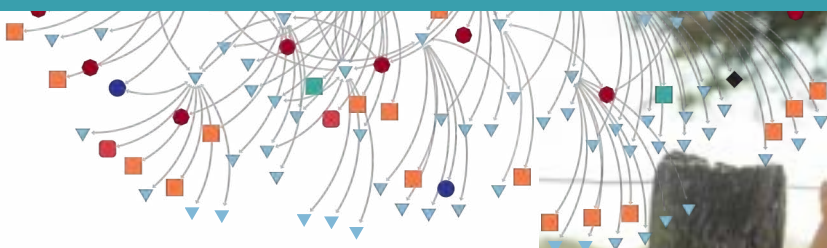# Thriving Country Kids: Social Network Analysis (SNA) and systemic advocacy in rural, regional and remote Queensland
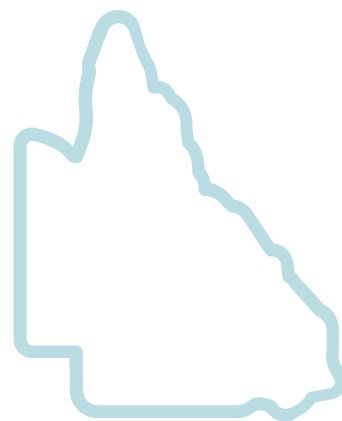
The Social Network Analysis Project

- SNAP TOOLKIT -

provides tools to advocate for systems that support children & families

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands upon which we live and work, and their continuing connection to land and sea, kin, culture and community. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and to First Nations colleagues.

We are privileged to welcome and grow our children and support our families in these places.

We also acknowledge the First Nations leaders, advocates and organisations that have fought for children and their families, and the resulting consequences of adversity and trauma over generations.

We acknowledge the resilience, determination, leadership, generosity and innovation of First Nations peoples, and we recognise the value inherent in Indigenous ways of 'knowing, being and doing'.

HOW YOU CAN USE THIS TOOLKIT

TO SUPPORT EVERY CHILD, IN EVERY COMMUNITY, TO THRIVE..

This toolkit is designed to:

- **help you understand how to complete a Social Network Analysis (SNA)**

- **show how the SNA can be applied to strengthen our collective advocacy approaches**

- **demonstrate how social networks operate in rural, regional and remote Queensland, drawing on findings from TQKP's Social Network Analysis Project (SNAP)**

- **give you tools to develop targeted systemic advocacy campaigns to change systems.**

SUGGESTED CITATION

CREATIVE COMMONS

GLOSSARY

Betweenness	Measures how often an element acts as a bridge between two other elements.
Centrality metrics	The umbrella term for the different measures used in network analysis.
Closeness	Determines how close one element is to all other elements in the network.
Connection	The lines, reflective of a relationship, that join elements in a network.
Degree	The number of connections or links that an element has.
Element	The 'dots' on the map – which are reflective of the organisations in this context.
Social Network Analysis (SNA)	A methodology for visualising networks made of elements and their connections.

ABBREVIATIONS

ARACY - Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
FPC - First Person Consulting
NGO - Non-Government Organisation
SNA - Social Network Analysis
SNAP - Social Network Analysis Project
TQKCC - Thriving Queensland Kids Country Collaborative
TQKP - Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership
UNISC - University of the Sunshine Coast

WHO WE ARE

THRIVING QUEENSLAND KIDS PARTNERSHIP

Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership (TQKP) is a Queensland-based intermediary and coalition focused on systems change for the benefit of infants, children, young people and their families.

An initiative of ARACY (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth), TQKP brings together a cross-sectoral coalition of Queensland leaders, organisations, practitioners, and collaborators working together with the shared purpose of improving the conditions for Queensland children and young people to thrive now, and into the future. To learn more about our work, please visit www.tqkp.org.au or email tqkp@aracy.org.au.

OUR FUNDING PARTNERS

The work of Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership is supported by the generous investment of all our philanthropic partners. For the Country Collaborative, we'd like to specifically mention Tim Fairfax Family Foundation and The John Villiers Trust, who contribute directly to this work.

THRIVING QUEENSLAND KIDS COUNTRY COLLABORATIVE

This Social Network Analysis Project was made possible via the efforts of the Thriving Queensland Kids Country Collaborative, an interdisciplinary, multisectoral network of non-government organisations (NGOs), philanthropies, government departments, and researchers working together to create conditions for every country child to thrive, regardless of postcode.

SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS PROJECT (SNAP) TEAM

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INTRODUCTION

SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS AND SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY IN COUNTRY QUEENSLAND

In Queensland, most kids are doing well, but many are not. This is especially true in regional and remote communities, where giving every child a fair go and a great start can be more challenging.

Systemic drivers such as limited digital and physical infrastructure, less access to services, and broad and one size fits all policy and investment approaches mean that country kids often fare more poorly than their urban counterparts. [1,2]

Children living outside of metropolitan Queensland are more likely to start school with one or more developmental vulnerabilities and are less likely to complete year 12. [3]

On average, fewer country kids participate in sports and recreation activities and more experience food and housing insecurity and higher disaster exposure risk. Out of the top ten most socio-economically disadvantaged communities in Australia, six are located in remote areas of Queensland. [4]

In non-metropolitan areas, place-based services and local governments often cite a lack of access to decision-makers as contributing to these problems. This limits the ability of local leaders to influence policy and investment decisions that impact their communities and respond to local problems with bespoke solutions.

In short, these systemic issues make it harder for country kids to access the systems and supports they need to grow up well.

Despite these impacts, country communities are also renowned for their grit, tenacity and community spirit. Social ties in smaller areas are often stronger and despite geographic isolation being higher, country communities report lower levels of loneliness and a better sense of belonging.[5]

In small communities, social bonds are strengthened as people rely on one another and social capital is built as people work together and contribute collectively. These positive and strong networks enable local service systems to better coordinate the support that they provide, leverage shared resources and information, and establish collective agendas to advocate for better conditions for kids in local communities.

However, despite the crucial role that partnerships play, their value is often intangible and therefore difficult to understand and communicate. For example, place-based organisations may be unaware of the broader networks that they are a part of and where they can most easily connect with decision-makers to advocate for local priorities.

Further, the high level of social capital that many organisations have been able to establish in local communities and broader sectors via partnerships is often not measured and can largely go unnoticed. This means that the high value offered by organisations who are well connected, influential and deeply embedded within communities and systems is often not considered in service commissioning and investment decisions.

Social Network Analysis (SNA) is an approach that allows us to visualise relationships that exist between individuals and organisations in a network. [6] SNA can help us understand what partnerships look like, how information, resources, and ideas flow, and where collaborations emerge over time within networks. [6] This positions SNA as a powerful tool to unlock the collective capacity of networks in communities to strategically form and advocate to advance priorities that create conditions for all children to thrive, regardless of postcode.

HOW DID THIS WORK COME ABOUT?

The TQKP Country Collaborative undertook the Social Network Analysis Project (SNAP) to better understand the collaborations that underpin grassroots and strategic systems change efforts contributing to child wellbeing and development in rural, regional and remote Queensland. The group identified that a disconnect is often experienced between metropolitan and country communities and that centralised urban decision-making processes are often applied broadly across more remote areas.

This toolkit aims to share some of the findings from the SNAP, which we have adapted to provide a 'how to' guide to support communities and organisations to apply the principles and processes of the methodology within their own local contexts.

WHAT SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS TELLS US

WHAT IS SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS?

SNA is a relational mapping technique that produces visual network maps.[6] These network maps present the individuals or organisations (which are called 'elements') and their relationship (visualised as lines connecting the elements).

To create a map, individuals or representatives of organisations nominate their connections with others. This information is then consolidated and visualised using SNA software.

The network maps can be analysed to identify key points in the network - but the visuals themselves are powerful tools to demonstrate the breadth and complexity of collaborations and partnerships.

In short, SNA can provide a way to demonstrate what your network looks like, and how it connects to the networks of others.

The analysis of network maps results in measures known as centrality metrics. These metrics help us to understand what the position of an organisation in a SNA map means in terms of their influence.[6]

There are many different metrics, but the ones most typically used are:

- Degree - identifies the number of connections each element has in a network.
- Closeness - identifies the number of connections from one elements to all other elements in the network.
- Betweeness - identifies the number of times an element sits between two other elements.

SNA helps us zoom out and understand the position of an individual organisation relative to others in a network. This position is what gives organisation's developing relationships for collective advocacy greater influence.

Degree: The number of direct connections an element possesses.

Closeness: The distance one element is from all other elements.

Betweeness: The amount that an element directly between two other elements.

This means that a small organisation could be very influential because of which relationships it holds, not the number. Equally, a large organisation might have a large number of relationships, but due it its position in the wider network, may actually be fairly isolated.

These metrics provide different ways of understanding how organisations are or could be influential in a network. These are quantitative metrics - which means that SNA allows us to 'put numbers' to the maturity, strength and number of our partnerships and networks.

When we analyse a network in this way we produce results for every organisation's position in the network. This means when examining the results, it is useful to consider:

- Which organisation ranks the highest (as in, which organisation is most influential)? Are they who you would expect?

- Which organisation ranks the lowest (as in, which organisation is the least influential)? What does that mean for what the network is planning?
- Are there 'entry points' into the network? For example, an organisation might not have a relationship with another influential organisation, but is connected indirectly via another organisation.

The visual maps and quantitative data SNA provides unlocks key insights about partnerships, making it a powerful tool to inform collective advocacy approaches.

By considering the position of organisations within systems, we can identify the most influential actors within our networks and the most impactful partnerships – or possible partnerships - to nurture.

CONDUCTING A SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

Undertaking a network analysis might seem out of reach, but the steps are straightforward. Below are the broad steps that were used in the SNAP, which you can adapt to your context.

SCOPING THE SNA

The connections between actors and organisations can be endless. This means that the early stages of doing an SNA are about getting some clarity and defining your needs.

For SNA to provide value, you need ask and answer some key questions from the outset to define your network.

Doing this well will ensure your network is not too vague, which would make it difficult to map, or too large which makes data collection and management burdensome.

The Country Collaborative used questions like those in Table 1, which are a great starting point for anyone looking to adopt SNA.

Table 1: SNA scoping questions.

Scoping question	Tips
What questions are you trying to answer with your SNA?	Remember, you are asking questions about the network, and positions of organisations within the network.
What are the boundaries to the network you want to visualise and analyse?	For example, geographic, sector and/or issue-based networks.
What types of relationships are you capturing?	Are they formal, or informal? Do they fulfill a certain purpose like information sharing, or shared service delivery?
How do you understand the strength of relationships?	You can use ideas like maturity, frequency of contact, level of formality, or something else entirely. There's no one way to understand it, but it is worth thinking about what a 'good' relationship looks like.

GATHERING DATA

Once you have clarity on WHY you are looking to use SNA and have defined your boundaries, it is time to gather data. There's lots of ways to do this, but may include things like:

- survey data (either by running a new survey, or drawing on data from pre-existing surveys)
- interviews with representatives of the network you are trying to understand
- social media analytics
- other data sources, such as reports, media releases and articles.

Whatever method you choose, collecting data will help you achieve two goals:

1. identifying who is in the network (individuals or organisations)
2. identifying how they are connected (partnerships, formal service agreements, membership of a working group, sharing of information or resources).

These are the minimum requirements to develop a network map. If you can, also try to identify the quality, or strength of that relationship. This comes down to:

- how well it operates
- how aligned it is to a common goal.

For instance, you might enjoy working with an organisation, but not share any common goals. Conversely, the reverse could also be true.

Understanding relationship quality can provide a powerful and nuanced overlay to your SNA – but it is also not a requirement. For your first time start with the basics and build on it from there.

PREPARING DATA

It is important to clean data so that it is consistent and organised before undertaking your analysis. This might mean taking steps like identifying typos or duplicates and putting data into a format that is ready for upload to a SNA platform.

There are many platforms that will all have different requirements and guidance on what the format will look like. The basic rule of thumb though is that you will need to have a:

- unique list of elements (the organisations or stakeholders) and any features related to them
- separate list of the connections (the links) between organisations, and any information related to those connections. For example, their strength or rationale for existing.
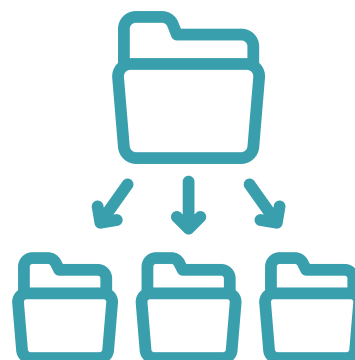
SNA is a quantitatively driven methodology, which means that any data related to the relationships or organisations will need to be numerical or categorical.

Relationship strength is a mixture of two things:

Process - how well it works

Purpose - clarity on why it exists.

PRODUCING NETWORK METRICS

It is now time to upload your data to a SNA platform to create the visual network maps. There are many platforms available. For the SNAP we used Kumu, however there are others such as Gephi, SocNetV, and others. They all have their strengths and weaknesses – it is about finding the right one for you.

Once your map has been uploaded into your chosen platform, you can run the analysis process that will produce your network metrics. The way that metrics are calculated is consistent – but some platforms will allow you to calculate other metrics beyond the most common ones we identified.

The best part is that even if you have no other data beyond the elements and existence of relationships, you can produce these metrics and use them in your visualisation process.

For example, you can re-size elements based on their degree, closeness, and betweenness scores.

These metrics not only give you the numbers that can help you make decisions, but the visuals themselves are a catalyst for conversation.

VISUALISING DATA

The visualisation processes all tie back to how your data is organised, and the information collected for the element and connections. Even the simplest dataset can still produce network analysis metrics – but extra information allows for the use of additional visual elements to aid the message and impact of your network.

The way that you visualise parts of your map will vary depending which part of the map you are changing, and the data you can collected.

Think of the map as the basis for telling a story - this is what should guide your approach to visualisation. What are the messages or insights you want to communicate?

ELEMENTS

Often represented as dots, these are the individual entities that make up your network. E.g. people, organisations, communities and so on.

You can also assign different shapes to represent different element types in your network. For example, a square for state government, a triangle representing NGOs, and a circle for philanthropy.

Colour can be used to further differentiate actor characteristics, such as sectors, and size can be used to reflect scale like number of staff or clients.

There are no specific rules to govern what you do here – you need to think about your audience and the message you're trying to present.

CONNECTIONS

These are represented as lines between elements and represent a relationship. Where you have data on the quality or nature of the relationship this can be reflected in a number of ways.

Firstly, where the direction of the relationship is known (incoming or outgoing) an arrow can be used.

Line thickness can be varied to reflect strength or frequency, and line colour can be used to identify type of relationship. Like elements, there are no specific rules, it depends on what you are trying to demonstrate.
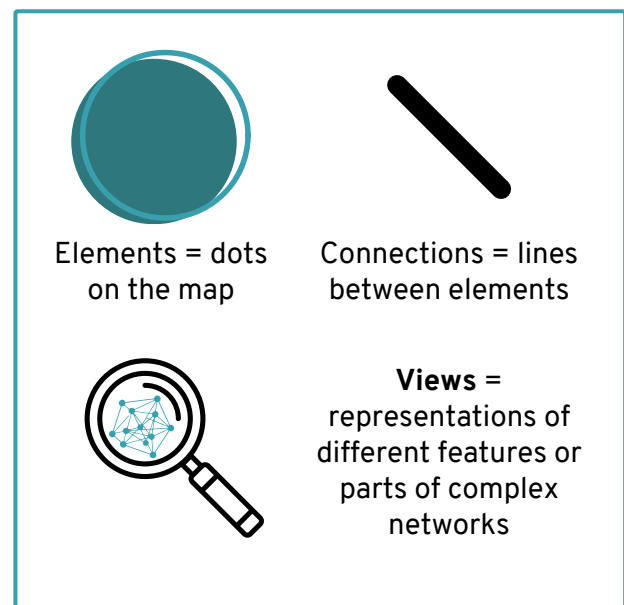
LAYOUTS AND VIEWS

Large network maps – like the one that we generated through the SNAP – can be complex to analyse and interpret. In these situations, the use of filters to further contain the map are useful.

For example, you might filter out relationships of certain types or strengths, or filter the network so that only not-for-profit organisations and their relationships are reflected.

This is the power of SNA – once you have the network data there are many ways in which it can be used.

Additionally, once created the task of maintaining it is a lot less e.g. via an annual update. Many platforms allow you to create different 'views' - which are combinations of the features described above. Think of this like 'saving' different representations of the network that you can switch between.

Elements = dots on the map

Connections = lines between elements

Views = representations of different features or parts of complex networks

HARNESSING INSIGHTS

The visual nature of SNA network maps provides a powerful means to reveal the nature and pattern of relationships. SNA maps enable us to see significant connections, or lack thereof, to make decisions about what to do next. For example, a SNA map might unlock insights like:

- Who in your network has the closest relationship with a key decision maker you are seeking to influence?

- Who in your network is best at rapidly disseminating information?

- Who in your network has the closest relationship with a key decision maker you are seeking to influence?

These insights can be used to inform a range of activities, including systemic advocacy campaigns.

In addition, the maps themselves are valuable conversation starters. They can be used in any number of contexts, including as a way of demonstrating what your partnerships look like, but also in meetings or consultations with different groups.

CASE STUDY: THE COUNTRY COLLABORATIVE SNAP

The purpose of the SNAP was to map the networks that exist to support children, young people, and families in country Queensland, which was based on the domains of wellbeing described in ARACY's The Nest framework.

SNAP DATA COLLECTION

The SNAP team co-developed an online survey that was distributed across Queensland by email and LinkedIn to organisations amongst TQKP's existing networks and partnerships.

The survey was designed to collect information from the extended network of organisations that contribute to the health and wellbeing of children in country Queensland and determine their key connections with one another.

The survey design included:

- brief details about the respondent organisation, such as their name, website, and geographical location
- a request to list up to 10 organisations that the respondent organisation works with in relation to children and young people's wellbeing. In the survey, this was defined as any work an organisation undertook related to ARACY's The Nest framework.[7]
- a 'select all that apply' question on the nature of each relationship ('membership in a network', 'exchange of information outside of that network', or 'collaboration on activities')
- self-nominated ratings on the importance of each relationship to the respondent organisation's objectives (a five-point scale starting with 'No contribution' through to 'Significant contribution'), and on the maturity of the relationship ('Emerging', 'Developing', 'Established', 'Advanced').

Collected data was manually cleaned in Excel. The main task was ensuring consistency of organisation names. The data was then uploaded into Kumu for visualisation and analysis.

SNAP FINDINGS

There were 85 organisational respondents to the survey, which identified an additional 468 organisations. In total, the network map consists of 553 organisations and 728 relationships spanning a large portion of Queensland (see Figure 1).

We identified nine different types of organisations – each identified by a different shape and colour in the map.

This reflects the existence of a significant number of relationships focused on child and youth wellbeing in Queensland. It also provides a way of communicating the volume of work required to do this - each line in the map over the page is a relationship that reflects collaboration, communication, and shared goals.
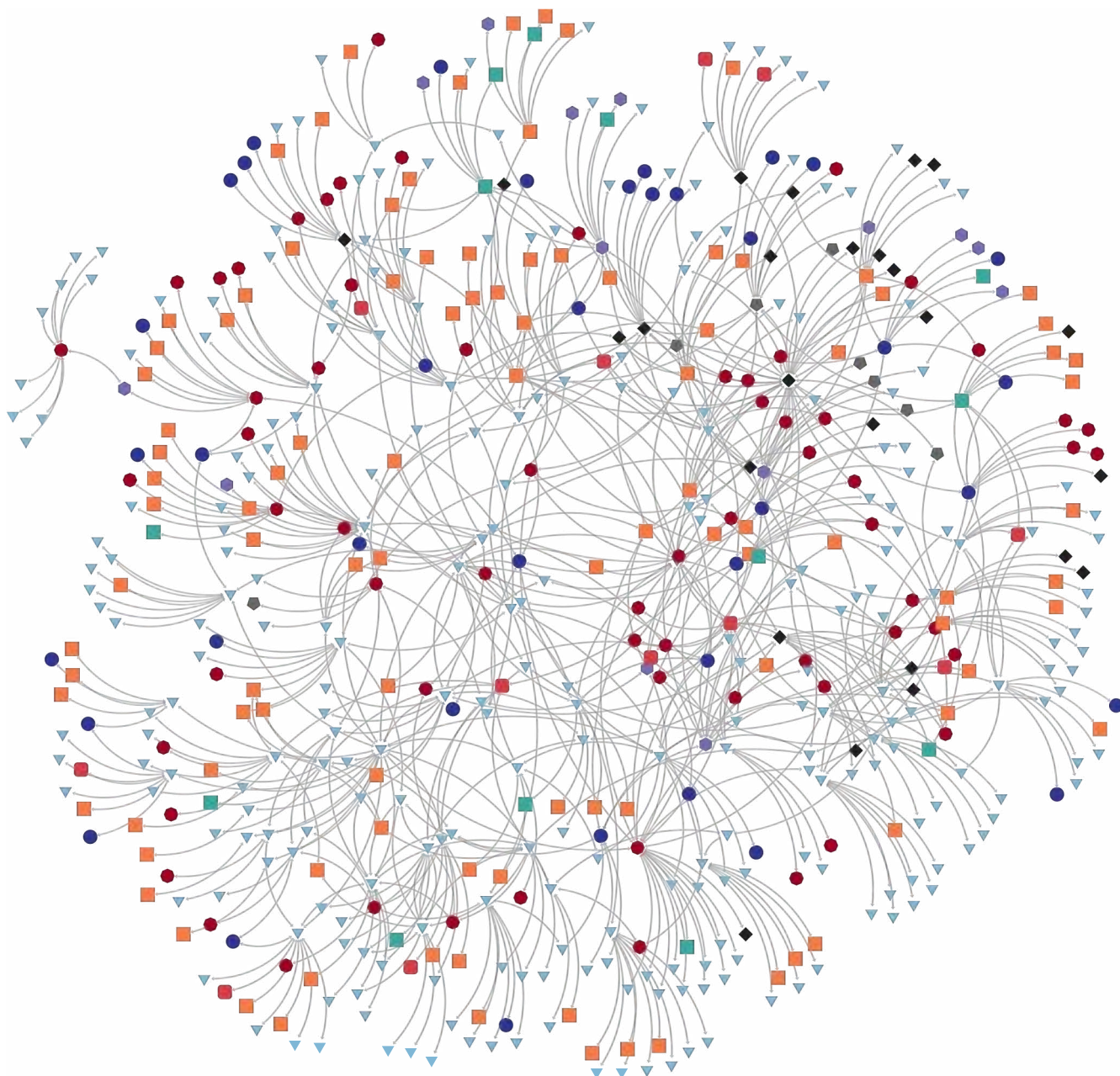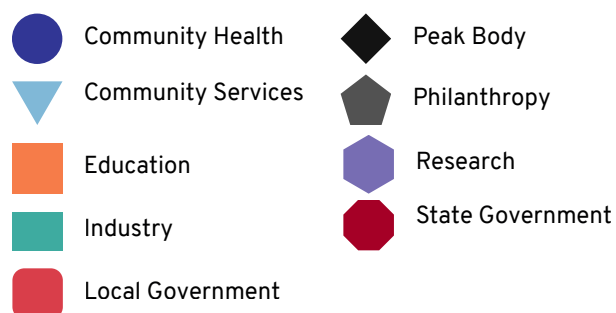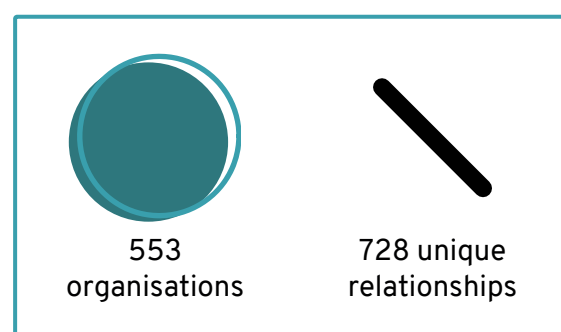
Figure 1: Social network map of identified organisations and their connections in Queensland, generated through the SNAP survey respondent information.

LEGEND

- 🔵 Community Health
- 🔻 Community Services
- 🟧 Education
- 🟩 Industry
- 🟥 Local Government
- ◆ Peak Body
- ⬟ Philanthropy
- ⬢ Research
- ⬣ State Government

NETWORK SIZE

553 organisations

728 unique relationships

The network analysis produced the three centrality metrics (degree, closeness, and betweenness) for all 553 organisations.

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The analysis allowed the team to identify the most influential organisations in the network (i.e. key influencer organisations). It also allowed us to identify some whole-of-network results.

For example, the average degree (number of connections) for the whole network is 2.6. This means that each organisation (shape) in the network map has an average of 2.6 relationships.

In terms of understanding who is most influential, each of the three centrality metrics provides a different insight:

- degree – the number of connections each element has
- closeness – the average number of connections each element is from all other elements in the network
- betweenness – the number of times an element sits directly between two other elements. In other words, it bridges them.

In addition, we can nuance our network analysis further by using the additional data collected on the relationships – like their maturity ('Emerging', 'Developing', 'Established', 'Advanced').

Each of these data points has a weighted value (1-4) which was then considered in the analysis. The values produced mean we can identify influential organisations by considering the quality of their relationships.

Table 2 below summarises the top ranking organisations based on each centrality metric and the reported strength of the relationship.

On average, each organisation in the network has 2.6 relationships.

All other organisations have been de-identified, but we can see that TQKP ranks highly across all three – which was expected, as the network was generated from those who are connected to the organisation.

Interestingly, some are also ranked in one metric only, others in multiple. This highlights the value of using multiple metrics when analysing networks to understand what their positions can mean for the work that is being done or questions being asked.

This process identifies five organisations who ar most central - as defined by the three types of metrics - taking into account how well 'advanced' their relationships are.

This nuanced analysis helps us understand where an organisation might have fewer really strong relationships, compared to another that has a greater number of less well developed relationships.

Table 2: Top ranking organisations based on each centrality metric, weighted by relationship maturity.

Degree	Closeness	Betweenness
Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership	Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership	Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership
Community Services Organisation A	[Redacted - Individual's name]	Community Services Organisation E
Community Services Organisation B	Philanthropic Organisation A	Government Department A
Philanthropic Organisation A	Community Services Organisation D	Community Services Organisation A
Community Services Organisation C	Community Health Organisation A	Community Services Organisation D

These results can be overlayed onto the network map to understand where the organisations from the table above are positioned relative to each other, and the rest of the network.

Doing this helped to reveal which key influencer organisations are positioned close to one another and which are not and therefore determine who is already working together and who is not.

In terms of developing partnerships or advocacy, this can be a valuable way of identifying if all of the organisations collaborate together – or if they are spread out.

If they are collaborating together, then finding an 'in' to that network might become a big priority for your organisation.

Conversely, if they are spread out, it might be a chance for your organisation to identify one of these influential organisations and to develop a close working relationship.

For example, in Figure 2 over the page we can see that the top 10 closest organisations in the network are mostly clustered together, except for one.

This one (Community Services Organisation A) sits in a different position relative to the other green squares. In Figure 3 this square has been changed to a red triangle for ease of visibility.

Having a robust analysis and a map identifying key influencers can help not only to see who works closer together but more importantly this understanding can help inform advocacy efforts by understanding:

- which organisations are currently connected or collaborating
- which key influencing organisations work closely together
- which organisations can act as connectors of organisations across the network .

These insights supported the Country Collaborative to understand the broader ecosystem and identify other organisations who can support the collective agenda of the coalition and systemic advocacy goals.

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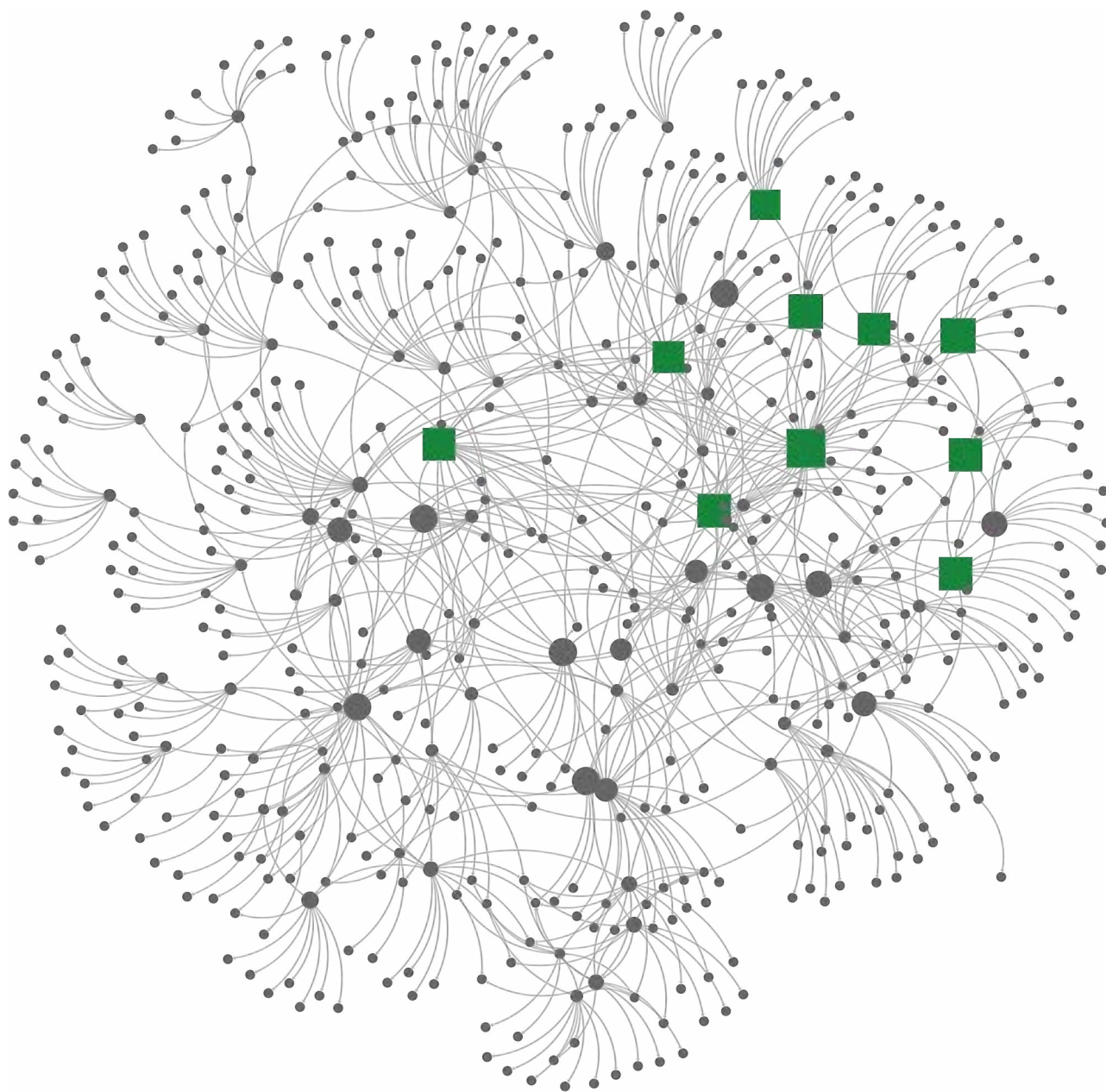
Figure 2: Network map with organisations sized by their closeness. The top 10 ranked organisations are the green squares.

LEGEND

Elements sized by closeness centrality and weighted by relationship maturity

Top 10 'closest' organisations in the network

TOP 10 BY ORGANISATION TYPE

The breakdown of the Top 10 'closest' organisations by their type is as follows:
- Community Services x 3
- Peak body x 2
- Research x 2
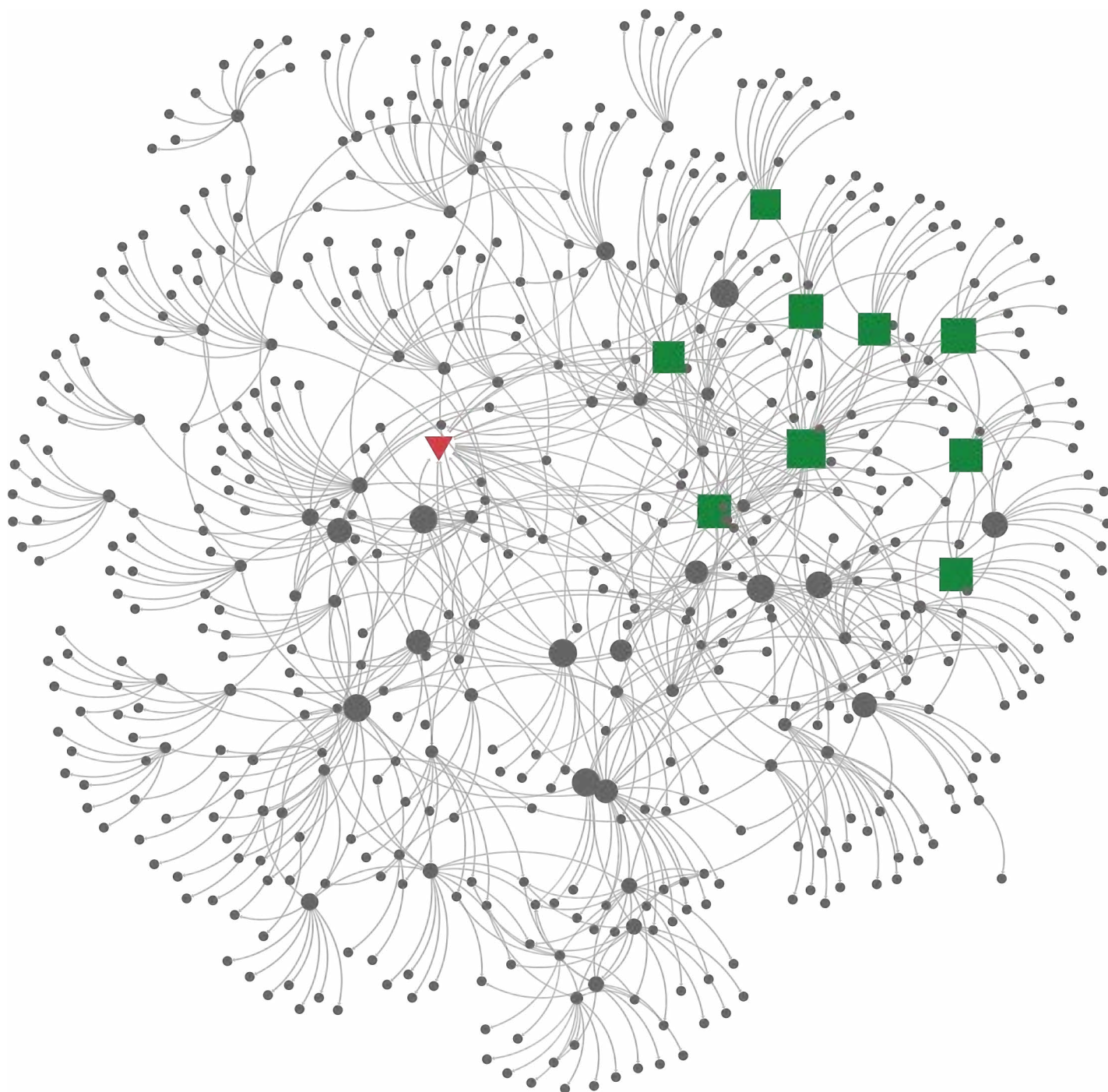- Community Health
- Philanthropy
- Individual person

Figure 3: Network map with Community Services Organisation A changed to a red triangle.

LEGEND

Elements sized by closeness centrality and weighted by relationship maturity

Top 10 'closest' organisations in the network

Community Services Organisation A

SNA helps us spot important organisations in a big network, like Community Services Organisation A, so we can focus our efforts, such as planning advocacy.

INTRODUCTION TO ADVOCACY

Advocacy is about creating change, for individuals, communities and systems by influencing how and what decisions are made, and where resources flow. There are many forms of advocacy including individual, community and systemic advocacy, all focused on achieving change at different scales.

The focus of this guide is **systemic advocacy** – influencing systems (such as investment, policies, government strategies) in response to the needs of service providers and communities. The tools in the following pages can also be used to influence or create change within businesses and other organisations, such as philanthropies.

Advocacy to influence systems to achieve positive change for individuals or communities which can include funding, programs, or changes to approaches or rules.[8]

Systemic advocacy requires a clear focus, with consistent and repetitive messaging, to achieve long-term goals. These goals could include:

- changes to legislation and policy
- influencing the timing and flow of resources and investments
- shifts in public opinions and mindsets.

This approach will generally require multiple phases, with ongoing requests, meetings and submissions with different groups or individuals, and can take several years – if not electoral cycles.

Systemic advocacy also generally requires multiple stakeholders to influence change, highlighting the importance of collective approaches.

While an individual may be responsible for change, they are also positioned in broader networks and systems and influenced by others, such as members of parliament, government staff, media and the community.

Each of these network members are important, as they put pressure on decision-makers and create noise around advocacy issues.

SNA is a valuable tool for systemic advocacy planning as it can highlight network members connected with key decision-makers and those who can create change. It can also highlight network members with common goals, revealing strong avenues for collective work and alignment.

When decision-makers hear from multiple people about the importance of an issue this increases the pressure on them to listen and take action.

By organising collectively, messaging and goals can be coordinated to create a greater impact (Figure 4).
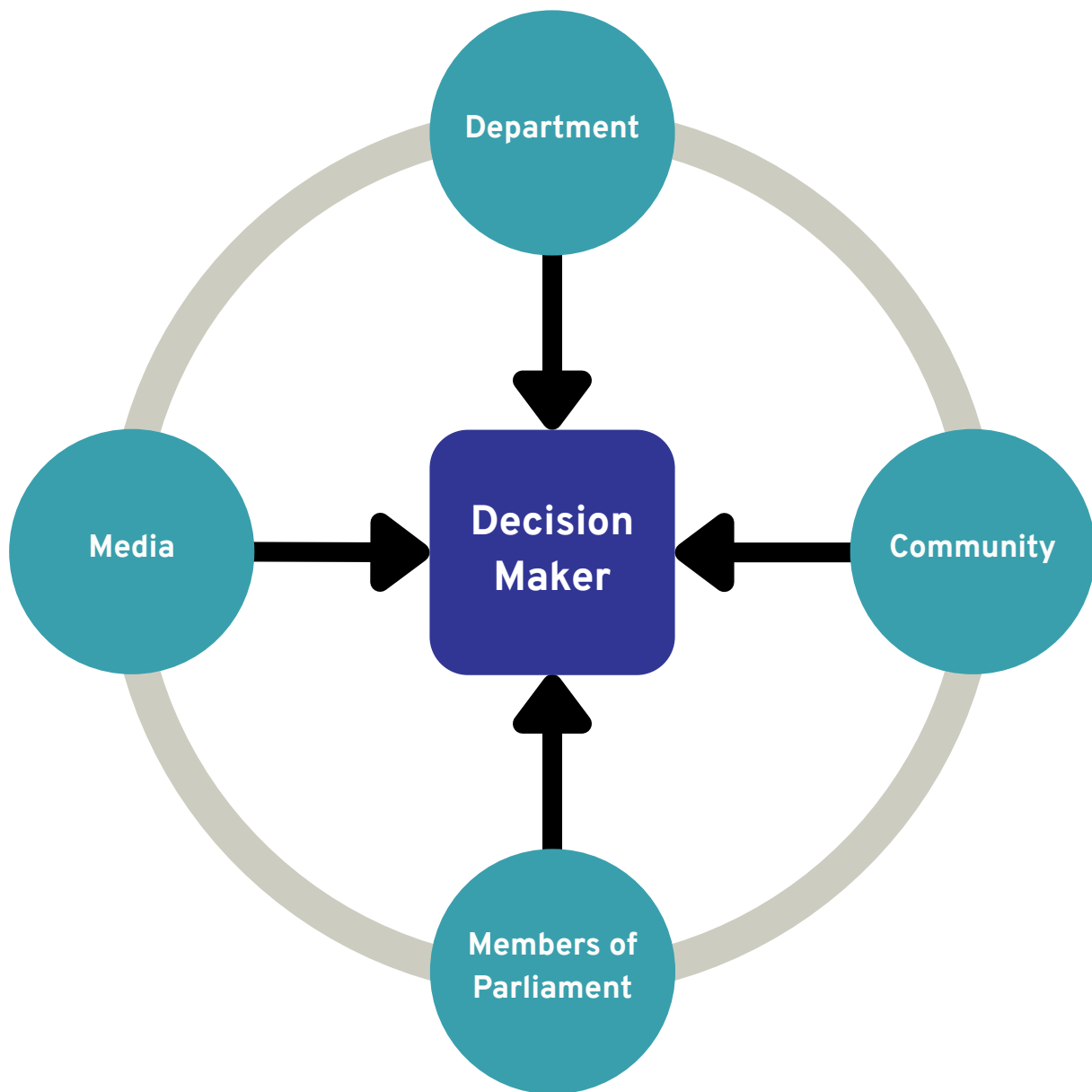
Figure 4: How SNA supports systemic advocacy - by strategically identifying the right people to reach decision makers.

Conducting a SNA can help to identify who is aware of the issue you are seeking to address, who can work together and who can help to identify and access opportunities for advocacy.

For rural, regional and remote communities, this can be particularly powerful as the level of local representation, and access to decision-makers can be limited. This can make establishing a strong and unified voice even more important.

Working as a network has many advantages, including:

- collective voices are more powerful than individual messages, as they demonstrate momentum and are underpinned by shared agendas
- leveraging networks enables workloads to be shared and resources and skills across organisations to be harnessed
- bringing multiple perspectives to an issue or problem-solving process.

THE ADVOCACY PROCESS

This toolkit presents the outline of a basic advocacy process using Strategy, Network, Action, Post action. This is presented as a cycle as change rarely happens when it is first discussed, it is also something that needs to be maintained or reinforced (Figure 5)

*Figure 5: Strategy - Network - Post action - Action: A framework to systemically advocate for change*
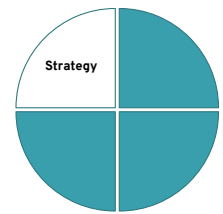
STRATEGY

Strategy is key. You need to have a clear idea of what you want to achieve with any advocacy work or campaign. This keeps you focussed, ensures that you are considering the needs of your network and community, and ensures that messaging is consistent. Developing a strategy document can help coordinate and guide the work of those involved.

An SNA can be a powerful tool to help you develop your initial strategy as it can provide you with insights into your connections and points of influence.

For example, in Figure 6 you can see that the government organisation you need to influence is connected to you by three degrees. While you could directly approach the decision-maker, you might instead use these connections to build a collective approach.

By engaging these stakeholders in your campaign, you can approach the decision-maker with a unified voice and aligned strategy. See the following section on Networking for more details.
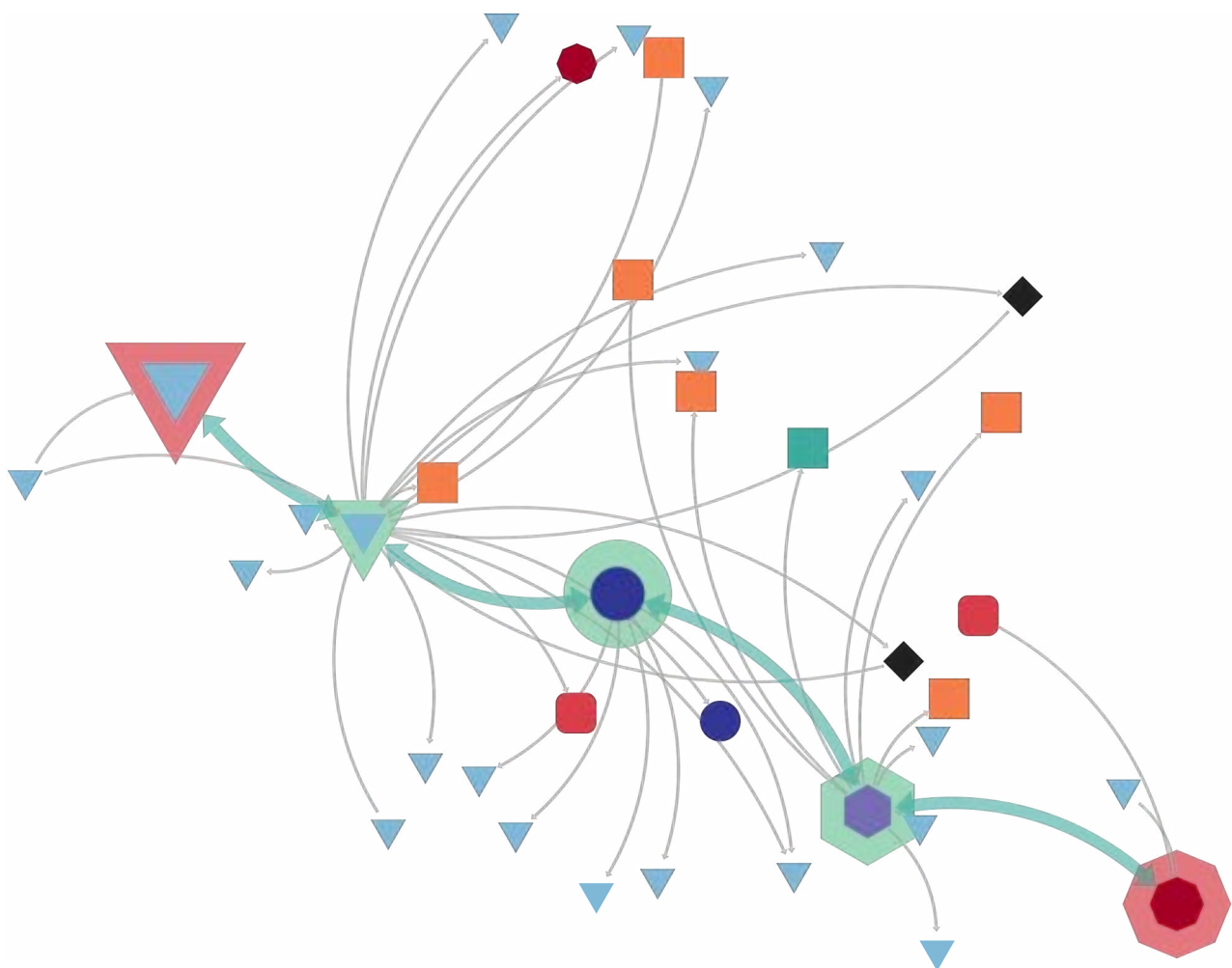
Figure 6: Demonstration of the organisational connections for Community Service Organisation A.

Your strategy should be reviewed for relevance regularly and updated where required. This could include updates after you have completed research, built your network, once you have completed initial meetings, or after you have achieved your initial objectives or goal. Your strategy should contain several key points.
Use Table 3 as guidance.

Table 3: Strategy guidance.

Component	Tips
Issue overview	• Details that highlight what has caused the problem you are trying to solve. • An overview of who is impacted and why this is an issue for them. • Relevant policies or legislation impacting the issue. • Work already happening to address problem, or solutions you can offer.
Goal	Consider why you are advocating for this change, your long-term vision and what your advocacy would allow to occur. Focus on the change you want to achieve, rather than being specific about how you get there. After all, someone else may have a better idea or an option that hasn't been considered!
Objectives	Sub-goals that will allow you to reach your goal.
Key messages	• The key points you will make and information you will communicate to make your argument. • This should include data and case studies, along with key language to frame your messaging effectively.
Risks	The issues you may face and strategies to address them.
Stakeholders and networks	Key individuals or organisations who could provide support and those you are seeking to influence.
Action plan	• A timeline of the activities that you will undertake to reach your goal and objectives. This is what you will enact through the 'Action' stage of the advocacy process. • This could include an in-depth SNA, community profiles, developing local data sets, positional papers or reports, meetings, media campaigns or awareness raising activities.

ADDRESSING BARRIERS AND PITFALLS

Many things can undermine the effectiveness of an advocacy campaign when you are liaising with other parties. Be aware that you may not be their first priority. While important, your issue may not be their number one priority or there may be another issue that they have been directed to focus on.

There are several strategies that can help you overcome this issue.

Creating influence

- Consider how your issue may fit with the government policies, a party's election commitments or the interests of the organisation that you are approaching. Read their documents and tailor your language if needed.
- Look at who is already speaking about the issue or has a relevant background. Consider their previous work experience, areas of study and personal situation.
- You will also usually need to build your level of influence with staff members or advisors before you talk to the decision-maker. Meeting with people in these roles creates influence within the office and when opportunities arise, they can advocate for you or make you aware of future opportunities. All levels are important.

Consider the needs of your audience

- When developing your strategy allow for flexibility and adaptability. Different wording, case studies and data will be more effective with different people and groups. A parliamentarian who is a former teacher may be influenced more by data related to school outcomes. An industry stakeholder may be interested in labour market impacts and someone with a finance background may focus on the economic impacts.

- Adapt your timelines to fit in with schedules and events, or consider how much noise is being shared around an issue at the time to see if you will get any space to share your issues or ideas.
- Consider timelines for funding, elections, policies and strategies. You will be more effective if you are advocating when a strategy is being developed rather than when it is announced in the media.

Create a strong message

- You need to be ready to convince people that your cause is worthwhile. An effective way of doing this is to:
  - show them why you should be listened to – be credible
  - connect with them emotionally – why they should be interested
  - provide a logical outcome – communicate what can be achieved through change.
- Having evidence to support each of these points is essential. Figure 7 provides an overview of this approach

ETHOS

(Show you are credible - Why should they listen?)
60 years experience working with children and families.

CREATING A STRONG MESSAGE

PATHOS

(Appeal to emotions - Why should they be interested?)
If we aren't there where will children go for help?

LOGOS

(Be logical and reasonable - What could happen?)
We can support 7,000 children access help.

Figure 7: A visual representation of considerations to create a strong message, including ethos, logos, and pathos techniques.

KEY MESSAGES

When you get the opportunity to speak to a decision-maker, you will have limited time. Generally, half an hour, but it could be as little as 15 minutes.

A great way to get your message across is to have an elevator pitch. That is, a message you can get across in one minute that captures key information. For this you need to have a clear, well thought out message that provides a reason that action is needed, an overview of the benefits and what action is required.

Over the page (Table 4) is a hypothetical example advocating for an alternative approach to the Australian Government's social media ban for children and young people under 16 years.

Table 4: Example elevator pitch and messaging approach.

Elevator Pitch

Online spaces are critical in modern society for socialisation, learning and engagement. Our service connected with more than 6 million social media accounts last year and half of all counselling provided was online. Social media is a key platform for young people in rural, regional and remote areas to develop connections, access information and reach out for support. We cannot just ban social media. We need to create safe places online where children, young people and their parents, can connect with their peers, access reliable information, and develop their skills and capacity to engage online safely and productively.

Why is action needed?	What benefit would come from change?	What action is required?
• There are dangers online, we need to prepare children and young people to live in a digital world. • Children and young people in remote and marginalised communities rely on online spaces to access connection, information and support.	• Develop the capacity of children and young people to access reliable information and support. • Reduce safety risks online, including sextortion, extortion, bullying and misinformation.	• Develop safeguarding guidelines for online environments. • Resource organisations to develop and deliver safe online environments. • Educate children and young on how they can have positive online interactions. • Educate parents on how they can support their children to have positive online interactions.

Data and case studies

- Number of children/young people with social media accounts.
- Number of children/young people living in rural, regional and remote Queensland communities.
- Online support service statistics and case studies.
- Face to face and online services in rural and remote areas.

TIPS

- For different groups your strategy and messaging may change slightly depending on their views, needs or priorities. Some groups may focus on intervening before problems occur, others may prefer to respond. Both groups could still be interested in funding the same activity for their own reasons.
- Be deliberate and clear with your ask, but be flexible if you can. This allows people to own the outcome and have buy in.
- Organisational strategies, political policies, government documents and presentations (such as speeches) can highlight areas that align with your strategy.
- Have data, case studies and your ask ready.
- Emotions are a powerful tool for messaging, for many people this is what keeps them interested and engaged.
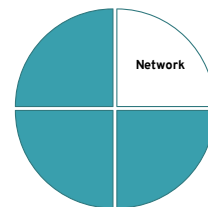
NETWORK

Networks are important allies in creating change. They are your partners, supporters, advocates, change makers and decision-makers. They support you as you go through the process, help to frame ideas and provide you with support when it is required.

Networks can range from small groups of 2 to 3 people, to large groups or coalitions that include hundreds of people or multiple organisations.

SNA can help you to identify who is in your current network and can either support you with your advocacy goals or identify available pathways to connect with decision-makers.

In Figure 8 below, you can see that there are key connections who have existing relationships with relevant decision-makers.

You can leverage these connections to identify a path to connect you with the right person and target your advocacy efforts.
For example, Figure 8 below highlights Community Services Organisation A's direct network.
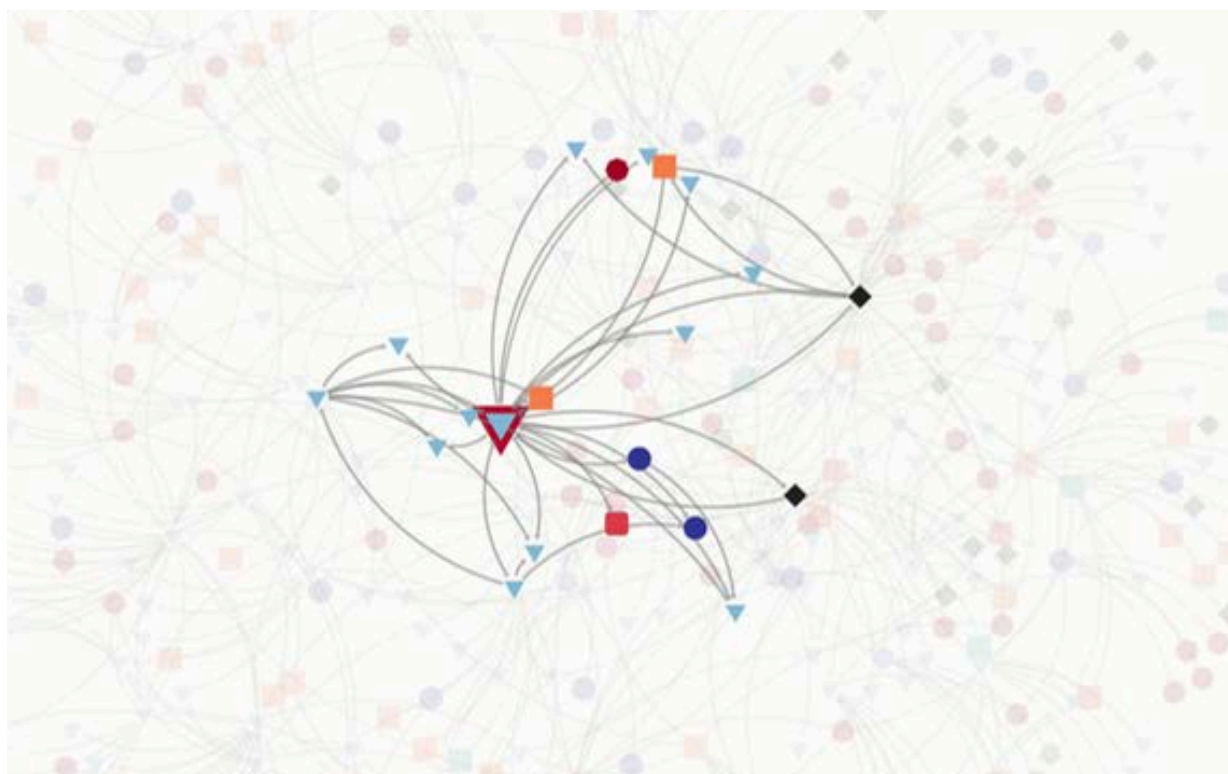
Figure 8: Community Services Organisation A (red outline) and their direct connections highlighted.

LEGEND

- 🔵 Community Health
- ◆ Peak Body
- ⬟ Philanthropy
- 🔻 Community Services
- ◼ Industry
- ⬡ Research
- 🟧 Education
- 🟥 Local Government
- ⬟ State Government

The direct network is made up of 20 organisations. Just over half are community service organisations, with the remainder spread across community health, systems intermediaries, like TQKP, state government, a university, and a local council.
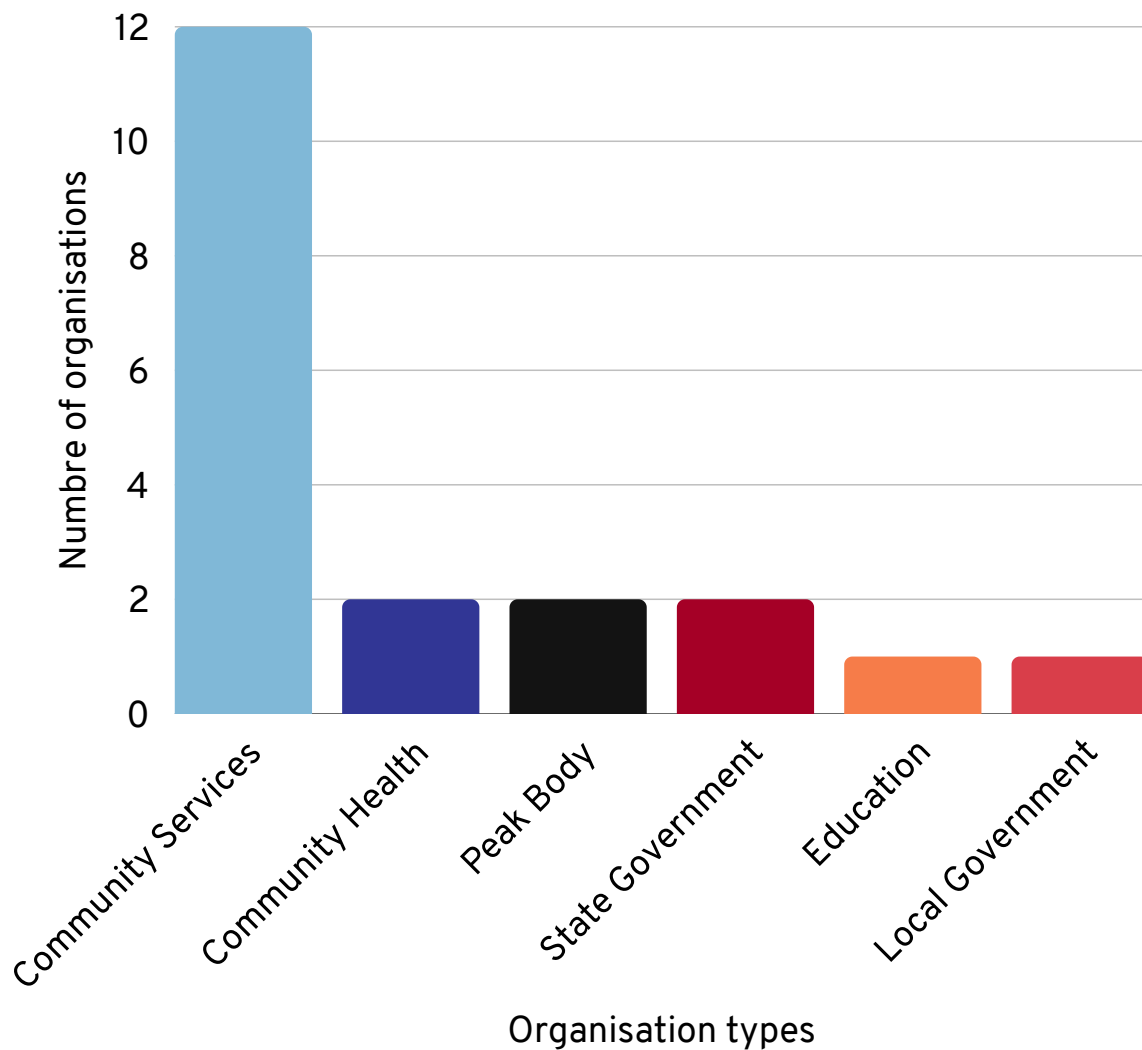

Figure 9: Types of organisations in Community Services Organisation A's direct network

The power of SNA is being able to help organisations take a second step beyond their direct networks.

For Community Services Organisation A, this expands their network from 20 other organisations to 82 organisations within an extra degree of connection. See Figure 10 over the page.

This allows the organisation to identify who they can reach via their existing working relationships.

This is also known as taking a 'two-step' view of your network - seeing not just who you know, but who they can connect you to.

For example, via their connection with TQKP, Community Services Organisation A can reach four other state government entities not within their direct reach. This means that Community Services Organisation A could leverage their connection with TQKP by requesting their support to broker a connection with these government departments, supporting them to connect with the stakeholders they need.
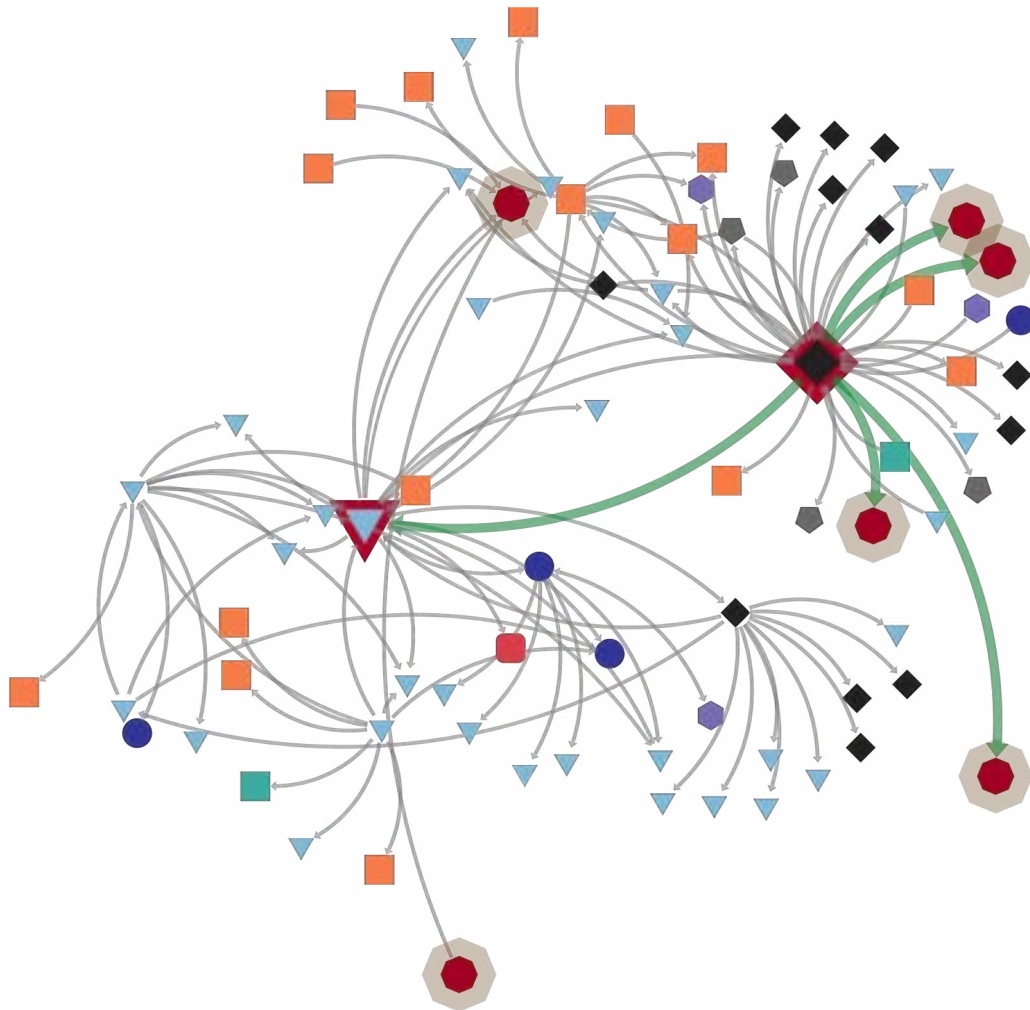
Figure 10: Two-step network for Community Services Organisation A

Tips for identifying potential priority contacts

Once you know what your key points or asks are, it's time to start building a pathway connect with your desired individual or organisation. Some tips include:

- Find out if there is a particular person you should reach out to – e.g. a partnership manager or a general inquiries contact
- For government, identify if there is a Minister that has responsibility for the issue, the local member where the issue is occurring or someone in parliament who has spoken about the issue – use the resources in the appendix as a starting point.

BUILDING PROFILES

Knowing who you want to work with, or are working with, is essential. It can help you identify likely allies, those who will add value to your work or those that are going to provide the worthwhile opportunities.

Developing profiles for each of these is a good step to building impactful relationships. Some key questions to answer include:

- Who are they?
- What are their interests or responsibilities?
- Who or what influences them?
- What is their background / previous roles?

- What are their views or attitudes?
- What are their priorities?
- What issues do they support?
- What's in it for them?

To find this information review their website and organisational documents, check social media accounts, check voting records, political profiles and Hansard.

It can also be helpful to categorise your contacts to identify the role that they play. Check out the sample guide below in Table 5.

Table 5: Sample guide for categorising contacts.

Label	Role	Importance
Decision Maker	Makes final or key decision in relation to your issue. This could be a Minister, Senior Manager or an influential individual (e.g. a philanthropist).	Able to action your request or can connect you with other key decision makers.
Adviser	Key person in the Decider's life that provides information or influences decision- making. This could be an Executive Assistant, Chief of Staff, Senior Departmental Staff or a Business Partner.	Can influence the Decider or determine if requests are directed towards the Decider.
Support Staff	Includes those on reception, answering initial inquiries or are general office staff that review and provide information.	Generally, the initial contact person in the office and will review inquiries, documents and requests.

Networking top tips

- Build a network of supporters and allies that support the outcomes you want to achieve.
- Use existing relationships and connections (if possible) to build new connections.
- Develop your understanding of who you want to connect with to personalise your approach.

Every person, connection and conversation is important in this process. You don't know who is connected to who and what role they may have in the future. Advisors become members of parliament, oppositions become governments and assistants become managers.
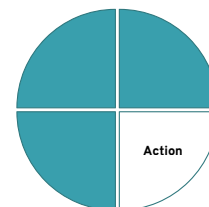
ACTION

Action involves the key activities that you are undertaking to push for or create change and is where you put your action plan into motion. Some elements action can be simple and consist of further research or meeting with prospective network members.

They can also be more complicated such as undertaking a community focussed SNA or survey, holding an event, or writing a submission to government.

This section will focus on getting your key message heard by those in positions of influence through direct communication. It is one of the key steps in advocacy that seems simple but is regularly overlooked.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Letters or emails are a key part of any advocacy campaign, they provide information, connection and opportunities to influence. you have identified your priority contacts a letter or email is a great next step. It is important to remember that when you are requesting a meeting with a Minister or member of parliament, or writing a submission, a formal letter is recommended.

You can write a formal email, but some offices still prefer a formal letter, which you can send via email. Your letter, or email, needs to clearly state your ask, who is involved or being represented, background information and who they can contact.

An example and guidance has been provided over the page.

Example	Tips
Address block Parliament House Minister for Rural Queensland 400l	Check organisational, parliamentary and members websites to ensure you have the appropriate address and person.
Greeting	Ensure you use the appropriate title when writing to a particular person. Check the appendix for resources.
Opening paragraph RE: Meeting Request – Proposed Social Media Ban I am writing on behalf of [organisation] to request a meeting to discuss the proposed social media ban. [Organisation] is a network of organisations that work directly with children and young people in regional and remote Queensland.	Be clear with what you are asking. Do you want a meeting, are you asking for their support, are you sending information, or inviting them to an event.
Evidence and ask While we are aware that there are significant risks associated with the use of social media for children and young people, we know that for those living in rural and remote areas that social media is an essential avenue for peer connection and access to support services that are less available in the regional areas of Queensland. Almost 15,000 children and young people live in remote areas of Queensland where the ability to socialise with peers and support services is limited due to the geographical limitations. Appropriate interactions on social media can allow children and young people to communicate with one another, an essential experience in healthy development. It can also allow them to access information and support in relation to a variety of issues, reducing the need for expensive and difficult to access services, such as clinical mental health support. We are asking that the government consider the needs of those living in regional and remote areas, and work with us to explore options to ensure that opportunities for connection are not removed.	Let them know why they should listen to you or your group and what action you would like to discuss. Include key pieces of data and talking points. These will inform the information you will be talking about at your meeting. The ask can be longer and more detailed; however, a long letter may not be read. If you have a detailed ask this can be better included as a separate report or submission. You can then provide a physical copy of this at a future meeting. Ask yourself, 'what does someone who hasn't considered this before need to know?'
Follow up and sign off We thank you for your time and we will follow up with your office to check your availability for a meeting. You or your staff can contact us through [*details*]. Yours faithfully, Organisation	Provide a contact point including their name, phone and email address. While the letter may come from your CEO the contact point may best be a person who is available and knows when they would be able to meet.
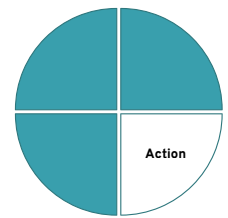
Briefings

It is critical that you are well prepared for meetings or discussions with decision-makers. Usually, you will only get limited time (30 minutes) for an initial meeting and you need to make that time count.

Sometimes you will also be asked for an agenda or key points which will allow them to be prepared and have relevant questions.

A great way to stay organised is to develop a briefing pack for your group - see an exammple structure and outline over the page. Your briefing pack is a private document for your group, which includes key documents, supporting dot points and notes.

Remember, when you are preparing a briefing pack:

- You don't need to be overly specific. Use phases like 'approximately', 'up to', 'more than' and 'almost'.
- For instance, instead of saying 'there are 14,788 children living in very remote areas of Queensland', say 'There are almost 15,000 children living in very remote areas of Queensland.' It is easier to remember, true and doesn't take as long!
- Consider likely follow up questions and prepare answers
- Leave room for notes or take a notebook with you. If you can, assign a person from your team to focus on taking notes.

Items	Details	Example
Meeting details	• Who are you meeting with? • Where are you meeting? • Include contact details for the meeting	3pm Monday 19 September 2025 Address Any other special instructions, e.g. parking, lift access Contact person details (role, phone number, email)
Meeting objectives	What are you trying to achieve?	• Create awareness of the impact of the social media ban on rural, regional and remote children and young people in Queensland • Highlight resources which are available online for children and young people
Background	Consider: • Previous meetings • Person's current and previous roles • Interests, agendas and statements made on your issue This helps with building a relationship and understanding their context.	Background on person you are meeting with: • Advisor with a focus on rural health • Previously in the Health Minister's office when they were an MP • Studied Human Services at University Minister background: • Minister has spoken about the importance of accessing early intervention and education supports related to Mental Health for those in rural areas
Key talking points and data	• What are the 3 to 5 points that you will focus on in this meeting? • Consider the background information you need them to understand, supporting data and case studies • Be clear about the solution and outcome that is needed and what you are asking for	• Social isolation and loneliness are key developmental challenges for children and young people in rural areas. social media can enable connection • LGBTIQA+ young people in rural areas are more likely to have significant mental health challenges. Social media is proven to be a protective factor for these groups. • There needs to be greater regulation on Social Media providers to provide a safe space, rather than a ban.

Key tips

- Ensure the purpose of any communication is clear and concise. Provide a submission or report as an attachment if there are large amounts of information to share.
- Follow up after sending your letter is important. Check that the letter has been received and try to discover if there is someone that it would be helpful to talk to. Offices can receive hundreds of emails per day and they can end up in junk mail. Following up with demonstrate your commitment and ensure your communication has been received.
- An adviser, especially for a Minister, is of significant influence. Do not be disheartened if your meeting is not with a Minister.
- Be prepared when attending meetings or events and know your key points.
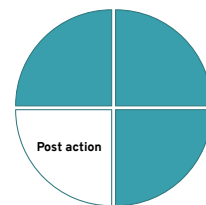
POST-ACTION

Once you have completed an activity from your Action Plan, such as held an event, published a document, or met with relevant people, what is next?

You simply start the process again! At this stage, you should review your strategy and messaging, write the next letter, develop the next report, organise the next meeting, and clarify your ask until you achieve the outcome that you are advocating for.

Our systems are in a constant state of change and the maintenance of relationships, takes time and effort. By focusing your efforts on continued communication and partnership building, you can ensure your relationships remain strong through time.

There are some specific follow up actions that should be completed after every action:

- Make a record, compare notes about what people were interested in
- Update your network, interested parties or community members through newsletters, social media or meetings to communicate key outputs and impact
- Send through any requested information, reports or links
- Complete any follow up tasks that have been requested of you, (e.g. make a submission, contact a specific person, invite key stakeholders to visit your service, site or community)
- Book a follow up meeting or discussion.

Once you have completed your planned actions, START THE PROCESS AGAIN by:

- Reviewing your strategy, talking points and key data (what questions were asked that you couldn't answer?)
- Reviewing your SNA. Identify any other key allies you encountered and keep building your network (who did they speak about?)
- Taking action by writing letters (always include a thank you)
- Updating briefing packs.

Final tips

Achieving great advocacy outcomes takes time, planning, coordination and continued adaptation. Our final tips when you are working towards creating change are:

- Set yourself achievable, realistic goals that start the journey towards the impact you want to see. Small, achievable steps create sustainable change and build greater momentum.
- Cultivating support and trust takes time and effort. Building a network will help support, inspire, guide and motivate you through the process.
- Be clear about what you want. Solutions are complex but your message doesn't need to be.
- Maintain connections and relationships to keep things moving
- Celebrate all wins, great and small!

Applying the tools from SNA can help with all of these points.

Carefully mapping your network throughout the strategy can show you your connections, your level of influence, how you can create change and who it will impact.

WRAPPING UP

Creating change is not about what you know, it is about who you know.

A collective voice is more powerful than any individual. While individuals may move on, or lose energy, focus and time, a network of voices builds momentum, renews focus and adapts as change unfolds and new issues emerge.

Drawing on SNA to harness this considerable collective power and accurately identify decision-makers provides practical opportunities to supercharge your advocacy process. However, this is only the first step.

By tailoring your strategy and messaging to meet the needs of your audience and using the process above, your chances of achieving your desired impact grow!

This toolkit provides a starting point, helping you identify and build your network and ensure that your message is heard and heeded by the right people, however there are many other great resources to tap into.

RESOURCES

These resources and links have been provided to help supercharge your work!

Name	Link	Notes
How to address Senators and Members	How to address Senators and Members – Parliament of Australia	Guide to addressing Federal Members of Parliament
Contacting Senators and Members	Contacting Senators and Members – Parliament of Australia	List of Senators and Members in Federal Parliament. Includes downloadable lists and labels which are useful for mail merge documents and campaigns.
Australian Government Style Manual – Parliament and councils	Parliaments and councils | Style Manual	
Department of Health and Aged Care organisational chart	Department of Health and Aged Care organisational chart | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care	Updated regularly
Queensland Parliament – Current Members	Current Members (including Ministers and shadow Ministers) | Queensland Parliament	
The Queensland Cabinet and Ministerial Directory	Ministers and Portfolios	
Ministerial portfolio	Timothy (Tim) Nicholls MP	Each Minister has their own profile which includes their Ministerial Charter Letter and diary.

Name	Link	Notes
They vote for you	https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/	Record of Federal voting record on key issues and legislation. Useful to identify potential allies.
Children's Health Queensland – Strategies and Reports	Strategies and reports | Children's Health Queensland	Plans, framework and documents which highlight the departmental priorities. Each area has a different focus, but can provide insight into strategic decision making and future opportunities.
AYAC – Young people creating change	2014_Young-People-Creating-Change-Toolkit.pdf	
Advocacy in Action – A toolkit for Public Health Professionals	2019_Advocacy-in-Action-A-Toolkit-for-Public-Health-Professionals-1.pdf	
Sample Advocacy and Communication Plan	Sample template advocacy communications plan_5.pdf	
NSW Parliament – Guide to Writing Submissions	Guide to writing submissions	
UNSW Social policy Research Centre – Making Submissions to Government Inquiries	Making submissions to government inquiries	

FRAMING FOR CHANGE LEARNING HUB

Our words, images and stories are powerful tools in advocacy. Our narratives and messages have the power to shift public understanding, generate support for better policies, and engage the whole community in our work.
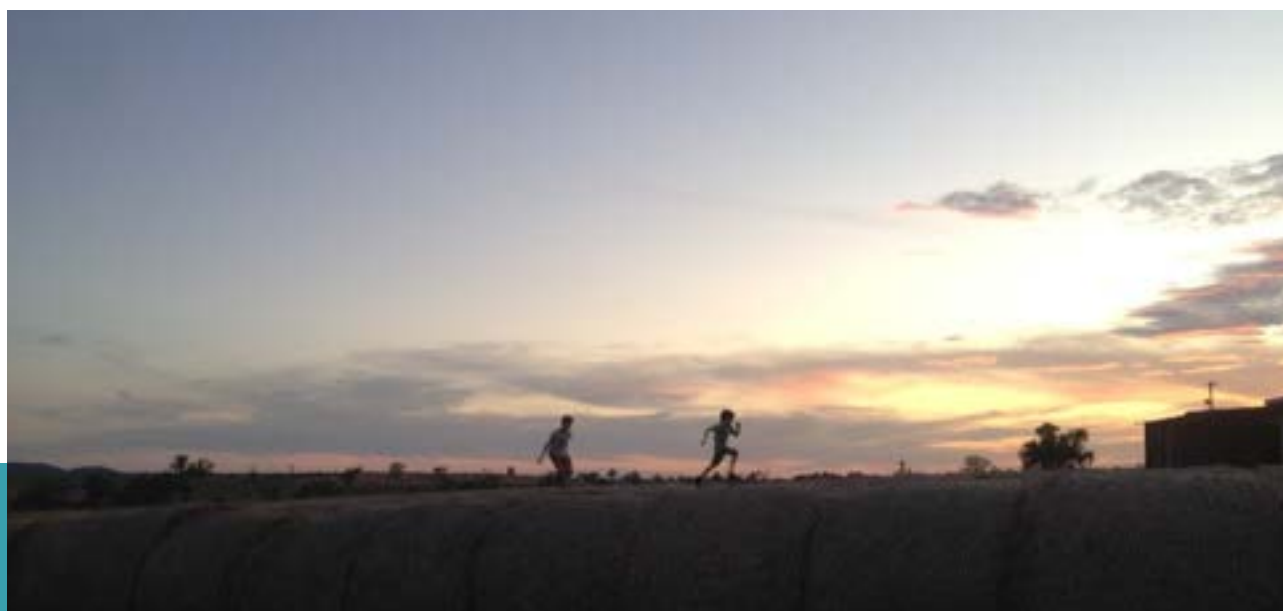
The Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership's Framing Initiative has collated evidence-based framing recommendations to support us to craft messages that work and that avoid triggering unhelpful mindsets. Visit www.tqkp.org.au/framing-for-change-learning-hub/

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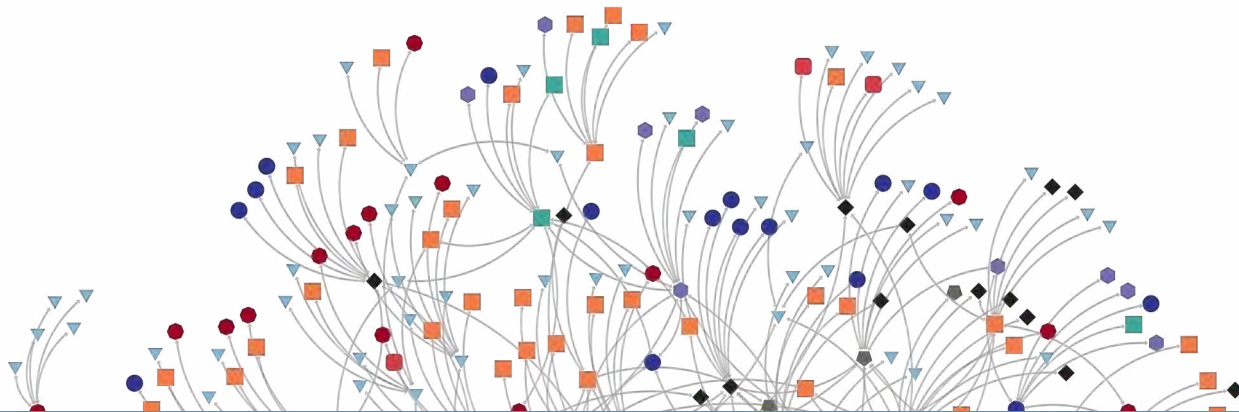
CONNECT WITH US

Thriving Country Kids: Social Network Analysis (SNA) and systemic advocacy in rural, regional and remote Queensland was codeveloped by Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership (TQKP) in partnership with the Country Collaborative alongside First Person Consulting; University of the Sunshine Coast; yourtown; and Communities for Children, The Smith Family.

If you, or someone in your network is interested in learning more about SNA, advocacy, the Thriving Qld Kids Country Collaborative, TQKP or the work of any of our partners, please connect. We would love to collaborate with you!

For more more information:

- www.tqkp.org.au
- tqkp@ARACY.org.au
- www.linkedin.com/company/thriving-queensland-kids-partnership

Download this document at tqkp.org.au/resources/snap-toolkit/