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Identifying and Describing the Network of Health, Education, and Social Service Non-Profit Organizations in Southern Nevada

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About the Authors

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Anna Smedley, M.S.W., is a student in the Sociology PhD program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She is completing her dissertation on variation in occupational mobility among white, black, Mexican, Puerto Rican and Cuban women over the past three decades. Since 2007 Anna has been involved in on-going diversity and community engagement initiatives that aim to create a college-going culture in southern Nevada, increase access to higher education for underrepresented groups, and create a more inclusive campus environment. She is interested in racial and ethnic variations in social mobility and teaching for social justice.

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The authors wish to thank The Lincy Institute at UNLV for providing funding and technical support for this project and the Department of Sociology at UNLV for providing computing support. Special thanks to graduate research assistants in the Lincy Institute for their help in locating contact information for the non-profit organizations and to Robert Lang, Lucy Klinkhammer, Alexandra Nikolich, Fatma Nasoz, Sonya Horsford, Ramona Denby Brinson, and Denise Tanata Ashby for their feedback on the research plan and survey design and their assistance with identifying the pool of eligible non-profit organizations in Clark County.
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Introduction and Summary of Findings

Many of the economic, social, and demographic issues facing southern Nevada are dynamic and interrelated, requiring a coordinated approach on the part of southern Nevada’s non-profit community. The coordination of services, skills, and talents enables community needs to be addressed in ways that exceed the scope and capacity of any single organization. With the increasing desire of funding organizations to support collaborative efforts, maintaining sustainable connections between southern Nevada’s non-profit organizations is needed now more than ever before.

This is the first comprehensive study of southern Nevada’s health, education, and social service non-profit network. Via a web-based survey of nearly 300 executive directors and other leaders of health, education, and social service related non-profit organizations, we were able to conduct a social network analysis to identify the structure of the non-profit network as well as the positions of individual organizations within that network. We found that southern Nevada’s non-profit network is not very dense, but that this is partly because of the vast size of the network (460 organizations were identified). The largest organizations are well connected, but there are opportunities for developing more connections across organizations of all sizes and sectors. Our findings show that the average organization is connected with 10 other non-profit organizations in southern Nevada, but there are also a number of isolates (i.e., completely disconnected organizations).

In terms of overall participation and activity, influence, access to information and resources, and ability to mobilize the non-profit community, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), United Way of Southern Nevada (UWSN), HELP of Southern Nevada, Catholic Charities, Three Square, the Clark County School District, Goodwill of Southern Nevada, and Opportunity Village consistently ranked highly. However, there were also a number of smaller organizations that we found to be important brokers and connectors, and these organizations can be used as models for helping to build the capacity of lower-budget and lesser-resourced organizations in the community.

When asked about barriers to collaboration, survey respondents indicated lack of funding and resources, perceptions of territorially and competition, the need for training, concern about lack of data availability and usage, the desire for more networking opportunities, and critiques of leadership. However, respondents’ comments also reflected hope and promise for the future of the non-profit community in southern Nevada. Based upon our findings, we have provided some suggestions for building sustainable inter-organizational collaborations at the end of this report.

Need for Project

There is a need within southern Nevada to manage non-profit organizations efficiently and effectively and to augment non-profit organizations’ abilities to build adaptive programs,
successfully compete for federal and foundational grant funding, and effectively serve the residents of southern Nevada. To date, no systematic study has been done to examine collaborations among southern Nevada’s non-profit organizations. Evidence generated through this project can help guide the development of optimal strategies to improve non-profit organizational cooperation, collaboration, and performance related to social, health, and educational outcomes.

**Purpose and Overview**

The purpose of this project was to identify the structure of nonprofit health, education, and social service networks with a special emphasis on identifying the nonprofit “leaders” in southern Nevada. Nonprofit leaders are those who influence the opinions, motivations, and/or behaviors of other organizations and stakeholders. These are the agencies that “make things happen.” Leadership, most often discussed in the context of individual opinion leadership and the diffusion of innovations model can be applied to the nonprofit sector to identify which organizations are the most active within southern Nevada’s nonprofit network, which organizations have the greatest access to information and resources, and which organizations can serve as brokers, intermediaries, and innovators of development and change.

**Research Methods**

**Sample and Research Tools**

The primary research tool used in this study was a web-based survey administered to Executive Directors and other leaders of health, education, and social service non-profit organizations located in Clark County, NV. The survey and research plan were developed via a collaborative effort between the study’s principal investigator, The Lincy Institute Scholars, and the Executive Director of The Lincy Institute.

The study consisted of three components: 1) a pre-survey focus group with southern Nevada non-profit leaders and funders, 2) the dissemination of a pilot survey to a sample of 40 organizations, and 3) the dissemination of the final survey to all health, education, and social service organizations that we were able to identify through multiple strategies.

Once the research team completed a draft of the survey instrument, we distributed the survey to five key informants who were selected based upon their knowledge about the southern Nevada non-profit community, roles in leadership positions, and experience with developing and maintaining collaborations. Through the information we collected from a focus group with four of these leaders and a telephone interview with the fifth leader, we edited the survey instrument to include the content that would enable us to achieve an empirically sound response rate and obtain valid and reliable data.
The list of organizations that would receive surveys was obtained through multiple sources. First, The Lincy Institute purchased a list of non-profit organizations from the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) based upon IRS data from 2010. We then filtered out any organizations that did not provide health, education, or social services or who did not provide funding or governance for organizations providing services in those categories. The list was supplemented with additional non-profit organizations that were identified by The Lincy Institute Scholars and graduate research assistants, including organizations that began after 2010. Because the contact information was out-of-date or missing for most organizations, the study’s principal investigator and graduate research assistants attempted to obtain current contact information for all Executive Directors, coordinators, or similar leaders through program websites, emails, and phone calls. Organizations that were not included in the initial waves of email invitations but who were identified as connections by initial organizations were sent surveys in subsequent waves until we felt we had reached a point of moderate saturation.

We emailed surveys via the Qualtrics web-based survey program to one representative (typically the Executive Director) at 40 pilot organizations in September of 2012. Based upon the results of the pilot survey, we made no major changes to the survey instrument and full survey dissemination occurred between October 2012 and April 2013. In total, 515 organizations, including the pilot organizations, were identified through our multiple sample identification strategies, including being identified as a connection by respondents who completed surveys. After eliminating organizations that did not fit the inclusion criteria (e.g., were not located in southern Nevada, did not provide health, education, or social services, or were not non-profit organizations), 460 total organizations were identified as connections within the southern Nevada non-profit network. Among those 460, after eliminating organizations for which we could not locate valid contact information after exhausting all sources, we were left with 390 eligible organizations. Out of those 390 organizations, we obtained surveys from 298 for a total response rate of 76% (298/390) and a total saturation rate of 65% (298/460). We sent five reminder emails to non-responders. Potential respondents were offered an incentive of entry into a drawing to win a tablet PC if they completed and returned the survey. At the end of the survey administration, we awarded tablet PCs to four organizations.

The research protocol was approved by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Analysis
Social network analysis (SNA) is a distinctive method designed to map, measure, and analyze the complex relationships that occur between people, groups, and organizations. Using mathematical algorithms and appropriate software designed specifically for network analysis, we can examine information and resource flows, levels of cooperation and collaboration, and overall patterns of relationships between non-profit organizations and how those patterns facilitate or constrain the overall functioning of southern Nevada's non-profit network. Accordingly, in addition to basic statistics describing the sample, we have also provided the results of our network analyses, including sociograms and sociometric statistics that describe
the network positions of selected individual organizations (e.g., organizational centrality) as well as characteristics of the entire non-profit network (e.g., network density).

**Identifying and Describing the Non-profit Network in Southern Nevada**

**Organizational Characteristics**

We asked respondents to identify some characteristics about their organizations, including years of operation, number of employees, annual operating budget, and types of services provided. Results are presented below. When a respondent did not identify the start year of the organization, we attempted to locate that information via the organization’s webpage or GuideStar. The sample sizes vary across each of the figures below due to a varying non-response rate on each of the items.

![Figure 1: Year Organization Began, N=387](image)

As demonstrated in Figure 1, the non-profit community in southern Nevada is young; 47.5% of organizations were started in 2000 or later. Over 78% of health, education, and social service non-profit organizations in southern Nevada are under 35 years old.

Most organizations operate with small budgets (under $1,000,000), as shown in Figure 2 below. Thirty-four percent of respondents indicated that their annual operating budget is less than $250,000 with another 13.7% reporting an operating budget of $250,000-500,000. However, nearly 20% of respondents reported annual operating budgets of $5,000,000 or more. These are mostly government organizations, funders, and the largest private non-profit organizations.
Most organizations are also quite small; more than half of respondents (53.8%) reported having 10 or fewer employees. About 12% of organizations employed 11-30 people, 9.3% employ 31-50, and just under a quarter of organizations employ 51 people or more. See Figure 3.
The majority of non-profit organizations we surveyed (74.1%) provide direct services to clients with the rest providing funding, governance, or other non-direct services (Figure 4). Types of services are presented in Figure 5. Almost 17% reported providing primary, secondary, or higher education services, about 13% provide physical health services, 12% provide mental health services, and 34% provide social services. Note that there is some overlap between these categories; categories of service provision are not mutually exclusive. Nearly half of all respondents indicated that they provide ‘other’ services that they did not categorize as health, education, or social services. However, a review of the services listed indicated that the majority falls into one of those three major categories. Services that respondents did not categorize include client advocacy and outreach, vocational training, community education, legal services, and public safety. Funders are also included in the ‘other’ category.
Social Network Analysis of Southern Nevada’s Health, Education, and Social Service Non-profit Organizations

Social network analysis provides information about both the structure of the non-profit network as a whole as well as the positions of individual organizations within the network. Network analysis enables us to determine the most well-connected and influential organizations within a network as well as the overall cohesiveness of the network. To assess the health, education, and social service non-profit network structure, we asked respondents to list up to 20 southern Nevada non-profit organizations with which they were most connected. We indicated that the organizations listed could be private or local/state government organizations but specified that they must be located in southern Nevada and must be in the health, social services, or educational fields. Some examples of connections were: having a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), sharing personnel, volunteers, space or data, referring clients, receiving client referrals, receiving funding, providing funding, having board members in common, participating in common projects or initiatives, collaborating on grant proposals, and co-sponsoring events. Respondents could also type in other ways in which they were connected that were not listed on the survey.

In terms of the general structure of the non-profit network in southern Nevada, two properties are particularly useful – cohesion and shape. Cohesion describes the number of connections within the network and includes the sub-properties of density and fragmentation. Cohesive networks are those that have more interconnections, and therefore, are more likely to collaborate. More dense networks have a greater number of connections between organizations. Shape can tell us about the overall distribution of connections and collaborations and distinguishes core organizations that are highly connected with each other from more peripheral organizations that have looser ties.

Figure 6 represents a sociogram\(^1\) (graphical presentation of connections) of the entire health, education, and social service non-profit network in southern Nevada.

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\(^1\) Note: The figure is not included in the text but is mentioned as a representation of the network structure.
Figure 6: Sociogram of Connections between Health, Education, and Social Service Non-Profit Organizations in Southern Nevada

The organizations are color coded to represent private non-profit organizations (red), government operated organizations (blue), funders (pink), and faith-based organizations (green). The size of the nodes and labels represent the number of connections held by that organization, and the lines indicate the connections between organizations. Because this is such a large network (460 organizations are included), it is impossible to see the names of each organization and the various connections between organizations. The larger and more visible names are the organizations with the most connections.

Network Cohesion

Table 1 presents the results of the analysis of the overall network. The average degree represents the average number of ties or connections between organizations. The average number of ties in southern Nevada’s non-profit network is just over 10. This is partially an artificial number because we asked respondents to identify up to 20 organizations with which they were connected. If we had asked them to list fewer, the average could have been smaller, and conversely, if we had asked them to list more, the average could have been greater.
Table 1: Network Cohesion Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Network Characteristics</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Degree</td>
<td>10.258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>0.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diameter</td>
<td>6.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Distance</td>
<td>3.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragmentation</td>
<td>0.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clustering Coefficient/Closure (weighted)</td>
<td>0.178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based upon the sociogram presented in Figure 6 above, it would appear that the non-profit structure in southern Nevada is quite dense, but this is simply because there are so many organizations represented in this sociogram. A review of density statistics reveals that this is not the case. The density score represents the proportion of potential ties in a network that are actually represented (i.e., the total number of ties or connections in the network divided by the total number of all possible connections). It examines the extent to which all of the organizations in a network are linked together. Higher density scores indicate more cohesive networks. The density score of 0.022 here is very low, but that is to be expected in large networks. The larger the network, the more opportunities there are for organizations to be disconnected.

The values for diameter and average distance are more reflective of cohesion in large networks. The diameter represents the largest number of paths for one organization to reach another. That is, how many organizations must one organization go through to reach another? If the diameter of the network is relatively small, then the organizations within the network are fairly close to each other, and the network can be viewed as cohesive. In the Clark County non-profit network, the longest number of paths is 6 with an average number of paths equal to 3. On average, Organization A must go through two other organizations (3 path lengths) to get to Organization B. This suggests that there is some room for improvement in the cohesion of southern Nevada’s non-profit network.

Fragmentation is another good measure of cohesion because it represents disconnection. The fragmentation score of 0.043 represents the proportion of pairs of organizations that cannot reach each other in the network, either through a direct connection or through other organizations in the network. Only 4.3% of all pairs of organizations cannot reach each other in the Clark County non-profit network. Some of these organizations are isolate (i.e., organizations that are not connected to any others). A total of 8 organizations reported 0 connections, and no organizations selected these 8 as connections.

Finally, the clustering coefficient, or closure, represents the extent to which organizations are clustered into local ‘communities’ or ‘cliques’. In other words, are most of the organizations with which you are connected also connected to each other, or is there more dispersion among connections in the network? The clustering coefficient of 0.178 is quite small. Most organizations in the network are not embedded in dense local networks where all organizations within that specific ‘community’ are connected to each other.
The second application of social network analysis in this project was to help us understand the roles and positions of individual organizations within the overall network. The position of an organization within the network determines its capacity to access knowledge and resources, spread that knowledge efficiently, and control the flow of information and resources. Ultimately, the organizations that score the highest on several key network measures are considered to be the most active and influential within the overall system.

**Measures of Network Centrality**

There are a number of ways to describe an organization’s participation within, importance to, or influence over the overall network. The most common measures of centrality are degree, eigenvector, betweenness and closeness. Networks with more central structures have greater capacity to coordinate with other organizations and provide rapid response to new opportunities. They also have greater capacity to anticipate and cope with uncertainties and challenges.²

**Degree centrality – How popular is your organization?**

One of the most common ways to measure network centrality is via degree centrality. Degree centrality is simply the number of immediate contacts an organization has in the overall network. Degree centrality is viewed as the organization’s level of involvement or activity in the network and characterizes the extent to which an organization can be considered to be a major channel for information. Organizations with high degree centrality are involved with many other organizations and thus have the potential to obtain and disseminate information and resources quickly.

As noted above, the average number of connections was 10.26, and the range was 0 to 97. The standardized degree centrality represents a proportion — the ratio of existing connections to all possible connections in the network. So a standardized degree centrality of .213 means that the organization holds 21.3% of all possible connections in the network. A list of the 20 organizations with the highest degree centrality is presented in Table 2 with the overall number of ties (connections with other organizations) and the standardized measure that represents the proportion of connections the organization has out of all possible connections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Degree Centrality – Top 20 Organizations</th>
<th>Degree Centrality (Number of Ties)</th>
<th>Standardized Degree Centrality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNLV</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>0.213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Way of Southern Nevada</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>0.180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HELP of Southern Nevada</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>0.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Charities</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>0.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Square</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0.154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark County School District</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>0.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity Village</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0.121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodwill of Southern Nevada</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0.110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 7 below presents a sociogram of these 20 organizations with the highest degree centrality scores. We can see that the private non-profit organizations are the most represented with 11 organizations while the faith-based organizations are the least represented with only one organization (Catholic Charities). Overall, the top 20 most connected organizations are also well connected with each other. UNLV, for example, is directly connected to 11 of these organizations, and Three Square and Catholic Charities are directly connected to 14 organizations each. Every organization within the top 20 can either directly reach each other or reach each other indirectly through a path through one or two other organizations.

Figure 7: Sociogram of Connections between the 20 Most Connected Organizations
red=private; blue=government; green=funders; pink=faith-based
Eigenvector Centrality – How popular are your friends?

In addition to how many connections an organization has, it is also important to be connected to the “right” organizations. That is, an organization increases its centrality in the network and its ability to obtain information and resources if it is connected to other organizations that have a lot of connections. In a childhood friendship circle, this would be like having a friendship with the most popular kids. This measure is referred to as eigenvector centrality. Organizations with a high number of ties sometimes also have high eigenvector centrality scores, but not always. For example, although The Salvation Army and Communities in Schools Nevada were not in the top 20 for degree centrality, there did rate highly on eigenvector centrality. Thus, while those organizations themselves do not have the same high number of connections as UNLV or UWSN, for example, they are connected to well-connected organizations, affording them access to information and resources.

If we apply an example from the non-profit field, think about a brand new non-profit organization that just comes onto the scene. The director of that organization would most likely want to get to know the leaders of other non-profit organizations relatively quickly in order to gain an understanding of types of services available in the community, opportunities for networking and collaboration, and mechanisms for funding. If the non-profit network is large, like that in southern Nevada, then there are many organizations to get to know. One way the new director could quickly get to know these other organizations would be for him or her to locate the director or direct service workers of an organization who is already working with many of the other organizations in the network (i.e., an organization that has a high degree centrality). By forming a tie with this organization, the director of the new organization stands a stronger chance of being introduced and connected to other organizations within the network, many more than if he or she had tried to form ties with organizations one at a time. Through forming ties with this one particular active organization with high degree centrality, the new director has dramatically increased his/her access to new ties, and thus the organization’s eigenvector centrality.

Organizations that have both high degree centrality scores and high eigenvector centrality scores are both “popular” and active in their own right and are connected to other “popular” and active organizations. The mean eigenvector centrality score was 0.028 with a range of 0.000 to 0.239. A table listing the 20 organizations with the highest eigenvector centrality is presented below.

Table 3: Eigenvector Centrality – Top 20 Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Eigenvector Centrality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Way of Southern Nevada</td>
<td>0.239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNLV</td>
<td>0.222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Square</td>
<td>0.218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HELP of Southern Nevada</td>
<td>0.216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Charities</td>
<td>0.214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark County School District</td>
<td>0.186</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Betweenness Centrality – Where is the organization located in the network?**

Where an organization is located in the non-profit network is also important. An organization that is situated between disconnected organizations can serve as an intermediary or an information and resource broker. This placement affords the organization certain advantages and power because it can control the flow of information and resources. If an organization rests between many other organizations in the network, that organization can greatly influence the network by being an effective messenger of information. This type of network centrality is referred to as betweenness centrality. Research indicates that betweenness centrality best captures the most important actors in a network – the non-profit leaders or most influential organizations. An organization with a high betweenness centrality score can be considered a bridging organization. If that organization was removed from the network, the network would become disconnected. In the most extreme case, the removal of one organization from a network could result in the collapse of the entire network.

Although an organization with high betweenness centrality commands a great deal of influence in the network, this is not always positive for an organization. Because an organization with high betweenness centrality is a broker between many other organizations, the director, other employees, and board members within the organization may experience a lot of stress and deal with time demands as a result of needing to respond to the needs of many different segments of the network. The average betweenness centrality score was 0.813 with a range of 0.000 to 12.254. A table listing the 20 organizations with the highest betweenness centrality scores is presented below.

Table 4: Freeman’s Betweenness Centrality – Top 20 Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Betweenness Centrality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNLV</td>
<td>12.254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Way of Southern Nevada</td>
<td>8.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HELP of Southern Nevada</td>
<td>6.911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity Village</td>
<td>5.449</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Catholic Charities 5.329
Three Square 5.197
Clark County School District 5.119
The Shade Tree 2.682
Goodwill of Southern Nevada 2.596
Nevada PEP 2.371
Clark County Family Services 2.232
MGM Resorts Foundation 2.216
Southern Nevada Health District 2.159
Westcare Foundation 2.134
Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada 2.083
Nevada State College 1.990
Nevada Health Division and Division of Mental Health Services 1.977
Clark County Social Services 1.961
USO Las Vegas 1.900
Nevada GIVES 1.881

Note: Normalized Values

Notice that Westcare Foundation, Nevada State College, Nevada Health Division and Division of Mental Health Services, USO Las Vegas, and Nevada GIVES did not make the top 20 for degree or eigenvector centrality but are in the top 20 for betweenness centrality. This suggests that although they may not be the most active organizations in the network, they are nevertheless in brokerage positions where they can help spread information, induce change, and influence the overall non-profit network.

Closeness Centrality – How independent is the organization?
Finally, closeness centrality emphasizes an organization’s independence. An organization that is close to many other organizations is very independent because it can quickly reach out to many others without needing to rely much on intermediaries or brokers. Organizations with high closeness centrality can also quickly mobilize others in the network because they can more easily reach out to many organizations than can more disconnected organizations. Researchers have linked closeness centrality with the ability to easily access information in a network and with having power and influence over the network. The average closeness centrality score was 7.712 with a range of 0.000 to 8.318. A table listing the closeness centrality scores of the 20 organizations with the highest scores is presented below.

Table 5: Closeness Centrality – Top 20 Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Way of Southern Nevada</td>
<td>8.318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNLV</td>
<td>8.308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HELP of Southern Nevada</td>
<td>8.292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Square</td>
<td>8.276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Charities</td>
<td>8.270</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Predicting Centrality

After calculating the most common centrality scores for each organization, we merged those scores with data collected from the organizations about their size, budget, age of organization, and types of services provided. With that information, we are able to predict the types of organizations that should have high centrality scores. In other words, what organizational characteristics are associated with degree, eigenvector, betweenness, and closeness centrality?

The results of bivariate correlation analyses are presented in Table 6 below. As demonstrated by these results, there are significant positive relationships between organization age, number of employees, annual budget and centrality scores. On average, older and larger organizations, in terms of both number of employees and budget, have greater centrality in the network, including greater activity, influence, power, and access to knowledge and resources. Overall, there is a negative relationship between being a private non-profit organization and each of the centrality scores, but this is largely because there are so many private non-profit organizations with only one or two connections, and those outnumber the handful of private non-profit organizations with a large number of connections that we discussed earlier. Finally, being a government non-profit organization has a positive relationship with degree, eigenvector, and betweenness centrality, while there is no relationship between being a funder or faith-based organization and centrality scores.

Table 6: Correlations between Organizational Characteristics and Centrality Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Characteristic</th>
<th>Degree Centrality (Number of Ties)</th>
<th>Eigenvector Centrality</th>
<th>Betweenness Centrality</th>
<th>Closeness Centrality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.273***</td>
<td>0.269***</td>
<td>0.210***</td>
<td>0.076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Employees</td>
<td>0.403***</td>
<td>0.406***</td>
<td>0.288***</td>
<td>0.157**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>0.452***</td>
<td>0.456***</td>
<td>0.297***</td>
<td>0.260***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>-0.122**</td>
<td>-0.135**</td>
<td>-0.121**</td>
<td>-0.107*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>0.172***</td>
<td>0.167***</td>
<td>0.151***</td>
<td>0.090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funder</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>0.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith-based</td>
<td>-0.013</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>-0.048</td>
<td>0.023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We also performed multivariate ordinary least squares regression to predict associations between organization characteristics (age, number of employees, and annual operating budget) and centrality measures (not shown here). Holding all characteristics constant, the only characteristic that was consistently associated with centrality scores was annual operating budget. Annual operating budget was significantly positively associated with degree, eigenvector, betweenness, and closeness centrality at the .01 level or better; organizations with larger budgets had significantly higher centrality scores.

**Examining Connections within Sectors**

Although the sociogram of the overall network (Figure 6) is useful at demonstrating the massive size of southern Nevada’s non-profit network, it is difficult to see individual connections within such a large network. Accordingly, the next several figures portray connections within the four specific sectors of the non-profit network (faith-based, funders, government, and private).

Figure 8 below portrays a sociogram representing the connections between faith-based health, social service, and education non-profit organizations in southern Nevada. The size of the nodes (circles) represent the number of ties within the entire non-profit network discussed earlier, with larger circles representing a greater number of ties overall. Note that an organization that has a lot of ties to the overall network may not have the most ties with other organizations within its particular sector.
Figure 8: Sociogram of Connections between Southern Nevada Faith-Based Organizations

As can be seen by examining the paths connecting faith-based organizations, the network is not very cohesive. There are nine completely disconnected organizations, which suggests that these groups are working in isolation from the rest of the faith-based non-profit community. Catholic Charities holds the most ties in the faith-based network with six, followed by Las Vegas Rescue Mission with five connections within the faith-based non-profit community. Without their connection to Catholic Charities, there are a number of organizations that would be completely disconnected from the rest of the network. We can also see that there are some other organizations that hold important brokerage roles within the non-profit network, connecting individual organizations to the rest of the network. For example, Renewing Life Center connects Club Christ Ministries to the network, and Omar Haikal Islamic Academy connects the Islamic Society of Las Vegas. Overall, the faith-based non-profit network is the smallest in southern Nevada, and although it is reasonably well-connected to the overall non-profit network, there is substantial enough fragmentation within its own sector to justify undertaking some community-building strategies.

Figure 9 below portrays the connections among funders of health, education, and social service organizations in southern Nevada. Perhaps expectantly, the funding sector is quite disconnected. Unlike private, faith-based, and government-operated non-profit organizations who often must work together to secure external funding and serve clients, funders often work in isolation and have more numerous connections with the organizations that provide direct services to clients and consumers than with other funders.

There are a total of 23 funders who are not connected to any other funding organization. United Way of Southern Nevada serves as a major hub for funding organizations, connecting two disjointed clusters of organizations. There are also a couple of dyads – two organizations
connected only to each other. Ultimately, the funding sector of the non-profit community in southern Nevada is connected to each other mostly through its connections with private and government-operated non-profits and not through direct connections within its own sector.

Figure 9: Sociogram of Connections between Southern Nevada Funding Organizations

Figure 10 below displays the connections among government-operated non-profit organizations. This is a larger sector than either the faith-based or funding sectors, so the connections are a bit more difficult to see. However, we are able to see that there are a fewer number of isolates – organizations not connected to any others. In total, there are only nine isolates within the government-operated network. The rest of the organizations are able to reach each other either directly or through their connections with another organization. This suggests a pretty good degree of collaboration among the government-operated sector of the non-profit community.

As is clear by the number of paths extending from it, UNLV is the center or the hub of the government-operated non-profit network in southern Nevada. As a result of its high scores on each of the centrality measures, UNLV is well positioned to disseminate information and intellectual resources, broker partnerships between disconnected organizations, and initiate innovation and change. CCSD, Clark County Family Services, and Clark County Social Services also have a number of connections within the government sector and are positioned as important hubs of information, resources, and capital. This suggests that they are quite active participants in the sector who could be mobilized to assist in efforts to help build the capacity of these organizations to secure federal grant funding to better serve the residents of southern Nevada.
Finally, Figure 11 below portrays the connections between the private, non-faith-based, and non-funding organizations within the non-profit community of southern Nevada. This group is by far the largest. As a result, it is difficult to see the myriad connections between organizations. Off to the left of the sociogram, we can see many isolates – disconnected organizations. Unlike with the faith-based, funding, and government sectors of the overall network, who each only had a handful of organizations that were highly connected and active in the network, the private sector contains a larger number of organizations that are highly active (i.e., many ties), are connected to other highly connected organizations (i.e., high eigenvector centrality), sit between other disconnected organizations to serve as brokers (i.e., high betweenness centrality), and are themselves connected to a large enough number of organizations that they are independent of having to rely on one organization for all of their information and/or resources (i.e., high closeness centrality).
Barriers to Collaboration

We asked respondents to rank the most important barriers they see to collaborating with other non-profit organizations on a five-item scale from greatest barrier to lowest barrier. The results of the ranking are presented in Figure 12. An overwhelming majority (nearly 64%) reported time constraints as the highest or second highest ranked barrier. Lack of shared vision came in next, with reluctance to share resources, lack of knowledge about good partners, and problems with leadership coming in as lesser perceived barriers. In examining differences in perceived barriers between private, government-operated, funding, and faith-based organizations, we found that funders were significantly more likely than the other three sectors to rate reluctance to share resources as the greater barrier to collaboration. Conversely, funders were significantly less likely to rate time constraints as the greatest barrier to collaboration, while a substantial proportion of private, government-operated, and faith-based organizations rated time constraints as the greatest barrier. This may reflect the fundamental differences between funders and direct services providers, and suggests that funders may need some education about time constraints experienced by direct service providers, while direct service providers might benefit from workshops on resource sharing and cooperation.
In addition to asking about barriers, we asked respondents to indicate their perspectives about the capacity of the health, education, and social service non-profit community to effectively secure grant funding. A bar graph showing the percentage of respondents who reported that the overall capacity was excellent, good, fair, and poor is displayed in Figure 13 below. The majority of respondents (70.4%) reported that southern Nevada’s non-profit community’s capacity to secure funding is fair or poor. Only 2.1% of respondents who answered this question (5 individuals) reported that the non-profit community’s capacity to secure funding is excellent.

There were no significant relationships between organization age and capacity rating, number of employees and capacity rating, or annual budget and capacity rating. There were also no
significant differences in capacity rating across sector type (i.e., private, government-operated, funding, and faith-based).

We provided respondents with the opportunity to write comments on anything they would like us to know about non-profit network relationships or the capacity of non-profit organizations in southern Nevada. We analyzed these comments for common themes. The most common words that came out of the comments are displayed in the word cloud below (Figure 14).

![Word Map of Barriers to Collaboration and Non-Profit Community Capacity](image)

Common themes included those related to funding and resources; territoriality, silos, and competition; the need for knowledge and training; concern about the lack of data availability and usage; the desire for more opportunities for meeting and networking; critiques of leadership; and reflections of hope and promise for the non-profit community in southern Nevada. A sample of responses falling into each of the main categories is provided below.

**Funding and Resources**

- “Resources are key. Our non-profits are woefully understaffed and underfunded.”
- “Most non-profits have cut back on staff and budgets due to reduction in grants and donor dollars. Fundraising events are yielding less than they used to and many local foundations have closed or are cutting back in giving.”
- “Lack of funding from state or county for small non-profits”
- “The majority of the non-profits are stretched too thin. Limited funding and limited staff and resources prevent them from growing.”
- “I feel the community safety net is becoming more impaired instead of more functional because so many have gone out of business because we are losing resources instead of gaining them. Most of us are working at or above our capacity.”
• “Too many agencies are still so worried about covering staff costs that it is difficult to collaborate on program need because the agency is applying for staff cost above all needs.”
• “I think that the money for program support is particularly thin, though there may be a bigger problem, now that all of the local foundations that have previously funded capital projects are folding/leaving town.”
• “I think there is a lack of capacity due to a lack of local sources of funding for the broad range of non-profit work that takes place in southern Nevada. So much local funding is very limited in scope and no matter how much we may collaborate, some of our work is never going to fit neatly into the narrow definitions put out by funders. The funders need to grow more sophisticated and start taking a broader view of the needs in the state and how those needs could be met.”

Territoriality, Silos, and Competition

“There is an unfortunate lack of spirit of collaborative efforts of most non-profits in the city. There is too much of the cut throat spirit instead. I believe this holds us back from reaching our potential, as well as adequately meeting the needs in the community. If more non-profits were willing to collaborate we would have a more effective, just, and sustainable non-profit sector, which would be more capable to meet the demand for services from the community.”

• “Very clicky groups and not real community minded players, only partner if they can get something from the other agency, me mentality”
• “No one will collaborate on projects. Very territorial.”
• “I think the capacity exists; however, the history of the culture of the non-profit community in southern Nevada has not been one of collaboration to our community of working in partnerships and not silos.”
• “Things get done when everyone plays well together and there is less of the ‘this is mine and I will not share’ attitude.”
• “There is still a measure of partisan thinking in our community. The feeling that we are competing against one another is still alive and primarily driven by the competition for grant monies in our field.”
• “It is very difficult to get agencies to collaborate and share information unless funding is held over their head which is very frustrating since we can only learn from each other.”
• “Organizations continue to operate as silos. For example, our organization has been providing complete free services for children for 5 years. No other organization does this. But several have thrown their hats into the arena in the last 2-3 years, and none have initiated a discussion of collaboration with us. Meanwhile, most of these entities have diluted the funding resources, making it harder for any of us to develop in a systematic way.”
• “It seems like everyone wants to be the ‘hub’ and there is not often willingness to be the ‘spoke’ in something bigger.”
Knowledge and Training

- “There are some good people doing good things in our community but most would benefit from training on organization skills, good business practices, and marketing their needs to the community.”
- “We would love to see some educational workshops on applying for grants.”
- “I think there is a desire to serve the community, but a lack of understanding on how to do that effectively (apply for funding, appropriate evaluation of existing programs and services, etc.)
- “It would be helpful to have a resource guide that outlines what a non-profit does, capacity, waitlist, referral guidelines, and updated frequently.”
- “We would love to see some educational workshops on applying for grants.”

Use of Data

- “Non-profits must evaluate their programs.”
- “Virtually no use of outcome measures and deep outcome data”
- “Non-profits should focus more on data driven decision making and ensure that they are accountable (in terms of tracking outcomes rather than outputs) for the programs and services they provide.”
- “Non-existing community level data sharing for community indicators and outcome tracking.”
- “There continue to be programs funded that do not provide best practices services or meet any established standards of care. We would like to see that funders of the non-profit community insist that funding be tied to best practice and done with fidelity.”

Community Planning and Meeting

- “Non-profits should get together all of the time since they share common visions.”
- “A number of years ago many of the non-profits gathered together for quarterly meetings but over the years that has gone away and there are really no good mechanisms in place to bring together the leaders of the non-profit organizations.”
- “No history of community planning processes”
- “Infrequent opportunities to meet and mix”
- “I wish there were more networking events so I can connect with other organizations.”
- “I would be interested in participating in discussions with other local non-profits just to obtain information about who they are and who they serve.”
- “Need to physically get together for introduction”
- “I would like to see an opportunity for all non-profits to engage in a venue to meet each other…a conference if you will.”
- “I would like to propose an annual non-profit forum where each organization in the health, social services, and education services area come together and share best practices.”
- “Common communication vehicles and forums could improve the ability to know about other partnerships. Directory of service information”
Administration and Leadership

- “Some of the organizations have leadership in place that perpetuates abuse of power. Some organizations have a lot of top administrators making a lot of money while direct staff is at minimum wage.”
- “I would like to see leadership that moves the non-profit community from fighting to get a bigger piece of the pie to developing more pie to share.”
- “Leadership, even when good at the top spot, is not strong at second and third levels.”

Hope and Promise

“The work of a non-profit comes from a genuine desire to improve one’s community. It requires a tremendous amount of heart, sweat and tears to become successful. It has been the greatest joy of my life and the hardest thing I have ever accomplished.”

- “I have found it much easier to collaborate with other non-profits in the last several years.”
- “The larger non-profit organizations in southern Nevada have come together as a group to identify ways to collaborate. The concept of collaboration has been talked about for a number of years but is actually being put into practice in recent months. The intent is to find more efficient ways to use limited resources and to eliminate duplication of efforts and programs.”

“I think that there is untapped capacity. Much of that is due to lack of interconnectedness, redundant processes, infighting and lack of effectively tapping into national funding for the market. As a community we are striving to remedy this, we have some work before us! In the big scheme of things we are still a young community and sometimes that is more apparent than others. On a positive note, I believe that most of our non-profit community is truly passionate and engaged in impacting positive change in southern Nevada and most are willing to work together towards common goals.”

Identifying Opinion Leaders

New ideas and practices are often spread through communities via opinion leaders – also referred to as champions, advisors, advocates, and community leaders. Opinion leaders, while not always the first to adopt an innovation or promote a new idea, tend to monitor community climate and exercise their influence when the advantages of a new idea become clear. Opinion leaders are often very effective at minimizing barriers to collaboration and change and increasing the rate of diffusion of new ideas and projects through their influence over the opinions, beliefs, motivations, and behaviors of others within and external to the community.
Accordingly, in addition to asking survey respondents to identify the organizations with which their organizations were connected, we also asked them to identify up to 10 people whom they perceive to be the leaders and/or connectors of the non-profit community of southern Nevada. We specified that these are the people to whom an executive director, program coordinator, etc., might turn for advice, expertise, assistance, or collaboration when opportunities for funding or programmatic improvement arose. A total of 569 people were identified. Most of those people (73%, N=414) were identified only once. Cass Palmer and Stacey Wedding were identified the most frequently at 26 times each. The word cloud below (Figure 15) identifies the people who were most commonly listed as opinion leaders with larger font sizes indicating more times identified.

![Word Map of Opinion Leaders](image)

**Figure 15: Word Map of Opinion Leaders**

**Limitations and Disclaimer**

The findings from this project should be considered in light of some methodological limitations. First, despite our best efforts, we were unable to secure responses for every health, education, and social service non-profit organization in southern Nevada. If the organizations without responses are fundamentally different from those who did respond (e.g., non-responders have fewer collaborations), then this has the potential to bias the results. However, because all organizations were asked to identify up to 20 organizations with which they were connected in some way, all organizations had equal opportunity to be selected as collaborators by another organization, even if the director of a particular organization did not complete the survey. We can confidently say that organizations that did not show up in our study or who have no or only a couple of identified collaborators were not systematically disadvantaged given that they could have been selected by any of the 298 organizational leaders who submitted surveys. Second, these surveys were completed almost exclusively by Executive Directors and similar leaders of
non-profit agencies. The perspectives of non-profit leaders are likely very different from those of direct-service workers who may have differing perceptions of collaboration and barriers. Third, although we received surveys from 298 organizations, there were some missing answers on questions having to do with organization age, budget, number of employees, and other questions throughout the survey. Although there is no evidence to suggest that this is the case, if organizations with missing responses are systematically different from organizations with fully completed surveys, the results of the analysis that had missing answers may be biased.

We have used the terms ‘connection’ and ‘collaboration’ interchangeably throughout this report. However, we recognize that an organization that is connected may not necessarily collaborate on projects. Working together on a grant proposal or a community event or referring clients to each other, for example, are different types of collaborations than sharing board members or staff members. Connections are not fundamentally a measure of the quality of cooperation or collaboration. We intend to discuss the count, quality, and nature of connections in a future report.

Similarly, we wish to emphasize that this was not a study about the quality of services provided by individual organizations or by the non-profit community as a whole. It is important to acknowledge that many younger organizations have not yet had the opportunity to develop multiple connections and that the opportunity to develop sustainable collaborations may vary across organizations due to diversity of clientele, geographic location within the city, or lack of consistency in executive directors, board members, or staff. To be sure, an organization that has many connections with other organizations may not necessarily provide better services than an organization that has no or fewer connections. What connections enable organizations to do is easily access information, knowledge, and resources, help to mobilize innovation and change in services, and enhance the organization’s ability to successfully compete for programmatic funding. Ultimately, these are all things that can help to improve service quality, particularly over an extended period of time. However, organizations that have many connections are also at risk of being overcommitted to multiple organizations. This can lead to organizational stress. Accordingly, it is essential for leaders of these well-connected organizations to think strategically about the relationships the organization hopes to sustain over the long term, the goals the organization wishes to accomplish, and the human and financial resources it will take to maintain these relationships and accomplish these goals.

Finally, given that this study was conducted by a faculty member and research assistants at UNLV and funded by the Lincy Institute at UNLV, it is reasonable to wonder about the potential of bias in the results and the reporting, particularly given that UNLV scored so highly on measures of network connectivity and collaboration. However, all of the research team members have received extensive training in objective research methods and human subjects research, and the study was approved by UNLV’s Institutional Review Board – a unbiased committee designated to approve, monitor, and review social and behavioral research involving human subjects in order to protect the rights and welfare of the research subjects. The study’s principal investigator has over twelve years of academic research experience and has numerous peer-reviewed journal articles in some of the most well-respected and highest rated journals in
the fields of sociology, public health, evaluation research, behavioral medicine, and demography. We can be further confident in the results given that the organizations we would expect to see ranked highly on measures of network centrality based upon their organizational size, age, budgets, and media presence in the community, (e.g., UWSN, HELP of Southern Nevada, Catholic Charities, Three Square, etc.) are indeed ranked at the top of each measure of centrality, lending validity to these results.

Despite the limitations discussed above, this is the first comprehensive study to empirically examine connections between health, social service, and education non-profit organizations in southern Nevada. The findings from this project can help to guide the development of optimal strategies to improve non-profit organizational cooperation, collaboration, and performance related to social, health, and educational outcomes.

Suggestions for Building Sustainable Inter-organizational Connections

Although the Lincy Institute cannot solve the challenges expressed by survey respondents that were related to lack of funding, there are several steps that the Lincy Institute, together with UNLV, can take to promote sustainable inter-organizational connections that should ultimately lead to greater capacity of southern Nevada non-profit organizations to successfully compete for federal and foundational grant funding and to more effectively and efficiently serve the residents of our community. Some potential strategies are outlined below.

1.) Several respondents noted the lack of data availability and usage among non-profit organizations. One strategy to increase data use would be the development of an interactive comprehensive data dashboard where direct service organizations could upload aggregated data about their client population so that data were available for funding proposal or program service development. This dashboard could also include a listing of all non-profit organizations in southern Nevada, along with contact information for the director(s), and a brief summary of the types of services provided.

2.) A number of respondents suggested that non-profit organizations could benefit from more community planning and opportunities for networking. Accordingly, the Lincy Institute at UNLV could sponsor an annual non-profit community educational and networking conference that would bring together the directors and program coordinators from all of the service sectors (health, education, and social services). The conference could include sessions on evidence-based approaches for maintaining collaborations between agencies and for successfully completing interagency grant proposals and projects. The conference could also be an opportunity for funders to discuss their expectations for direct service organizations and for the directors and front-line workers in direct service organizations to discuss their constraints and barriers to providing services.
3.) Some respondents indicated problems with leadership and suggested that, although there are good people providing good services, many employees would benefit from training on organizational skills, business practices, grant development, and marketing. A Southern Nevada Non-Profit Leadership Academy or a series of leadership workshops for lower-tiered managers and promising future program leaders might enhance the level of skill among current and future non-profit program leaders. This leadership academy could be modeled after other successful development programs and could provide a curriculum of seminars related directly to prominent non-profit management issues and challenges that are specific to southern Nevada. This academy could occur in person and via web-based modules. The academy might also consist of a mentorship program wherein lower-tiered managers could be placed with directors of successful and stable non-profit organizations in a sort of internship or shadowing program. The logistics of this kind of placement would be complicated, and would necessitate agreement among both the director of the organization whose employee would be trained as well as the director of the organization who would be doing the training/modeling. An incentive for organizations on both ends might be needed.

4.) In addition to a leadership development program, a mentorship program for underperforming organizations might be useful in building the capacity of these organizations to build collaborations and successfully compete for federal and foundational grant funding. The directors and direct service staff of over-performing organizations (those organizations that scored higher on the centrality measures than what the regression models predicted) could provide advice, guidance, and support to organizations in similar service content areas that are struggling to build connections and collaborations.

5.) Because annual meetings and other networking events can be costly and time-consuming, there should be some other sort of mechanism through which non-profit organizations can be in regular contact with each other. To this end, the Lincy Institute could moderate a southern Nevada non-profit organization listserv where directors and other leaders of the non-profit community could regularly communicate and share information, plan meetings, and obtain advice.

Finally, this report should serve as the beginning of a discussion about the meaning of these findings and next steps. The Lincy Institute should bring together a sample of respondents who completed this survey to obtain feedback on the findings via a focus group. This insider perspective could help to lend insight into what we found here and lead to non-profit network development strategies.

**Conclusion**

Southern Nevada is an ever-changing community with a diverse set of social, economic, and demographic challenges. No single organization is able to deal with these challenges effectively. A coordinated approach to service delivery can have many advantages for the residents of
southern Nevada, as well as the employees of non-profit organizations themselves. Such advantages include the coming together of diverse stakeholders with differing perspectives, the pooling of tangible and information-based resources, the sharing of ideas and strategies, the diversification of talents and capabilities, reductions in overlap in services and the coordination of existing services, research and analyses that are broader in scope and more expansive in detail than those done by a single organization, and a unique chance to better understand other organizations in our community. Collaboration does not come without challenges, however. Successful collaborations demand clear communication between organization, a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship, a commitment to mutual goals and objectives, shared responsibility, mutual authority, accountability, and respect, and the sharing of resources and rewards.

We hope that this report can serve as a starting point for a larger discussion about southern Nevada’s non-profit community, the capacity of our organizations to successfully compete for funding and serve clients, and strategies for improving collaboration and making southern Nevada a better place for our residents to live, work, and play.

References

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