

Collaborative Network Analysis

Tapping into Untapped Relationships



Relationships matter. We nurture vibrant communities by working together with our partners, because disciplined collaboration is where lasting change begins to happen. That's why every Georgia Family Connection Collaborative is charged with establishing and sustaining essential partnerships and a dynamic local network, which in turn powers the statewide network.

All communities possess diverse untapped opportunities, and although some have more than others, each Collaborative has the potential to more fully draw out those hidden resources.

A process called Social Network Analysis examines interactions among Collaborative partners to help us better understand and expand on connections that affect systems of services. This process helps Collaboratives visualize, dissect, and analyze the quantity, quality, and strength of member interactions.

Social Network Analysis is beginning to reveal those untapped opportunities by looking at relationships in a new way. Understanding these relationships is critical for us to know where we are now and what we can do to improve collaboration locally and across our statewide network.

This edition of Evaluation Snapshot previews findings from this new evaluation of how Collaborative networks operate. It also provides an overview of Social Network Analysis as a tool that can inform how we function in our communities and as a peer learning network to better understand and build stronger Collaborative partnerships—and implement strategies that improve outcomes for children, families, and communities across the state.

How is Your Collaborative Connected?

Social Network Analysis's targeted approach to identify and connect partners can help any Collaborative's efforts to move forward in embracing a culture grounded in improving measurable outcomes for children, families, and communities. Reliability and trust among partners play a critical role in a thriving Collaborative that produces positive child and family outcomes.

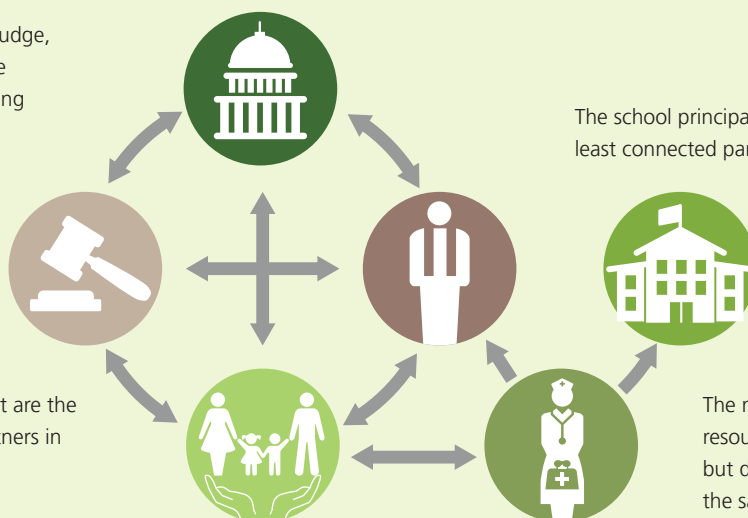
This network visual, for instance, reveals whether relationships among partners are reciprocal—mutual sharing versus one-way sharing, which partner has the most connections, and which has the strongest connections.

Collaboratives can use this deeper understanding of relationships to improve partner engagement and Collaborative effectiveness.

Basic Collaborative Network Demonstrating Connections Among Partners

The county commissioner, judge, social worker, and priest are all interconnected, suggesting mutual collaboration.

The social worker and priest are the most highly connected partners in the Collaborative



The school principal is the least connected partner.

The nurse provides resources to the priest but does not receive the same in return.

Each circle represents an individual partner.

The arrows represent connections to other partners—and to Collaborative work among those partners.

Centrality—the number and closeness of those connections—highlights partners who are integrally connected.

Collaborative Social Network Analysis vs. Self-Assessment Partner Engagement Analysis

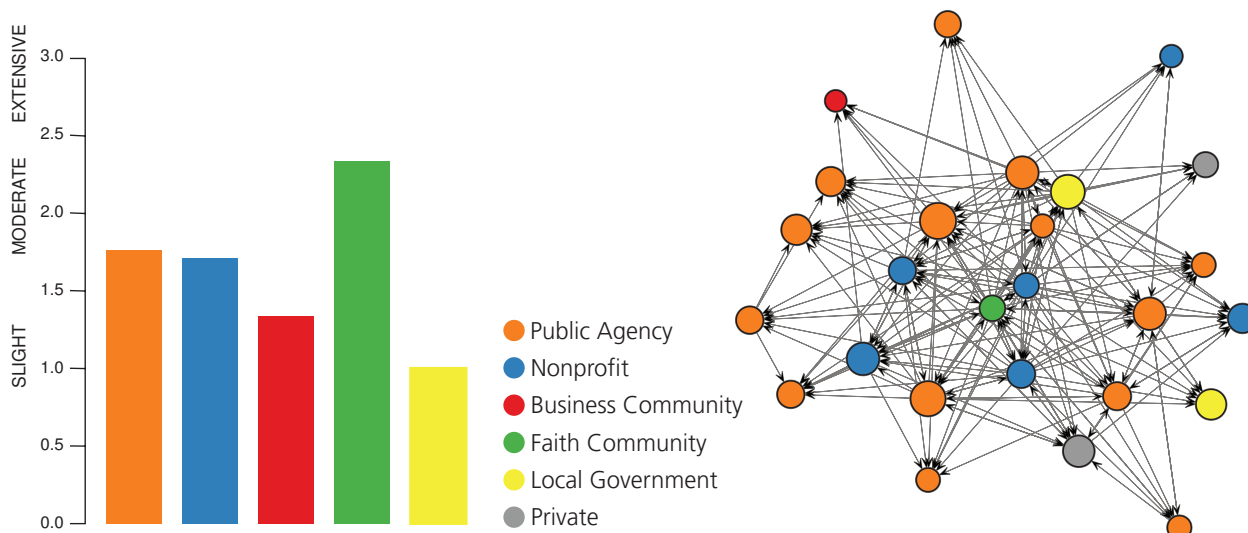
The Partner Engagement Matrix collected from the Cook County Family Connection Self-Assessment analysis shows the Collaborative members represented by five sectors, along with their average participation range—slight, moderate, or extensive.

What this Partner Engagement Matrix does not uncover are unique characteristics about individual partners within each sector, or about their relationships. Without that critical data, one partner's extensive participation in a

Collaborative might be concealed by averaging it with other partners' slight or moderate participation within the same sector.

However, Social Network Analysis evaluation technique gives Collaboratives a closer look at interactions among partners. Network analysis evaluates the strength, number, and nature of connections among each partner organization or individual, whether or not relationships are reciprocal.

Cook County Collaborative Network Visual Demonstrating Partner Rating of Influence by Sector



What can Self-Assessment data tell us about sector engagement?	Community Sector	What else can Collaborative network analysis tell us about sector engagement?
Moderate engagement	Public Agency	Average influence rating overall across sectors Centrality ranging from below average to above average
Moderate engagement	Nonprofit	Average influence rating overall across sectors Centrality ranging from average to above average
Slight engagement	Business Community	Average influence rating overall across sectors Below average centrality
Moderate to extensive engagement	Faith Community	Average influence rating overall across sectors Above average centrality
Slight engagement	Local Government	Average influence rating overall across sectors Centrality ranging from average to above average

Demonstrating Partner Ratings of Influence by Sector

This Cook County Collaborative Network chart, which highlights all the organizations in the Cook County Collaborative working together at least once per quarter, provides detailed information about individual partners and the quality of their relationships with other partners.

The Collaborative network chart shows that each partner's influence varies within and across sectors. Some partners are more influential and some more central than others. The circles are similar in size, which suggests that the Collaborative members tend to regard one another as similarly influential. The number of orange and blue circles shows there are numerous public agency and nonprofit partners. However, the faith community partner plays a central Collaborative role as indicated by the green circle's central position and high number of links with other partners. Paired with the Self-Assessment data that identifies the faith organization as more extensively engaged, this suggests that the faith community is a key player, highly engaged and essentially connected to

other organizations. Collaborative leaders should involve this key partner in future Collaborative initiatives to help connect and involve other organizations.

The red circle indicates that there also is only one partner representing the business sector with a less central, less interconnected role, yet receives an average influence rating. Self-Assessment data confirm the business organization as only slightly engaged. This suggests that the business community is an untapped resource, not highly engaged, but perceived by other organizations to be influential. The Collaborative might benefit from outreach to boost business sector involvement. Such data-driven insights could be used for technical assistance to improve Collaborative functioning by strengthening fragile connections or reaching out to under-involved partners perceived as being influential.

Using Collaborative Network Analysis to Strengthen Collaborative Partnerships, Activities, and Strategy Implementation



These six types of activities are the core elements and primary responsibilities of a functioning Georgia Family Connection Collaborative: working toward measurably better outcomes for our children, families, and communities.

- **Communication**—activities that increase awareness among partners, policymakers, and the public about trends and disparities on child and family well-being; inform planning, budget, and policy decisions that determine the priorities, services, and resources to improve outcomes for children and families; and encourage community members to engage in the work
- **Collaborative Development**—activities that ensure effective Collaborative functioning, strengthen partner relationships, and promote active public support
- **Family Engagement**—activities that promote family involvement, especially in planning and decision-making roles, throughout the Collaborative and partner activities
- **Results Accountability**—activities that document, measure, report, and use findings related to the Collaborative's work and associated changes and outcomes
- **Systems Change**—creative solutions that work to identify and eliminate the barriers, service gaps, and inefficiencies standing in the way of progress and positive outcomes in the community
- **Sustainability**—activities that support and maintain Collaborative functions and the strategies the Collaborative chooses to implement

A seventh type—**Programs and Services**—consists of activities the Collaborative or its partners lead to support and provide programs, services, and events designed to directly serve children, families, and communities.

Collaborative network analysis can be valuable as Collaboratives build stronger partnerships and implement strategies to enable measurably better outcomes.

The following examples show how Collaboratives can use network analysis to strengthen partnerships, activities, and strategy implementation:

Communication

Your Collaborative conducts focus group sessions with public agency and nonprofit sectors and discovers that community leaders indicate a disconnect between services offered and community knowledge of the services. A network analysis of your Collaborative's network shows that most partners regard one another as similarly influential. Given the large number of public agency and nonprofit partners that are engaged in the work, your Collaborative creates an online community resource directory that outlines community agencies, populations served, and services provided. By doing that, partners also receive as much as they are giving to the Collaborative relationship.

Collaborative Development

A network analysis reveals that across sectors, most of your Collaborative's partners are only slightly to moderately engaged. And although the faith community partner is a key player, there is only one representative from the sector. After discussing the findings, Collaborative members reason that its inability to optimize commitment and participation might be adversely affecting child, family, and community outcomes. To address these concerns, your Collaborative establishes strategy teams for planning, implementing, and resourcing programs, activities, and events. Your Collaborative also revamps its meeting agenda, committing to efficiency and effectiveness by limiting meetings to 90 minutes and focusing on fiscal stewardship, strategy team reporting, and future planning. In addition to that, each strategy team recruits at least one member from the faith community to share Collaborative information and requests with the community Ministerial Alliance. The team also develops work-plans that clearly outline responsible parties and dates for task completion.



Family Engagement

Your Collaborative's network analysis exposes a noticeable lack of family representatives as network partners. As a result of these findings, your Collaborative creates a series of Parent Cafes and Kitchen Table Conversations where Collaborative members explore and discover each other's contributions and gifts. Family representation is defined as family members who have received or are receiving community services and are participating in strategic planning and Collaborative decision-making on the Board, Collaborative, and strategy team.

Results Accountability

Your Collaborative's strategy team is focused on positive youth development that has been in place for the past year. Your Collaborative explores the possibility of developing an evaluation system to improve documentation of both strategy activities and results for involved youth and families. The network analysis results show only moderate engagement by the public agency sector; and the local college is not among the moderately engaged members of this sector. Strategy team members agree to identify and recruit a partner with solid relationships at the local college to reach out to several professors and identify a mechanism for students and professors to help build and implement a meaningful evaluation system.

Systems Change

Your Collaborative's annual data review exposes an increase in the number of students absent 15 or more days. After reviewing data for each county school, results show that while one elementary and one high school's numbers remained stable over the past year, school absences at the county's only middle school tripled. Middle school administrators attribute the elevated school absences to an increase in chronic childhood asthma complications. According to your Collaborative network analysis, there is only slight Collaborative participation among the local government, public health, and school system, and moderate participation among nonprofit providers and the health care sector. As a first step, your Collaborative forms a health care strategy team, with one of its strongest partners, the health clinic director, serving as chair. Over the course of the year, the strategy team recruits partners, examines data, and proposes solutions. As a result, a nurse practitioner provides medical care at the newly opened middle school health clinic for students and their families. The clinic is self-funded through Medicaid reimbursements, private pay, and community donations.

Sustainability

For the past three years, your Collaborative has served as the lead implementing partner for the county's Teen Court, a positive youth development strategy to reduce juvenile incarceration. After learning that federal funding would cease at the end of the next fiscal year, the strategy team meets to develop a sustainability work plan. The team's first step in developing the work plan centered on examining your Collaborative's network analysis to identify partners that might have a vested interest in the Teen Court's continuation, and to determine the identified partners' strongest community connections and resources. The network analysis reveals that the faith community partner—highly engaged, integrally connected, and mission-driven to positively affect community change—would be the ideal partner to lead the effort.

Programs and Services

The librarian at your county library, who also serves as a Collaborative member, notices that a large number of the county's children are coming in after school and staying until parents pick them up when they get off work. Recognizing that this is the children's only alternative in a county where no structured after-school programming is available in the county, she asks your Collaborative to look into sponsoring a Boys & Girls Club to address this youth development issue. After researching the start-up process and costs, your Collaborative concludes that it would take both money and community support to open the doors. The network analysis brings to light that local government is only slightly engaged, and although strong relationships exist with the county chair and commissioners, three other city municipalities are not members of your Collaborative. Beyond that, two large manufacturing plants that are viewed as influential in the county and employ more than 1,000 workers are disconnected from the community and your partners, rarely supporting any Collaborative strategies. As a first step, your Collaborative identifies partners who have strong relationships with the missing critical parties to engage in one-on-one informational and invitational discussions.

Thinking Differently

Think about influence and connectivity beyond how you have in the past. Think about the way connections can yield new opportunities in your county. Think differently about what partners can bring to your Collaborative table and ways you can better leverage relationships in your work toward measurably better outcomes for children, families, and communities.

Part two of this three-part series will explore the dimensions of partner engagement, including centrality, cooperation, and coordination.



GEORGIA
family connection
PARTNERSHIP

What we at Georgia Family Connection do is vital, because everything we do is aimed at improving conditions and prospects of families in every community across the state. We work toward measurably better outcomes for all Georgians. Evaluation Snapshot examines how collaboration among our partners affects indicators of child, family, and community well-being. Snapshots are taken from reports by the Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) Outcomes Team, a group of researchers from EMSTAR Research, Metis Associates, Georgia State University, and GaFCP.

GaFCP is a public-private nonprofit created and funded by the state of Georgia and investors from the private sector. We support Georgia Family Connection, a statewide network of collaborative organizations in all 159 counties committed to improving the quality of life for children and families—the only one of its kind in the nation.

Please send questions or comments to Steve Erickson at eval@gafcp.org.

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