HANDOUT → Why Networks?

1. Effective networks improve information flow

Effective networks **enhance the flow of information** so that people are aware of events that are happening, new resources, and new ideas. When people know each other, they are more likely to share information. With more information, people can often improve their programs, projects, and services.

2. Effective networks increase communication and awareness of relationships

Effective networks **improve communication and increase the productivity of interactions**. People tend to limit their interactions to people like themselves. An effective network helps people connect to people from different types of organizations, different backgrounds, or different parts of the world. As a result of these new relationships, people gain broader perspectives and often generate better solutions.

3. Effective networks open new resources

Effective networks **open new resources**. There are often many hidden resources in any network. When you take time to identify needs of individuals and organizations in the network, you can then introduce the individual with a need to someone who can fill that need by providing information, funding, space, etc. In addition, you can encourage people to reach out on their own to build new relationships that will provide resources in an ongoing manner.

4. Effective networks expand and support leadership

Effective networks **build and enhance leadership**. Networks contain many hidden leaders – people that others look to for ideas or information or those who are connecting people in separate communities but who are not recognized as leaders. Once identified, you can help such individuals think about their role and encourage other leaders in the community to recognize the important role these hidden leaders are playing. With additional leadership, the community will be more resilient and less vulnerable to the loss of any one leader.

5. Effective networks encourage collaboration, innovation, and learning for breakthroughs

Effective networks **encourage collaboration and innovation** that result in action that makes a difference. Individuals in effective networks identify opportunities where joint action could make a difference, then bring people together to cook up a project. Once network participants have seen or been part of successful collaborations, they begin to generate new collaborations without assistance. Eventually people are part of many joint projects at any one time, which enables them to spread innovations generated in one project throughout the network. Also, being part of so many collaborations tends to expand people's perspectives and generate breakthroughs.

6. Effective networks increase inclusion and bridge divides

Effective networks **build bridges** across traditional divides. Network maps enable people to identify sub-groups that are isolated from the parts of the network that have resources and access, then identify and work with individuals who can help bridge the divide by bringing together people from both groups.

7. Effective networks result in better outcomes

Effective networks result in **better outcomes** for individual change: behavioral change occurs most often when an individual is embedded in effective networks. Preliminary research shows that people dealing with complex, intractable problems have more success in effective networks.

8. Effective networks facilitate scale and impact

Effective networks enable us to bring together large numbers of people and organizations to impact a problem or create a new opportunity. Effective networks mean we can experiment with new approaches and then share the results of those approaches with many others. In this way, we can identify **patterns of success** and share those aspects of our approaches with many others so that their strategies contain some of these same elements.