

Ten Ways to Use a NetMap

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This note is intended to show how a network map can be used to help you

1. Explore your existing network

One of the primary reasons for creating a network map is to understand your own network. Knowing how its connected, and what assets it has makes it easier to decide what to do. So often we have a formal or intuitive view of our network. It's either a formal structure or a just feeling of the common interest out there. A network map can make the network visible and provide ways of measuring its connectedness. It can also incorporate the views and experience of its members and provide a framework for contact and sharing. This exploration is part of what might be called the 'Diagnostic' stage of creating a NetMap.

2. Use the mapping process to engage and involve your network

Some maps will be prepared by organisations based on research and their perceptions of how their network works. The best network maps allow map members to contribute their own information and to update it over time. The actual process of mapping can involve organisations and key individuals in building and decorating the map to show what's important to them. Events, workshops, interviews and online data collection can all contribute.

3. Identify gaps and opportunities

Once the initial data has been collected and used to create a network visualisation or NetMap using Kumu or similar software the map can be analysed using Social Network Analysis (SNA) - a method that can identify which node is most central, how nodes cluster because of the way they are connected, how generally connected the network is and how that changes over time. As you become more used to reading the patterns of a network you start to identify gaps - 'holes' in the network and clusters that should probably be connected. This is useful for anyone in a community connector role to encourage collaboration and sharing.

4. Identify communities and clusters of interest

The map will show some nodes that cluster together because of the pattern of connections. SNA can identify clusters across complex maps with many nodes and connections. Kumu calls these clusters '**communities**' and can colour the map to show these and provide a legend. These communities are a useful guide to how you might try to influence and spread information. We can identify the nodes that are most central to these communities and work through them to get your message across most efficiently.

Kumu can also create clusters of nodes based on **common interests** by specifying some attribute in nodes, creating 'pseudonodes' that represent these and then linking all the nodes that share these attributes to the appropriate pseudonode.

5. Create a visual database that emphasises connection and collaboration

One of NetMapping's strongest advantages is that it makes the network visible so you can see the patterns in the complexity.

6. Evaluate connectivity over time

Many network projects have an increase in connectivity as a major aim. We can use Kumu to generate a measure of connectivity. This is based on the average 'degree' per node. A degree is a connection as measured at the node it connects. Remember that each connection on a map has two ends - so the number of degrees across the map is double the number of connections! The value of using average degree as a connectivity measure is that it is not affected by the overall size of the network.

As a project progresses, connectivity may increase because of its activities. A netmap can be animated to show this and the average degree metric used to evaluate the changes.

7. Campaign more effectively

One of the major uses for netmaps is to organise campaigns and to spread campaign messages more effectively.

8. Build and strengthen your network

A network map by itself will not build and strengthen your network. It's a mistake to see the map as the end product. It should be seen as a helpful guide for on the ground workers who have an interest in how their networks work and as a guide to collaborative action in forming new links or bringing new participants to the map.

9. Integrate policies, programmes and projects