



## NATIONAL HOME VISITING NETWORK

*The Home Visiting Network Weaver Toolkit was developed from learnings generated through the Network Weaver Community of Practice, a peer learning community of the National Home Visiting Summit*

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*The Home Visiting Network Weaver Toolkit is intended to be a living document that will grow even more valuable over time as additional ideas, tips, and stories of network principles in action are added. The initial content is based on the Network Weaver Community of Practice, a peer learning community of the National Home Visiting Summit, that took place in 2020 among stakeholders in the early home visiting field. We invite all users to share your networking experiences with us, so that we can incorporate them into the toolkit. Please engage with the **Network Weaver Community of Practice on the Early Childhood Connector** at [www.ecconnector.org/nhvs](http://www.ecconnector.org/nhvs).*

# 1. The Power and Importance of Networks and Their Weavers

## The Power of Networks

In the early home visiting field, stakeholders work hard every day to improve practice, research, and policy in ways that enhance outcomes for young children and their families. At times, success is compromised because efforts are disconnected.

- Maybe families are served by more than one program and receive conflicting information, or information that really doesn't match their needs.
- Maybe programs are competing to enroll the same families rather than considering which model could be the best fit.
- Maybe program leaders are applying for the same funding opportunities rather than looking for ways to collaborate.
- Maybe policymakers are crafting policy for families without stopping to ask families what they need and want.
- Maybe researchers are designing evaluations that add to the literature or meet a policy need but miss the opportunity to inform programmatic changes that will benefit families.

Our intentions may be golden, and our actions can sometimes have unintended consequences -- or simply miss the mark -- when we work in our typical siloes.

Networks can help.

Networks create a space where stakeholders come together to share, link, align, and leverage each other's work. It is a safe space to disclose challenges, brainstorm opportunities, and co-create solutions. Networks help us understand the African Proverb: "If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

## The Importance of Network Weavers

Network weavers are essential for realizing the full power of networks. Network weavers are all of the stakeholders who are eager and able to work together with a network mindset. This mindset requires a commitment to working in new, and sometimes uncomfortable, ways. Some jokingly say it is an "un-natural act among un-consenting adults."

Network scientist Jane Wei-Skillern, Ph.D. outlines the following principles that are central to the network weaver mindset:

- **MISSION, Not Organization.** As leaders, we adopt strategies and tactics to achieve our overall mission, not necessarily to stimulate the growth of any one organization or domain.
- **NODE, Not Hub.** As partners, we see each of our organizations as part of a larger web of activity targeting our cause, not as a hub of isolated action.
- **HUMILITY, Not Brand.** Our organizations work alongside our peers as equals and are willing to take a back seat when other partners are in a better position to lead.
- **TRUST, Not Control.** Trust and shared values guide how we interact and create an environment that maximizes our collective impact.

When a group of network weavers commit to embodying this mindset, they can dream big and think outside the box. They can challenge the status quo, shift from a deficit orientation to one of abundance, and embrace the freedom that comes with re-imagining a different future, one that is built with input of all stakeholders including parents and other consumers.

## **The National Home Visiting Network**

In 2017, some of us in the early home visiting field had the opportunity to learn about network science from Marty Kooistra, Network Practitioner, Principal - Sapwood Advisors and Executive Director, Housing Development Consortium of Seattle-King County. It became clear that if we could work with a network mindset, we would be able to realize goals that previously seemed unattainable. So we set to work and established the National Home Visiting Network.

*The purpose of the National Home Visiting Network is to inspire the growth of a well-networked field that catalyzes and magnifies the collective reach and effectiveness of early home visiting.*

The more we learned and practiced the network principles, the more we realized that we needed to share them with others. We offered a plenary session at the 2019 National Home Visiting Summit on *The New Network Leader: How You Can Grow Your Impact*, and from that we launched the Network Weaver Community of Practice.

## **The Network Weaver Community of Practice**

The Network Weaver Community of Practice (COP) began in January 2020 as one of the peer learning communities of the National Home Visiting Summit. The Network Weaver COP focuses on shared learning among home visiting stakeholders about how working in collaborative networks can help expand the reach and impact of home visiting.

The COP met in person at the 2020 National Home Visiting Summit and then convened virtually four times during the year with each convening providing an opportunity to become more familiar with the principles.

Participants were also able to talk through the challenges of working in collaboration with others. There are trust and power issues, competition and gatekeeping, and perceived lack of time and inefficiency for really getting the work done. It became clear that the network principles - if truly owned by the network weavers -- can help to minimize these challenges.



## **The Purpose of this Toolkit**

This toolkit is offered as a simple to use, high-level look at the principles that network science says are essential for well-functioning networks. It walks you through each of the four principles with examples and questions to ponder as you work to internalize the principles. Beyond the principles, it includes guidance on steps to take to build strong and effective networks. Finally, it includes short stories of the network principles in action and links to additional resources for those who want to better understand network theory.

We welcome your feedback. In what ways has the toolkit helped? Do you have stories and experiences about the principles that you would like to share with others? Please engage with the **Network Weaver Community of Practice** on the Early Childhood Connector at [www.ecconnector.org/nhvs](http://www.ecconnector.org/nhvs).

## II. Network Principle #1: MISSION, Not Organization

*As leaders, we adopt strategies and tactics to achieve our overall mission, not necessarily to stimulate the growth of any one organization or program.*

### What Does This Mean?

We all tend to focus first on achieving the goals of our individual organization. We look inward and design our programs to provide the highest quality home visiting to the families we enroll. Our funders want this too. But if we also want to ensure that the benefits of home visiting are accessible to *all families*, we need to think beyond our individual program.

We know that almost 18 million pregnant women and families (including more than 23 million children) could benefit from home visiting. But in 2019, just about 300,000 families received home visiting services through programs funded with local, state, or federal resources.<sup>1</sup> That's a huge gap. This gap can't be filled by any one program simply working harder. Instead, we need to think about how we can create a context for achieving much deeper delivery of services. And that means that we need to work TOGETHER in service of the larger MISSION.

When we think about shifting from the work of our individual organization to a greater mission, we begin to practice the first principle of effective networks - mission, not organization. In doing this, it is really important that we hold ourselves accountable and don't just create one-off actions that side-step the complex, systems-level problems. Lasting change is going to require intentional work across silos and sectors that serves both the self-interests of the participants and the shared interests of the collective.

### Network Principle in Action

The Rapid Response Virtual Home Visiting (RRVHV) collaborative was created to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Across the country, home visiting programs were searching for ways to maintain meaningful connection with families and best support them during this time of increased anxiety and stress. Rather than each program going it alone, leaders recognized that working together to share best strategies, policies and procedures would benefit all programs and by extension all families being served. This work needed to be about MISSION, not organization.

The entire project was pulled together as a collaborative - from collaborative content to shared decision-making. The collaborative leverages the extensive resources and expertise that already exists across the home visiting field, from various models, to state administrators, training and technical assistance providers, researchers, and others. All materials and webinars are provided free of charge and made accessible through the Institute for Family Support Professionals as well as other platforms. Everything that has been and will be developed as a result of RRVHV will remain available to support the future needs of the field.

For more information about RRVHV: <https://institutebsp.org/covid-19-rapid-response>

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<sup>1</sup> National Home Visiting Resource Center. (2020). *2020 Home Visiting Yearbook*. Arlington, VA: James Bell Associates and the Urban Institute.

## Questions for Reflection

- Think about your own collaborative efforts. What have been the obstacles you have faced in keeping a focus on a collective MISSION vs. the interests of one particular organization or program? What have you done to keep mission at the center?
- Do you find it more straightforward to focus on MISSION during times of intense crisis? The challenge and demands of mission-first are not any easier during a crisis, just more pressing. Would you agree that the challenges faced by families with young children are tremendous all the time? If so, how can you look at those challenges as crisis worthy of a mission-first response?
- From an organizational leadership/management lens, there tends to be an emphasis on organizational development and capacity building - to be the “go to” or the “known leader/expert.” Have organizational structures and priorities gotten in the way of DOING mission? How has your organization helped your ability to DO mission? How has your organization hindered your ability to DO mission?



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*Key points from the August 17, 2020 Community of Practice led by Marty Kooistra, Network Practitioner, Principal - Sapwood Advisors & Executive Director, Housing Development Consortium of Seattle-King County and Melissa Kelley, Facilitator, National Home Visiting Network, with special guest Jeanna Capito, Facilitator, National Alliance of Home Visiting Models and the Rapid Response Virtual Home Visiting Project.*

**Webinar link:** <https://tinyurl.com/y3p9hyju>



### III. Network Principle #2: NODE, Not Hub

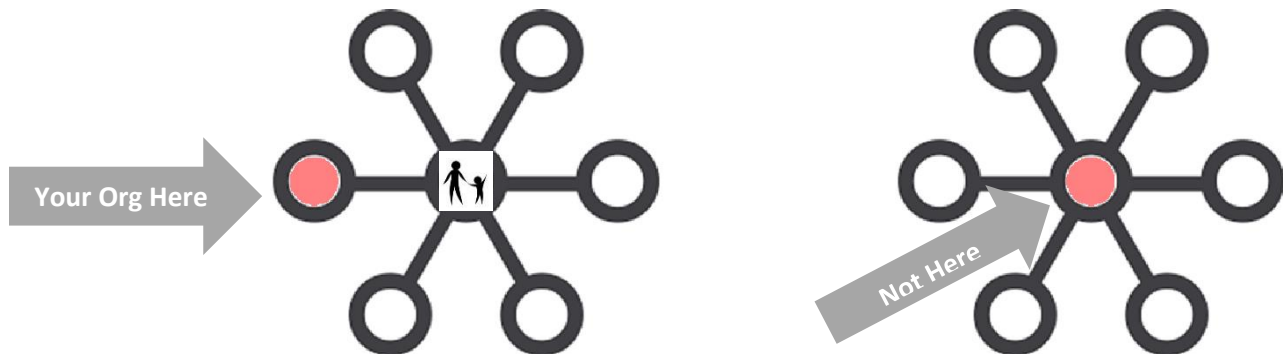
*As partners, we see each of our organizations as part of a larger web of activity targeting our cause, not as a hub of isolated action.*

#### What Does This Mean?

This principle prompts us to think about how we perceive ourselves and how we act. Do we think of our organizations as the center of activity (the HUB), or are we a NODE working collaboratively with others towards a common goal?

Networks include partners who commit to working together to form a large web or constellation. At the center is the focus of the work - for example ensuring healthy birth outcomes. Partners recognize that the outcome they are striving to address can't be met by just one partner or program.

Makes sense. Right? But it's counter to how we typically build organizations so it requires an intentional mindset shift. This is what it looks like to be a NODE, not a HUB:



Networks are effective when the goal is to **MOBILIZE** various organizations and resources that **TOGETHER** can deliver more impact, not when the goal is to become a leading organization first, engaging in collaboration at the margins.

#### Network Principle in Action

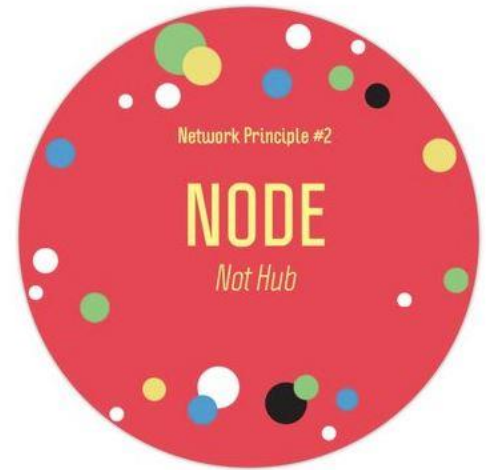
In 2005, hurricanes Rita and Katrina left a wide swath of damage in Louisiana. Thirty-eight thousand of the five hundred thousand homes affected met the Habitat for Humanity criteria for support. A concentrated effort was urgently needed to rebuild. But the reality was that of the 21 Habitat affiliates, they had never built more than 60 houses in a year, collectively. There was no way they could scale to meet demand. Habitat needed to re-think their approach and move away from an isolationist orientation to being part of an integrated ecosystem where Habitat could build relationships with other providers and together offer safe housing options for families. This required leadership shifting the Habitat mindset from a HUB to a NODE.

Another recent example comes from California. Originally, home visiting efforts in the state were funded primarily by the federal government. Several years ago, Governor Newsom made a commitment to devote state funds for home visiting, and local First 5 Commissions did too. With more funders in this space, it became necessary for people and programs to

stop operating in silos. Recently, California First 5 funded local coordination grants to enable counties to support a NODE model. The message was if you are funding or implementing home visiting, then come to the table as equal partners and coordinate efforts because everyone has a contribution to make to the entire system of child and family support services.

### Questions for Reflection

- How do you perceive yourself and your work -- a NODE or HUB?
- Do you think others in your ecosystem see home visiting as a NODE or as a HUB?
- How would you frame a NODE mentality as furthering EQUITY?
- What does it look like at your level (whether that be as a funder, a policymaker, a program leader, a technical assistance provider, a local program administrator, a home visitor) to create a network map with your organization as a NODE?
- How deeply do you believe your organization's leadership understands the ecosystem in which your organization operates?
- How well does the leadership understand the gap between your organization's outcomes/impact and the reality of the myriad needs that families face?
- How can you help your philanthropic partners support your work as a NODE?



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*Key points from the October 19, 2020 Community of Practice led by Marty Kooistra, Network Practitioner, Principal - Sapwood Advisors & Executive Director, Housing Development Consortium of Seattle-King County and Melissa Kelley, Facilitator, National Home Visiting Network.*

Webinar link: <https://tinyurl.com/y78fbol2>



## IV. Network Principle #3: HUMILITY, Not Brand

*Our organizations work alongside our peers as equals and are willing to take a back seat when other partners are in a better position to lead.*

### What Does This Mean?

When we think of the home visiting field, it seems unusual to question humility. After all, aren't the people who work in the field already some of the most humble? Of course they are! And they also have an unwavering commitment to their program or model. It's that commitment to model that can take some down a slippery slope where if left unchecked can shift the most humble into the most territorial.

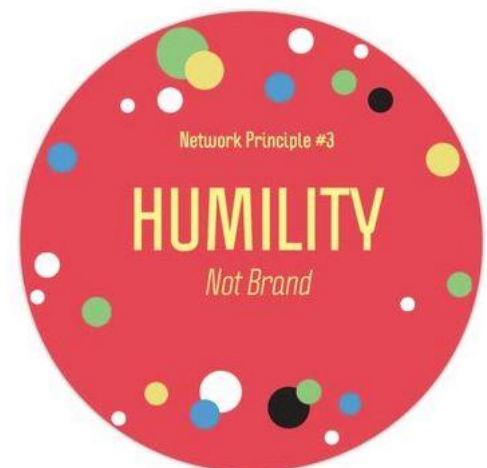
Humility, not brand reminds us that we need to show up as equal members of a network and walk together to realize our collective mission. We all have things to contribute. There are times when we might step forward to facilitate a project, and times when we should stand back and let others lead. It's about continuously considering who is best positioned for the work. There is too much that needs to be done to allow ego, brand, and turf to enter!

### Network Principle in Action

Several years ago, HIPPY International looked to launch its program in Liberia. The effort was a partnership of three organizations -- Friends of Liberia, the We Care Foundation, and HIPPY International. Typically, when HIPPY starts a program in a new country they brand and promote the program. In Liberia, the We Care Foundation wanted to have a leadership role and thought the program should be re-named FLI -- Family Literacy Initiative. HIPPY International recognized that without the We Care Foundation's involvement, the HIPPY program would not be able to thrive so they continued as a partner but took a back seat. Today, FLI has grown to five sites in Liberia and is a platform for the Administration of Education.

### Questions for Reflection

- **Introspection:** What are my organization's (or program's) core competencies?
- **Do It All vs. Strategic Allies:** Does my organization/program have to provide ALL of the services that our families need? -OR- Would a network or coalition approach be best?
- **Map the Landscape:** What would a map look like that includes all the other organizations who are working in your state or local community with whom you are or could be partnering?
- **Discern and State Your Unique Value-Add:** How would you articulate the work that your organization is uniquely qualified to deliver, and that which may be less so? Similarly, ask the other entities to articulate their unique services.
- **Scarcity or Abundance:** Are you operating from a mindset of SCARCITY or ABUNDANCE? Is the glass half full or is it half empty?



*Key points from the June 8, 2020 Community of Practice led by Marty Kooistra, Network Practitioner, Principal - Sapwood Advisors & Executive Director, Housing Development Consortium of Seattle-King County and Melissa Kelley, Facilitator, National Home Visiting Network.*

**Webinar link:** <https://tinyurl.com/y4k7qds2>

## V. Network Principle #4: TRUST, Not Control

*Trust and shared values guide how we interact and create an environment that maximizes our collective impact.*

### **What Does This Mean?**

Network scientist Jane Wei-Skillern, PhD. reminds us that “Strategy and structure matter, but the single most important factor behind all successful collaborations is trust-based relationships among participants. Many collaborative efforts ultimately fail to reach their full potential because they lack a strong relational foundation.” Even though the entire home visiting field is predicated on relationships, we still grapple with trust when working collaboratively.

TRUST is necessary for partners to work together effectively and accomplish their shared mission. It is critical that we strengthen trust and minimize control that is oppressive. We need to do this with the obvious things (being truthful to one another) and the less so obvious (the trust issues below the surface).

Many are familiar with the iceberg image. What we can see above the surface are the tangible outcomes and formal organizational pieces (e.g., explicit norms, organizational charts, missions and goals, position descriptions). What we cannot see (those parts below the surface) are the informal structures (e.g., implicit norms, power and influence patterns, secrets, views about competence and behaviors, trust and confusion). Understanding what is below the surface is essential to build trust and make collaboration work.



### **Network Principle in Action**

Michigan has been working for several decades to support parent leadership and voice, first within the special education space and now across government agencies and programs, including early home visiting. Parents sit on local and state boards providing frank feedback and co-creating solutions. This wasn't always easy for some around the table. Often there was a “hidden fear” that parents would come and ask for things that were unattainable. It was essential for agency staff to let go of control in order to truly listen and understand the parents' experiences, strengths, and needs.

## Activities for Building Trust

These trust building activities are listed in order from those that might be best for new groups, to those that could help deepen established relationships.



### 1) Shift the Context: The Meeting Space Matters

- Pick a neutral spot that is not commonly known to certain groups or that carries connotations of turf
- Share responsibilities for food, supplies, meeting set-up and clean-up

### 2) Opening Conversations: Speed Dating

- Pair up, give people an easy question to respond to in a one-minute timeframe
- Continue repeating in new pairs with new questions and increase the intensity or vulnerability of the questions
- Sample questions:
  - What do you hope to accomplish today as a group? (opening question)
  - What's one thing in your work life that is going really well?
  - What's one quirky/unique/weird thing about you that nobody knows?
  - What do you hope to accomplish today as a group? (closing question)

### 3) Get to Know the Organizations in the Room

- Each network/organization provides a 3-minute (uninterrupted) presentation -- what they do, what they see as their high-level competencies, how they do their work
- Participants then provide two minutes of feedback (not Q&A)
- *This is a good initial activity as it is not risky for most people. Feedback shows that people are listening and if they are in a positive headspace*

### 4) Community Voices - Roots of Empathy

- Everyone sits in a circle with their backs to each other (about 10 people)
- Ask people to share (in no particular order) a recent experience working with a client/family/someone in their community that they are supporting or interacting with (without mentioning identifying features)
- *Even if the next story is long in coming, the quiet space in between is important because it allows people to process what they are hearing*
- *This activity helps to ground people in reality and highlight the missing voice(s) in the room - and helps all to think about whose voice/experience should be in the room or recalled in decision-making*

### 5) Three Minute Speeches: Understanding Each Participants' "WHY"

- Ideally groups of 3-4. Each participant shares for 3-minutes (uninterrupted) WHY they do what they do (not WHAT they do)

### 6) Life Stories: Being Authentic

- Groups of 5 people. Each person shares their life story in 5-7 minutes
- Participants then provide 2 minutes of feedback (not Q&A)
- Facilitator then synthesizes the collective sense of the journeys
- *This activity creates a sense of community and interdependence*

## 7) Authentic Conversations: Addressed and Acknowledged

- In the full (large) group, this is a free-flowing conversation, but needs to be well-facilitated so that group feels both the safety and freedom to express themselves in a respectful manner
- What needs to be addressed? (These are above the surface issues such as when/where to meet, who facilitates, etc.)
- What needs to be acknowledged? (These are below the surface issues such as dominant organizations, experiences with organization behavior)
- *This activity develops the muscle of the group to hold tensions*

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*Key points from the March 23, 2020 Community of Practice led by Marty Kooistra, Network Practitioner, Principal - Sapwood Advisors & Executive Director, Housing Development Consortium of Seattle-King County and Melissa Kelley, Facilitator, National Home Visiting Network.*

Webinar link: <https://tinyurl.com/4dafapdl>

## VI. Steps Towards an Effective Network

In addition to the four network principles, network scientist Jane Wei-Skillern and her colleagues David Ehrlichman and David Sawyer, outline five key steps in a process for making your network effective. These steps are not always linear - be prepared to circle back as you continue to develop your networking muscle.

### 1) Clarify purpose

- Why does your specific collaborative table exist?
- What are you trying to achieve together?
- Is the purpose shared by everyone at the table?
- During the network development phase, a lot of time is usually spent just working on figuring out purpose. And, often this needs to be revisited as things evolve or as conditions change.

### 2) Convene the right people

- This doesn't mean the most powerful people.
- What are you trying to achieve and who are the major players that work on that issue?
- Are those that would be impacted at the table? This is often a forgotten group, but for any effort to be successful, *it is necessary*.
- Are the people at the table able to make decisions and get things done?
- Do you have diverse perspectives represented? You don't want active obstructionists, but you do want different viewpoints.
- This also needs to be revisited regularly - people change jobs, sometimes you need additional voices at the table as your purpose evolves or as new needs arise.

### 3) Cultivate trust

- This takes time and it takes intentional work to get to know one another. You have to carve out time during convenings for this. Just sitting at the table strategizing together doesn't build trust. Developing relationships and building trust is an ongoing process, especially as the people at your table may change over time.
- Build trust not for acceptance or agreement or affirmation, but for accomplishment.

### 4) Coordinate actions

- You've probably heard that there are different levels of collaboration. Maybe you've heard about the scale from communicating to coordinating to collaborating to co-creation. Or sharing to linking to aligning to leveraging. Just figuring out who is doing what is a basic step that allows you to look at how you can leverage your collective resources to make an impact.



### 5) Collaborate Generously

- It isn't just about what you can get. In fact, if you have a common mission and clarity in purpose, then what you give is how you are able to make a difference.

For more information, see:

[https://ssir.org/articles/entry/five\\_steps\\_to\\_building\\_an\\_effective\\_impact\\_network#](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/five_steps_to_building_an_effective_impact_network#)

## VIII. Network Mindset Resources

### **Stories of Network Principles in Action in the Home Visiting Field**

Posted on the National Home Visiting Resource Center website:

<https://nhvrc.org/superhero-movies-home-visiting/>

**Parent Leadership and Voice in Michigan: An Evolving Commitment That is Contingent on Trust and Humility**

- [https://nhvrc.org/wp-content/uploads/Final\\_NHVRC-Network-Story\\_Parent-Voice-Michigan\\_2020.pdf](https://nhvrc.org/wp-content/uploads/Final_NHVRC-Network-Story_Parent-Voice-Michigan_2020.pdf)

**The Power of Networks: How Network Principles Helped the Home Visiting Field Successfully Communicate Program Outcomes**

- [https://nhvrc.org/wp-content/uploads/power-of-networks\\_2020.pdf](https://nhvrc.org/wp-content/uploads/power-of-networks_2020.pdf)

**Shifting Behavior From a Model-Specific Orientation to Cross-Model Collaboration: The Evolution of the National Alliance of Home Visiting Models**

- [https://nhvrc.org/wp-content/uploads/Final\\_NHVRC-Network-Story\\_Shifting-Behavior\\_2020.pdf](https://nhvrc.org/wp-content/uploads/Final_NHVRC-Network-Story_Shifting-Behavior_2020.pdf)

**MIECHV as Node Withing a Constellation of Programs Needed to Achieve Health Equity**

- [https://nhvrc.org/wp-content/uploads/Final\\_NHVRC-Network-Story\\_MIECHV-as-Node\\_2020.pdf](https://nhvrc.org/wp-content/uploads/Final_NHVRC-Network-Story_MIECHV-as-Node_2020.pdf)

**Shifting Mindsets: How Understanding the Need for Parent Voice and Network Principles Shapes Perspective of a Social Science Research Analyst**

- [https://nhvrc.org/wp-content/uploads/Final\\_NHVRC-Network-Story\\_Shifting-Mindsets\\_2020.pdf](https://nhvrc.org/wp-content/uploads/Final_NHVRC-Network-Story_Shifting-Mindsets_2020.pdf)

**National Home Visiting Summit: A Place to Build and Grow Community**

- [https://nhvrc.org/wp-content/uploads/Final\\_NHVRC\\_Network-Story-HV-Summit.pdf](https://nhvrc.org/wp-content/uploads/Final_NHVRC_Network-Story-HV-Summit.pdf)

### **Research on Network Principles**

**Four Network Principles for Collaboration Success (Article and Video)**

- <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=tfr>
- <https://youtu.be/tbLHabh7SsM>
- Wei-Skillern, J., & Silver, N. (2013). Four Network Principles for Collaboration Success. *The Foundation Review*, 5(1)

**Five Steps to Building an Effective Impact Network**

- [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/five\\_steps\\_to\\_building\\_an\\_effective\\_impact\\_network](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/five_steps_to_building_an_effective_impact_network)

**The Most Impactful Leaders You Have Never Heard Of**

- [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the\\_most\\_impactful\\_leaders\\_youve\\_never\\_heard\\_of](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_most_impactful_leaders_youve_never_heard_of)

**Cultivating a Network Leader Mindset (Podcast)**

- [https://ssir.org/podcasts/entry/cultivating\\_a\\_network\\_leader\\_mindset](https://ssir.org/podcasts/entry/cultivating_a_network_leader_mindset)

**Tactics of Trust**

- <https://blog.convergeforimpact.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/The-Tactics-of-Trust-SSIR-Winter-16.pdf>

### **Network Resource Websites**

- <https://newnetworkleader.org/>
- <https://networkweaver.com/>
- <https://visiblenetworklabs.com/>