Title

Building Stronger Weak Ties among a Diverse Pool of Emergent Nonprofit Leaders of Color

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Abstract
This article explores theoretical underpinnings of social capital and strong and weak ties as they relate to relationships within, between, and among six cohorts of promising nonprofit leaders of color in a northwestern U.S. city. Using mixed-methods, including network analyses, it considers the impact and potential of a university/community collaboration to deliver a program to promising emergent leaders nominated for their talent and commitment to the work of their community-based organizations often in competition for limited resources. The paper considers the program's implicit effect on relationships and reveals inter-sector connections among alumni. Findings show substantial alumni movement between organizations, increasing the potential for collaboration and mentoring relationships. The paper concludes with recommendations for programs seeking long-term impact and discusses a series of unanticipated findings and the questions they engender, many critical as communities and organizations become more diverse and social needs do not diminish. [1]

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Introduction

Several years ago leaders from the African American and Latino/a communities in Portland, Oregon approached their public university's nonprofit management institute to partner in developing and delivering a Leadership Fellows Program. Their intent was to ready a diverse pool of talented men and women of color for nonprofit leadership roles; to prepare the community-based organizations where they worked for executive transitions and sustainability; and to do so with the goal of strengthening the overall community in which the organizations deliver essential services. The organizations invited to participate in the first cohort were identified because, serving and often led by people of color, they were deemed by local leaders as essential to the region's health and could not be allowed to fail for want of leadership development or thoughtful executive transition planning. This paper represents the first longitudinal review of the program's impact.

Definitions and Literature Review

The concept of social capital was arguably first popularized by Robert Putnam in his 1990s work on bonding and bridging in social relations (2000; 1995). In a synthesis and critique of the research focused on diverse communities, Arneil (2006) contrasts what she calls the American School's definition of social capital emanating from civic participation, and the "thick trust" that researchers believe this associational participation engenders (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000) and the European School's focus on networks and

resources (Arneil, 2006: 200 citing Gramsci, date unknown; Bourdieu, 1973, 1984, 1986).

Broadly, and incorporating aspects of both schools, social capital refers to trust and the reciprocal traditions it engenders within communities, involving resources and information sharing. Social capital can be found either within social networks (see for example Woolcock, 1998; Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Fukuyama, 1995; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993; Coleman, 1988) or between networks, although it is the between network relationships that have been shown to enhance work-life opportunities (Alder and Kwon, 2002; Granovetter, 1995; Burt, 1992; McPherson, Popielarz, and Drobnic, 1992; Montgomery, 1992; Baker, 1990; Lin, Ensel, and Vaughn,1981). Researchers agree that social capital and community are integrally related concepts, neither existing in the absence of the other, and no longer limited by geography as is exemplified by Internet communities of interest forming in recent years among political, social, and professional communities globally (Etzioni, 2001).

Strong ties, a concept attributed to Granovetter (1973) and akin to Putnam's bonding social capital concept wherein "thick trust" resides, are those that exist within social networks: in families, among old friends, among cultural, racial or ethnic groups and/or among neighbors who have deep respect for the norms and expectations of their communities (McPherson, Popielarz, and Drobnic, 1992; Nelson, 1989; Krackhardt and Stern, 1988; Granovetter, 1983, 1973). Strong ties also occur in work environments, and influence communication and mobility within and between groups (Hansen, 1999; Podolny

and Baron, 1997; Lin and Dumin,1986). While strong ties honoring wisdom and tradition have their obvious benefits, they have also been shown to thwart the benefits accruing to those with weak ties wherein receptivity to new perspectives through network bridges can more readily occur (Granovetter, 1983). These weak (bridging) ties are characterized by infrequent and/or casual contact, and provide access to new ideas and innovation when they link otherwise unconnected groups or individuals (Granovetter, 1983, 1973). This work owes some of its conceptual roots to distinctions between intimate and casual contacts among close friends versus acquaintances found in the ethnic relations literature (Amir, 1969; Nelson, 1988).

Thus, where strong community ties predict behaviors contained in the concept of bonding social capital (akin to money in the bank where trusted relationships can be tapped as resources) (Bourdieu, 1985), they are a positive phenomenon. Yet an unquestioning belief in the benefits of strong ties can be limiting. Consider, for example, where trust and cooperation are assumed by community members, but fail, or where the networks are so exclusive that bridging racial, ethnic or economic divides for the potential common betterment of all does not happen. As Putnam and Goss point out, in a society experiencing rapid social change such as communities absorbing large numbers of immigrants, without bridging that allows diverse perspectives to be heard and considered, tightly knit homogeneous groups can with relative ease devolve into patterns of thinking and action that result in “frightening ends.” Just as groupthink can result in bias, stereotyping, and poor decision-making, bonding

without bridging can, to use their contemporary metaphor, “equal Bosnia” (2002:11-12).

There is substantial evidence that the size and type of social network ties is significantly related to social resource richness, and that having a combination of both strong (culturally grounded within network) ties and weak (bridging network) ties may be of greatest value (Adler and Kwon, 2002: 21, 35). When social capital increases through the maintenance of strong, and the growth of weak, ties, wisdom can be shared both within and between communities and the richness of diversity benefit all (see Thomas and Ely, 1996, in Weisinger and Salipante, 2005). It is this richness around which the Fellows Program was established and that which we are exploring in this paper.

Premises and Program Description

The Fellows program was designed to bring talented emergent leaders from strongly tied communities together to create opportunities for weak ties to develop and strengthen between them. It is based on several premises that, following the outcome of Premise 1, do not lend themselves to weighting or ordering.

Premise 1: Community-based organizations serving people of color with limited resources need to have access to leadership development training for their promising staff. This training, a one-week immersion program followed by monthly meetings and retreats that focus in part on each organization’s place in the broader community, including but not limited to historical presence and role, leads to Premise 2.

Premise 2: With training, these emergent leaders will be able to help stabilize their organizations and the rash of organizational closings, and services threatened will diminish.

Premise 3: If the emergent leaders do not remain with their organization, they will be prepared to move to other nonprofit programs in the community at a higher professional level.

Premise 4: Over time, as competitive communities are bridged, the collective voices of the region's diverse communities of color will become stronger.

Program description Participants in the first cohort represented ten community-based organizations regularly locked in competition for limited local resources. Seven organizations had missions to serve the local African American community; the remaining three served a more recently arrived Latino/a population. All the organizations, or programs within them, in some way addressed common client needs in health, education and/or human services, while many had missions focused on serving a specific racial or ethnic community.

Teams were recruited from each organization to include the executive director and two or three promising staff members, although the "team including executive director" concept was dropped in successive cohorts. Participants spent five days in residence where a traditional leadership program was adapted to center around the unique needs faced by leaders of color working in a city with a historically small, but increasingly diverse minority population. The week was

followed by monthly trainings and two retreats for the first, and two successive, cohorts. A scaled-back, less-costly one-year curriculum was delivered to the fourth through sixth cohorts. During these six program cycles 58 nonprofit organizations sent emergent leaders to be part of annual cohorts capped at 25 "Leadership Fellows" (referred to as Fellows); to date over 120 local nonprofit organizations and public agencies have sponsored, retained or hired program alumni and the sponsoring organizations' mission foci now include Native Americans, new Asian immigrants and African refugees in addition to emergent African American and Latino/a leaders.

Fellows train in a retreat setting that allows them to share stories around their communities' distinct yet common concerns, and explore collaborative opportunities for building their programs and organizations. Creating informal opportunities to work together and build trust is fundamental to the program design. The Institute serves as a university home and communications hub for fund development, administration and continuity. The program's commitment is to developing emergent local leaders and not airlifting temporary executives in from afar to fill positions as had in prior years been the practice. "Growing local talent" and "building networks within and between communities" have been the guiding principles. It is a model that can be adapted elsewhere as it values and questions both history and change simultaneously.

Methods

This study explores the dynamic outcomes of the program reflected through a social network analysis. Fellows nominated to participate from strongly

tied communities have much that is common between them. Never having been part of the region's dominant culture these commonalities include race and/ or culture, and often language as well as, in some cases, treacherous histories of discrimination and other historical, political, economic and social experiences passed down in oral and written traditions.

In the program's third delivery year, members of the second cohort asked for Institute assistance to help "explore the web of professional relationships" that Fellows were beginning to identify and attribute to the program. With that invitation we began a social assets assessment (Gelles, Merrick, Otis and Sweeten-Lopez, 2002), and later designed this social network project, heeding the caveats of those familiar with the pitfalls of social network assumptions and analysis.[1]

Social Network Analysis (SNA) Using the program UCINET© (Borgatti, Everett, and Freeman, 2002) we mapped the relationships between and among six cohorts of Fellows and their organizations to model their overt relationships based on individual responses to several questions, both professional and demographic (Wasserman and Faust, 1994:19). Demographics included gender, race or cultural identification, leadership program cohort membership and length members of the Fellows network have been part of it (a.k.a. "years as alumni").

Caveats in conducting this kind of research exist. Marsden (1990) suggests that there is ambiguity in what we know about the strength and benefits of ties that affect our social service organizational work in part because they have been imperfectly measured[2]. Nonetheless, in accordance with Granovetter's

recommendation that research needs to consider dynamic systems, we queried multiple cohorts to explore their strong and weak ties over time (1983: 229). Acknowledging that some Fellows would be disinclined to participate, in part because the level of trust necessary to share information about one's relationships was too "thin" (Putnam, 2000: 136-138), we accepted this as a design weakness, yet not problematic enough to stop the inquiry.

We focused on connections both within and between racial or ethnic groups, and on the centrality of individuals in the relationship maps. We also considered time spent in the relationships, and the frequency of contact among participants (Marsden, 1990; Marsden and Campbell, 1984). We explored geographic mobility (between organizations and extra-regional), employment history (McPherson et al., 1992), and economic sector. We kept responses confidential despite the fact that our Human Subjects Review Committee allowed us to ask respondents if we could use their names and many said we could do so.

Because network analysis is best when comprehensive, we sought to query all alumni for whom we had contact information and distributed the questionnaire to 121 of the 137 living alumni. With the final email reminder and thank you we let all of the alumni know what percentage of the respondents hailed from *each* cohort. This resulted in a rash of competitive listserv communications and increased the response rate substantially for one cohort. Realizing that the maps produced are not comprehensive, we treat the findings

as an example of the program's potential, particularly for those who may not realize how "networked" they are through their cohort ties.

Traditional survey instrument With a traditional survey delivered online we sought information on: (1) the personally stated racial or ethnic identity of the program participants; (2) the extent to which sponsoring organizations had missions to serve primarily one cultural or racial group; (3) the professional advancement reported by alumni; (4) the proportion of alumni who left their organizations during or in the years following the program, and the proportion of these who have remained in the community; (5) the proportion of those remaining in the community who continue to be involved in community-focused work; and (6) the extent to which alumni have increased their leadership presence in the community, serving on governing bodies of nonprofit social service organizations.

Social Network Analysis The SNA was designed to provide information for the alumni about their actual and potential networks in a form that would be accessible and valuable to alumni, program sponsors, and the nonprofit research community. The networking instrument was adapted from a model presented at the Leadership Learning Communities 2006 meeting. Members of each cohort were listed in alphabetical order and each respondent was directed to reply to five relationship criteria for each of the 138 alumni in "a click on those that apply" format. If the respondent did not know a program graduate, they were directed to skip the name entirely. Each cohort member was asked to describe his or her relationship with other program participants on (1) Awareness ("*I know enough*

about this person or this person's work to contact him or her as a resource"); (2) Some Communication ("*I have sent one-on-one emails, called or spoken with this person over the last three years*"); (3) Frequent Communication ("*I communicate with this person or have communicated with him or her on what I deem to be a frequent or regular basis*"); (4) Learning ("*This person has provided me with useful ideas or resources*"); and (5) Mentoring ("*I would call this person if I needed coaching or counseling about my work*").

We operationalized the structural variables in ways that we acknowledge were open to interpretation and not mutually exclusive. "Learning from" a Fellow required awareness of the Fellow, just as "frequent communication" involved, by definition, the first level of communication and a judgment about what this meant, although a definition, as stated above, was proffered. What we sought to know was which criteria would provide the greatest window into professional relationships for bridging between communities and these statements allowed us to determine this.

Sampling, coding and operationalization We analyzed the UNICET© program's Netdraw © maps using Fellows' names, and then coded each case categorically for race, gender, years as alumni and length of program experience (see Figure 1 note). All respondents (and non-respondents who often appeared in maps due to the ties indicated by respondents) were protected with anonymity once the cohort coding was complete.

Focus of analysis The analysis focuses on the three cohorts that had the most uniform program delivered to them (the 2nd, 4th and 6th). This included a

consistent nomination and application process, a class mix that included not only African Americans and Latino/as but members from other communities of color; the participation of a senior visiting practitioner from out-of-state as a Fellow participant-observer; a conscious curricular decision to forego a formal exploration of racism in the first immersion week (the 3rd and 5th cohorts had a curricular variation that differed in this regard); a selection criterion stipulating a minimum of two years with one's program or organization; and a signed commitment to a full year of program activities for all participants. Thus when the first, third and fifth cohorts appear in the maps they represent those contiguous to the second, fourth or sixth cohorts in the analysis.

Findings

Document and survey analysis for cohorts one through six Over the six year period 53 percent of the program's participants have been African American; 38 percent Latinos or Latinas, and the remaining nine percent have been new Asian and African immigrants, Native American, or "Other," most of whom were East Indian, Middle Eastern or of mixed-lineage. The "Other" category was too small to be meaningful in our analysis of the racial/ethnic breakdown of survey respondents, but it is worth noting that 83 percent of these (10 of the 12) were in the latter three cohorts, reflecting a programmatic decision to increase representation from more diverse communities.

Our population N is 123, based on two deaths and 14 Fellows for whom active emails and phone numbers were not available (139-16). Sixty-seven Fellows responded, reflecting a 54.5 percent adjusted response rate. Cohorts

have varied demographically in gender, average age, education, and class size although we did not collect information on age and education in this study. At least 85 percent of the respondents still live in the metropolitan area (N=57), with an additional several, commuting from more rural communities, who never did live “in the region.”

Of interest based on Premises 2 and 3, 69 percent of the respondents indicated *at least* one job change since the summer immersion program (N = 46) and overall these individuals reported a total of 90 changes ranging from one to six per person, both within and between organizations. In the second cohort, for example, nine respondents indicated job changes, and these nine accounted for a total of 26 overall employment moves since their week in immersion; 90 percent of these individuals reported leaving their sponsoring organization within two years of completing the one week summer immersion component of the program.

Of the 90 aggregate position changes indicated, 59 percent (N = 53) occurred within the sponsoring organization (lending support to Premise 2), and approximately 40 percent were to or within other organizations or agencies (Premise 3). Fifty percent were reported as promotions, 11 percent of the reported changes were split between lateral shifts and promotions, and 22 percent were lateral shifts. Eight individuals said they had moved, but did not respond to this question (17 percent). There has been noticeable movement to public agencies (N=8) and occasionally into foundation work and the for-profit sector. We also found a significant drop in the extent to which the Fellows’

organization or agency's mission was deemed by them to be culturally specific or focused.[3]

One steadfast similarity we found among respondents is a shared commitment to community and social justice through agency and volunteer work. When asked about human service volunteer activity, when nominated and currently, 15 of the 67 respondents reported serving on committees of nonprofit human services organization boards at the first time point; this increased six percent, to 19, who reported currently serving in this capacity. When asked about full governing board membership for human service organizations, there was a three percent increase (from 13 to 15 individuals). Using the Foundation Center taxonomy of organization types, Fellows reported an overall increase in community volunteer leadership seats on boards from 55 to 64 during the same time period despite the fact that many have young families and workplace service expectations, a common phenomenon in nonprofit organizations. This movement towards more engagement (as intended in Premise 4) approaches statistical significance, suggesting that the increase in board membership we see is not due to chance alone ($p = .056$).

Network Demographics There is substantial professional awareness of one another *within* each of the three cohorts (see Figure 2) operationalized as *"I know enough about this person or this person's work to contact her or him as a resource"* Arrows pointing in each direction reflect a reciprocal relationship in which each party is aware of the community work done by the other.

— Figure 1 about here —

[Figures begin immediately before reference pages]

The fourth cohort (web on the left) had the highest response rate with seven to eight central nodes representing individuals serving as back and forth links to all the other cohort members. An arrow pointing from one individual to a second indicates that the first expressed interest in, has a relationship with or would seek a relationship with the second.

The central nodes in this map (Figure 1, fourth cohort) reflect each of the formal communities of color in the class: one Asian man (ASM31), a Native American woman (NF31), a Latina (LF31), and two African Americans, a man and a woman (AM31and AF31). The absence of a Latino in this pool reflects the fact that this class had very few men and no Latinos, possibly an artifact of the selection process that year. The lower right map (2nd cohort) depicts at least eight Fellows each serving as reciprocal connectors to one another.

The top map in this figure represents the sixth cohort, the smallest and most recent. The nodal connectors for this network are reflected in three individuals: two African American women (AF11) and one Latino (LM11). Of interest in this cohort is that there is only one African American man (AM), although he is connected to a Latino (LM), an African American woman (AF), and a male representing another ethnic group (OTM). Through ties only one connection removed he is linked to Latinas (LF), the two Asian women (ASF), and virtually everyone else in this cohort's network. We call attention to these

within-cohort connections because while individuals from culturally and racially distinct communities have historically strong ties within their communities, without opportunities for bridging there tend to be few connections between communities. It is the intent of the leadership program to assist Fellows to open up to one another, and, in the social capital terminology, create bridging social capital among themselves which appears to be occurring.

We entered Awareness responses from these three cohorts to see how many relationships crossed cohort boundaries. When the cohorts were not contiguous there were very few if any ties beyond classes, but where ties existed, we uncovered both a centrality and density of relationships.[4] As Figure 2 indicates, there are six Fellows from the second cohort's 22 members who serve as centrally located nodes, indicating awareness of Fellows in the two noncontiguous cohorts. Note that arrows go in only one direction on this map, an artifact of the way the question was phrased when we input data for the map.

--Figure 3 about here—

Of these six Fellows, three are African Americans (one woman, AF42, and two men, AM42), two are Latinos (LM42), and one is a Latina (LF42). Four of the six have moved from the nonprofit to the public sector since becoming Fellows. Of the four, two are with the largest local county, one is in public secondary education. The other two are Hispanic, one recently having moved cross-country (LM42), yet remains working with the nonprofit world and connected to the

Fellows community; the Latina (LF42) continues to serve a rural farm worker community. Thus, with only one outlier, it appears that all of the Fellows from each of the classes are connected through the six centrally located Fellows, and with the exception of the two Fellows on the periphery of these central six (AM42 and LF42), all of the members of the fourth and the sixth cohorts are connected through the second with only one degree (or link) of separation.

Our analysis of frequent communication and mentoring within and between cohorts provided additional information about the program's impact as well as its long term potential. Specifically, there is substantial and diverse communication between members of contiguous cohorts. Using Figure 3 as an example, 37 percent of the connections (18 of the 52 "edges" as they are called in the SNA literature, or arrows in the vernacular) linking Fellows to one another in this map of 1st and 2nd cohorts cross racial/ethnic lines. Similarly, 40 percent of the 2nd and 3rd cohort connections cross racial/ethnic lines; 50 percent of the 3rd and $4^{th;}$ and 39 percent of the 4th and 5th (see note #2). This, however, drops substantially when the cohorts are not contiguous (see Figure 4 with only ten edges).

—Figure 3 about here —

—Figure 4 about here —

Calculating the edges for the first and second cohorts (see Figure 3: those most distant from their program experience) we found that Latinos/as report that

they are initiating more cross-racial frequent communication with African Americans than the reverse. Latinas reported that 45 percent of their frequent communication is with African American women, and Latinos identified 55 percent of their frequent communication is with African American men. In contrast, African American women reported that only 7 percent of their frequent communication is with Latinas and for African American men their frequent communication with Latinos is 14 percent.

The maps also provide evidence that the potential for mentoring is spanning racial and ethnic lines. As Figure 5 on the website shows, there are substantial relationships extant between contiguous cohorts even when Fellows are several years removed from their program experience. Of the 35 edges in this map, 31.4 percent of them connect African Americans and Latinos/as. But when the cohorts are not contiguous, the potential mentoring relationships drop to become virtually nonexistent, with only one connection between two Fellows (see Figure 6 on website).

Discussion

Briggs' descriptive work on race bridging notes that newer immigrants (not whites and blacks, but Asians and Hispanics) report more varied race bridging than more established communities of color (2003:15). With fewer Latinas, Asians and Native Americans in the Fellows cohorts, the need to bridge communication to other groups may simply be an artifact of the numbers. When one group (African Americans for example) have critical mass in a cohort, they will need a reason to reach out. A program can generate both an awareness of

the need to work together and opportunities to do so, thus creating conditions for bridging social capital in the long term as this program appears to be doing. This supports studies suggesting that without intentional programming, reaching out to others may not occur (Bacharach, Bamberger, and Vashdi, 2005).

Anticipated findings In addition to frequent communication findings corroborating Briggs' descriptive work on race bridging initiated by newer immigrants (2003:15), of keen interest in this study is the number of central nodes representing individuals who serve as linkages to one another and the extent to which these represent cross-racial and ethnicity boundary-spanning. These linkages provide evidence that, at least from this program, collaborative activity between strongly tied communities can be expected, particularly within and between contiguous cohorts. The depictions confirm what we have heard from Fellows over the years, but without corroborative interviews (the next phase of this work), have not assessed systematically: that bonding within groups remains strong, but substantial bridging is also taking place that Fellows attribute to the program experience. As one African American Fellow stated recently when on an alumni panel speaking to a successive cohort:

> This [Fellows] program played a big role in our decision to send our five year old to [one of the school district's] Spanish immersion programs. But when I went to one of the parent orientations and asked if the school had a relationship with [either of the main African American and Latino/a nonprofit academic support programs in the city] I was told that they "had tried for years" to get those organization's programs into the school, but

> had not succeeded. I left that meeting and made two phone calls. Just two phone calls! That's all it took, because from this [Fellows] program I knew who to call and had a personal relationship with them. This is just one example of what the program means for our communities.

Of the central nodal connections, the most active (represented by density of edges) is occurring among the most "engaged" alumni.[5] As predicted in the weak ties literature, these individuals are among those who have moved professionally most often since becoming alumni. For example, five of the six central nodal Fellows in Figure 2 have changed employment three or more times since their summer in residence, and none of the five remain with their sponsoring organization, although three have moved to or from organizations that later sponsored other Fellows, lending support to theories about employment options coming most effectively through weak ties (Granovetter, 1995; Lin, 1981). Other maps indicate similar positioning and movement.

Unanticipated Findings

Job change ironies While job change is to be expected following a comprehensive program in leadership development and with the over time accumulation of experience among emergent leaders (Lynch, 1991; Topel and Ward, 1992), there are ironies in this phenomenon. Implicit in the program's design is that the emergent leaders will remain with their sponsoring organizations to work and strengthen the managerial infrastructure of their agencies, adding value as they expand their knowledge and hone their

leadership skills. Initially this appeared to be a straightforward transactional relationship between the program and the participating organizations. Developing talented individuals identified as rising leaders in their communities, each from an organization and with a commitment to it, was an integral assumption in the program's design (the two year employment expectation attempts to assure this) and addresses Premises 1 and 2. But for many individuals, and their sponsoring organizations, the relationship proved to be otherwise.

When we explored job movement, or the lack thereof, it appears that the stronger, larger organizations with sustainable funding streams and stable leadership have been more often able to find a place for these new leaders to grow professionally upon program completion (Premise 2). From a social capital perspective, when a large, culturally specific organization has the capacity to retain and further develop its leadership talent after sending staff to participate in a program of this sort, the learned benefits of bridging may be lost to the more immediate strong ties within the organization and a return to bonding social capital can occur.

Alternatively, when growth opportunities did not exist within the sponsoring organization, some executive directors encouraged returning Fellows to move on, recommending them for positions elsewhere where they would be able to develop professionally (supporting Premise 3), thus creating bridges to others in the wider community. In contrast, other organizations appear to have been unwilling or unable to mentor these new leaders yet did not encourage their departure, either having them return to former positions with no change or job

enrichment, or adding to their workloads without strategic direction or organizational support. Many of the struggling organizations appear to have had no plan in place to encourage Fellows' development, and sometimes added substantially to their workloads due to organizational resource constraints, in many circumstances frustrating or overwhelming the returning alumni. Thus this organizational capacity issue explains much of the movement about which we know, although was not addressed specifically in the survey design. Ironically, in many cases it was these organizations that the program was intended to serve. In reality it appears to be serving individuals and the broader community (Premise 3), in some cases to the neglect of the sponsoring organization (see Leuven, 2005, on "employee poaching"). This we deem to be an important finding and one needing to be addressed in future research and program development.

Releasing bonded social capital When job movement results in staff remaining in the community, as have approximately 80 percent of the Fellows, the benefits to the new organizations to which they go are self-evident. Finding access to job opportunities, as many have done through the weak ties developed in this program, offers incalculable individual benefits and creates opportunities for building social capital on a broader level (Premise 3 and possibly 4). When this occurs the original sponsoring organizations *appear* to be the losers; this is not, however, always the case. Our analysis evidences movement both out of and into these organizations. Specifically, at least 13 Fellows who left their sponsoring organization were hired by another Fellows' sponsoring organization

at some point during the years covered in this study. This into-movement has occurred in organizations that have lost Fellows, and to others that have retained them, and reflects new energy and leadership for the recipient organizations as well as for the public sector units that have hired these transitioning Fellows. In many cases this movement reflects what we call a *transition and release of* bonded social capital. With this movement there is opportunity for substantial cross-fertilization of ideas for programs that may, with too many strong ties, have become insular (supporting Premise 4).

Public sector connections Commitment to the community focus appears to remain high. In addition to the 13 Fellows we have identified moving to another sponsoring organization, another eight have moved to the public sector, and an additional five have transitioned to work in public higher education (a sixth is pursuing doctoral work). These join an original eleven public stewards, from the most recent three cohorts, who were recruited into the program as "exceptions to the rule," from public sector agencies with strong ties to the nonprofit community, notably but not exclusively from the city's Public Housing Authority. The community focus embodied in Premises 3 and 4 appears to be being achieved through these agency transitions, adding to the benefits inherent in the increased participation in nonprofit governance by program alumni, and may also explain the decrease over time we found in organizational cultural specificity.

To date, 24 percent of the respondents (29 of 123) work in public agencies or units, and about a third of these transitioned from the nonprofit sector since

becoming Fellows (10/29 or 34.5 percent). This movement has significant implications for policy and its implementation, given the Fellows' knowledge of the roles played by, and needs of, community-based organizations in and beyond their own cohorts. As one program alum who made this transition pointed out, [we] are in "highly nuanced" places. Some of us are now in positions where our "ability to act as advocates is deeper than it was when we entered the program." To synthesize a story from the newest cohort of Fellows, when African refugees (many from contentious communities before they came to this country) and Latinos/as, all new or newer to the community, find themselves in shared neighborhoods defined by refugee absorption policy not of the nonprofit community's making, it is often Fellows, their organizations, and their shared support networks that provide ideas for minimizing the inevitable cultural clashes, helping new leadership to craft a sense of community where none had previously existed.

From a bridging social capital perspective, Fellows' job movement to public agencies has numerous implications. When Fellows have knowledge of funding cycles and political processes, they are able to establish multidirectional and reciprocal weak ties that have long term policy and service implementation benefits for nonprofits, elected officials, and particularly for civil servants without nonprofit work awareness or experience. It is particularly important for emergent leaders from groups who, in Arneil's terms, have been seeking multicultural justice through their community-based work and Fellows program engagement.

Bonded social capital contained by design? While the network maps sans stories depict and quantify the program's successes and potential, they have also exposed possible weaknesses in the coherence of the program's initial premises. First, the premises were not weighted. Just as strengthening communities is a program focus, stabilizing community-based organizations is fundamental to its design as well. And while weak tie benefits have resulted from inter-racial and intercultural Fellows' transitions over time, the program continues to face the realities of how to involve organizations with strong, tightly bound racial or ethnic ties in the broader more open networks focused on building social capital among diverse communities of color. Review of the star in the western quadrant of Figure 7 (at about 8:00 o'clock) offers striking evidence that when teams come from organizations with strong ties to which they return and wherein they remain, the program's organizational focus (Premise 2) may conflict with its broader community focus (Premises 3 and 4).

— Figure 7 here —

The tight communication links that the star depicts are among Fellows from one community social service organization that has focused on youth from a particular racial background for over two decades. The communication edges, wherein 96 percent reflect internal networks, suggest the need to consider how these strong ties affect the program's broader community-focused purpose. In this case we attribute the communication edges to a robust nonprofit organizational culture that appears to have resulted in networked communication

directed inward, with strong ties (Granovetter, 1983, 1973) focused on either building or maintaining bonding social capital.

Benefiting from successful mission-driven work and the potential for advancement within the organization, at least for many, these program alumni appear to be “focused within” in ways that may negatively affect the Fellows Program’s cross-cultural mission. To date only one Fellow sponsored by this organization has moved on to other organizations in the community, a transition that occurred five years ago, although the organization has had Fellows in each of the successive cohorts. In addition, based on a 73 percent response rate from Fellows sponsored by and remaining with this organization, only one reported a community leadership role outside of the organization in “committee or governance service” (fitting Premise 2, but not supporting Premises 3 or 4). While we recognize that the employment choices or community activity of no one individual can serve as evidence of a closed system, the numbers in this case support the theory of strong ties, in which internal networks serve those within the unit to the possible neglect of broader community foci. This phenomenon reflects contrasting examples of program success: some Fellows’ experiences serve to strengthen their sponsoring organizations and some seem to be more integrated into a broader community in what appears to be a more open, dynamic system. With the exception of this one organization, the data confirm enough movement among organizations, and communication between program participants of color from differing racial and ethnic groups, to support the theory

of bridging social capital implicit in professional weak tie activities among the Fellows.

Longitudinal surprises Of comparable interest, beyond the strong ties phenomenon evidenced in Figure 7, is that the maps provide overwhelming evidence that program participants from noncontiguous cohorts are not in frequent communication with one another or seeking one another out for mentoring. Knowing who is among one's alumni group can have a powerful impact on shared work and bridging social capital. More than one graduate over the years has pointed out that seeing Fellows "around the table" when you walk into a county or city hearing provides a sense of "the Fellowship having my back," particularly when deliberations about services, equity and need among, pertaining to, or having implications for diverse communities gets heated or demands a coherent collective response. When alumni do not know who among them can be supportive in these ways, as Figures 4 and 6 indicate (see website), the program's potential is diminished. The maps evidence this lack of awareness (see Figures 4 and 6).

Conclusion

Our findings provide empirical evidence for the theory of strong and weak ties as phenomena to increase social capital in communities of color. Yet the survey was imperfect and raises many questions that remain to be addressed in subsequent research. These include, but are not limited to, the degree to which the program can take credit for the relationships being built; the meaning of these

relationships in community-building; the role of trust and competition for limited resources; and the implications when bridging weak-tied relationships are not developed by a distinct and bonded participant group. Fundamental, too, are questions surrounding the role that organizational capacity plays in a nonprofit's ability to support and retain newly educated leaders; the role of mentoring both within and between members of distinct racial or ethnic minorities; and the potential for cross-cultural weak ties to serve not only communities of color, but to educate the broader community about the strengths as well as the needs of the growing diverse population and its organizations. The linkages to the public sector alone are of great interest. For example, with increased growth in the program and concomitant awareness of the Fellows' leadership network, is there potential for a critical mass of emergent leaders that can facilitate even broader bridge-spanning in pursuit of a growing and shared social capital?

Beyond answering some and raising other questions, the analysis raises red flags for others involved in the delivery of longitudinal cohort programs. Despite regular evaluations, we were not cognizant of the lack of alumni awareness that we found in cohort non-contiguity. We are now even more committed to building long-term impact evaluations into program designs. The findings in this study, and the questions they engender, make evident how much would have been lost absent this analysis.

This study was also designed with the intention of sharing its generalizeable findings. We find that the public, through its agencies, has benefited in numerous ways from this program. As authors and participant

observers, four of whom are Fellows, and two of whom have moved to the public sector, we see daily evidence of this. One co-author stated in a conversation:

> We [who have transitioned to the public sector] face multiple obligations: to elected officials and the citizens they represent (the taxpayers for whom they and we ultimately work); to the nonprofit community that nurtured [our] early development and can benefit from our expertise and knowledge of the public sector's processes and expectations; and to the very communities [of color] these nonprofit organizations were created to serve. There is tremendous complexity in these relationships and the Fellows Program has provided us with a place to explore with one another what it means to be engaged professionals in a growingly diverse and complex community.

Several conclusions are essential to consider as our communities and organizations become more diverse. First, we need to be more cognizant of the implications of strong versus weak community ties and their benefits as well as potential impediments to building social capital. Weak ties exist in the very nature of urban environments, but they must be identified and nurtured. We need to recognize that building trusting relationships between competitive communities of color is fundamental to building one community where trust and social networks "flourish" and individuals and their [respective] communities

prosper (Putnam, 2000: 319). Understanding and teaching these concepts in the Fellows Program and others like it will help to nurture their development.

The interrelationship between trust and competition, particularly when political and economic conditions lead to between-group competition and a sense that resources are zero-sum, is but one phenomenon needing further work. Being together in a leadership program does not, we contend, as Putnam suggests, lead to increased trust per se. Rather, it creates opportunities to work together and with this a thicker trust can develop. If, how, and under what conditions this is likely to occur requires further exploration. Questions abound, including but not limited to that which the non-respondents may have to add to our understanding.

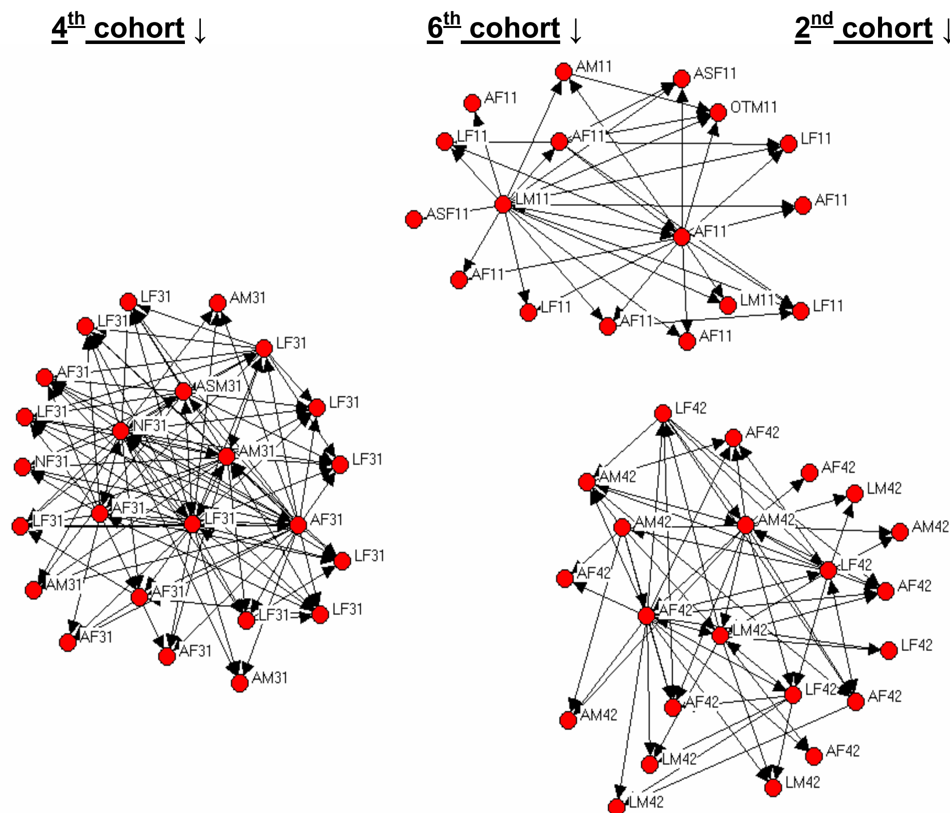
As Briggs (2003) points out, there is an extensive yet inconclusive literature on bonding and bridging, addressing both its benefits and potential hazards for communities, although much of the work on communities of color looks at minority linkages to majority populations. The question then is, if through leadership development we are seeing a pool of centrally located leaders emerge who are committed to building *and benefiting from* stronger weak ties, what can we learn from them and what role should the academy play to assist them? As a starting point we need to heed Arneil's concluding thoughts: the issue "is not just the number of connections, but their nature (2006:240)."

Figure 1

Awareness within 4th , 6th and 2nd cohorts (left to right below) independent of each other

"I know enough about this person or this person's work to contact her or him as a resource"

4th cohort ↓ **6th cohort** ↓ **2nd cohort** ↓



Note: Each dot represents one individual. The far left character indicates race:

L=Latino, **A**=African American; **NA**=Native American; **AS**=Asian; **OT**=Other

The second character is gender, **M**ale or **F**emale.

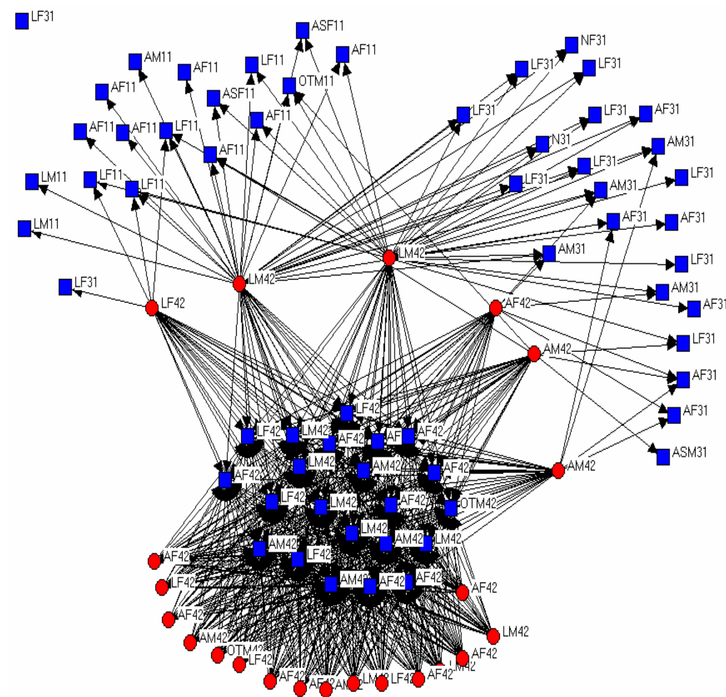
The second character from the right indicates the number of years as a program alum: **1**=6th cohort; **2**=5th cohort; **3** = 3rd *and* 4th cohorts (the third cohort had a two-year program and the 4th cohort had a one-year program; both graduations occurred the same month); **4**=2nd cohort; **5**=1st cohort.

The far right number indicates a one or two year program. For example, a Latina from the fourth cohort has been an alumna for three years and is identified as **LF31**.

Note: 2nd cohort is lower right map; 4th cohort is map on left; 6th cohort is top map

Figure 2

Awareness of one another, second cohort in relation to fourth and sixth, noncontiguous cohorts
In response to statement: ***"I know enough about this person or this person's work to contact her or him as a resource"***



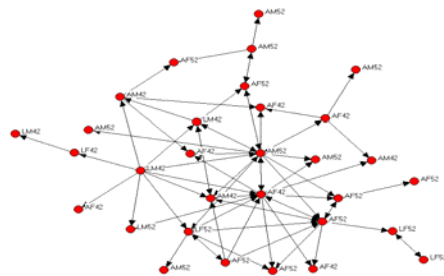
NOTE: The tight mass of circles and squares on the bottom of this map represent members of the second cohort networked to each other. The central squares are duplicates, representing those who serve as nodes and others within their cohort (N=22), fanning out from their within-cohort connections to the other two cohorts, while the line of circles at the bottom represent connections within the second cohort, some of whom completed the instrument and some of whom did not, but were identified by those who did complete it.

Figure 3

Frequent Communication between contiguous classes

1st and 2nd cohorts

"I communicate with this person often or have communicated with him or her on what I deem to be a frequent or regular basis."

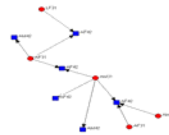


Note: Additional maps can be available upon request and will be posted on the Institute's website.

Figure 4

Frequent Communication between non-contiguous classes

4th cohort with members of 2nd cohort

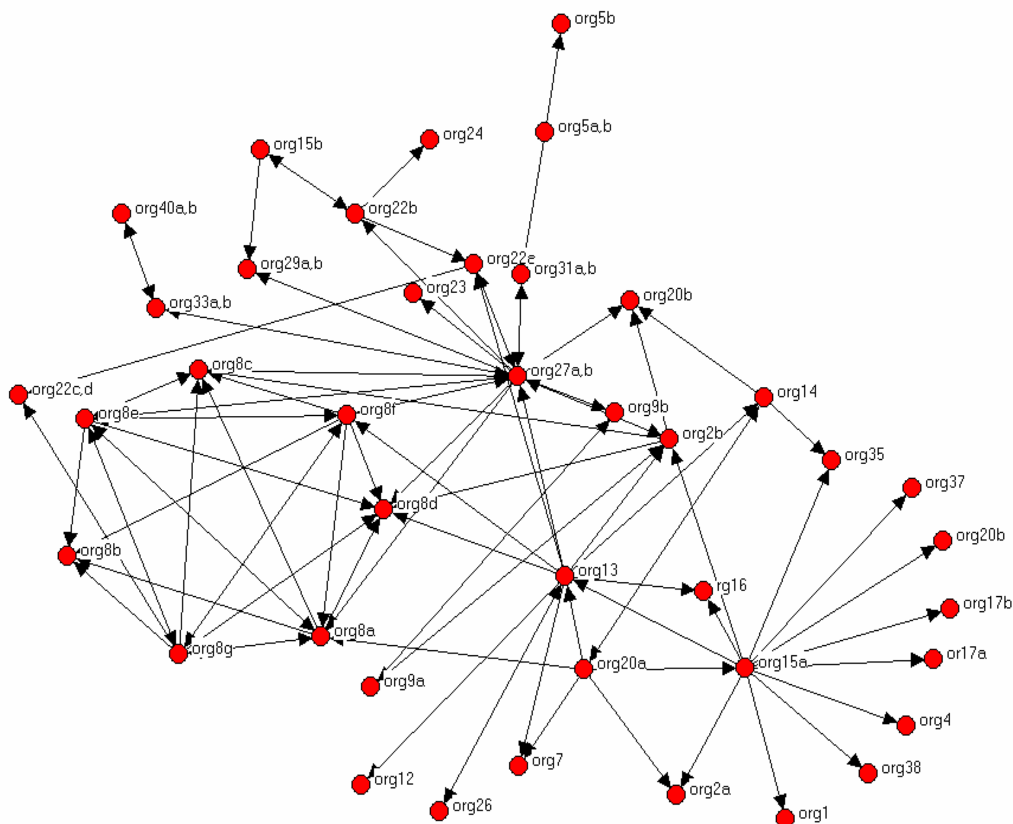


Note: Only one of the ten connections in this map crosses racial/ethnic boundaries.

Figure 7

Frequent Communication, time points 1 and 5,

— 4th and 5th contiguous cohorts upon nomination and currently —



Note: One organization's communication linkages are depicted in star configuration at about 8:00 o'clock. The seven Fellows from this organization are coded org8a - org8g. There are 46 communication edges emanating from these Fellows, and 96 percent of these (all but two) are internal, occurring within the one nonprofit organization. The two external communications are both African Americans, one who is now at the county and is represented by the centrally located node org27a,b and one who is with another nonprofit represented on the far left by org22c,d. The codes are mutually exclusive indicators for the purpose of the authors' analysis with no hidden meaning.

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ENDNOTES

[1] One assumption, reviewed in a recent critique of social capital theory by Arneil (2006) is Putnam's and others' general premise that the more connected one is, the more trusting one is (thus his concern in Bowling Alone with the apparent demise in "joining"). Arneil notes that empirical studies suggest that the participation to trust relationship identified by Putnam may actually be the opposite in that participation does not necessarily lead to increased trust. In sum, she suggests "that trusting people tend to join organizations in the United States, but that 'civic engagement does not lead to greater trust (2006, referencing Uslaner (2002) and Stolle, 1998 and 2001: 131-132)."

[2] Marsden warns that data gathered by surveys and questionnaires is likely to be of better quality and more reliable for strong ties rather than distal, weak ties (1990).

[3] We found that the change in cultural specificity over time, from more to less, was statistically significant at $p \leq .06$

[4] For additional maps go to http://www.inpm.pdx.edu and click on the Leadership Fellows link.

[5] We operationalized engagement to include individuals who have participated in the program's ongoing development or delivery over the years, either through their own initiative or staff invitation, and/or those who offered to be interviewed for the next phase of this study.