

# Minnesota Food Charter Network Final Evaluation Report December 2018

*Submitted by:*

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## I. History

Launched in 2015, the Minnesota Food Charter Network (Network), is currently hosted by the University of Minnesota's Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Institute. The Network is a major vehicle in Minnesota for encouraging cross-sector collaboration to implement Food Charter strategies. The table below presents an overview of key Network milestones by year.

<b>Minnesota Food Charter Network Milestones <sup>1</sup></b>	
<b>2011-2013: Charter Concept and Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Minnesota Food Summit held in 2011</li> <li>• MN Department of Health receives federal funding to support development of the Minnesota Food Charter and Minnesota Food Charter Network</li> <li>• Community engagement activities involving 2500 people conducted to inform Charter development</li> </ul>
<b>2014: Charter Development &amp; Research to Determine Options for Structural Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minnesota Food Charter Steering Committee convened by the Healthy Food Healthy Lives Institute, University of MN</li> <li>• Study of alternative structures or models to support Food Charter completed</li> <li>• Charter Drafting Committee convened</li> <li>• Charter launched at the 2014 Minnesota Food Summit</li> </ul>
<b>2015: Statewide Network Planning and Launch</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead Partners (Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, Minnesota Departments of Health, Human Services and Agriculture, Extension and Healthy Food Healthy Lives at the University of Minnesota) agree on a Charter support structure and commitment funding for 2 years (\$250,000 per year)</li> <li>• Guides to support Charter implementation developed with Blue Cross support</li> <li>• Network launched at the 2015 Minnesota Food Access Summit</li> </ul>
<b>2016: Statewide Network Development &amp; Implementation of Operations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healthy Food Healthy Lives Institute becomes fiscal host for Network</li> <li>• Network director hired</li> <li>• Operations team begins meeting</li> <li>• Network structure introduced to local, regional, and issue-specific networks and groups across state and Request for Support to develop support system for these networks and groups</li> <li>• Network Action Teams formed</li> <li>• Food Leaders from across Minnesota convened by Extension</li> <li>• Cross-Agency Work Groups update government leaders on Network progress</li> </ul>
<b>2017: Statewide Network Operations Continue</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funds to build capacity awarded to selected food networks by Extension</li> <li>• Food Leaders convened virtually by Extension</li> <li>• Strategic planning involving network stakeholders to propose common planning and reporting tool</li> <li>• Food Access Summit held</li> <li>• Action Teams develop workplans to address identified strategic priorities</li> <li>• Selected Action Teams cease meeting and others form</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> For detail on the milestones, see *Minnesota Food Charter Network Launch, Milestone and Timeline* prepared by Johnstad and Associates (June 25, 2017). Available through the Center for Prevention - Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota.

The Network includes many local, regional, and issue-specific networks and groups (sometimes called Food Networks, Food Coalitions, Food Policy Councils, or Collaborative Food Organizations, etc.) involving hundreds of individuals from across Minnesota who are affiliated with many different organizations. It also includes multiple teams focused on supporting the work of these networks and groups. Participation is dynamic and ever changing.

Operating as a network isn't the same as operating as an organization. By design, a network, even if it is intentionally focused on the same issue or vision, is a decentralized, member-driven platform of relationships that is self-organizing.

In 2017, the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, in collaboration with the Network, contracted with Johnstad & Associates to document the Network launch and to develop an evaluation framework and data collection tools for assessing and reflecting on the health of the Network.

Johnstad & Associates relied on three research-based documents to identify the core aspects of Network health and effectiveness: Peter Plastrik's book *Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact* (2014), a monograph produced by Innovations for Scaling Impact and Keystone Accountability, *Next Generation Network Evaluation* (2010), and June Holley's *Network Weaver Handbook: A Guide to Transformational Networks* (2012). These core aspects of health and effectiveness center on:

**Network Connectivity:** What is the nature of the relationships within the Network? Is everyone connected who needs to be? What is the quality of these connections? Does the Network effectively bridge differences? Is the Network becoming more interconnected? What is the Network's reach?

**Network Vibrancy:** How healthy is the Network along multiple dimensions (participation, network form, capacity, leadership, etc.)?

**Network Effects:** What is the added-value of the Network to charter-related work?

#### **Why Focus on Network Health**

Promoting the health and effectiveness of the Network involves individual participants, local, regional and issue-specific networks and groups and teams EACH assessing and reflecting on their performance.

The assumption is that a healthy network increases the probability that it will add value to community-based efforts to improve Minnesota's food system and contribute to outcomes that a single individual, organization, or sector could not achieve.

This report summarizes what Johnstad & Associates learned about the current health and effectiveness of the Network (Appendix A summarizes the sources of data). Think of it as a baseline. Repeated self-assessment and reflection by individual participants and the many local, regional, and issue-specific networks and groups will promote continuous improvement in Network health at multiple levels.

Throughout 2017 and 2018, Johnstad & Associates produced many reports and memoranda that are listed in Appendix B. These documents are available from the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota.

Appendix C provides a snapshot of a set of tools for assessing network health that were developed and piloted by Johnstad & Associates. These documents and tools are available on the Minnesota Food Charter Network website.

## II. Status of Network Connectivity

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Connectivity simply means how people working on the goal of healthy food for all are connected to each other—the quality and depth of these connections. It also refers to how information and resources flow throughout the Network. Developing strong connections among members is the foundation for three types of network actions:

- Members **exchange information** easily and hopefully learn because of the interchange.
- Members prioritize and **align** a shared set of ideas, goals, and strategies.
- Members work together to **produce** innovation practices, public-policy proposals, and other “outputs” to improve Minnesota’s food system.

Peter Plastrik and his colleagues, in *Connecting to Change the World* (Plastrik, et al., 2014, pp. 85-86), have identified a progression of levels in how individuals experience network connections.

**Level 1:** I have been introduced to this person, but do not exchange information with them on a regular basis (at least once per month).

**Level 2:** I exchange useful information with this person on a regular basis (at least once per month) but have not worked/do not work directly with them on a project.

**Level 3:** I exchange useful information with this person on a regular basis and have worked or am working directly with this person on one or more projects.

**Level 4:** I depend on this person regularly for important advice and have worked with him/her on more than one project.

Strong connections among members will, at a minimum, result in the exchange of information. But creating alignment and jointly producing practices etc. takes facilitation, time, and patience, especially if the members have little experience working together.

Network mapping is a great way for people to cultivate a network mindset and see themselves as part of a network. Maps help participants see, analyze, and act to improve connections by:

- Visualizing how information and communication flows,
- Identifying resources—who is “out there” and could be tapped for involvement,
- Identifying where people have common interests and priorities to learn from each other or work on strategies together,
- Identifying who is missing from the network.

In 2018, Johnstad and Associates worked with five networks and groups that volunteered to complete hand-drawn or computer software assisted maps.<sup>2</sup> The primary purpose was to pilot written mapping resources that Johnstad and Associates developed. Neighborhood Roots, the Nutrition Collaborative at the Minnesota Department of Health, and the Cross Agency Working Group planned, conducted, and reflected on hand-drawn maps. The Metro Food Access Network and the Minnesota Food Leaders group each completed the computer software mapping process. Given the reach of these two networks, we share key findings here.

<b>Metro Food Access Network</b>	<b>Minnesota Food Leaders</b>
<b>Purpose of mapping:</b> Determine how to best meet the needs of MFAN partners and facilitate self-organizing.	<b>Purpose of mapping:</b> Strengthen a network mindset and identify Food Leaders with common interests and priorities who could be a resource to others.
<b>Participation:</b> 92 out of 120 partners (77%) completed a web-based survey.	<b>Participation:</b> 55 out of 65 leaders (85%) from across Minnesota regions completed a web-based survey.
<b>Findings about diversity:</b> There is diversity among partners in terms of sectors, roles, and location (urban, suburban, and statewide, but very limited rural representation). There is little diversity in terms of gender or racial backgrounds (most identified as female and white).	<b>Findings about diversity:</b> There is little diversity in terms of racial/ethnic backgrounds (most identified as white). The <i>core</i> of the network (meaning the center where there are denser ties and people can access most individuals through their direct connections) is strongly represented by people working statewide or in the Metro and Northern regions (but there is representation of all regions in the core).
	<b>Findings about network patterns:</b> The <i>core</i> is mostly staff of non-profits and Extension. People working in a range of sectors including food production/farming, education, and philanthropy are in the <i>periphery</i> (meaning people positioned nearer the edges of the map who are only connected to the core through 1 or 2 people). Respondents added 142 names of individuals who they consider “go to people” to advance their efforts. It is the beginning of the network periphery and focus on a shared understanding of who the resources are on the edges of the network that could benefit the whole network. Public health staff are positioned across the map and might benefit from learning more about what each are doing and its value to the work.
<b>Findings about interest in affinity groups:</b> Partners want to engage across a variety of sectors. <sup>3</sup>	<b>Findings about priority issues/interests for affinity groups:</b> Three topics (from a list of 10) emerged as priorities with people already having good connectivity: (1) Embracing equity across the food system (including issues related to race, gender, sexuality, geography); (2) Building a regional food system with measurable goals; (3) Influencing policy at the local and state level. The other 7 topics may become priorities as people get to know each other and start to exchange information and advice.

<sup>2</sup> Pilot results for the 5 networks/groups are summarized in a report, *Minnesota Food Charter Network Evaluation: Pilot of Social Network Analysis Methods* (October 18, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> A sample computer-generated map created for MFAN regarding roles of network partners appears in Appendix D.

<b>Metro Food Access Network</b>	<b>Minnesota Food Leaders</b>
<p><b>Interest in racial equity:</b> Concentrations of partners (10+) expressed interest and a willingness to lead efforts in 4 areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Organizational tools to build and support a racially diverse staff,</li> <li>2. Developing skills for being an anti-racism ally,</li> <li>3. Skills for authentically engaging communities of color, and</li> <li>4. Tools for people in non-leadership positions to use in promoting a shift in organizational cultures to be more inclusive.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Interest in racial equity:</b> Only 6 Food Leaders indicated they are not focused on racial equity work at this time. Areas of interest for others include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Developing skills for authentically engaging under-represented communities,</li> <li>2. Developing skills to involve and support distributed and diverse leadership; and</li> <li>3. Obtaining resources to create an inclusive network culture.</li> </ol> <p>Many people expressing an interest in racial equity are not part of the core and bringing them together to focus on diversity could foster greater engagement and peer support. The survey, however, did not ask if anyone was willing to serve in a convener role.</p>
<p><b>Interest in advocacy &amp; policy:</b> Concentrations of partners expressed an interest in 2 areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Developing skills to support community members as advocates for food policies, and</li> <li>2. Developing skills to advocate for statewide or national food policies.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Findings about biggest challenges and addressing them:</b> 56 food leaders identified the biggest challenge (from a list of 7) as securing ongoing, sustainable funding for their network functions/operations.</p> <p>Other common challenges: Not having enough capacity to staff the network and the lack of consistent engagement of network members.</p>
<p><b>Interest in action teams:</b> A concentration of partners expressed an interest in a team focused on local government action.</p>	<p><b>Findings regarding willingness to provide leadership to peers:</b> 15 Food Leaders offered to convene their peers on a topic or to be a resource in convening others and sharing their experience.</p>

In November/December 2018, Johnstad and Associates interviewed a purposefully selected sample of people who have been deeply involved in the Network. Respondents consistently agreed that one of the most important reasons for a Network to exist centers on fostering connections that make work on the Minnesota Food Charter strategies possible. Illustrative quotes:

- *Greater connectivity will lead to stronger engagement and intention in the work.*
- *The Network should create a connected ecosystem of resources, whether those resources are people, financial, or information based.*
- *The Network needs to in some way be a clearinghouse to let people know what is going on and what is happening—that should be a core function.*
- *This [connectivity] should be one of its most important activities.*

Current activities cited as promoting connectivity include hosting regular convenings (both regional and statewide), participants in networks and groups identifying their passions and shared interests, and networks and groups regularly reporting out what they are working on and accomplishing together.

Selected interview respondents also commented on the current lack of connectivity to representatives from large scale agricultural growers and grocery stores. Most people get their food through these



channels so if the goal is to work toward everyone living in Minnesota having access to affordable, healthy, and safe food, they need to be engaged.

### **Key Takeaways About Connectivity**

**Connectivity takes time to cultivate.** It takes time and ongoing trust building to get participants to Level 4. We see from the SNA pilot that participants in the MFAN and identified Minnesota Food Leaders are interested in building network connections for specific purposes and outcomes (i.e. to act, to develop skills, to provide peer support).

**Peripheral connections need development** (meaning people positioned nearer the edges of the network or group who are only connected to the core through 1 or 2 people). An untapped aspect of the statewide network to explore and leverage are the peripheral connections to sectors and individuals.

**Social Network Analysis (aka creating maps) builds energy and excitement.** While multiple interview respondents indicated the Network seems to be losing energy, participants in the mapping pilots consistently agreed the results were invigorating for them and their group and served to deepen their relationships and focus their investment of resources.

**Connectivity is a key component of network health.** Building strong connections among players in Minnesota's food system is a step that should not be skipped in network building. Expect that some people will be eager to get to the substance of the work so be strategic about building and strengthening connections by taking action or learning or supporting one another over time.

But remember, this connectivity is the foundation for work related to alignment and collaborative actions that produce results. Network mapping, either hand-drawn or computer-based, will build enthusiasm and help participants see, analyze, and act to improve connections. Local, regional, and issue-specific networks and groups should be encouraged to engage in network mapping on a regular basis (at one to two-year intervals).

### III. Status of Network Vibrancy

Vibrancy centers on the characteristics the Network must have so that its efforts will be successful and sustainable. The basics include:

- An agreed upon shared purpose, structure and governance,
- Plans to build needed capacities, and
- Alignment of goals and strategies of the many local/regional and issue-based networks/groups with the Minnesota Food Charter.

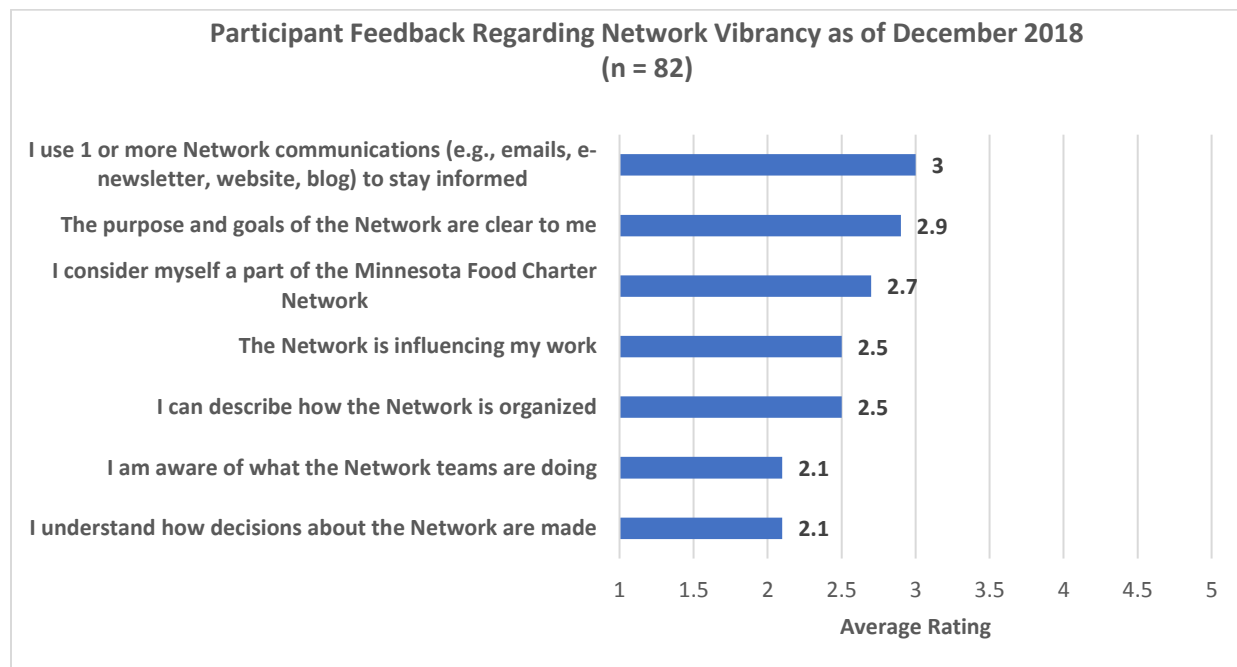
A document review process is a good first step for the Network leadership to assure that key aspects of the Network are in place to set the conditions for building vibrancy. It involves the identification and analysis of existing documents. The documents may be hard copy or electronic and may include reports, logs of activities or events, meeting minutes, newsletters, communications materials, or survey results.

In early 2018, Michael Dahl, the Network Director, identified and reviewed existing documents using a rubric created by Johnstad & Associates. Key findings are summarized below.

<b>Core Characteristics of Vibrancy</b>	<b>Document Review Question</b>	<b>Status as of March 2018</b>
Shared purpose	Has the Network specified its value proposition related to the MN Food Charter (e.g., purpose/goals/benefits to stakeholders) in writing?	Yes
Structure & governance	Is there an up-to-date MFCN structural plan in writing that shows how all key groups relate to each other (e.g., partners, leadership, teams, local/regional networks, & groups)?	Yet to be developed
	Is there a current MFCN governance plan(s) in writing that indicates how major decisions about the Network are made?	Yes—Specific to Strategic Team
Participant capacity development	Have network leaders, partners, and/or teams assumed responsibility for fostering the capacity of Network participants in terms of needed opportunities for skill development, material resources, and methods for making connections?	Partially
Alignment	Are team workplans current & do they align with current Network priorities and milestones?	Yes

Source: Document Review rubric completed March 2018

**Network purpose, structure, and governance.** In 2018, individuals from across the state who indicated at least some familiarity with the Minnesota Food Charter Network answered questions related to the Network’s vibrancy as part of the Statewide Network Participant Feedback Survey. <sup>4</sup>

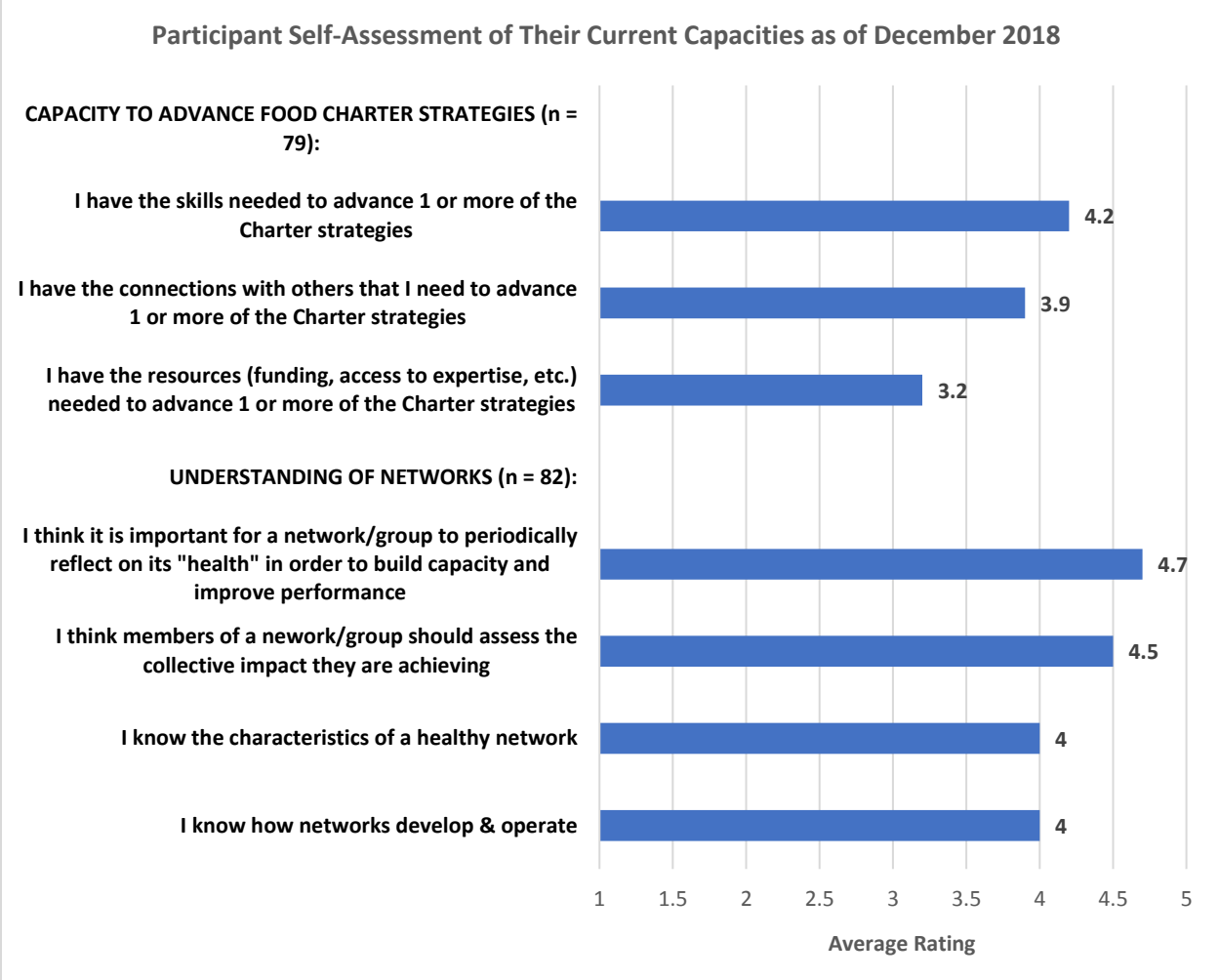


Source: Statewide Network Participant Survey, December 2018  
 Rating scale used by respondents: 1 = *Not so much* to 5 = *Totally*

Although individuals interviewed by Johnstad and Associates in November/December 2018 were selected because of their strong connection to the Network, many of them expressed a lack of understanding of current Network goals, how it is organized, what the teams are doing, or how decisions are made. In retrospect, many respondents feel that the Network may have been “over-structured” as it was launched. Going forward, the structure should be simplified and more focused on fostering connectivity regionally and locally.

**Capacities needed to advance Charter strategies in networks.** Respondents to the statewide survey also assessed themselves in two essential capacity areas that promote network vibrancy: (1) their capacity to advance one or more of the Minnesota Food Charter strategies, and (2) their understanding of how networks function effectively.

<sup>4</sup> Refer to Appendix A for a summary of the characteristics of survey respondents.



Source: Statewide Network Participant Survey, December 2018  
 Rating scale used by respondents: 1 = *Not so much* to 5 = *Totally*

**Alignment.** The alignment of the work of local, regional, and issue-specific networks and groups was assessed by Johnstad & Associates in cooperation with University of Minnesota Extension using a web-based poll.<sup>5</sup> As of late 2017, the self-reported work of the active networks and groups consistently aligned with one or more of the Minnesota Food Charter goals.

<sup>5</sup> Key contacts from 53 local, regional, and statewide networks and groups (there are about 70 listed in the *University of Minnesota Extension Food Network Directory*) responded to a poll in late 2017. Only two of the responding networks or groups were no longer meeting and about 17% (that's 8) indicated their current focus was on re-launching or strengthening the health of their network.

<b>Self-Reported Alignment of Charter Goals &amp; Strategies by Local/Regional and Issue-Specific Networks and Groups as of October 2017</b>	
<b>Charter Goal Area</b>	<b>Examples of Network/Group Strategies</b>
Improved healthy food skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving food skills, with emphasis on school gardens</li> <li>• Supporting farmers through increased education and training opportunities</li> <li>• Hosting food-related learning experiences</li> <li>• Providing tangible education and tangible resources to gardeners</li> </ul>
Healthy food affordability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adding use of alternative forms of payment at farmers markets</li> <li>• Advising policy makers and elected officials on how to assure residents have access to affordable food that is safe and nutritious</li> </ul>
Healthy food availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanding farmers markets</li> <li>• Launching neighborhood projects to cultivate and share food</li> <li>• Expanding community-based agriculture sites</li> </ul>
Healthy food accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanding mobile food shelves</li> <li>• Creating awareness and change about the barriers to accessing food due to lack of transportation</li> <li>• Studying seniors' eating habits to determine ways to increase access to healthy food for low income seniors</li> </ul>
Healthy food infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting sustainable methods of food production and distribution to protect air, land, and water, and promote healthy communities</li> <li>• Reducing the use of pesticides</li> </ul>

Source: Poll of local/regional network/group key contacts, October 2017

A Johnstad & Associates evaluation team member had the opportunity in November 2017 to observe a meeting of the Cross-Agency Working Group (CAWG), one of the teams operating as part of the Minnesota Food Charter Network. Members of this work group include staff from the Minnesota departments of health, agriculture, human services, education, corrections, pollution control, transportation, and USDA rural development. In its current form, the group has been meeting bi-monthly since August 2016.

One focus of CAWG's work has involved exploring and expanding strategic alignment, collaboration, and coordination across agencies. To do this, staff from four agencies (50% of the agencies represented at the work group) contributed information to: (a) identify the nature of each agency's work in Minnesota's food system (e.g., funding, partnering, and/or programming), and (b) how this work aligns with the Minnesota Food Charter strategy domains (Infrastructure, Food Skills, Accessibility, Affordability, and Availability).

The group then analyzed the information to identify current patterns (as of 2017).

### **Key Findings About State Agency Opportunities for Strategic Alignment, Collaboration, and Coordination as of 2017**

The Food Charter domain, *Infrastructure*, had the highest number of identified agency initiatives (programming, funding, partnerships) to improve access to healthy food that occur across the food system: growing, processing, distribution, and/or consumption of safe, healthy food.

The domains, *Availability* (diverse variety of healthy food more available, unhealthy foods less) and *Food Skills* (people are equipped with healthy food skills), had the next highest number of identified agency efforts, with each involving about the same number of strategies.

The domains, *Accessibility* (healthy food is easy to get) and *Affordability* (healthy food for all people regardless of income) each have identified agency efforts but less so than the other Food Charter domains.

The above information has set the stage for cross-agency team members to explore and set in motion opportunities for coordination and collaboration.

### **Key Takeaways About Vibrancy**

**Statewide Network mindset not yet developed.** Many people do not yet see themselves as part of the Network. Indicating the Network is not influencing their work may be a signal that people are relying on an “organizational mindset” in which the Network is a distinct entity, but somehow separate from their work locally or regionally.

**The Network’s structure, governance, and decision-making not widely understood.** There is a lack of understanding and clarity about the Network’s current structure, governance, and decision-making. Given the expected changes in Network funding and the directorship, the time is ripe to restructure the Network and clearly articulate and communicate how work on Minnesota’s food system will be supported.

**People have content skills but need more connections.** Network participants on average see themselves as having the skills to advance Charter strategies. At the same time, they are less likely to report having the necessary connections to other people or resources (financial, access to expertise, etc.).

**People have a basic understanding of networks and collective impact.** Most participants express an understanding of networks and value the periodic assessment of network health and collective impacts being achieved.

**The Minnesota Food Charter is influencing work.** The Charter is shaping the work of the various local, regional, and issue-specific networks and groups. The challenge remains how to get this information widely shared, celebrated, and acted upon.

## IV. Status of Network Results

Results center on the contributions being made by the Network and their effects. Peter Plastrik and his colleagues remind us of the complexity of getting to collective results:

*In networks the usual problems of impact assessment are compounded by the fact that decentralization creates a “chain of impacts.” First in the sequence, the network affects its members—providing each of them with something new that they value and can use. In the sequence’s second step, individual members of a network start to use in their own situations what they are getting from the network.*

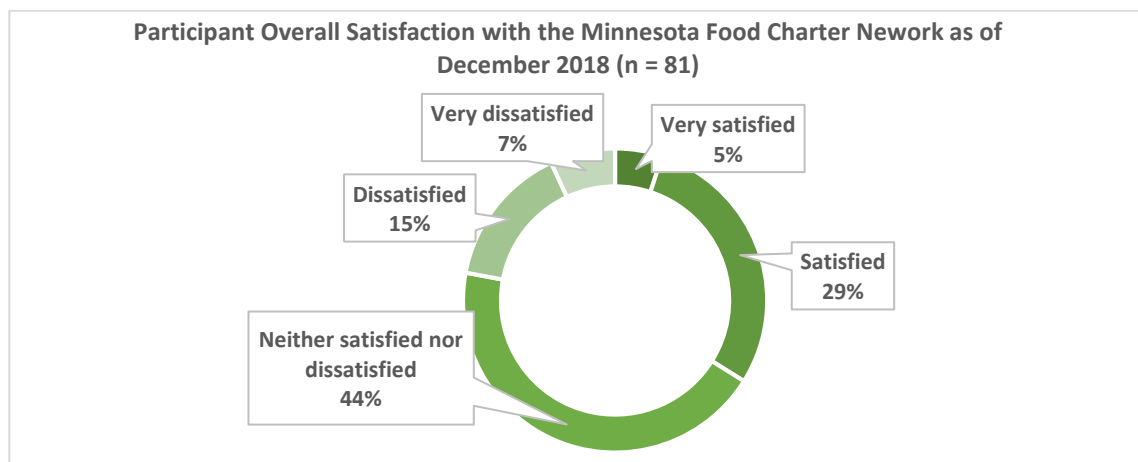
*The third step in the sequence has two dimensions: individual and collective impacts. What the individual members do directly or through others “back home.” Even as the network produces individual member impacts, members who are working together, in small clusters or as a whole network, may start to have a collective impact.*

*As networks evolve, they become more capable of enacting this impact sequence effectively, but it takes time and it’s not necessarily a linear process. (Plastrik, et al., *Connecting to Change the World*, 2014, pp. 160-161)*

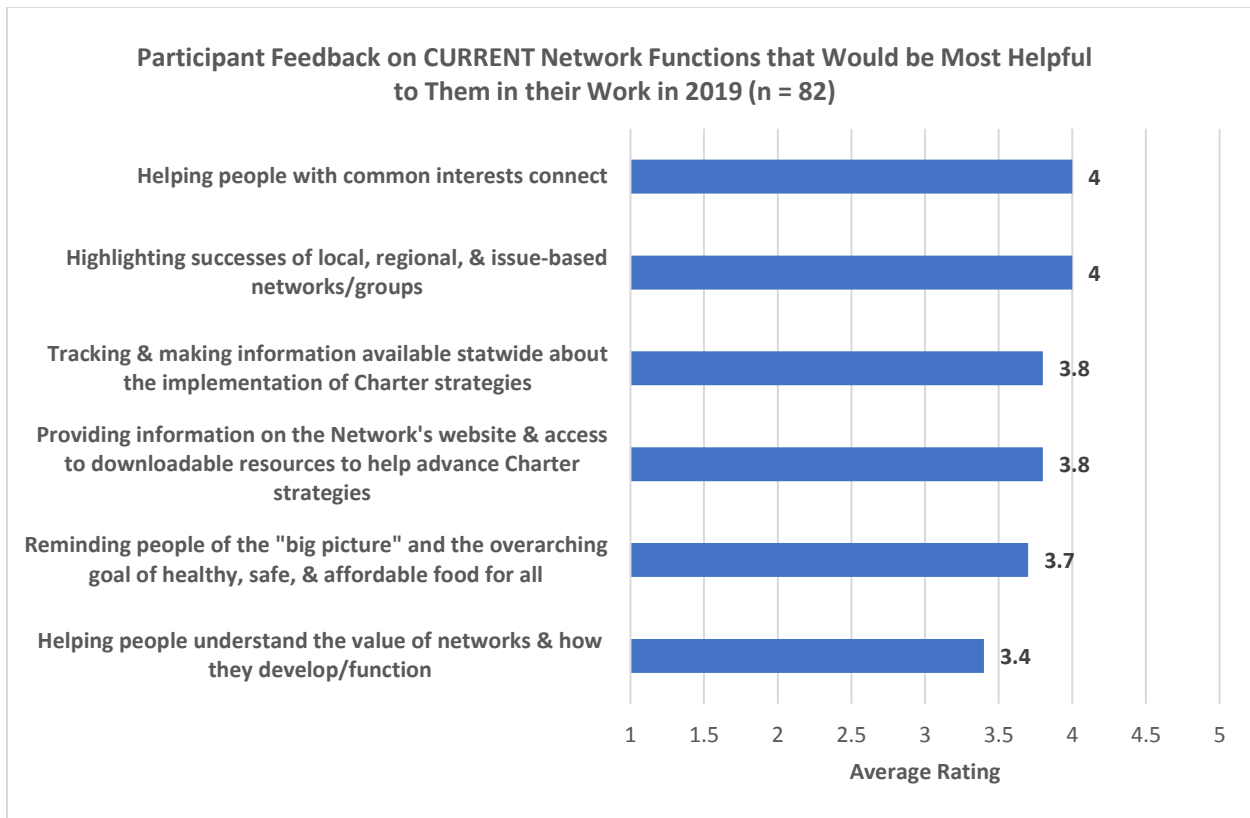
At this stage of the Network’s development, critical questions include:

- How is the Network contributing (or not) to Food Charter-related work?
- How do we determine the value of the Network?
- How can we tell if the Network is worth our investment?

As we enter 2019, collective Network contributions have yet to be articulated and Network effects are not routinely being measured and reported. Assessing the degree to which Network participants value and are satisfied with its stated purpose and current functions can serve as good starting point.



Source: Statewide Network Participant Feedback Survey, December 2018



Rating scale used by respondents: 1 = *Not so helpful to me* to 5 = *Totally helpful*

Statewide survey respondents also commented, in their own words, about specific Network activities that would be helpful to their work:<sup>6</sup>

- More clearly articulating the purpose and functions of the Network in advancing the Charter and fostering the prioritization of Charter strategies to focus on;
- Educating and spurring support and action, focusing on both the general public and elected officials;
- Capacity building centered on gaining access to needed funding and expertise.

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<sup>6</sup> Many of the comments elaborated on current Network functions or stated them more succinctly so they were not included in the summary that follows.



### Key Takeaways About Network Results as of 2018

**Satisfaction is mixed.** A large concentration of people (44%) have not formed an opinion about the Network. About a third (34%) report they are *satisfied/very satisfied* with the remaining (22%) indicating they are *dissatisfied/very dissatisfied*.

**Network functions highly valued.** Helping people with common interests connect (convenings and fostering the use of network mapping can do this), sharing local/regional and issue-specific network successes, reporting on Charter strategy implementation, and making information available on the Network's website have the highest value among Network participants.

**Clarity is needed to enhance Network vibrancy.** Clearer articulation of the purpose and core functions of the Network in advancing the Charter would be helpful to people, serving to enhance vibrancy.

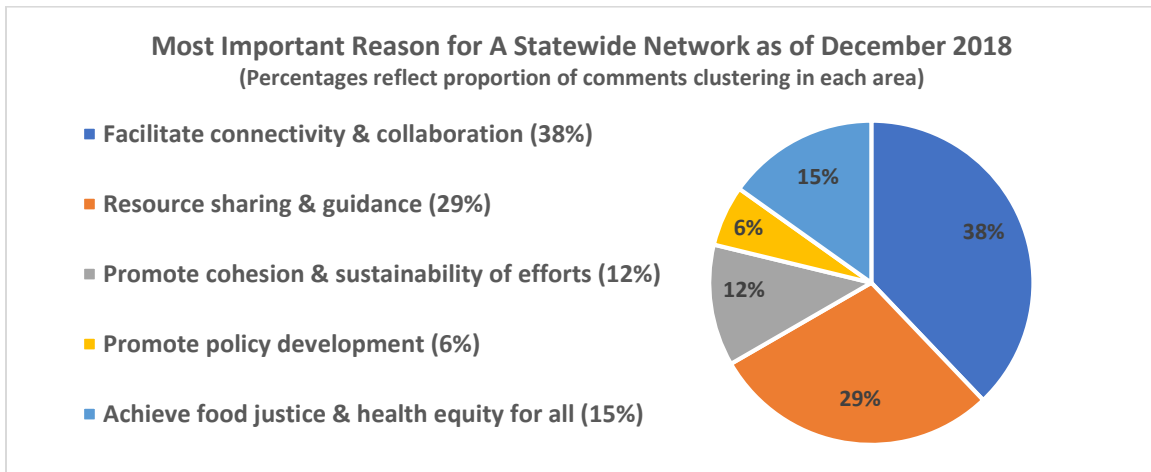
**Articulating and reporting on Network milestones may strengthen satisfaction.** Given the Network is still relatively young, network experts (June Holley and Peter Plastrik) recommend creating a set of milestones—intermediate indicators of progress—toward impact. Periodically reporting on these milestones may help to shape opinions toward satisfaction.

## V. Moving Forward

In this section, we provide additional input from Network participants that can inform the further design and development of the Minnesota Food Charter Network.

The collective value of a network that will bring members together must be cultivated by network builders—what members will get from and give to each other must be clearly articulated.

In the statewide survey, respondents indicated the most important reason for a Network to exist in Minnesota in their own words. Their comments clustered into five distinct propositions they value, with achieving food justice and health equity for all being the “big goal” that all members of the network potentially share and are motivated to achieve. The other four propositions (see chart below) represent the potential benefits that may draw people to the Network.



Source: Statewide Network Participant Feedback Survey, December 2018

Survey question: *From your perspective, what is the most important reason for a statewide Network to exist in Minnesota?*

Most Important Reason	Illustrative Quotes from the Statewide Network Participant Feedback Survey
Facilitate connectivity & collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>To not duplicate the same things but to work as a team.</i></li> <li>• <i>To support the interconnections of the MN Food Charter strategies to Minnesotans.</i></li> <li>• <i>To bridge and encourage connections and amplify awareness of current work and possibilities.</i></li> <li>• <i>To connect groups around Minnesota working on various aspects of the food system together.</i></li> <li>• <i>To create the infrastructure to secure resources, build connections and share learning.</i></li> </ul>
Resource sharing & guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>To share promising programs, build capacity and relationships.</i></li> <li>• <i>To share best practices, gather ideas to implement locally and have a shared communication to build awareness and support.</i></li> <li>• <i>To connect people to successful ideas rather than all trying to do the same things.</i></li> <li>• <i>To keep all the partners informed of the work and success going on across the state.</i></li> <li>• <i>To provide big picture guidance and keep us aware of the good that is happening wherever, so we can learn and build off each other's efforts.</i></li> </ul>
Promote cohesion & sustainability of efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The statewide Network provides the infrastructure and capacity to assist, support and direct the smaller networks to appropriate resources that ensure all have access to move the Charter work forward throughout MN.</i></li> <li>• <i>To verify the scope and determine the direction of collective work toward priority goals.</i></li> <li>• <i>To work cohesively to build a strong, just, thriving local food system.</i></li> <li>• <i>To provide a unified effort so that healthy foods are accessible to all at affordable prices.</i></li> </ul>
Promote policy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Orchestrate statewide advocacy for food related issues.</i></li> <li>• <i>Build collective power to advance statewide policy change (advocate for and pass legislation at the State Capitol).</i></li> <li>• <i>Advocate for funding to support community-based programs such as Market Bucks.</i></li> <li>• <i>The state does not have equal climate or growing conditions but maybe we can band together to address bigger legislative issues and support growers.</i></li> </ul>
Achieve food justice & health equity for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>To improve food equity and accessibility, as well as to help food producers to find viable marketing opportunities for their products.</i></li> <li>• <i>To increase healthy, good food access for all.</i></li> <li>• <i>To increase momentum and visibility of food access issues and increase equitable access to healthy foods.</i></li> <li>• <i>To effectively address root causes, not symptoms, of our broken food system.</i></li> </ul>

Source: Statewide Network Participant Feedback Survey, December 2018

Peter Plastrik in his book *Connecting to Change the World* stresses the importance of collective value:

*Knowing a network's purpose and membership sets the stage for spelling out its value propositions, the specific benefits that network members will realize by participating in the*

*network. . . . Most people join a network with the idea that participating will get them something that helps them, or their organization do their work. They may not have thought much about working with other members on a common goal. But, if the network serves only as an umbrella for a collection of individual projects, it is not realizing its added-value potential (Plastrik, et al., 2014, p. 51).*

The statewide survey also asked respondents to provide one idea in their own words for improving how the Minnesota Food Charter Network functions. These ideas clustered in five overlapping areas (some of which could involve partners and/or local/regional and issue-specific networks and groups taking responsibility) and were expanded upon by individuals interviewed by Johnstad and Associates in November/December 2018.

### ***Fostering connectivity***

- Finding ways to connect and help rural areas with this work;
- Creating a way to understand who is in the network and what it means to be a member;
- Creating a spot where people interested in volunteering can get connected with groups needing volunteers;
- Building a platform where people can connect directly;
- Planning for and attending a face-to-face gathering/networking meeting can help energize and refocus our efforts.

### ***Building capacity across Minnesota regions***

- A lot in the way of local capacity building has been done; now it's time to move to fostering regional and then statewide collaborative/collective action;
- More regionally-based meetings and in person sessions for sharing;
- Investing in regional network weavers;
- Make it easier for individuals outside of organizations doing food systems work to be involved in the regional network chapters;
- Providing funding for local and regional networks; recognize that those with "boots on the ground" often have the brainpower and motivation to make change in their communities but lack some resources to make change happen.

### ***Establishing priorities***

- Creating an infographic or a "getting started" resource about how to use the Charter would be helpful;
- Accept that the Network cannot be everything to everyone so pick the right lane and stay there;
- Focus—it feels like there are too many moving parts trying to fix an entire "system" all at once--99 strategies is a lot and people are overwhelmed and don't know where to start; develop a strategic focus/theme for what the Network should focus on for specific time periods--that could help people know where to start;
- Either support the work and function of local networks or work to improve healthy food access on a state level via changing policies and regulations.

### ***Enhancing communication and trust***

- Communicate more;
- Show us how you're helping our efforts--right now the Network just looks like another task force which produces little or nothing to help us;
- Make it easier to know about available information and how to access it;
- Be clearer about what we should be doing and how to work within the network;
- Trust needs to be built among the sectors of us who work in this field daily.

### ***Fostering public awareness and support***

- Educate and build support with Tim Walz and Erin Murphy and new commissioners;
- Share data and infographics describing collective action and results;
- Increase awareness of the Network's existence state wide;
- Provide public information on all small as well as large steps being undertaken in Minnesota regarding local food;
- Actively recruit people to be Network members.

Finally, a few comments focused on ideas for **restructuring** the Network:

- Transfer responsibility for Network functions to one of the state agencies so the work is sustainable;
- Redesign the Network to make it more of a coalition model;
- Eliminate the Network teams and focus on food charter strategy implementation with support from a steering committee(s);
- Add regionally-based staff;
- Recognize the Network doesn't really do anything that wasn't already happening organically in the food world; dissolve the Network and free up resources for other groups working in the space.

### **Key Takeaways About Moving Forward**

**People are clear on the Network's value proposition.** The most commonly cited reasons for a Network to exist center on facilitating connectivity and collaboration and resource sharing and guidance.

**People offered specific ideas in how the Network can improve.** Ideas for improving how the Network functions in 2019 are very specific and echo the reasons for it to exist:

- Focus on building connectivity and capacity across Minnesota regions,
- Establish priorities and effectively communicate them,
- Enhance communication and trust, and
- Foster public awareness.

A few ideas centered on restructuring or redesigning the Network.

## VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

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The Minnesota Food Charter Network has been operating for two years, far too soon to judge its merit and worth. From the Network research literature, we know that it may take five to 10 years for tangible Network effects to emerge.

We conclude the available data substantiate the following *accomplishments*:

- The Minnesota Food Charter is a recognized touchstone for work statewide. Network participants on average see themselves as having the skills to advance Charter strategies (although it remains overwhelming to some who would like more guidance on priorities and what to focus on).
- Participants recognize the importance of building connectivity across all sectors and groups and see it as a top priority. Network mapping, either hand-drawn or computer-based, is proving to be effective in building enthusiasm and helping participants see, analyze, and act to improve connections. Regional and statewide convenings draw large numbers of participants and are valued.
- Most participants express an understanding of networks and value the periodic assessment of network health and reporting on collective impacts being achieved.

*Challenges* are an inherent aspect of any initiative, particularly one involving many organizations and groups, players with very different backgrounds and ways of working, and the need to design and launch new activities within a relatively short time period. Available data point to aspects of Network health that are priorities to address:

- People tend to see the Network as a distinct entity, separate from their work locally or regionally. They do not yet see themselves as part of the Network.
- The value proposition for a statewide Network isn't clear to people. The language from the Network website does not align well with what people across the state are asking for. As the Network refines its value proposition, the language needs to be sharpened. Additionally, people would benefit from hearing and reading about what the Network is contributing to their work (a set of agreed upon milestones and reporting on them would make the value proposition come to life).
- There is a lack of understanding and clarity about the Network's current structure, governance, and decision-making. Given the expected changes in Network funding and the directorship, the time is ripe to restructure the Network and clearly articulate and communicate how work on Minnesota's food system will be supported.

- People need to see progress and are hungry for information about what other networks and groups across Minnesota are focused on and achieving. Gathering and sharing stories about the successes of local, regional, and issue-specific networks and groups should be the focus of sharing rather than the successes of individuals and single organizations.
- Fostering connectivity needs to become more intentional and ongoing. There is a need to identify and mentor more individuals who are willing to take on leadership and facilitation roles. Network mapping exercises are a good method for people to self-identify.

We as external evaluators have been focused on developing and piloting tools to assess Network health and do not have the depth of knowledge needed to recommend substantive actions the Network leadership and key stakeholders should take next.

We can offer a *recommended process*. We encourage people to maintain a stance of inquiry, particularly if one accepts that the Network is a very complex social innovation intended to transform individuals, organizations, and systems. Holding a stance of inquiry means focusing on these early results and then taking the time to sit back to ask *So What* questions:

- What sense can we make of these emerging data?
- In which aspects of the Network are we seeing movement and progress?
- What does it mean to us in this moment and in the future?

Engagement in this type of inquiry individually and collectively sets the stage for moving to *Now What* questions, informed by the available data. Action-oriented questions that Network partners and participants in different local/regional and issue-specific networks and groups might focus on include:

- What do the findings reveal about next steps?
- What other information do we have/need?
- What are my/our options?
- What are my/our resources?
- When and how can I/we act—individually and collectively—to optimize opportunities in this moment and the next?

Answers to these questions will inform the articulation of the next set of next steps related to the Network.

## Appendix A: Sources of Data

Johnstad & Associates had limited data regarding the health and effectiveness of the Network because although the proposed evaluation tools were piloted, they have not yet been "rolled out" and used statewide. Data for this report came from five sources.

Measure & Focus of Questions	Timing of Completion	Number of Respondents/ Participants	Characteristics of Respondents
<b>1. Poll of Local/Regional/Issue-Based Food Networks &amp; Groups</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update contact information</li> <li>• Operating status of group</li> <li>• Focus of activities</li> <li>• Targeted outcome areas</li> </ul>	Oct. 2017	53	Contact person for each network listed in Univ. of MN Extension Food Network Directory
<b>2. Network Document Review (focus on assessing developmental status)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure &amp; governance</li> <li>• Communication practices</li> <li>• Plan for knowledge development</li> <li>• Plan for participant capacity development</li> <li>• Sustainability plan</li> <li>• Alignment with MN Food Charter</li> </ul>	Feb. 2018	1	Network Director
<b>3. Social Network Analysis Mapping</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respondent characteristics</li> <li>• Interests and issues</li> <li>• Topics wanting to learn about</li> <li>• Skills wanting to develop</li> </ul>	May-July 2018	Metro Food Access Network 92 out of 120 partners (77%)	
		Minnesota Food Leaders 55 out of 65 leaders (85%)	
<b>4. Statewide Network Participant Feedback Survey</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Characteristics of respondents</li> <li>• Current understanding of Network</li> <li>• Importance of Network functions</li> <li>• Feedback on current operations</li> <li>• Self-assessment of capacity to do work</li> </ul>	Nov. 2018	115	See below
<b>5. Interviews with Key Informants</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current Network strengths, weaknesses, &amp; challenges</li> <li>• Reflections on current Network connectivity and vibrancy</li> <li>• Expected Network results</li> <li>• Priorities for further Network development</li> </ul>	Nov.-Dec. 2018	15	Sample of Network partners, team leads, & local/regional champions



<b>Characteristics of Statewide Network Participant Survey Respondents (n = 115)</b>		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Response Options</b>	<b>Number **</b>
Region in which respondent works (respondent could check all that apply)	Statewide	20
	Metro	38
	Central	14
	Northwest	9
	Northeast	22
	Southwest	10
	Southeast	14
	West Central	3
	Tribal	3
Sector/setting in which respondent works (respondent could check one)	Agriculture/food production	5
	Community-based or neighborhood org.	11
	Education (Childcare, Pre-K, K-12)	3
	Faith-based community	1
	Funding agency or organization	0
	Government (local, county, state)	21
	Healthcare	4
	Hunger relief	18
	Interested community member/volunteer	4
	Public health and nutrition	21
	Retail (including grocery stores, farmers markets, public markets)	2
	Student in middle school, high school, college	0
	University / Extension	24
	Worksite	1
Other (community gardens, regenerative agriculture/consumer advocacy, across the food system)	3	
Participant in local, regional, or issue-specific network or group focused on food	Yes (see list on next page)	87
	No or not sure	28
Membership on a Network team (respondent could check all that apply)	Not a member of a team	78
	Cross-Agency Working Group	3
	Engagement Team	2
	Food Hub Action Team	4
	Learning & Capacity Building Action Team	3
	Shared Measurement Action Team	4
	Strategic Team	4
Familiar with MN Food Charter	Yes	90
	No or not sure	14
Work related to 1 or more MN Food Charter strategies	Yes	77
	No or not sure	14
Familiar with MN Food Charter Network	Yes	69
	No or not sure	7

\*\* Total number of respondents vary across categories because respondents could skip questions.

## Statewide Network Participant Feedback Survey Respondent Network/Group Affiliations <sup>7</sup>

- Anoka County Food Solutions
- Bountiful Basket Food Shelf works with The Carver County Food Shelves with Carver County Public Health & SHIP
- Carlton County Food and Nutrition Network
- Cass Clay Food Partners Cass/Clay Hunger Coalition, Ugly Food of the North
- Cass County Food Shelves Coalition
- CentraCare Health
- CRFAN
- Channel One Regional Food Bank
- Community Action Duluth- UMD-Land Lab Sustainable Farming Program
- Campus Compact, AmeriCorps, VISTA
- Crow River Food Council
- Dietitian groups; Channel one
- Farm to School Leadership Team
- Fair food access
- FEAST
- Food shelf
- Get Fit Itasca
- Greater Mankato Area Hunger Assistance Network
- Grow North, Upper Harbor Terminal, NIFC, Environmental Initiatives
- Healthy Active Communities
- Healthy Kids Coalition, Farm to School Network
- Healthy Northland
- Homegrown Minneapolis
- Interagency Nutrition Group, Minnesota Department of Health
- Iron Range Partnership for Sustainability
- Land Stewardship Project
- Live Well Lake County
- Metro Food Access Network (MFAN)
- Minnesota Food Bank Cluster/Feeding Minnesota
- Minneapolis Food Council
- MN Schoolyard Garden Coalition
- Morris Healthy Eating
- Northeast Regional Sustainable Development Partnership
- Northland Food Network
- Northeastern Food
- Northland Food Network
- Northside Fresh
- Nutritious Food Coalition

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<sup>7</sup> Many respondents reported affiliations with multiple networks/groups that have been listed separately; duplicate affiliations have been combined

- PartnerSHIP 4 Health, which facilitates networking, groups with regional food shelves as well as producers/farmers markets/food hubs.
- Real Food Inc.
- Red Lake Local Foods Initiative, Intertribal Ag Council, other indigenous food and seed organizations
- Regeneration Minnesota, Regeneration International, Organic Consumers Association
- Roots, Shoots & Boots Food Network
- Rutabaga Project
- Second Harvest Heartland
- SHIP (multiple geographic areas)
- Southwest Minnesota Food Network
- SW MN Food Security Summits Hunger & Homeless Taskforce
- Sustainable Farming Association, Midwest Food Connection
- Shelf Network
- St. Peter Food Access Network
- Sustainable Development Partnership Northwoods Food Project Cook County Extension
- TRF Growing Forward
- United Way Hunger Solutions
- Wabasha County Food Access Network
- Waconia United Food Shelf
- Watonwan County Community Food Partnership
- Martin County Community Food Partnership

### **Minnesota Food Charter Network Teams**

- Shared Measurement team
- Hunger Solutions team
- Engagement team
- Learning and Capacity Building Action team
- Evaluation team
- Cross Agency Work Group
- Strategic Team

## **Appendix B: Available Reports and Memoranda**

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Monthly Evaluation News Write-ups (April-December 2017)

1. Developmental Stages of a Network
2. Overview of Network Health Tools
3. Characteristics of Effective Networks
4. Network Connectivity
5. Roles of Ambassadors and Champions
6. Local/Regional Network Poll Results
7. Network Mapping
8. Network Phases

Minnesota Food Charter Network Launch, Milestones, and Timeline (June 25, 2017)

Contributions by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota to the Food Charter and Minnesota Food Charter Network (June 25, 2017)

Presentation of Existing Social Network Analysis Data for the Northwest Food System and the Minnesota Food Network Leaders (December 2017)

Minnesota Food Charter Network Self-Study Tools and Piloting Plan (December 30, 2017)

Minnesota Food Charter Network Evaluation: Assessing Network Team Performance (December 2017)

Minnesota Food Charter Goals and Strategy Areas: Sample Outputs, Outcomes, and Data Collection Tools (December 21, 2017)

Minnesota Food Charter Network Evaluation: Statewide Network Participant Feedback Survey and Pilot Plan (December 30, 2017)

Minnesota Food Charter Network: Document Review (March 2018)

Minnesota Food Charter Network Evaluation Framework (May 10, 2018)

Minnesota Food Charter Network Evaluation: Pilot of Social Network Analysis Methods (October 18, 2018)

Minnesota Food Charter Network Evaluation: Pilot of the Statewide Network Participant Feedback Survey (December 10, 2018)

### Appendix C: Overview of Network Assessment Tools

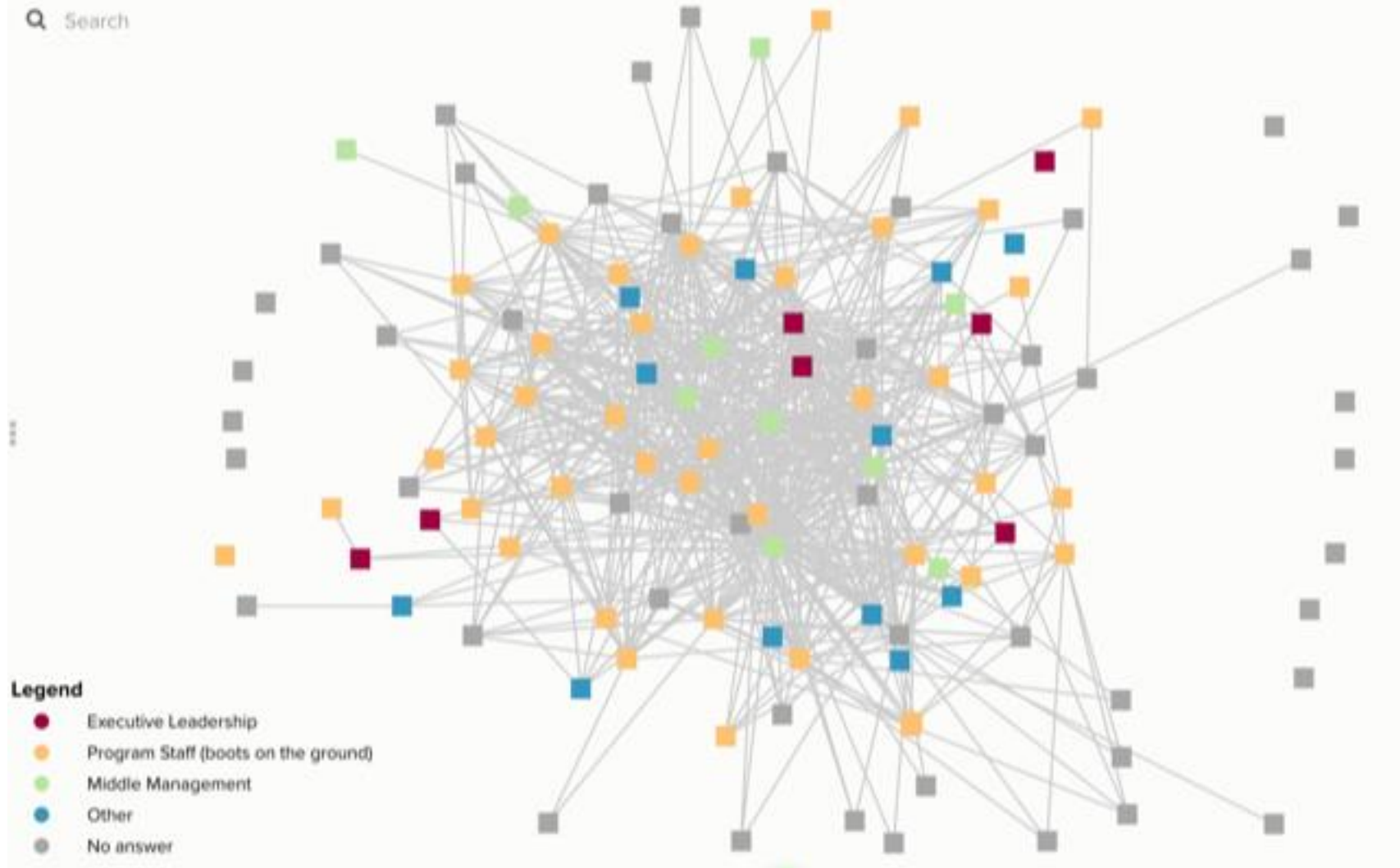
Network Health Assessment Tools	Level of Assessment (also referred to as unit of analysis)			
	Statewide	Individual Network Teams	An Individual Participant in a Local, Regional, Issue-Focused Network/Group	Local, Regional, Issue-Specific Networks & Groups
1. <b>Document Review:</b> A process to answer key questions about Network structures and processes that can be assessed through document & website review and analysis.	√			
2. <b>Statewide Network Participant Feedback Survey:</b> An online survey for participants to provide feedback and input regarding the performance of the Minnesota Food Charter Network.	√			
3. <b>MFCN Team Health Scorecard:</b> A checklist for members of MFCN teams to use in reflecting on the team’s health and performance areas that need to be developed further.		√		
4. <b>Individual Network Participant Self-Assessment:</b> A checklist for individuals to reflect on and strengthen their own behavior and knowledge in promoting Network health and effectiveness.			√	
5. <b>Network Health Scorecard:</b> A checklist for active local and regional networks and groups to diagnose their strengths and to identify performance areas that need to be developed further.				√
6. <b>Social Network Analysis:</b> Two options for analyzing and visualizing a network or group: 1. Creating hand-drawn maps, or 2. Using a web-based survey and software to generate maps				√
7. <b>Scorecard for Just Starting or Restarting Networks:</b> A self-assessment and planning checklist for core members of local & regional networks to use as they are starting or restarting their group and recommended resources for moving forward.				√
<b>Participatory Gathering and Analysis of Network Effects:</b> A process for collecting examples to illustrate the Network’s influence, added-value, and role in setting the conditions for systemic change. <i>(NOT YET DEVELOPED)</i>	√			

### Health Areas Assessed by Each Tool

Network Health Categories	Focus of Questions	1. Document Review	2. Statewide Network Participant Feedback Survey	3. MFCN Team Health Scorecard	4. Individual Network Participant Self-Assess.	5. Network Health Scorecard	6. Social Network Analysis (mapping)	7. Scorecard for Just Starting or Restarting Networks
Connectivity	Communication strategies	√	√	√	√	√		√
	Communication among members & with external stakeholders			√	√	√	√	
	Relationships among members			√	√	√	√	
	Collaboration among members			√	√	√	√	
	Decision-making processes	√	√	√		√		√
	Performance accountability		√	√	√	√		
Vibrancy	Shared purpose, goals, and plans	√	√	√		√		√
	Structure and governance	√	√	√		√		√
	Size & cohesion of core & periphery						√	
	Needed capacities (knowledge, skills, material resources, connections)		√	√	√	√		√
	Alignment of goals & strategies with MN Food Charter	√						
	Resilience & sustainability	√					√	
Contribution & effects	Value of working together			√	√	√		
	Relevance of the work to fulfilling the MN Food Charter	√	√					
	Achievement of overall goals and objectives of the Network **		√					

\*\*A participatory process for gathering and analyzing Network effects (NOT YET DEVELOPED)

## Appendix D: Sample MFAN Social Network Analysis Map



Note: Names have been removed here but network members would see them when discussing the map.