



NETWORK  
IMPACT

# Day 1: ECRN Annual Meeting

## The Network Advantage

October | 2023



# 1. Welcome!

# We work with a broad range of networks on a spectrum of issues

Over a decade of experience serving social-change agents with a mix of strategies, tools, research, and consulting expertise to design and use networks for increased impact. [www.networkimpact.org](http://www.networkimpact.org)

## Types of networks:

- Domestic/international
- Single sector/multi-sector
- Single funder/multi-funder
- Individuals and/or organizations
- Small and large
- Place based/not place-based

## Issues:

- Rural policy
- Healthy communities
- Homelessness prevention
- Place-based civic engagement
- Secondary and post-secondary education
- Early childhood development





## **Goal for today (*and tomorrow!*)**

To develop a shared understanding of what it takes for regional ECD networks to reach their goals *as networks* and achieve collective impact in the ECD field.

**With our  
time today...**

- **Welcome and goals**
- **Core network concepts and capacities**
  - Network Advantage
  - Connectivity - Alignment - Production
- **Connecting, aligning and producing outcomes in regions**



Think of a successful network that you know well (*but that is not your own!*)

What are three key factors that contribute to the network's success?

*Take 2 minutes to consider an example to share with the group.*



# 2. Core concepts

# What is a social *impact* network?

Individuals and/or organizations who join together *as peers* to advance a social good

## Social impact networks come in many shapes and sizes

Choices about how the network is constructed are driven by the network's **goal** and a **theory of change** about how to use a network to get there.



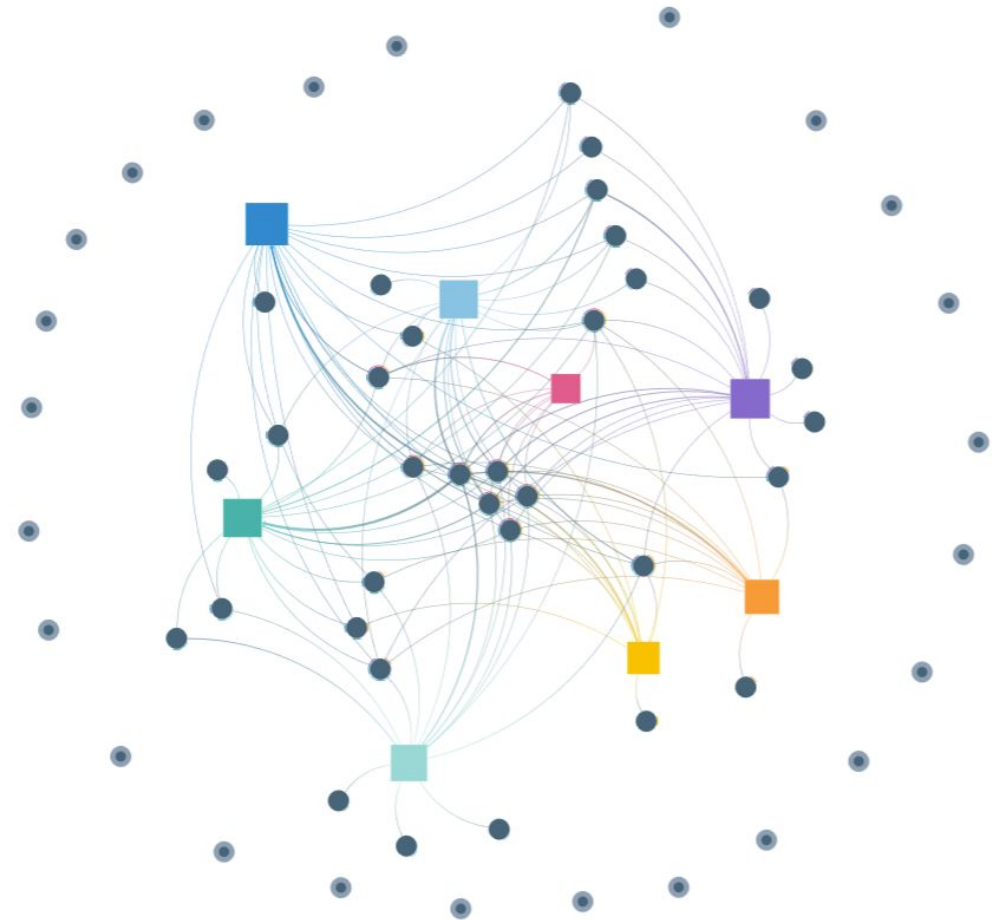


# What is a generative social impact network?

**Generative network:** a set of relationships that are maintained *over time* to activate as needed. Members are deliberate about building, strengthening, and maintaining ties.

Generative social impact networks well-suited for situations where the problem you are trying to solve...

- Has no clear recipe or formula for success
- Is evolving and requires that solutions evolve with it
- Cannot be addressed effectively by any single individual or organization
- Cuts across sectors or fields of practice in which actors typically operate



# The Power of Networks

**Access**

**Resilience**

**Learning &  
Innovation**

**Impact**



# Early ECRN network advantage outcomes\*

## Access

BUILDING THE CROSS-SECTOR CONNECTIONS NEEDED FOR ECD TO ADVANCE

## Access

CARVING OUT A SPACE FOR GOVERNMENT CONNECTION, CAPACITY BUILDING AND ENGAGEMENT

## Resilience

LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR EFFECTIVE CRISIS RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

## Learning

EXPANDING REACH AND CAPACITY THROUGH NATIONAL NETWORK BUILDING

## Learning

LINKING THE GROUND TO THE GLOBAL

## Impact

CREATING READINESS FOR EFFECTIVE POLICY CHANGE

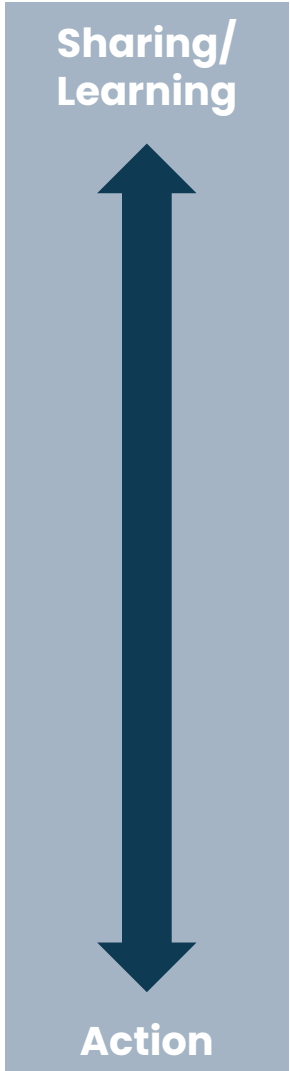
## Impact

MAINSTREAMING ECD AS A PUBLIC SECTOR IMPERATIVE

\*These seven primary outcomes achieved regional ECD networks are described in greater detail in the full report: [How Regional Networks Catalyze Early Childhood Development](#)

# Generative networks v. other collective action models

Type	Definition	Key Capabilities
<b>Learning Community/ Community of Practice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning communities are groups of people interacting to exchange knowledge or personal information.</li> <li>Communities of Practice are a specialized type of learning community; members share a discipline, set of problems, or passion about a specific topic.</li> </ul>	Loosely coordinate and episodically collaborate to deepen knowledge and expertise by focusing on particular challenges or opportunities; does not have a strong shared identity or participant commitments to each other beyond the specific work
<b>Membership Association</b>	A set of individuals or entities that formally join an entity, meeting eligibility and participation standards, obtain services from staff, and shape the entity's activities	More staff driven, pooling of resources for shared services, such as professional development, setting standards, or policy representation
<b>Alliance/Coalition</b>	A temporary alignment of individuals, organizations, parties, or states focused entirely on a specific desired result (e.g. policy adoption)	Joint action towards a specific outcome or objective (such as electing a candidate or securing public policy); usually disbands when the effort has been completed
<b>Generative Social Impact Network</b>	<b>A highly connected, tightly aligned set of individuals and/or organizations that works together, adapts over time, and generates a sustained flow of activities and outputs to solve a defined social problem</b>	<b>Form a platform for multiple, ongoing impacts (rather than a single outcome); has renewable collaborative capacity; often evolves towards co-production over time.</b>
<b>Movement</b>	Large numbers of people loosely aligned around a large cause (e.g., civil rights, environmental protection). A desire to right a wrong ignites their passion.	Less coherent, focused and coordinated—and much larger and sprawling—than a generative social network. A movement may contain networks; networks may spawn a movement.



# Network mindset

Participants see themselves as one part of a larger web of activity directed toward a cause, not as the hub of the action  
 –Jane Wei-Skillern

From	To
Focus on growth	Focus on mission
Focus on control	Focus on trust
Focus on yourself	Focus on others
Focus on garnering resources	Focus on sharing resources
Focus on the particular	Focus on the whole



# Network-minded leaders

Organizational Leadership	Network Leadership
Position, authority	Role, behavior
Few leaders	Everyone is a leader in some way
Leaders broadcast	Leaders engage
Small group in the know	Openness and transparency
Directive	Emergent
Top down	Bottom up
Leaders ensure tasks are completed	Leaders help identify breakthrough/opportunities
Planning	Innovation and experimentation

# Value propositions

Value Proposition (VP)= The benefits that members seek from their participation in a network.

- Individual VP: benefits to individual members
- Collective VP: benefits produced by working together that could not be achieved separately

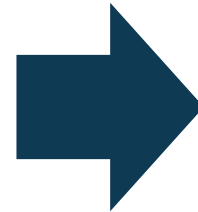
*Members typically have multiple value propositions and their value propositions often shift over time*



# Example: *VPs changing over time signal new capacity needs and gaps*

*When I joined the network I needed...*

- Support for services and programs
- Strengthened position in the local ecosystem
- Support for my organisation's early growth/pilot phase
- Support for scaling up projects
- Validation/professionalization
- Funding



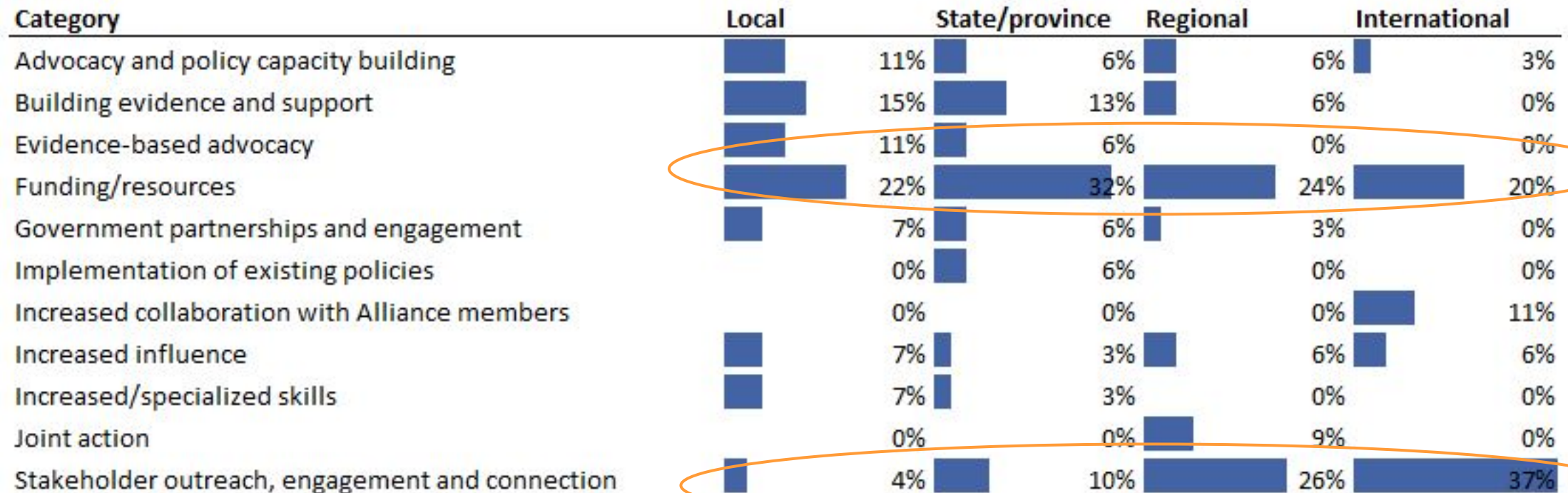
*Now I need...*

- Connections to partners/funders
- Strengthened ties to other network members
- New evidence of impact
- Innovation, new models for service delivery
- Support for joint projects/collaboration
- Support for sustainability
- Support for exchanging best practices and addressing barriers



# Example: VPs for different strategic initiatives signal different capacity needs and gaps

Members in this network identified advocacy and policy change at the local, state, regional and international levels as core value propositions for the network going forward. The network was interested in how to support more advocacy and in a survey, they asked members what they needed. They learned that funding and resources were more critical at the country and regional levels, and partnerships and engagement with stakeholders were more important at the regional and international level. This gave network organizers information about the different kinds of support their members needed.

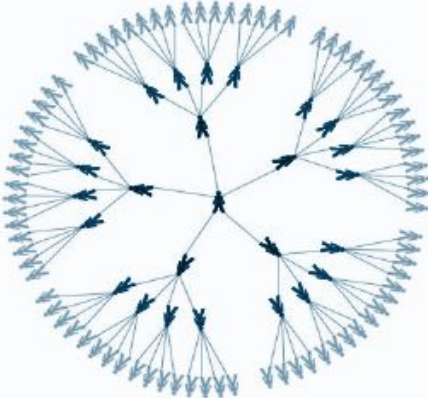


# Network structures

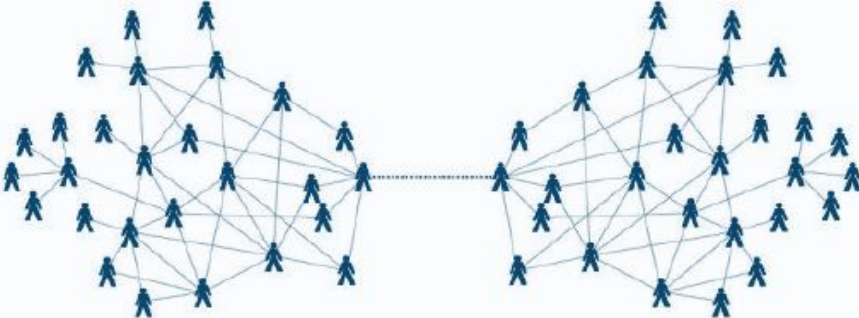
### Assembling diverse capacities



### Expanding reach



### Creating bridges between clusters



# Network structures

For ECD, where cross-sector connections are critical, the ability to both support dense clusters and bridge between them is critical. Also critical is for networks to be organized to ensure that members' diverse capacities are leveraged to both increase capacity, as well as produce new ideas and solutions.

## **Structural features of networks make them powerful vehicles for promoting change:**

- Efficiency: connect and coordinate resources
- Effectiveness: spread promising practices
- Innovation: bring diverse perspectives to find solutions

## **Key questions:**

- How efficient are the connections the network makes?
- How dependent is the network on a small number of individuals?
- Is structure adjusted to meet changing network needs and priorities?

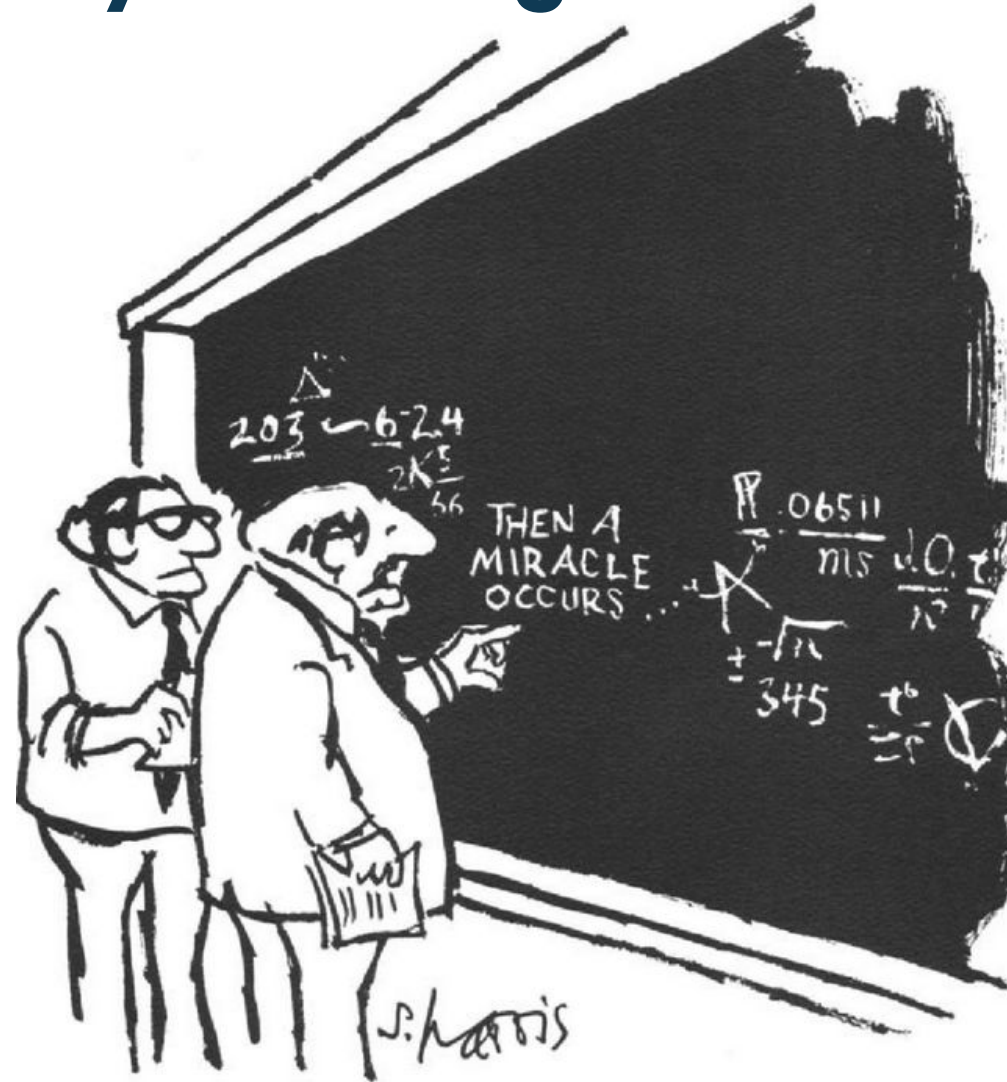
## **Structure Matters:**

- Highly connected "hubs" are effective in spreading ideas and connections
- "Dense clusters" are ideal for close collaboration and peer exchange
- "Boundary spanners" are people well positioned to make connections across clusters, bridging different segments of a network

## **Strong and weak ties:**

- Strong ties in closely knit networks are a source of valuable social capital
- Weak ties provide access to external assets
- Outliers (nodes on the periphery of a network) often have access to ideas and information that people at the core do not.

# Network Theory of Change

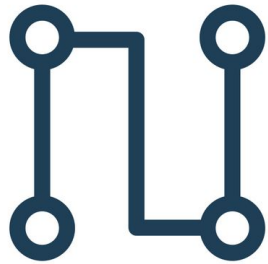


"I THINK YOU SHOULD BE MORE EXPLICIT HERE IN STEP TWO."

# Network Theory of Change



Organizing social impact networks should be oriented by a common understanding of the network's purpose that is shared by members and other key stakeholders including funders, any consultants who play an important role, and the network's backbone or secretariat.



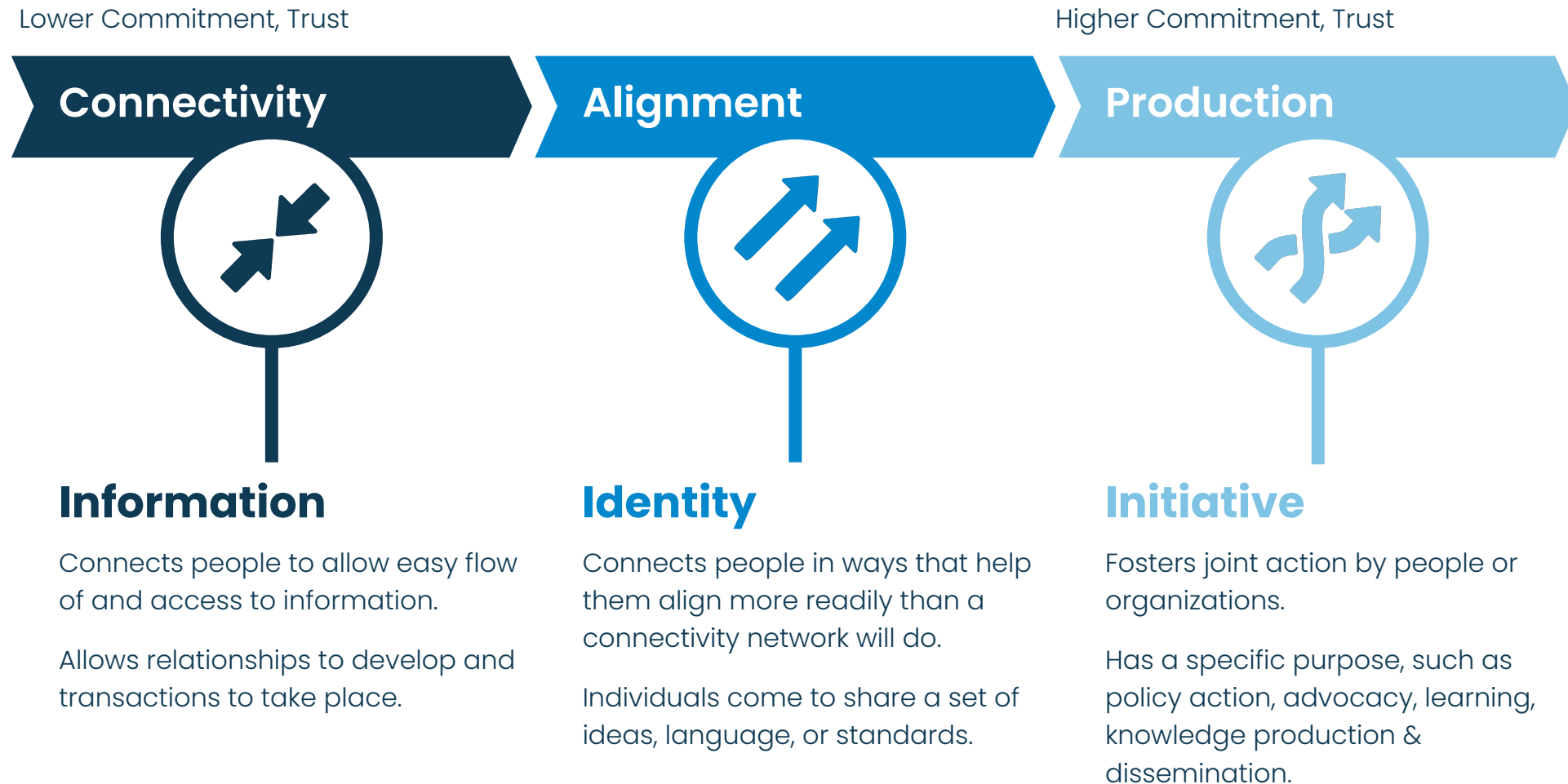
**Without tethering network organizing to outcomes and benchmarks using an agreed-upon Theory of Change, there is a risk that members will focus narrowly on process at the expense of progress. Having a theory of change is critical for networks to engage in continuous learning and improvement. Network's need to monitor more than programmatic outcomes and the process of implementing programs. Effective networks knit together many types of activities strategically to advance larger initiatives, which are designed to achieve specific goals.**






# 3. Using C-A-P as a network building foundation

# Networks have three basic functions

All networks have a connectivity function; some networks also have an alignment function; other networks aim for connectivity and alignment, as well as production. In addition, these three functions build on each other – you can't have alignment without having connectivity, and you won't reach the levels of trust and strong relationships needed for joint action in a production network without first focusing on alignment.

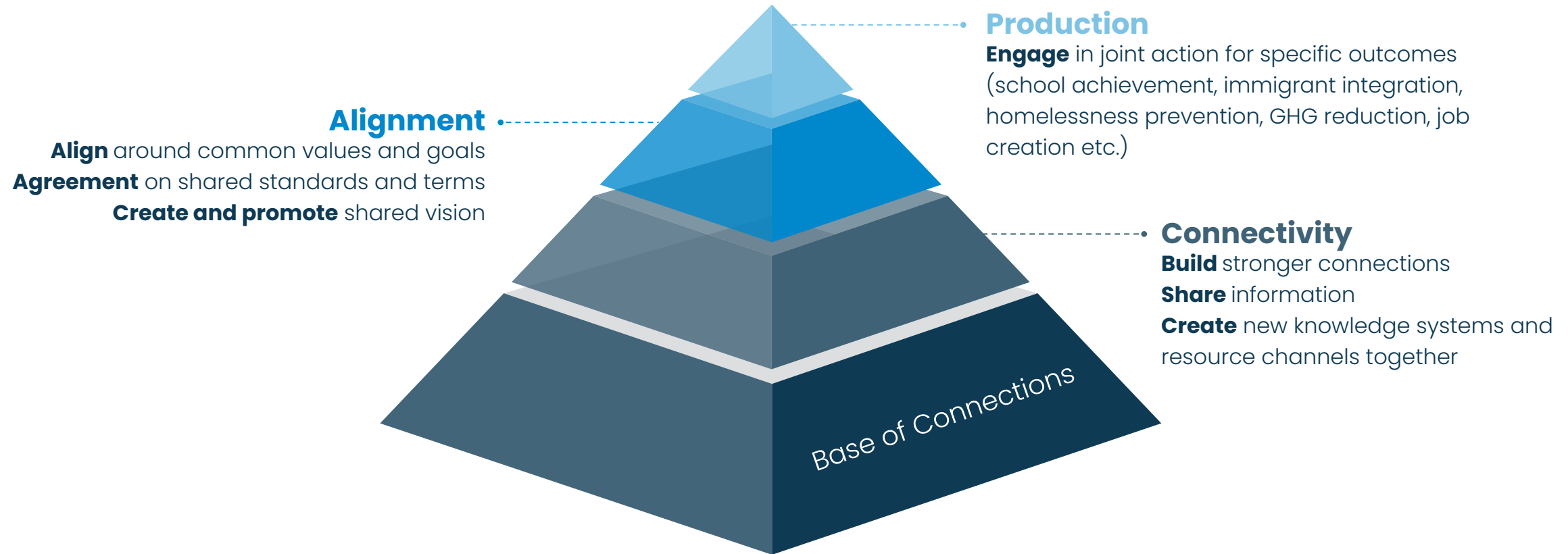


# Implementing C-A-P has implications for network organizers and network infrastructure

	 <b>Connectivity</b>	 <b>Alignment</b>	 <b>Production</b>
<b>Membership</b>	Few eligibility rules	Some eligibility rules	Stricter eligibility rules
<b>Key task of network “builder”</b>	Weaving – help people meet each other, increase ease of sharing and searching for information	Facilitating – helping people to explore potential shared identity and value propositions	Coordinating – helping people plan and implement collaborative actions
<b>Enabling Infrastructure</b>	Web platform with networking tools for communications, documents	Capacity to analyze, compare, and synthesize frameworks, definitions, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Project management and project budgeting capacity</li> <li>- Performance accountability mechanisms</li> </ul>



# Evolution of network functions





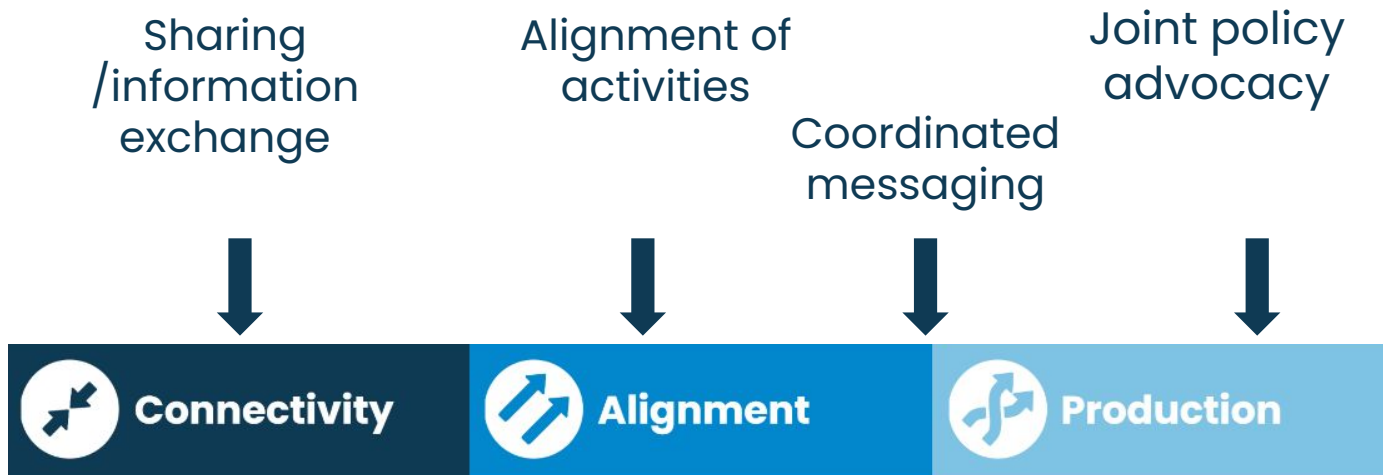
**WHO:**

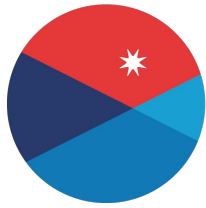
160+ nonprofits and funders in upper Midwest

**WHAT:**

Reduce global warming pollution economy-wide 80% by 2050

**HOW:**





PARTNERSHIP  
FOR THE  
**FUTURE of  
LEARNING**

## WHO:

A diverse network of 700 education and social justice field leaders from 300+ organizations and 20 foundations committed to an equitable, high-quality, public education system.

## WHAT:

Align partners around a common set of strategies including promoting policies to strengthen public education and calling attention to schools that are making learning rigorous, relevant, engaging, and available for every student

## HOW:

Exploratory Groups for peer learning and exchange

Working Groups that align partners broadly around priority strategies

Coordinating Group identifies opportunities for greater synergy across the network



**Connectivity**

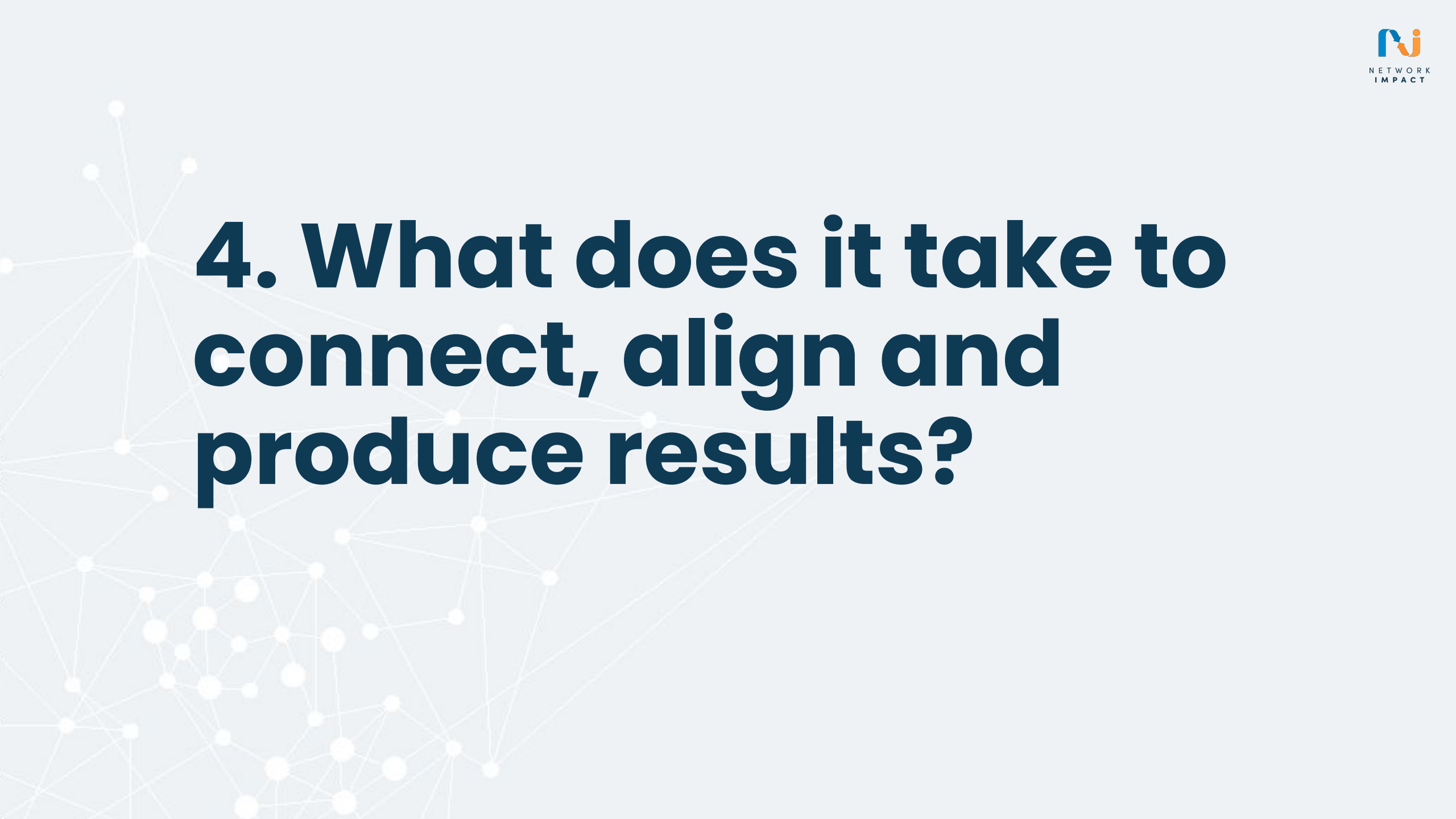


**Alignment**



**Production**





**4. What does it take to connect, align and produce results?**

# Network health, resources and capacities: Example

This activity...	Requires these resources by members and/or backbone...	Includes these actions by backbone and/or members...	Requires these network capacities...
<p><b>Exchanging Information with each other for peer learning</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared interest</li> <li>• Time to exchange information and discuss</li> <li>• “Opt in” by participants (low risk &amp; commitment)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify high-priority interests</li> <li>• Clarify interest at a level of specificity</li> <li>• Identify those with good information</li> <li>• Prepare “presenters”</li> <li>• Set sufficient time for discussion</li> <li>• Facilitate sharing/discussion around what <i>others</i> want to know</li> <li>• Have opportunities for continued exploration</li> <li>• Post presentations/discussion notes</li> <li>• Identify “lessons learned” and cases that might be valuable for others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity to support processes that allow members to define, develop and maintain shared interest.</li> <li>• Backbone staff time, online directory where members can search for and find each other, scheduling and administrative support,</li> <li>• Network weaving to connect members with similar interests or issues to address</li> </ul>

# Network health, resources and capacities: Example

This activity...	Requires these resources by members and/or backbone...	Includes these actions by backbone and/or members...	Requires these network capacities...
<p><b>Aligning with each other</b>            (e.g., agreeing on a policy agenda )</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared interest</li> <li>• Time to develop &amp; refine/negotiate shared ideas, language, and understand different points of view</li> <li>• May need facilitation</li> <li>• May need research</li> <li>• Time/capacity to draft agreement</li> <li>• “Opt in” and “stay in” by participants (medium risk &amp; commitment)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify high-priority, high-value interests and targets</li> <li>• Define core terms</li> <li>• Clarify how agreement/consensus will be reached</li> <li>• Openness, willing to learn, on part of participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitation to help members explore potential shared identity and value propositions</li> <li>• Capacity to analyze, compare, and synthesize frameworks, definitions, etc.</li> </ul>

# Network health, resources and capacities: Example

This activity...	Requires these resources by members and/or backbone...	Includes these actions by backbone and/or members...	Requires these network capacities...
<b>Producing a shared outcome</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared interest</li> <li>• Set goals, timetable</li> <li>• May require facilitation</li> <li>• Time/effort to acquire resources—funding, capacity</li> <li>• Process management &amp; coordination with production schedule</li> <li>• Time for joint decision-making &amp; guidance</li> <li>• “Stay in” and “produce” by participants (high risk &amp; commitment)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify high priority, high-value, “we want to make it happen” interests</li> <li>• Maintain participants’ engagement—don’t outsource to staff/manager</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination capacity to help members plan and implement collaborative actions</li> <li>• Project management and project budgeting capacity</li> <li>• Performance accountability mechanisms</li> </ul>

# Where do you think the greatest need is in the ECD field – Connectivity, Alignment or Production, and why?





# 5 min break!





# 5. Connecting, aligning and producing results in regions

# Format

In this section, each network will talk about some of the successful work they have been able to accomplish as a result of ECRN funding.

We'll start with an example, and then facilitate a discussion with each network's leaders about their work.



**The network continued its learning forum, which was co-designed by Learning Groups and based on ECD priorities, in order to refine strategy and concretely discuss advocacy priorities.**

The network learned more about *HOW* members learn from each other in order to design future programming to strengthen national networks and ARNEC's collective ability to drive change. As a result of the forum, both country-level and regional-level commitments were made to increase ARNEC's strategic focus, including climate campaigns.

**Discussion questions:**

1. How did ARNEC engage its learning groups to help co-design the Forum?
2. What kind of action items or commitments did members make as a result of the forum?
3. What capacities led to these successes? Did the Forum build on other work by ARNEC?

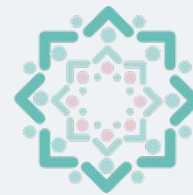


## **AfECN used the flexibility provided by the fund to go beyond the limitations of other funders and expand critical work across the region.**

- As a continental network, AfECN, needed to expand its work outside of countries covered by existing grants. For example, funding was available to support collaboration with the ECSA-HC that convenes the Health Ministers but with additional flexibility, AfECN was able to cross-reference the same issues with West Africa (WAHO), scaling up the impact the initiative could have.
- Since 2019, there have been conversations about intentionally connecting education, health and child protection departments to support integrated ECD programming at the African Union. In 2023, an opportunity arose to form a nurturing care task force, a key mechanism to advance the work. AfECN now has the resources to advance a more integrated approach to ECD.

### **Discussion questions:**

1. For the initiative with health ministers in both east and west Africa, what will success look like?
2. What kinds of resources does it take to scale impact in the region?
3. Are there other examples where AfECN has used flexible resources to do more/better?



**ANECD held a first-ever regional forum, which brought in representation from the diverse countries in the region that the network serves – 65 people from 14 Arab countries, including ministries of health, education and social services.**

They also engaged academicians, I/NGOs, and leading global experts in the various session formats chaired and moderated by the network members. Almost all of the presentations and program examples were from members in different countries, and that was the first opportunity many of them had to collaborate on strategic interventions & development and learn from each other.

**Discussion questions:**

1. What did it mean to ECD stakeholders in the region to have this type of opportunity? What did it mean for ministry representatives?
2. How was the secretariat team able to lead and organize the work, and engage members in different leadership roles during the forum?



INTERNATIONAL  
**STEP by STEP**  
ASSOCIATION

## **The ISSA Secretariat facilitated and increased network learning and collaboration, leveraged network relationships and knowledge, catalysed partnerships, and mobilized resources in response to the war in Ukraine.**

- The ISSA network strengthened a thematic learning community around the Primokiz methodology, with a total of 45 municipalities in 6 countries able to develop data-driven strategies for identifying and delivering meaningful services to young children and their families, and with a focus on the most vulnerable and benefits for all children.
- In Ukraine and several neighbouring countries, the ISSA network quickly launched a training on Psychological First Aid for 200 Master Trainers, who in turn are training thousands of practitioners; the Secretariat also channelled millions of dollars and in-kind support to members and grassroots organisations, including 14,000 laptops and 950,000 storybooks.

### **Discussion questions:**

1. What did it mean to ECD stakeholders in the region to have this type of opportunity? What did it mean for ministry representatives?
2. How was the secretariat team able to lead and organize the work, and engage members in different leadership roles during the forum?



**At the outset of the session we talked about factors for successful networks. What additional factors can you identify from the work in regions?**



# Thank you!

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