Scoping a Network

HEAR transfer index

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*Although this note discusses some general principles of mapping and data collection, it is based on a preferred process using the **sumApp** data collection system and the **Kumu** network mapping and analysis system. For further information on these see: Setting up sumApp and Kumu*

Often we might think of a network or set of networks as being bounded organisationally or by a geographic area. For instance an organisation may wish to only map its various departments and individuals, a partnership may wish to limit the network investigation to its members or a community may wish to only consider the organisations and groups active within a locality. In almost all cases such an approach can lead to important actors and linkage being missed and the network map giving a distorted view of how the network works. As you explore a network, boundaries will make themselves clear and often these will be drawn outside the organisation or area that you wish to study or influence.

Boundaries and Levels

In scoping out the exploration of networks, we need to take account of how network boundaries form naturally and beware of setting false limits to the work. It is one thing to say that we should explore a network to see what its boundaries are and quite another to specify the members that will form the network beforehand. Maps can be divided into 'bounded' - where the limits have been set before you start mapping - and 'unbounded' where the process of mapping is itself exploring the boundaries of the network.

BOUNDARY SPANNERS

We must be careful to recognise the role of organisations or people in the network that act as bridges to other networks or organisations through which they may link with other members of the network. Thus node B in the network may link to organisation A outside the supposed network boundary but which also links to node C in the network. see: The Power of Boundary Spanning and Networks for more information.

STRATEGIC, OPERATIONAL OR PERSONAL?

The table below shows the various levels at which netmaps apply, the typical users, activities and benefits that occur at each level.

	Users	Activity	Benefits
Strategic	Policy makers, Programme Managers	Identifying network gaps and opportunities. Assessing the chages in connectivity and asset sharing over time and producing measures for evaluation.	Better local coordination of service delivery. Allocating resources and skills to network effective organisations and community groups.
Operational	Network Weavers, Community & Interest Groups	Weaving new connections and strengthening existing. Persuading agencies, community groups and key individuals to contribute to the map as network database.	Greater awareness of the 'hinges' in the networks within which they operate. Ensuring that key people and organisations are engaged and involved. Guidance on the

		Using the map to suggest new collaborations and clusters of interest or influence.	exploration of new links to exploit common and complementary interests.
Personal	Local managers, Health provision coordinators, key activists	Identifying perceived connections surrounding their own activities. In some cases using Kumu to explore possible connections, skills and resources. Using the map prepared at strategic or operational level to trace locally significant patterns.	Better awareness of surrounding networks and their effects on the coordination and delivery of servicers.
Beneficaries	The general population of an area or interest group.	Will not normally use the map but will experience the benefits of closer and more coordinated work between service providers & community groups.	Better, more coordinated delivery

Verifying a netMap

A 'verified' netmap is one where the members of the map have contributed the data on their attributes and connections. This process may be carried out through survey, interview or some participatory event. An 'unverified' map has been constructed from the external knowledge and impressions of the map creator which may be gained by research or personal experience. Unverified maps can be useful in gaining a first impression of the network to be mapped and can often say as much about the perceptions and experience of the creator as it does about the network itself.

UNVERIFIED MAPS

An unverified map will commonly have been prepared by an organisation or individual from known information about the network members. For instance, an examination of the websites of map members will often give information on their activities and connections to others organisations that can be used to form a starter map. Of course this information may be out of date or partial but it can be used to create a starter map that can be verified later.

VERIFIED MAPS

A verified map will have been the subject of some sort of survey where the members of the map have been asked to contribute their own data and are able to change that data over time. Maps prepared in **sumApp** are verified by their members through private system that is effectively passworded through a unique, online link. Another advantage of this system is that it allows the continuing management of a **Kumu** map fed and displayed through sumApp

Time limitation

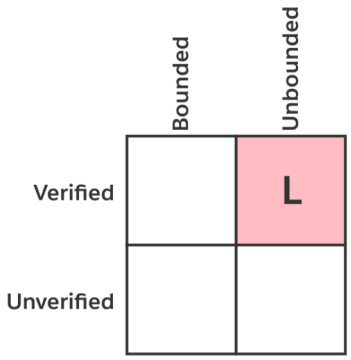
Netmaps can be short term or long term. A short term map will provide a snapshot of the network at the time the map is created and may be very useful in pointing out gaps and opportunities in the structure of the network. A long term map will be open to change as the time progresses and you may wish to animate this through the taking of snapshots at regular intervals. If this long terms map is a verified map, map members would be required to be able to update their data as their attributes and connections change.

See Transitions in Later Life for an example of a 'time-sliced' map.

Specifying the map type

We use a simple little diagram to indicate what type of map is being constructed
The little grid on the right indicates that a map is Verified, Unbounded and Long-term. This is typically a map that constructed using sumApp and perhaps

participatory events to collect data (Verified), which is being used, at least initially to explore the **extent** and **structure** of existing networks and which will continue in the Long-term (L) allowing members to change and update their data through their unique sumApp link.



The benefit of completing the diagram before you start mapping is to give you some clarity in terms of the validity of the process and the limits of the map you intend to produce as well as suggesting the methods you might use to collect data and construct the network map. For instance if you are not concerned with the verification of the map and just wish to create an impression of the network from your own perspective, you may use Kumu directly to sketch up an unverified map.