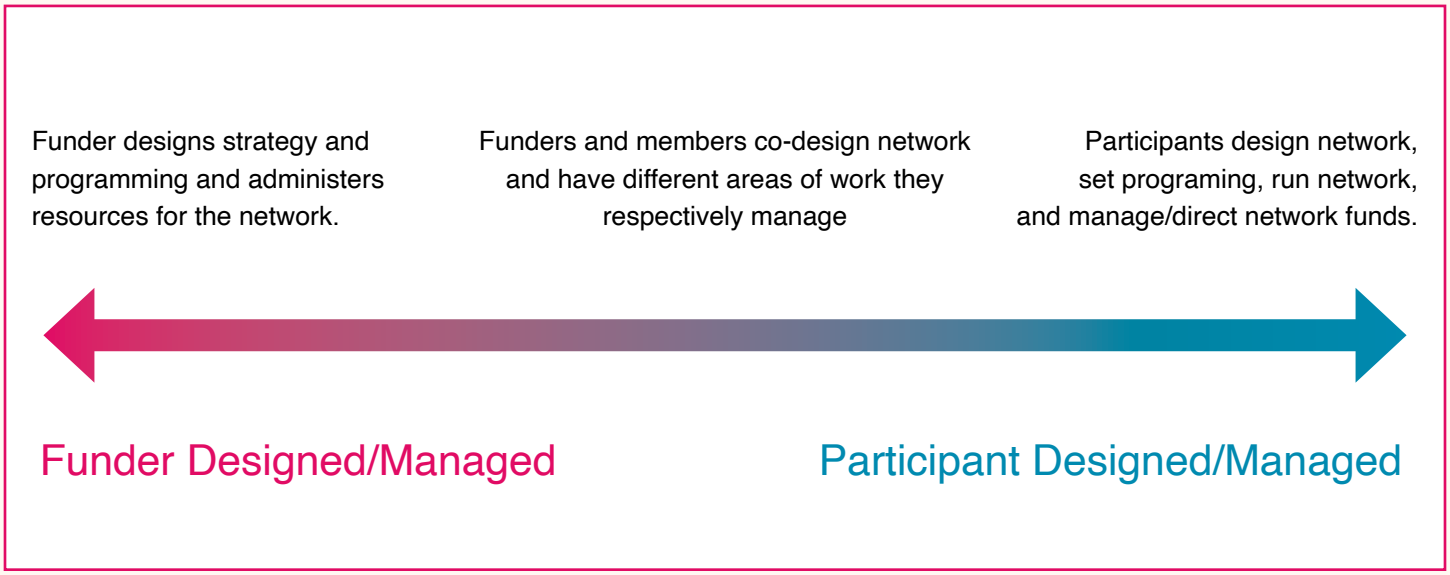
Aligning on network purpose: The research findings emphasize the importance of purpose, both in deciding whether a network is the best vehicle for achieving it, and to serve as a north star for the activities of the network. In the early phases of supporting a network, a lot of energy gets focused on building the network. So much so, that building the network can become the primary focus, diminishing attention to the network's ultimate "why": its social impact goals.

This issue becomes more complicated in leadership program alumni networks because many programs invest heavily in individuals with the philosophy that they, as individuals, have the skills, amplified by the support of the program, to lead change. When this philosophy or theory of change plays out in the network, it can take the form of individuals seeing the network (especially if it is funded by the same foundation that supported their leadership program) as another vehicle for the funder to get resources to alumni for their individual work rather than to support collective action. Members may believe *the network is for them rather than a network of them* and other alumni focused on the shared purpose of tackling a specific, complex problem.

Networks operate a mindset that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and that by connecting across organizations, issues, and geographies, network members learning and working together will be able to achieve results that they could not achieve alone.

Identifying the membership: Membership in leadership program alumni networks may seem straightforward, by virtue of their focus on alumni. However, some leadership programs see value in opening up their network to current participants as well. One network even explored the possibility of having some activities open to non-members from their communities who could benefit from training sessions or wanted to participate in some of the collective actions. It is essential for the alumni (your primary members) to weigh in heavily on questions of membership expansion, asking how it would serve the network's purpose. It is also important to explore when to best expand a network, based on a shared assessment of the health of existing connections and the scaffolding needed to onboard and engage new members.

Deciding who will be designing and administering the network: It is important to decide who will be involved in deciding the network purpose, membership boundaries, value proposition, governance, operations and assessment benchmarks and processes. All of the funders interviewed for this report appreciated the need to engage alumni in planning and found ways to engage alumni early on. That said, the extent to which alumni were given decision making authority varied quite a bit across programs. It may be useful to think about this as a continuum, understanding and being clear about whether it will be predominantly funder-driven, alumni-driven, or co-designed (see below).



There are a number of parties who are often involved in the design of an alumni network: the alumni themselves (and sometimes current leadership program participants); leadership program staff; network consultants; and funders. In a funder-driven model, the foundation might serve as a backbone organization for the network through foundation staff, an intermediary organization, or both. The charts below outline some of the advantages and challenges of both funder- and alumni-driven models, which may help in assessing the context, purpose, objectives, and distribution of authority that make sense for your network.

Sometimes, funders use consultants or intermediary organizations to provide network support. In one network that was funder-managed via an intermediary (with plans to transition to an alumni-managed network), tensions emerged between members and the network design consultants over authority and power. The funder had minimum requirements for the allocation of grant resources that consultants were responsible for, and they were trying to navigate what members wanted to do with legal issues regarding compensation of individuals.

Because roles and authorities were not explicit, members had begun to mistrust the consultants as gatekeepers who were heavy-handed with the resources. This highlights the importance of being clear on respective roles and how decisions will be made.

Because roles and authorities were not explicit, members had begun to mistrust the consultants as gatekeepers who were heavy-handed with the resources. This highlights the importance of being clear on respective roles and how decisions will be made.

Below is a power mapping tool that network consultants created to be explicit about decision-making authority, which can be especially useful in the design phase.

There are also a number of other tools that use a matrix to identify roles and responsibilities, such as RASCI (Responsible, Accountable, Supportive, Consulted, Informed) or DARE (Deciders, Advisors, Recommenders, Execution Stakeholders).

When the goal is to provide supports:	When the goal is action toward systems change:
Advantages: Opportunity to tap the expertise of alumni and to hear and learn from the work of alumni on the ground Decision making authority over purpose, direction, strategies, work and allocation of resources to align with the foundation's goals Provides financial resources (often sole source) and staffing support to the network **Challenges:** Resource expectations that can pull alumni focus from opportunities they see to what they think the foundation will fund Could limit ideas, initiative and innovation from participants; power dynamics could undermine equity Heavy lift for the foundation, and could limit funding from other entities in the long run	**Advantages:** Create a bottom-up, decentralized network structure that distributes leadership and authority to people doing the work and closest to the issues Encourage alumni to pitch ideas and self-organize collaborative projects that can produce innovations in addressing the network purpose and social justice goals With increased ownership, alumni will have more buy-in and take on more of the work of the network **Challenges:** Foundation staff may not feel like they have as much say in the direction of the network that they are funding to achieve specific objectives Alumni could organize collaborations around issues that the foundation does not have public positions on or does not want to be associated with supporting If alumni take on significant leadership roles, it may be necessary to financially support their time and energy

Naming and negotiating power: Such mapping won't eliminate the power dynamics that still exist in funder/grantee relationships, but it is a starting point as members create systems of accountability for monitoring how power is being exercised. This is the cultural work of the network. As one seasoned network evaluator pointed out, "For network members, this could mean being ready to better navigate the relationship with the funder, not being either too deferential about agreements or overly demanding and uncompromising about the budgeting constraints and funder guardrails."

Evolving roles and administrative functions: Several funders interviewed described a renegotiation of roles over time and movement from staffing by foundation staff or consultants toward self-management by network members. In the early stages of a network, it is helpful to have what some refer to as "backbone" support to coordinate work as members learn and practice network principles and experiment with decentralized ways of working. However, this role is facilitative, not one of providing centralized direction. Shifting responsibility and authority to network members has several advantages, including increasing ownership by members and lessening the administrative load for a funder; it can also create distance from policy issues that the network might want to take on that are problematic for the funder.

Power Mapping: What decisions/authority are shared or reside with alumni or foundations?

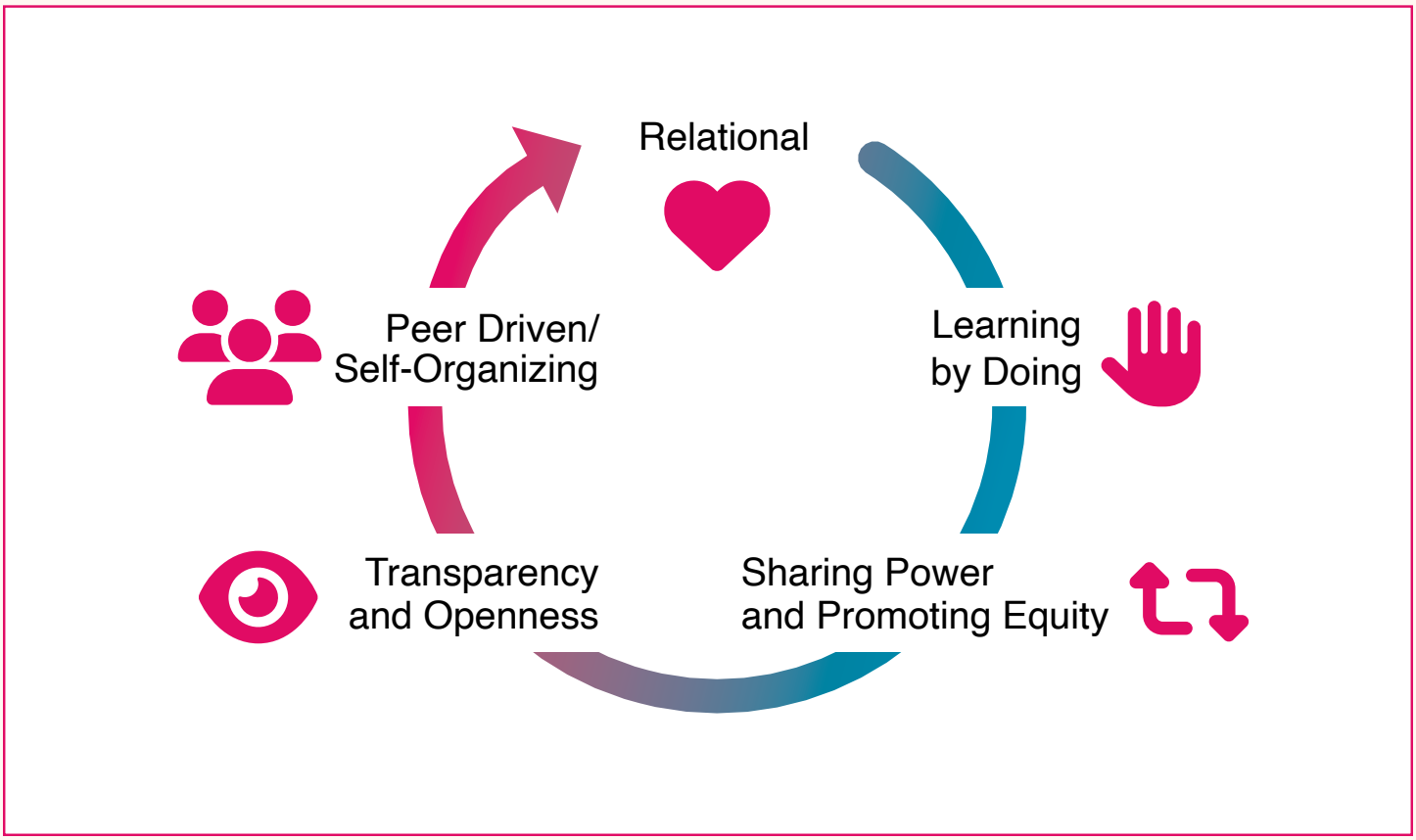
Domains of Work/Power	Foundation	Alumni	Shared
Setting the purpose of the network			
Funding the network (staffing, technology, grant funds, and scope, etc.)			
Allocation of network resources			
Governance: deciding who makes what decisions and how			
Structures: designing the network scaffolding for work			
Communications: messaging, platforms, collaborative technologies for work, etc.			
Governing: lead roles in a coordinating body leading work			
Strategy decisions (e.g., emergent vs. centralized)			
How to organize and coordinate the work			
Measurement of success and making meaning of data			
Deciding issues that members can work on or not			
Roles leading actual workgroups (and deciding who)			
Representing the network to external audiences			
Administrative and logisitical support			

Doing the Culture Work

Researchers who study networks have identified ways in which they behave differently than organizations. They have a different culture, and shifting culture takes work. This section focuses on the specific network values and behaviors that enable networks to achieve wins like those described earlier in this report. Anchoring network work in liberatory values, in particular, is radical new territory that needs nurturing, attention, and protection.

Reinforcing network values, principles and behaviors: The characteristic values and principles that are so essential to network results require new behaviors. These behaviors can feel uncomfortable and need to be practiced in a supportive environment. When networks are at their best, people new to the network often claim that it feels like a different space where they can be more themselves. At the same time, networks don't operate in isolation: they are subject to all of the influences of white supremacy culture. This is why the default to "old ways of being" is so strong, and why networks need to commit to deep and persistent cultural work. Below are some (not all) of the more universally recognized network principles to grow a new culture of working.

- ***Relationality:*** Relationships are the secret sauce of networks. Close bonds among longtime members create social glue, cohesion, and the trust needed for risk-taking and collective action. The newer and less connected members entering a network also bring new ways of looking at things, resources, and possibly ties to other networks that can be mobilized. Both are important to the network's success. Building relationships takes time, and informal spaces where members can share stories, get to know each other's strengths and interests and build trust.
- ***Learning by doing:*** The willingness to try new things, to fail, and to learn from failure is fundamental to producing innovations in tackling wicked problems that have no easy solutions. Taking risks, and learning what does and doesn't work, shapes an emergent strategy. To encourage a spirit of risk-taking, some networks even celebrate failures with "FailFests," or as with MomsRising's implementation of "funerals for failed ideas."



- ***Promoting equity and sharing power:*** Networks have the opportunity to redistribute power and operationalize equity in focusing on root causes of systemic problems, structures, and access to opportunities. For example, networks are reimagining governance structures that engage open conversations about who gets to make decisions and how they will be made. In their paper, "Cultivating Equity-Promoting Networks," Audrey Jordan and Diana Scearce offer these recommendations:
- Center those most impacted and distribute power (grassroots on top),
- Share leadership for the moment (non-hierarchical and provisional based on immediate need),
- Value and include diverse perspectives,
- Cultivate trust and build bridges,
- Ensure that the pace of change meets the need for systemic transformation,
- Keep everything visible and out in the open, and
- DO and BE different to get different results.
- ***Transparency and openness:*** Networks thrive on diversity and the contributions of many different people and organizations. Because of the distributed structure of networks, it can be hard for members to "see" the network and what is happening in the network. Transparency about how the network operates (e.g., how to plug in, how decisions are made, resources and how they are allocated) will help members find their niche and foster equitable access to opportunities. Some networks have regular new member orientations and/or a charter that describes the network's purpose, values, and structure. It is also a good idea to regularly show members, through visual representations, how the network is organized, who is doing what, and the flow of the network's work and activities.
- ***Self-organizing/peer-driven:*** Networks are peer-driven. As members are sensing the needs of people in the community where they are working, they may have an idea about an action that could make a difference. The self-organizing spirit, sometimes referred to as "do-acracy," means that they can start pitching their ideas to others in the network. If a group of people want to try it out, they have the authority to make that decision. For example, in one network of unhoused people, there were weekly meetings at a church and if more than three people signed on to an idea, it was a go. This resulted in a sit-in at the mayor's office to secure driver's licenses for unhoused people, helping to remove a significant obstacle to employment.

Tapping a network leadership core: Before they can grow, networks need a consolidated core of network members who are early adopters, meaning that they understand network principles and are committed to reinforcing the network's purpose and values. They remind or educate members about why a network approach is important for making a difference in their shared goals. This core is not to be confused with a hierarchy in the traditional sense. Instead, core members serve as network stewards (not power brokers) and as co-creators, spokespeople, and trainers who model new ways of working.

Building network capacity: The practice of intentionally designing and activating networks is relatively new, even for people who have been part of networks that have formed more organically. For those steeped in organizational culture, network principles and behaviors are not intuitive. Without network training or self-paced modules available, people new to the network are likely to view it through an organizational lens. This could result in frustration with the time spent on relationships, a feeling that members initiating actions is chaotic, or a perception of lack of leadership when leadership is distributed in a non-hierarchical structure. One of the best ways to build network capacity is to be explicit about how network principles are being applied in the daily operations of the network and why. Regular training (e.g., building reflection on network principles into regular meetings as a standing practice) helps members to understand the benefits of network behaviors and structures.

Cultivating network capacity in leadership programs: Leadership programs can support the emergence of an alumni network by: introducing models of leadership that are collective, exposing participants to network principles, and providing participants opportunities to practice network behaviors together. In "Leading Culture and Systems Change," a team of network consultants generated the following model for how leadership programs can tweak their delivery to help participants practice network thinking, values, and behaviors.

Key

Network Principle
Delivery Strategies

Relational	
Storytelling	Retreats
Nature Experiences	Trust-Building Excercises
Creative Disruption	

Learning by Doing	
Scaled Experiments	Learning Protocols
Rewards for Risk Taking	Innovation Fund
Practice Emergence with Processes like Open Space	

Sharing Power and Promoting Equity	
Transparent Conversations about Power	Culturally Relevant Leadership Models
Equity Evaluation Metrics	Attention to Demographics of Staff and Participants
Use Equitable Decision-Making and Governing Processes	

Self-Organizing/Peer-Driven	
Community of Learning and Practice	Peer Assists or Peer Coaching
Co-Design of the Program	Self-Organized Learning and Action Projects
Participant-Run Learning and Action Fund	

Openness and Transparency	
Select Activities Open to Non-Fellows	Porous Program Boundaries
Open Communication Platforms	Open Source Materials, Modules, and Curriculum
Multiple Entry Points for Engagement	

Network Development Strategies

Supporting emergence: Social activist and author of the book "Emergent Strategy," adrienne maree brown describes emergence as "building complex patterns and systems through relatively small interactions and as an adaptive and relational way of being." In a network context, this means holding a vision around something as big and complex as systemic racism, while creating space for a lot of experimenting, noticing, and learning about what is emerging from multiple small actions that begin to shape strategy. This is how the principle of "learning by doing" seeds innovation. Most people situated in organizational contexts are far more familiar with plans developed by centralized leadership bodies and less familiar with emergent strategy. Some networks use both. The charts below describe the pros and cons of each strategy approach.

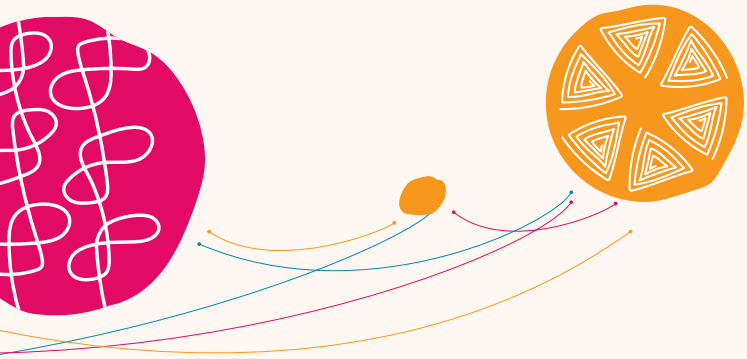
Emergent Strategy	Centralized Strategy
Strategy evolves based on learning from multiple actions initiated by members to innovate on complex problems with no known solution	Strategic plan is developed by a central body based on current experience, research, or best practice and disseminated to members to then implement
Network members generate and reflect on different experiments they believe will advance the purpose	All network members implement the same set of strategies
Network members closest to the ground are sensing and responding to opportunities	Strategic planning is usually a top-down process that assumes that managers know the work best
Strategies develop from what is being learned through multiple, bottom-up experiments	Learning and assessing the strategy is centralized and conducted by management or external evaluators
Member working groups have responsibility, authority, and accountability for plans	Accountability for implementing strategy is held by a central oversight body
Network encourages self-organizing around member-driven ideas	New ideas from members need to be vetted and authorized through management channels

Adopting an emergent strategy ***does not*** mean that a network will not have a set of goals and plans developed by workgroups or a coordinating body. Emergent strategy ***does*** mean making space for network members to initiate small actions that will contribute to the network's purpose. The difference is that rather than strictly adhering to a set plan, there is permissive, strategic intention connected to a touchstone. Experienced network consultants suggest using small experiments to give people an embodied experience with what it feels like to do something without knowing the outcome, to reflect, to learn, and then to act on that wisdom.

Engaging new and current members: Networks can harness the power of members with a range of interests, talents, and amounts of time to contribute. Various contributions to the purpose of the network are valued. There are a number of tools that can be used to organize and support diverse member engagement.

- ***Ladder of engagement:*** A "ladder of engagement" is a term used in networks to identify multiple points of entry for contributing meaningfully to the work with a path to increased responsibility for those ready to take on more.

- ***Network weavers:*** In the "Network Weavers Handbook," June Holley describes a network weaver as someone who helps to make the network healthier by: helping members to share their interests and connecting them strategically where there is a potential for mutual benefit; serving as a catalyst for self-organizing; drawing people on the periphery into the network; and helping to connect small groups (maybe different cohorts) to each other.
- ***Network mapping:*** Network mapping can be done using sticky notes to represent members and each of the people they are connected to, then drawing lines between the sticky notes to indicate the different types of connections (e.g., peer learning, information source, collaborative actions). More detailed maps can be generated by social network analysis software to reveal clusters and various kinds of connections among network members. There are also simple network mapping apps that are user-friendly enough for network members to use themselves. Network weavers and members can use these maps to:
    - Identify people who are bridges between disconnected clusters and who could help to strategically weave the network closer together,
    - See who is missing or unrepresented,
    - Identify areas of common interest for peer learning or collaborative action and find people from these interest groups willing to host a session, and
    - Monitor changes in the network over time.



Unleashing the self-organizing potential of network members is challenging for a number of reasons. For people who came up in organizations, the idea of authorizing one's self instead of seeking approval through a chain of command can be daunting. People already overwhelmed with work responsibilities outside of the network may not feel that they can take on one more thing. People who have not already had experience organizing, facilitating, or managing projects may feel nervous about taking on this kind of work. Fortunately, there are several practices and tools being used in networks to mitigate these obstacles:

- ***Culture:*** Network culture work and training needs to constantly reinforce a celebration of learning through mistakes with grace. This includes engaging in open conversations about equity and who believes they have authority and agency in the network. It also means changing practices. For example, in one network, white consultants with more authority ceded that power to encourage and support BIPOC network members to lead workgroups.
- ***Coaching or network weavers:*** Some networks use coaches (members who have had more training in network principles) who assist individuals or groups that want to initiate an action. They help with agendas, scheduling, facilitation, notetaking, and then identifying next steps. Using network maps, they make sure groups with shared interests are aware of each other and then help convene them to explore opportunities for learning and collaboration.
- ***Network activation funds:*** Network activation funds are mini-grants made available to seed new work in the network. The funds support work on the network's purpose and are administered using network principles (e.g., a transparent process and scoring criteria that gives weight to equity, learning, experimentation, and new connections among applicants). Network members read proposals and manage the selection of recipients. One network was able to engage 200 new members in its review process, many of whom had never before had the experience of being able to make decisions about funding critical work.

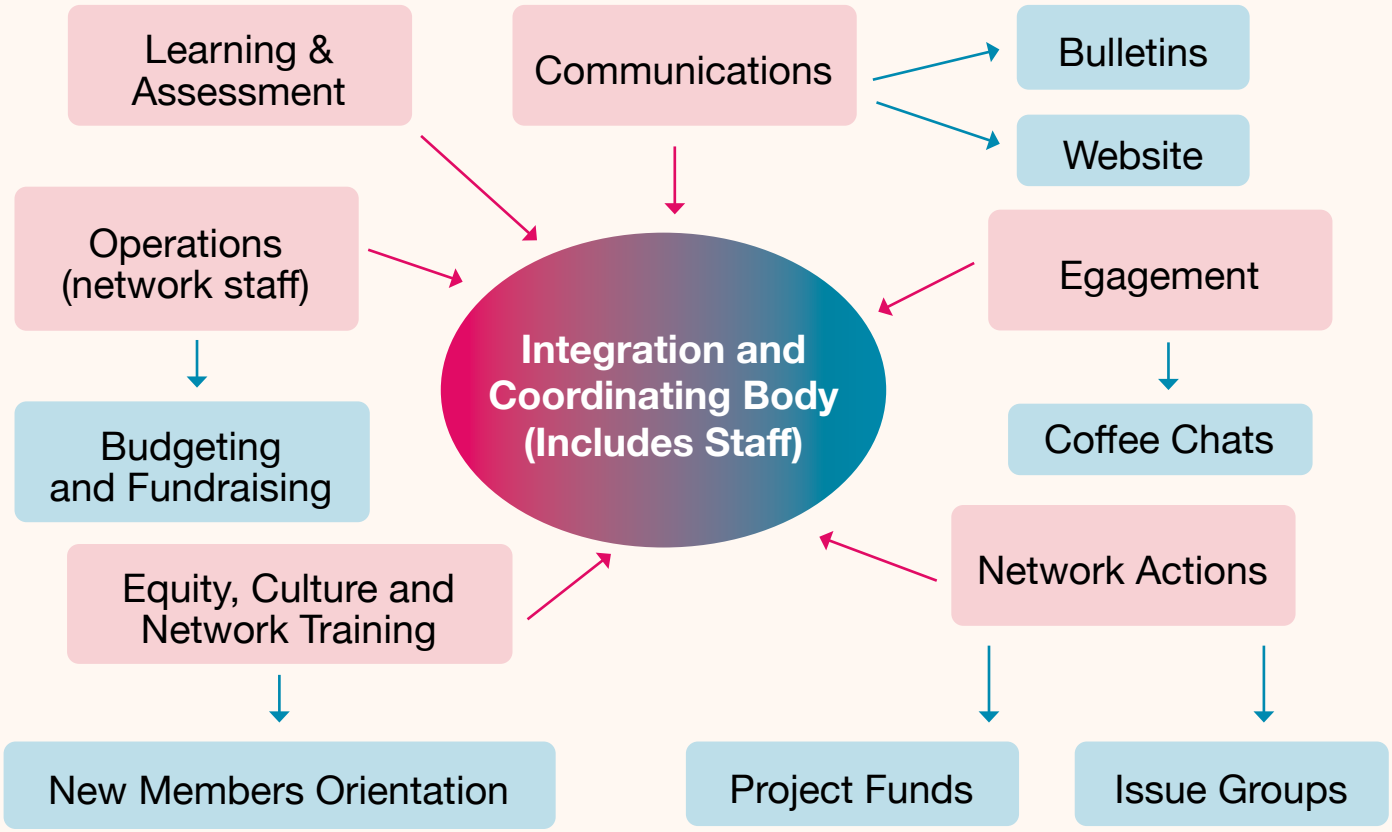
Network Scaffolding

The network's equity values should manifest in the ways the network organizes itself, communicates, governs, and affords opportunity and access to decision making. This section will take a deeper dive into the research question, ***"What can be learned from other foundation-sponsored alumni networks about power dynamics, equity, decision making realms and governance, structures, processes, communications, and resources?"***

Organizing the work of the network: There are significant differences in the ways in which networks and organizations are structured to accomplish their work.

- ***Traditional structures:*** In traditional organizations, work is often managed through a hierarchy that concentrates authority, strategy, and decision making with a smaller group of managers chosen by a board and executive director. These decision makers are rarely the people doing the work on the ground, with the most direct experience with and sense of what is needed and what is working or not working.
- ***Network structures:*** Networks form workgroups around the purpose-driven work of the network and possibly around key network-building planks like engagement, communications, training, or network culture. Each of these workgroups has planning and decision making authority over its own activities. A coordinating body responsible for operations helps to make sure that there is strong communication and shared learning among the groups. This body does not "oversee" workgroups, but may help identify new areas of work, mediate conflicts, and support network assessment/monitoring across the workgroups to strengthen the whole: a key to building collective power. As the Resonance Network wrote in the Network Weaver blog: "We claim our power when we see ourselves within the system — when we see and feel the way our agency, our choices can be used to change it. When our individual agency and power becomes collective."

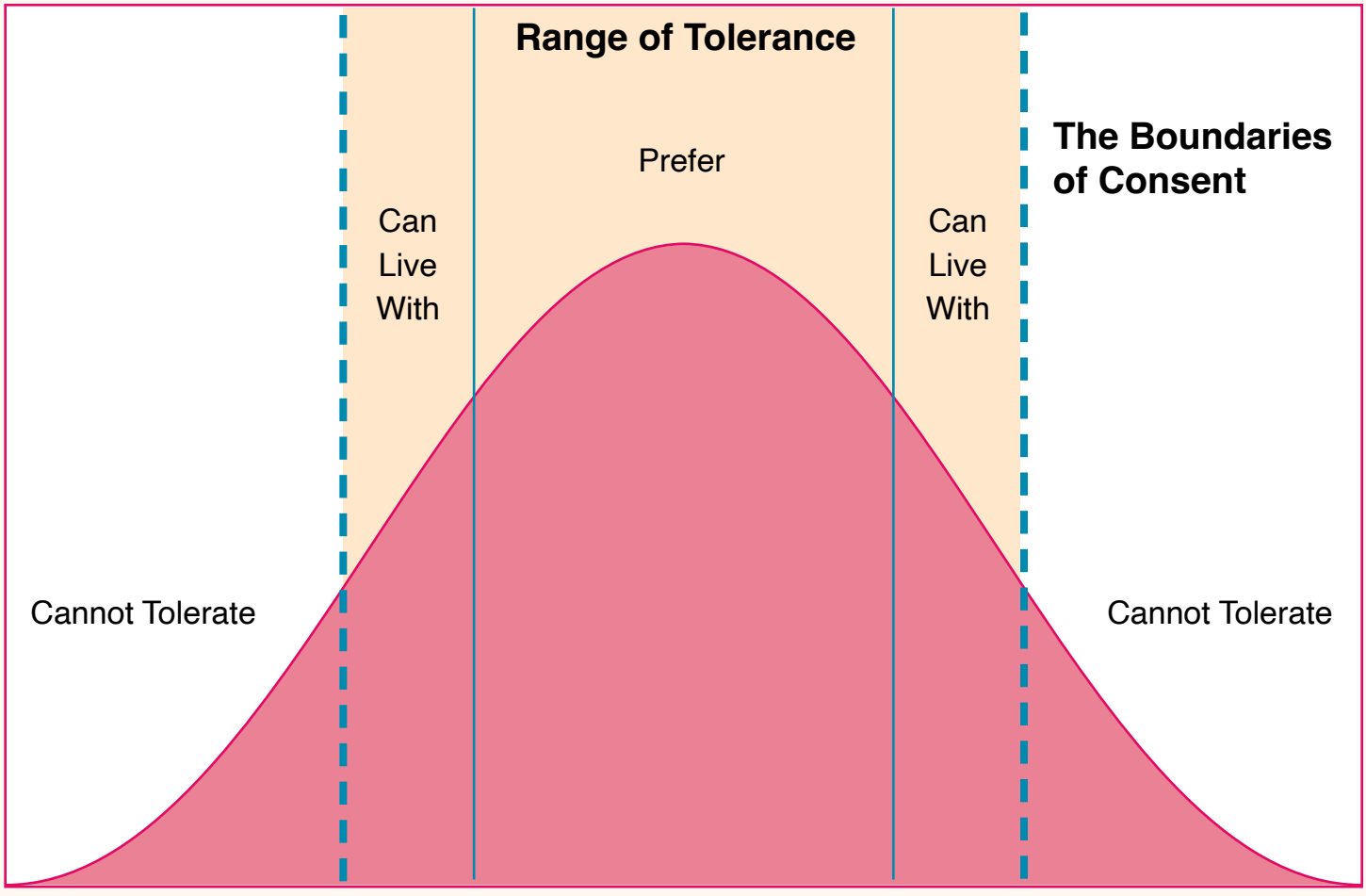
Below is a graphic representation of a sample network structure, drawn from multiple examples by the report authors, which included three components:



- ***Workgroups (Yellow Boxes):*** Workgroups are the bodies that lead the work and actions of the network. They have decision making authority to lead their respective areas. A representative from each workgroup sits on a coordinating body to coordinate with other workgroups and better understand their group in the context of the overall work of the network. Workgroups can initiate and lead subgroups to help carry out their work.
- ***Subgroups (Gray Boxes):*** Subgroups may be formed to carry out a specific piece of work for a workgroup as its work becomes more complex, e.g., the culture group may form a subgroup responsible for onboarding new members.
- ***The Coordinating Body (Blue Circle):*** This body, sometimes called an integration group, is composed of workgroup leads and network staff. This body facilitates coordination, keeps an eye on the whole and emerging strategy, recommends new workgroups, and addresses conflicts that arise in the network. This body does not have power over the parts but facilitates cohesion in the work.

Communicating in networks: A flatter hierarchy and decentralized work means that there needs to be: multidirectional communication between all of the workgroups; a shift in culture that places more responsibility on members for sharing with one another; and the implementation of collaborative technologies.

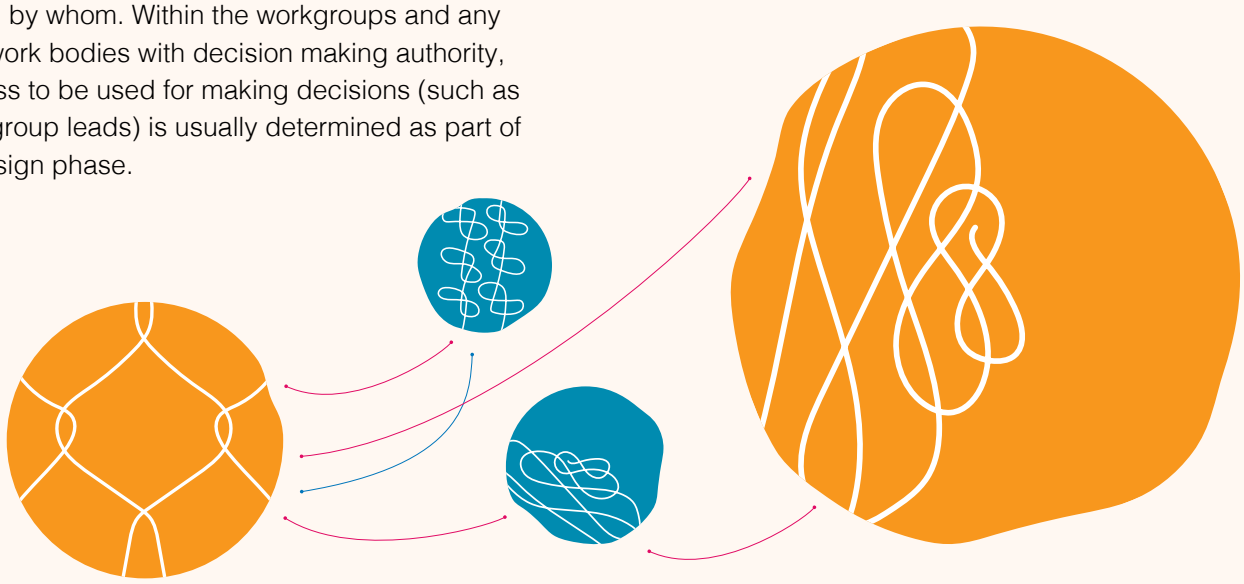
Communications tools: In their early stages, most networks have a communications workgroup or a coordinating body that issues communications about what is happening in the network, works on messaging, and may develop a website. Such one-way communication (also referred to as broadcast communication) is useful for recruiting new members, making announcements, and sharing early wins. Tools for this may include virtual meetings, websites, social media and listservs. But for network members to self-organize, they need to be able to talk easily with other members to find information, organize around issues of mutual interest and coordinate collaborative action. As a network grows exponentially, it's simply not feasible for a network weaver, or even a small staff, to monitor and seed all of the possible connections. This work belongs



to all of the network members, and they need platforms to support such exchange. Helpful tools may include messaging apps, shared document workspace software, and interactive directories. The group responsible for communications plays an important role in selecting members and training them how to use an entire system of tools to communicate and collaborate.

- ***A user-centered approach:*** With rapid advances in technology, it is tempting to go about developing a "super platform" — only to find that it sits idle. Ari Sahagun, a movement network ecologist, uses human-centered design to identify the communication technology needs of network members (e.g., scheduling, virtual meetings, queries to other members), work with them to experiment with the tools available to meet those needs and then iterate.[30] Centering members in this process can also reinforce a culture of experimentation and underscore that they are the network organizers and initiators responsible for communicating with other network members about the work.
- ***Governing in networks:*** Networks are experimenting with new governance models and then reviewing and adapting them. Areas of governance in networks are important places to break with structures and practices that reinforce white supremacy culture. For example, the Resonance Network has a WeGovern learning community that is reimagining, practicing and exploring what governance could look like beyond dominant power structures.
- Network governance includes how decisions are made and by whom. Within the workgroups and any other network bodies with decision making authority, the process to be used for making decisions (such as to select group leads) is usually determined as part of the co-design phase.
- Anchored in values of equity and transparency, some networks are experimenting with new decision making processes that provide more input to those who will be most impacted by the decisions. Some of these include:
- ***Advice process***: An advice process elicits input from everyone who will be impacted by or has an interest in a proposal, with responsibility for incorporating feedback in iterative rounds.
- ***Consent:*** The consent principle has a long history in governance and decision making. Ideally, it is to ensure that no one's concerns will be disregarded. Circle Forward has been introducing consent in network governance, because, like informed consent when practiced in the physician-patient relationship, it is grounded in respect for autonomy, transparency and the right to self-determination. Before network members take action, they test whether what they propose to do is out of the range of tolerance of those who are affected (as illustrated in the image below). In other words, Do they sense any unacceptable risks to the shared purpose or conditions they want to create together? Does it meet the threshold of good enough to try and safe enough to fail?

These two forms are not mutually exclusive. Sometimes, the advice process is a great way to test for consent on an idea. Or, the consent principle can be effective for an iterative group process of: considering a proposal; engaging in multiple rounds of framing, shaping, clarifying and testing; and then adapting the proposal until everyone consents.



Assessing network development and impact

This section offers some guidance on how to begin to approach network learning and assessment and points readers to evaluation resources. A key principle for effective network assessment is engaging members in a learning process where they examine shared values: build relationships; articulate and prioritize learning questions; choose tools and processes that best align with what they want to learn; and then determine how they intend to use that learning to grow and strengthen their network and its impact.

The decision about where to focus network assessment will vary depending on the type of network, its purpose, its stage of network development and its internal and external challenges. Network evaluations typically focus on assessing network connectivity, health, and results.

Network connectivity is concerned with the ties and relationships that exist within and among people, organizations, networks, initiatives and/or campaigns. Questions asked might include: *Who is connected and for what purpose? Who is central to the network, and who is on the periphery? What is the quality of network relationships (e.g., levels of trust, ability to share power)? Whose perspectives are missing or excluded? How efficiently do information and other resources flow across the network? Are the connections adequate to meet the network's goals?*

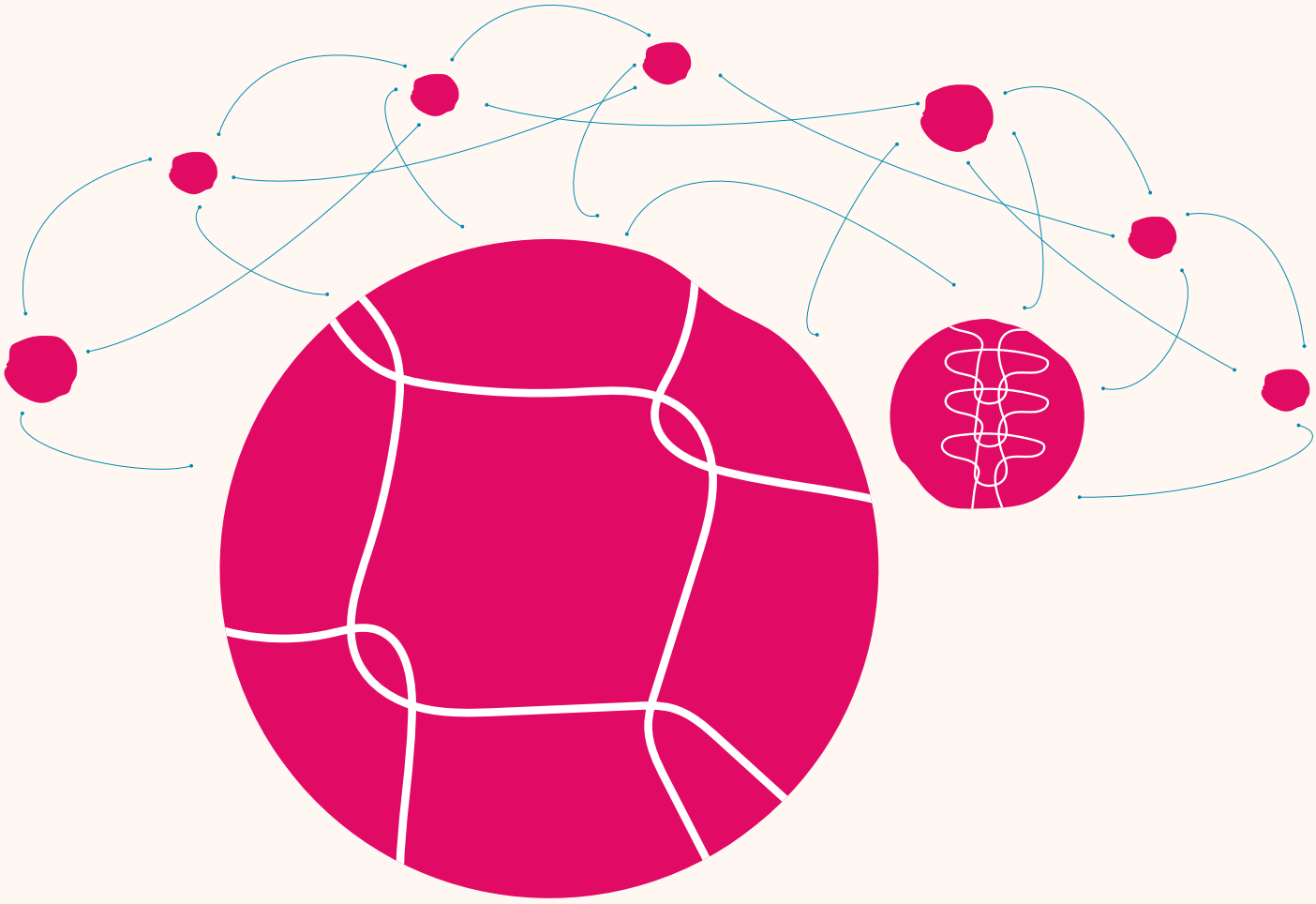
- ***Social Network Analysis (SNA):*** SNA is a useful set of tools and analyses for mapping and illuminating connections and relationships in a network. These tools help network members see themselves as part of a larger whole, identify opportunities to weave connections and find potential allies. SNA is also useful to those who are leading and managing networks. It provides information about the structure of the network that can inform conversations about network inclusiveness, equity, and resilience.
- ***Network Health:*** Network health involves an assessment of the infrastructure, resources, culture, and value creation of the network. Questions asked might include: *Do members have a shared purpose? Is the network clear about its goals? Does the network have the resources, infrastructure, and culture to support healthy network development and performance? Does the network have the capacity to learn from its successes and failures and adapt as needed? Is equity being effectively centered and operationalized in the network (e.g., in decision making and resource allocation)?*
- ***Network scorecards:*** Network Impact has developed a network health scorecard that can be used to gather feedback from members about network purpose, performance, operations, and capacity. These scorecards can be adapted based on the values and needs of the network. If used regularly, the aggregated data can be used to monitor improvements in network health over time.
- ***Learning culture:*** Network health assessments alone are not sufficient for networks to understand what is working well and where improvements are needed. Equally important is having the learning culture, processes, and reflective capacities in place to make meaning of data collected, develop consensus on lessons learned and use that learning to grow and strengthen the network.

Network results focus on the degree to which the network's desired goals have been achieved and what contribution the network has made to those outcomes. For more emergent networks, where the goals are not defined in advance, documenting stories of experimentation, progress and setbacks will support networks to value and celebrate their successes and adapt and learn from their failures.

- ***Outcome harvesting/contribution analysis*** is a useful evaluation approach to assess progress in complex environments, like networks, where outcomes are often not known in advance. The purpose is to document successful changes in behavior, relationships, actions and/or policies and then work backward to make a plausible case for how network actions contributed to those outcomes and what other factors may also have contributed.
- ***Stories and case studies*** enable networks to celebrate their successes, identify their challenges, and share what they are learning with others. Analyzing patterns in stories and case studies across a network environment can provide insights into what works and does not work to support network development and increase network impact.

Resourcing the network: Networks have been described as a way to leverage resources, or to scale—and sometimes to "do more with less." This does not mean that networks do not need resources.

- ***Uses of resources in networks:*** Resources in networks may be used: to hire staff or consultants; for equity funds to ensure equitable access in participation; to fund collaborative projectsl; for technology; to support network weavers; for trainers; and for basic operations.
- ***Nature of funding in networks:*** To optimize emergent strategy, not everything can be planned. Creating a special fund available to members who want to initiate action on opportunities they see will foster greater innovation.
- ***Calibrating resources to the network's development:*** Networks need to anchor in their values and processes, and identify the work that is in service of the network's purpose, in order to take on issues like budgeting and fund allocation. Too much funding, too soon, can put stress on these processes, and insufficient funds can stall momentum. It's important that funding adapt to fit the needs of the network, which will change at different stages of its development. Jane Wei-Skillern, Nora Silver, and Eric Heitz emphasize this point in "Cracking the Network Code": "Funders succeed with networks by providing sufficient resources to support the network without overpowering it."
- ***Allocation of resources:*** Decisions about how resources are allocated raise issues of power. This is why having clarity and communicating early about how these decisions will be made is important. When members are engaged and have voice in these decisions, they have a higher sense of ownership and often bring important insights based on their proximity to the work.
- ***Resource generation:*** Alumni networks funded by and closely identified with one funder that also funded the leadership program may initially have trouble attracting funds from other foundations. However, collaborative projects that are initiated by networks can provide opportunities to attract new sources of funding.



Challenges and Advice

Troubleshooting Issues in Networks: Networks are not immune to the issues of equity and power that plague organizations. Networks also come with challenges new to people accustomed to working in organizational contexts. Network consultants who convened for this research project began to name and share ideas about troubleshooting some of these issues.

Purpose: Network consultants sometimes see a drift from a network's collective purpose to questions such as: "What is in this for me?" or "How can this network serve my individual work?" This can be harder to avoid for the alumni of leadership programs that are anchored in the white supremacy paradigm of individual heroic leaders. If a social impact network gets caught up in individual interests at the expense of external impact, this is a powerful indicator that the network has lost its way and needs a reset.

> ***Troubleshooting:*** Emphasizing the concept of leadership as a process enacted through collective action toward shared purpose can help participants understand the value of a network. Reinforcing the network's purpose and stories of the difference being made in communities can also help to refocus members on the network's purpose of social impact.

Culture: Network consultants emphasized the need to invest time and resources in shifting culture. When a network is not grounded in values and new ways of working, a default to characteristics of white supremacy culture can manifest in interpersonal conflict and focus on personalities over purpose. For example, in one network, tensions began to emerge among members trying to meet a proposal funding deadline without having sufficient time for broad engagement and reflection on how to anchor the process in network values.

> ***Troubleshooting:*** Culture work takes dedicated time and spaciousness and can sometimes get sublimated to the network's activities and the desire to "get things done." This is why network consultants recommend that networks negotiate flexible timelines with their funders so that members have sufficient time for building trust relationships anchored in values prior to and throughout the process of navigating issues like resource allocations that can trigger power dynamics and conflict. One network had a workgroup dedicated to building culture—before ultimately coming to the realization that an equity culture is not an end state but the permanent nature of work like this, which calls for regular, ongoing investment from everyone involved.

Supporting the give and get principle: Even with large funder investments, financial resources are finite in ways that the wisdom and energy of members is not. One question in equity-promoting networks is not only how to use resources to ensure equitable access to participation, but how and when to use resources to stipend people who may be taking on a heavier lift. One important principle in networks, "gives and gets," is described in "Cultivating Equity-Promoting Networks":

> *A fundamental tenet of network practice is that every member engages because there is something of value to get, and the 'cost' of membership is to give back to the network. In this way the network is 'owned and operated' by its membership with the variety of member contributions meeting member needs. By embracing this principle of reciprocity, traditional 'power over' hierarchies can be disrupted and flattened. Members, in particular those from marginalized communities, come to see themselves as empowered contributors, not just as passive clients or service recipients."*

In one network, when a large number of members were receiving stipends as network weavers, confusing expectations began to develop over whether all members should be compensated for their work in the network. This began to obscure the "give and get" principle and the intrinsic value of participation—i.e., the chance to increase the impact of their efforts by working with others. Network culture is based on the principle that one gives more than one takes because it is everyone's responsibility to build the network's power to make an impact, and that itself is a return on an individual's investment. Cultivating this more collective spirit in humans steeped in the individualism of white supremacy culture can be a heavy lift.

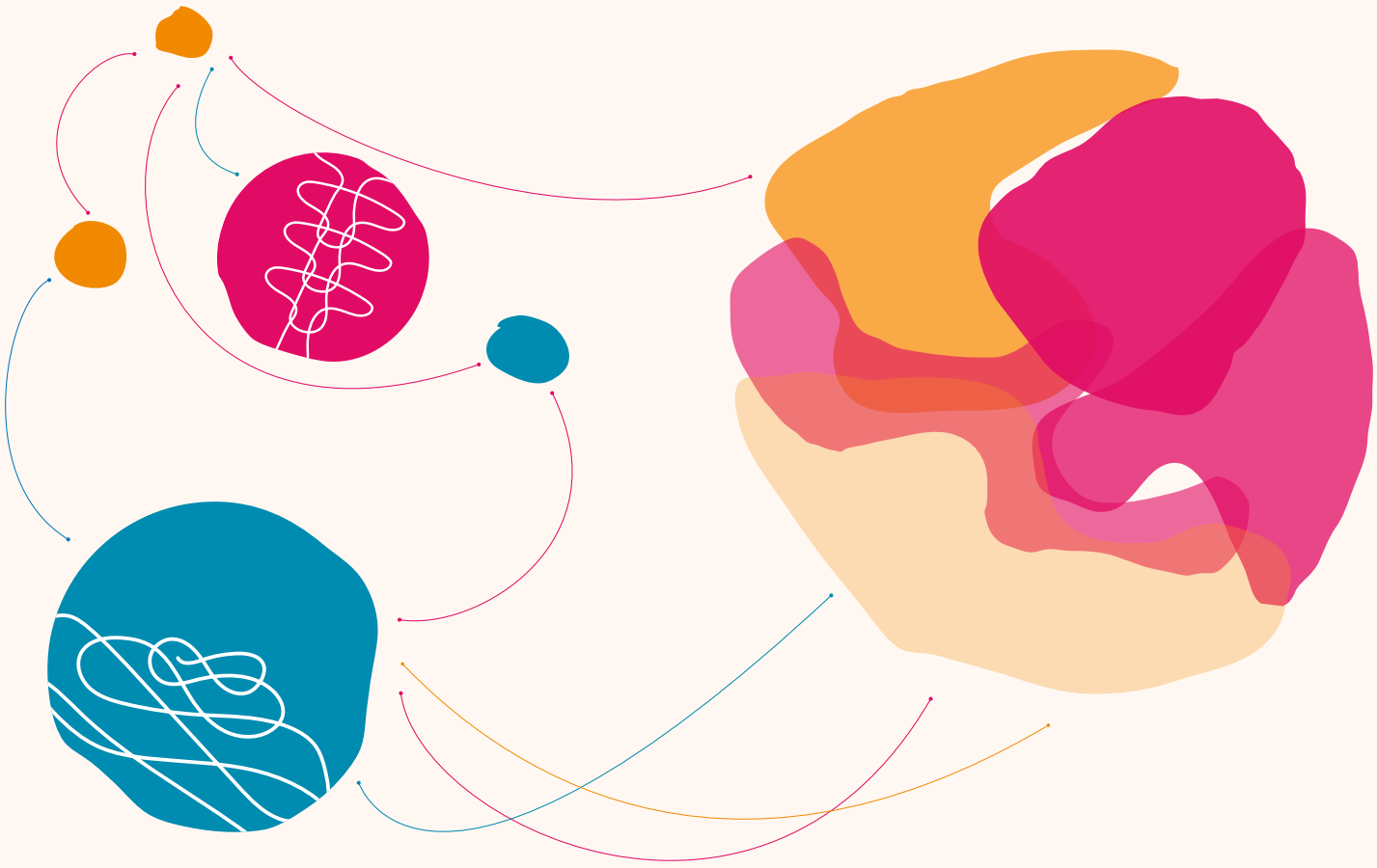
> ***Troubleshooting:*** Paying everyone who takes on work in the network can obscure the fact that, because of systemic inequities, not all members have the same resources enabling their participation. A healthy equity fund is critical for addressing this. Significant roles (e.g., staffing) should be compensated, but when

members do not see a value to their actions beyond how they benefit individually, it may be time to talk about network values, wins, and the power of "give and get" resourcing.

Scale: Discussions of scale often focus on numbers as a significant determinant of impact. Networks offer a different lens on this matter. In the words of Grace Lee Boggs, "We never know how our small activities will affect others through the invisible fabric of our connectedness. In this exquisitely connected world, it's never a question of critical mass. It's always about critical connections."[39] Many of the leadership programs interviewed have hundreds, if not thousands, of graduates and could potentially be adding new members each year to their network. The potential pool makes it tempting to bring everyone on board at once, if one were focused on quantity over depth of connection—but the latter is a more important measure of network health.

When a network scales its numbers too quickly (especially without a strong core of deeply connected people anchored in network values and processes), potential new members may not understand: how networks work; who they can connect with for support; the culture and values of the network that require new ways of working; how to identify ways to plug in; and where to find information. Network funders and members need regular, transparent conversations about metrics of network health like spaciousness, the pace, and what needs to be in place for healthy growth.

Troubleshooting: To grow a network successfully, it helps to first build deep relationships among a consolidated core of members who can: uphold the network's purpose and values; provide a strong training program/process or identify people who orient new members; design and implement communications mechanisms (e.g., a bulletin with a new member track, a website where members go for information, a platform for multi-directional communications); and create a charter and/or visual representations of how the members organize themselves to do the work.



PART IV: CONCLUSION

This research project set out to answer questions about the pros and cons of different approaches to connecting the alumni of leadership development programs, including the different roles that funders can play in administering support. The findings point to the need to begin by getting clear about what you hope to achieve by connecting alumni so that you can choose the approach that is best suited to that purpose.

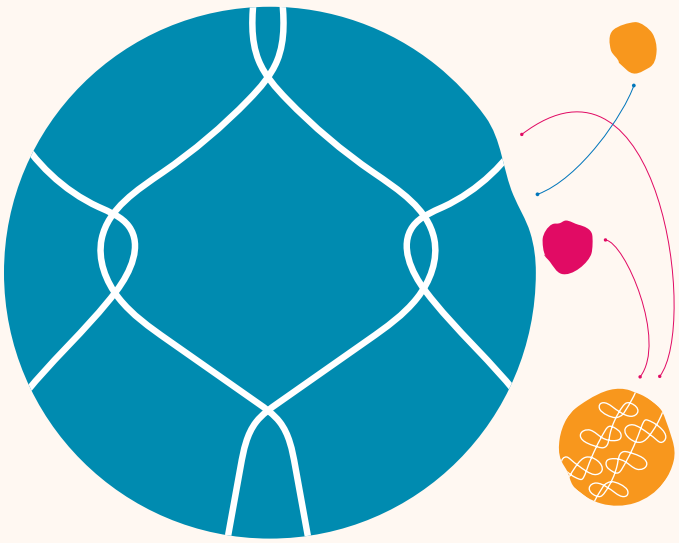
For those who hope to leverage alumni connections to amplify social impact goals, an equity-centered systems network is a strong choice.

There are benefits and challenges associated with whether the leadership alumni network is funder- or participant-driven. When funders take on a significant role, they can align the work with the foundation's goals and priorities, and exercise more influence over the network's purpose, direction, issues, and work. However, this degree of administration will be a heavy lift on the part of foundation staff, and could limit buy-in from network members and the self-initiating behaviors associated with innovation in networks. It is possible to share power to mitigate some of these challenges by having clear and transparent conversations about the authority that the funder and members each have in different realms of decision making. Many funders have found that as the network evolves, members are likely to seek greater authority and autonomy, allowing for a shift toward a more participant-driven model.

The research surfaced many lessons about how to center racial equity and racial healing in a network's purpose, values, processes, representation, access to opportunities and decision making. As part of creating an inclusive, equity-centered culture, members need to work in new ways that honor relationships and counter white supremacy culture. The network's governance and decision making processes need to be made visible and accessible to all members. This may require developing an equity fund to support equitable participation among those most impacted. Conversations about power need to be open, transparent and frequent. The structures of the network should distribute authority, and it should be moved to those doing the work to center those most impacted. In assessing its work, network members should take stock of both how the network is embedding equity principles in how it operates internally as well as progress being made on equity in its external social impact work.

Efforts to activate leadership program alumni networks are relatively new, and there is still much to be learned. This paper has shared examples of how such networks have activated their connections over the past several years: responding quickly to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color; mobilizing in response to the police murder of George Floyd; and continuing efforts to tackle inequities across a range of complex issues, including health, education, incarceration and more. These examples fuel a sense of both what is possible and what is needed.

This publication is intended to offer information and encouragement to those interested in forming or strengthening leadership program alumni networks, to share what others are learning, and to offer recommendations from experienced funders and network practitioners. Ultimately, this publication seeks to lift up equity-centered leadership alumni networks as powerful organizing opportunities for social impact and systems change.



Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Below is a list of terms used throughout the report with definitions for each.

With the understanding that words can have different meanings to different people based on their experiences and that a common vocabulary can help provide context, the definitions of the following concepts and phrases used in this report are provided below. While not everyone may agree on the definition of each word or phrase, a common understanding of how words are being used in particular circumstances, such as in this report, can help with understanding and more productive conversations taking place.

Equity: Situational fairness such that results cannot be predicted by race or other characteristics. ("Equity and Networks," Audrey Jordan and Diane Scearce)

Network Scaffolding: Network scaffolding refers to the processes, systems and structures for organizing the work of a network.

Intended beneficiaries: formerly called "target population," these are the people intended to receive or experience the ultimate, equitable outcomes of change goals.

Network Approach: A network approach refers to strategies that create an environment that will foster strong relationships across multiple boundaries (e.g. cohort, issue, geography, racial and ethnic identity); and encourage members to self-organize, weave connections, share learning, and take action on their shared purpose.

Self-Organizing: In contrast to a traditional "top-down" organization, a network or self-organizing approach aspires to have "many people who see themselves as leaders and are willing to reach out to others [to] take the initiative to organize exploratory projects." ("Network Weaver's Handbook")

Social Network Mapping: Visual representations of social interactions between individuals and groups generated by software to help a network see itself and strategically build connections that strengthen the network.

Network Connectivity: Refers to the strength of ties and different types of relationships that exist within a network environment among people, organizations, networks, initiatives or campaigns.

Open Space: A process (often referred to as a meeting technology) which enables everyone to come together around a theme to participate in co-constructing agendas that address issues that are important to them.

Appendix B: Interviewees

Funder Interviews

Justina Acevedo-Cross: Hawai'i Community Foundation

Motaz Attalla: (formerly) Garfield Foundation

Alexis Flanagan: Resonance Network (Formerly Funded by Novo Foundation)

Kim Haskins: Barr Foundation

Cassie Kingsbury: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Phil Li: Robert Sterling Clark Foundation

Phyllis Meadows: Kresge Foundation

Necoshaw Montgomery: The Russell Family Foundation

Ginny Oehler: (formerly) Health Foundation for Western and Central New York

Anita Patel: Bush Foundation

Abby Soloma: Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies

Barbara Squires: Annie E. Casey Foundation

Beth Toner: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Network Consultant Stakeholders

June Holley: Network Weaving Institute

Audrey D. Jordan, Ph.D.: Principle, ADJ Consulting and Coaching; Jerry D. Campbell: Professor and DEI Specialist, Claremont Lincoln University

Claire Reinelt

Yasmin Yonis

W. K. Kellogg Foundation Team

Xiomara Enriquez, Leadership Programs Officer, W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Reggie LaGrand, Director of Leadership Programs, W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Paul Martinez, Chief Leadership and Human Capital Strategist, W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Howard M. Walters, Program and Evaluation Officer, W.K. Kellogg Foundation

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Appendix D: Examples of Approaches for Providing Alumni Support

Foundation-Administered Model	Alumni Association Model
Purpose: To provide continued support to alumni in their work and provide growth opportunities ***Programmatic Support Elements:*** • Face-to-face convenings (virtual during COVID) • Transition support and coaching available for new roles or to support success on a project • Maintain a document workspace software of consultants to promote their work/services • Newsletter profiling the work of alumni ***Types of Funding to Alumni:*** • Mini-grants: Alumni can access $2K to work with each other (e.g., speak at each other's conferences) • Individual: Professional development funds • Collaborative grants: Up to $25K to work across silos • Subsidized convenings, including stipends for cohort retreats • Consultants (e.g., navigating pandemic) ***Budget: Foundation Funded:*** • Internal staffing costs • Costs of programs offered ***Administration:*** • The foundation runs the alumni program and is responsible for allocating the budget • The foundation sometimes seeks input from an alumni advisory council • In some cases, funding for an alumni liaison	***Purpose:*** To provide support to alumni members through convenings, programs, and opportunities ***Programmatic Support Elements:*** • National and/or local gatherings and conferences • Retreats for program cohorts to stay connected for peer support • Learning session with speakers or peer-based • Provide opportunity to support their leadership program in application review, as mentors or program delivery • Website, in some cases member directory • Announcement of career and consulting opportunities ***Types of Funding to Members:*** • Scholarships for events • Subsidization of events • Alumni projects ***Budget: Support by grants, member dues, and fundraisers:*** • Association staffing • Office and overhead costs • Scholarship funds and event subsidy ***Administration:*** • Fiscal sponsorship of 501(c)(3) or supported by the leadership program • Senior staff and board are primary decision makers, set direction, and implement strategy • Alumni often participate in planning committees for events, fundraisers

Appendix E: Example of a Leadership Alumni Network Approach

Foundation Administered Model

Purpose: To strengthen connectivity within and across cohorts to increase peer learning and collaborative action on systemic problems

Network Elements:

- National, local, and virtual convenings to build relationships and support collaboration on change work
- Member-initiated projects on social impact purpose
- Communities of practice for peer learning
- Focus on culture work: nework values and working in new ways
- Network trainings
- Website, bulletins, and tools that support multidirectional communication among networks (e.g., one network is using a messaging app for this)
- Member-driven engagement and recruitment activities
- Network weaving, often using social network analysis

Types of Funding for Network Members:

- Equity funds to ensure equitable participation
- Project funds
- Subsidies for convenings and for members who take on significant roles in the network (e.g., trainers, facilitators of network bodies)

Budget/Costs (usually foundation funded):

- Staffing, roles for network members, consultants
- Funding for projects
- Technology costs
- Convening costs

Administration:

- May be administered by foundation or their intermediary in strong partnership with alumni
- May be administered by alumni and self-governed
- Workgroups led by members have autonomy in leading their areas of work
- Strong member voice and initiative in direction of the network: bottom-up proposals and actions that support emergent strategy
- Open conversations about equity and power support and to inform network governance

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