

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM AND COLLABORATION
(OHIO COMMISSION ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM AND
COLLABORATION)**

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Abstract

The Urban Affairs Center conducted a study of collaborative behaviors of non-judicial and non-school-affiliated elected officials in Lucas County. The research team collected primary data through a Social Network Analysis (SNA) survey and telephone and face-to-face interviews. The results of the study showed that participants voluntarily initiate and participate in collaborations and are motivated by diminished resources to provide services. Their goals are to provide basic services and improve quality and efficiency of services. The subjects of this study generally do not attribute collaboration to any mandates imposed by the State or other entities. The conclusions based on SNA suggest that elected officials are more likely to interact based on professional rather than personal relationships. In addition, elected officials are slightly more likely to communicate with individuals from entities other than their own and with other entity types (i.e. cities and townships). As more information on collaborations within the State becomes available, it would be useful to conduct a broader SNA exploring intergovernmental relationships, the effect of networks and professional groups, and the perceived success of collaborations. In addition, it might be useful to include school districts in the research. Most study participants consider their entities' collaborative efforts successful. However, they suggest a need for changes in State policy related to Joint Economic Development Districts/Zones (JEDD/JEDZ), collective bargaining, and the financing of township government, to name a few. Such changes could incentivize more collaboration and improve the outcomes for existing collaboration within Lucas County and elsewhere in Ohio.

Chapter I: Introduction

In recent times, many of Ohio's jurisdictions have been experiencing declining revenues coupled with increasing costs. The current recession exacerbates this problem and is causing new problems. While jurisdictions within NW Ohio, especially Lucas County, do collaborate in some areas, including: Countywide Health Department, Countywide Emergency Medical Services (EMS), etc., there is room for much more collaboration. Currently, most local governments are looking for ways to cut costs and after multiple rounds of budget cutting they are left with the prospect of slashing public services. Many local leaders at this point feel the pressure to partner with other jurisdictions to deliver services, cut costs, and improve efficiencies.

The University of Toledo Urban Affairs Center (UAC) has a long history in researching issues related to the impact of current practices and policies; moreover, the UAC has assisted in developing policy recommendations related to collaboration. Most recently, the UAC conducted a countywide community survey that identified the perception and priorities of Lucas County residents with regards to the provision and delivery of public services by the county and the various jurisdictions within the county. This report builds on our historic work to identify specific areas of potential collaboration and partnerships between local governments.

In this study, the UAC research team will document the perceived efficiency and effectiveness of some current collaborations that have been identified by survey subjects and will also identify additional areas for collaboration. In addition, the researchers will investigate the aspects that encourage as well as hinder collaborations. Overall, the study is expected to provide informational support to the Local Government Collaboration and Reform Committee as they craft recommendations to promote and incentivize collaboration among local governments

thereby enabling them to meet the challenges of making the transition into a new economic context.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The research on collaboration as related to the field of public administration, especially the collaboration among governments and administrative units, has a relatively short history. In fact, the interest of public administrators on issues of collaboration, traditionally explored by business practitioners, did not occur until early 2000 and was mainly driven by the impacts of environmental/financial uncertainty and fast-approaching economic crisis (Foster & Meinhard, 2002). Therefore, there are a limited number of basic studies, which serve as the foundation for most recent investigations (Foster & Meinhard, 2002; Lackey et al., 2002; Entwistle & Martin, 2005; Ansell & Gash, 2007; Smith, 2007).

The combination of the topic's newness and the progressing economic uncertainty fuel more recent research activities and new attempts to clarify the basic structure of collaboration. Currently, the field of public administration is able to define the phenomenon and several of its measurable aspects. More importantly, based on the observable characteristics of an organization, researchers are able to forecast an organization's predisposition for and success in collaboration (Foster & Meinhard, 2002; Smith, 2007). Among those characteristics, it is suggested that the quality of the government's networks is the leading determinant of the government's success as a collaborator because 1) an organization with a good external network has better chances to locate a good-fit collaborator, and 2) an organization with a good internal network is more flexible and its managers are better prepared to carry on the interpersonal

relationships necessary to sustain collaborative projects (O'Toole Jr. & Meier, 2004; Hicklin, O'Toole Jr. & Meier, 2007).

The effectiveness of collaborations, on the other hand, is an intangible concept most often measured in terms of the client's (or the general public's) satisfaction with public services or just general public feedback about the services. Even in studies in which the internal and external validity are well-controlled throughout sampling and data collection techniques, public opinion remains true to its nature: subjective and open to interpretation (Nwankwo & Richardson, 1994; Beauchamp & Hicks, 2004; Daley, 2008).

Therefore, when measuring the effectiveness of collaboration, especially in public service provision, most studies use efficiency to supplement general public's feedback and refer to effectiveness as a combination of the client's satisfaction and efficiency. There are three commonly used statistical models that can measure efficiency of public service provision with relative precision (Beauchamp & Hicks, 2004; Navarro Yanez et al., 2008; Amirkhanyan, 2008). However, all three models use four types of data: projected input and output and actual input and output for one company over time or for several (comparable) companies at a certain point in time (Beauchamp & Hicks, 2004; Navarro Yanez et al., 2008; Amirkhanyan, 2008).

Unfortunately for this study, projected input and output were not available for a comparative study of several entities or as longitudinal data for any single entity. The client satisfaction data (general public's opinion on the service provision) was in place due to the recent UAC's study of Lucas County Community Satisfaction survey (UAC, 2009). However, the goal of the mentioned survey was to offer an overview of the service provision in Lucas County in general; thus, the data on individual entities remained scarce.

Chapter III: Methodology

Keeping in mind the scarcity of secondary data, the need to rely almost exclusively on primary data, and the restrictive timeline of the overall study (all discussed in Chapter II), the research team started the project with a revision in its proposed methodology. The decision was to eliminate several data collection steps and modify the remaining steps to obtain richer and more useful data. Therefore, Social Network Analysis became the leading technique enabling more accurate description, analysis, and interpretation of the communication between governmental officials and the collaborative behaviors of Lucas County governing agencies. In addition, the primary data was collected through telephone and personal interviews.

Goals and Objectives

The main goal of this study was to provide information that could be used to help improve frequency and effectiveness of local government collaboration within Lucas County and the State of Ohio.

Revisions in the methodology necessitate altering the study objectives to reflect the focus of the research. In particular, the research team aimed to:

1. Collect the data and explore the relationships between governmental agencies and their representatives' communication networks and the entities' collaborative behaviors.
2. Identify and explore the incentives that encourage collaboration and the impediments that prevent governments from collaborating on a local level.
3. Provide an analysis of the current status of local government collaboration in Lucas County and suggest ways to enhance the incentives and overcome the impediments in that collaboration; provide recommendations for further collaborations.

Research Methods

For the purposes of this study, the research team focused on collecting primary data, both qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative data was gathered through two SNA surveys and analyzed using Ucinet (Borgatti, S.P., Everett, M. G., and Freeman, L. C. Ucinet for Windows, Software for Social Network Analysis, Harvard MA Analytic Technologies) and visualizations were produced with Netdraw (Borgatti, S.P. Netdraw Network Visualization, and Harvard MA Analytic Technologies).

Qualitative data was collected through telephone interviews with selected government representatives and a series of face-to-face interviews with Lucas County administrator, Michael Beazley. The research team conducted thematic analysis of all the interviews independently; the results were interpreted through a comparative analysis of the themes gathered through telephone interviews and the interviews with Mr. Beazley.

Research Outline

The study consisted of five stages and unfolded along the three-month timeline in the following sequence:

1. Prior to initiating the study, the research team conducted an extensive literature review to establish a comprehensive framework for the investigative activities. A brief summary of the outcomes was provided earlier in the report.
2. The research team proceeded with a first face-to-face interview with Lucas County administrator, Michael Beazley. The main goal of the first interview was to discuss the initial research strategy, to identify potential sources of information as both individuals and document archives/records, and to begin to inventory existing formal and informal collaborations within Lucas County.

3. The research team attempted two SNA surveys: for elected officials and government agency representatives. However, as the response rate for the elected officials' survey was relatively low the decision was made to focus the communication networks between individuals rather than the collaboration networks between entities. As a part of data collection, all the selected non-judicial and non-school-affiliated elected officials in Lucas County were initially contacted by mail with a letter of invitation and a hard copy of the survey. Two weeks later, the participants received a postcard reminder. Three more weeks later, all the non-respondents were contacted by the phone and given an option to complete the survey online, via the phone, or attempt another hard copy of the questionnaire. The outcomes of the data collection and SNA outcomes are discussed in the chapter immediately following the methodology.
4. As the SNA was in progress, the research team developed a different survey aimed at replacing some of the initially proposed face-to-face interviews and focus groups. Initially, the research team planned to conduct one to two focus groups with representatives of the governments identified as successful collaborators and two to three individual interviews with the representatives of the governments, identified as unsuccessful/reluctant collaborators. However, because of the study's time limitations and the public/elected officials' schedule (during an election season), the fulfillment of this initial plan turned unrealistic. Thus, the researchers used a script to conduct telephone interviews with 48 selected government representatives (two from each municipality in Lucas County). The data collected during the telephone interviews served as the foundation for the Chapter V discussion of incentives that encourage

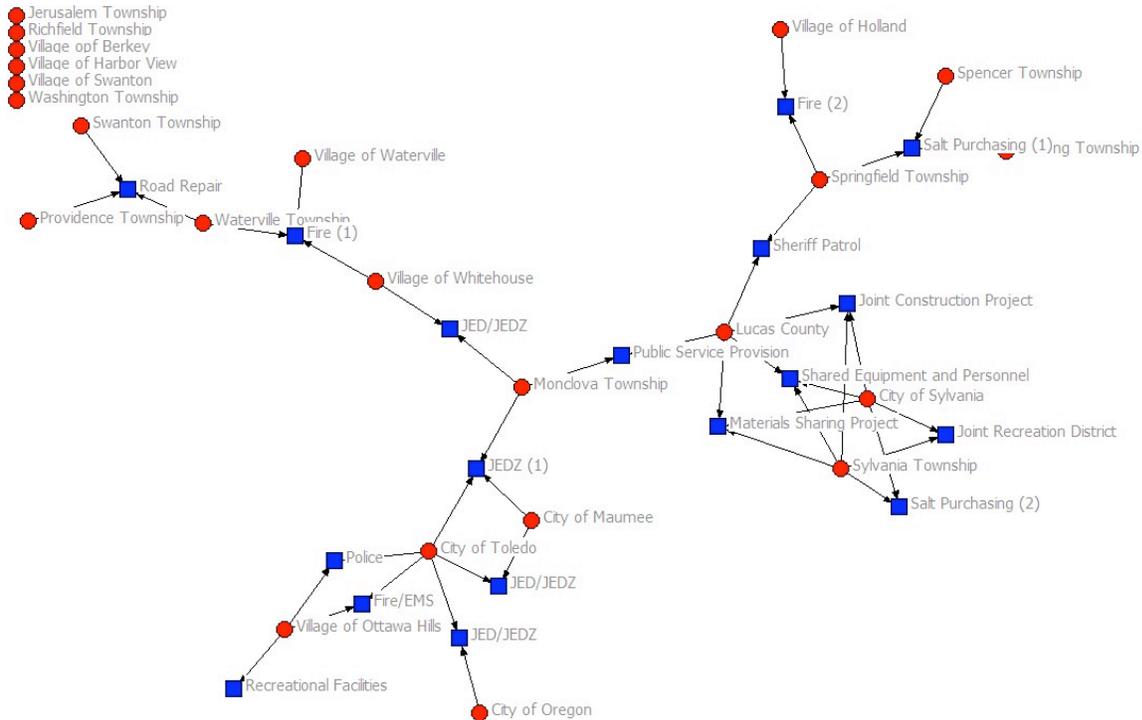
- government collaborations and the impediments preventing the governments from establishing/sustaining effective partnerships with each other.
5. All the collected data was interpreted through the prism of the follow-up interview with Lucas County administrator, Michael Beazley. The second conversation allowed the researchers to add some specific details that enhance the understanding of the study outcomes. The conclusions of this second interview are presented in the report Conclusion.
 6. The analysis of the collected data developed throughout the study; and the outcomes of each subsequent stage were presented to support and enhance the outcomes of the previous stages.

Chapter IV: Social Network Analysis

As discussed above, we were able to identify only a few voluntary collaborations between local government entities in Lucas County. These are illustrated in the Diagram 1.

In the absence of significant data on collaboration, we focused on communication between local elected officials as a possible indicator of the potential for more collaboration between local governmental entities.

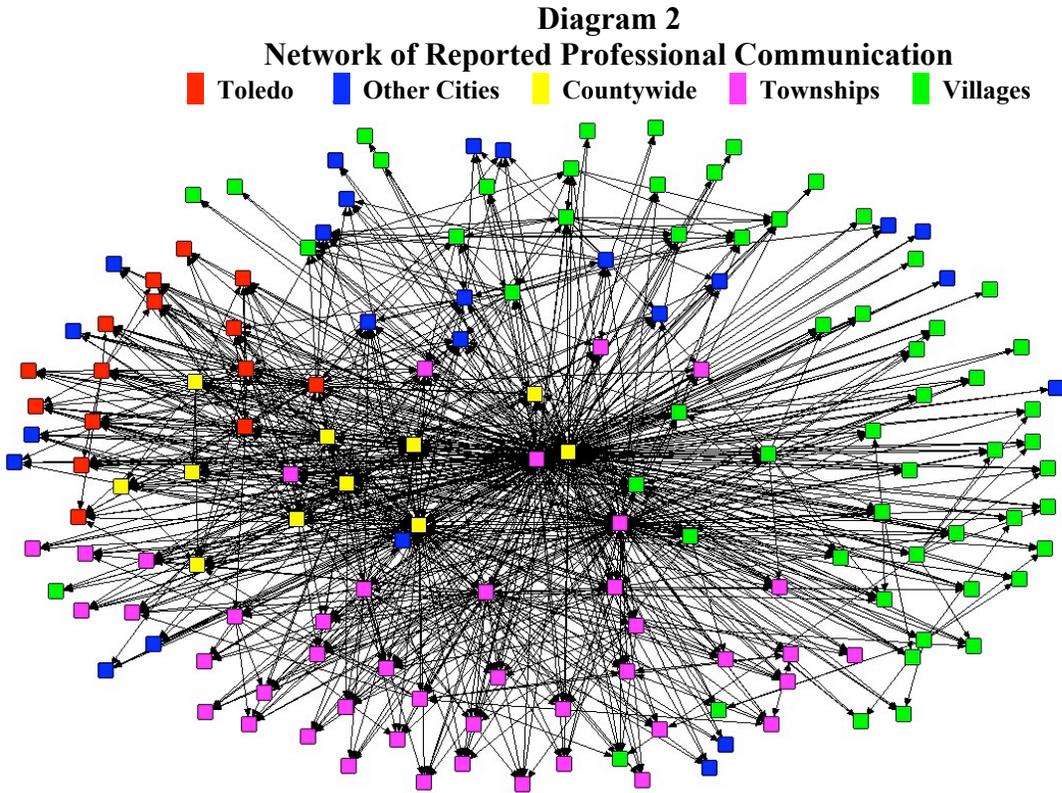
Diagram 1
Collaborations Between Local Government Entities in Lucas County



We used Social Network Analysis to look at the patterns of communication between and among elected officials in Lucas County. We surveyed 151 non-judicial, non-school board elected officials. Each was sent a roster including the entity represented, office held, and names of all 151 individuals. Respondents were asked to report both personal communication (unrelated to elected office) and professional communication (related to elected office), each ranked from 0 (no communication) to 3 (daily communication). Five sub-groups were defined by type entity represented: countywide elected officials, representatives of the city of Toledo, and officials of other cities, township officials, and village officials.

In all network maps, the nodes are individual elected officials. The links are communications reported by survey respondents (see Diagram 2). All analysis was conducted

with UCINET (Borgatti, Everett and Freeman, 2002, Analytic Technologies) and all maps were produced with NetDraw.



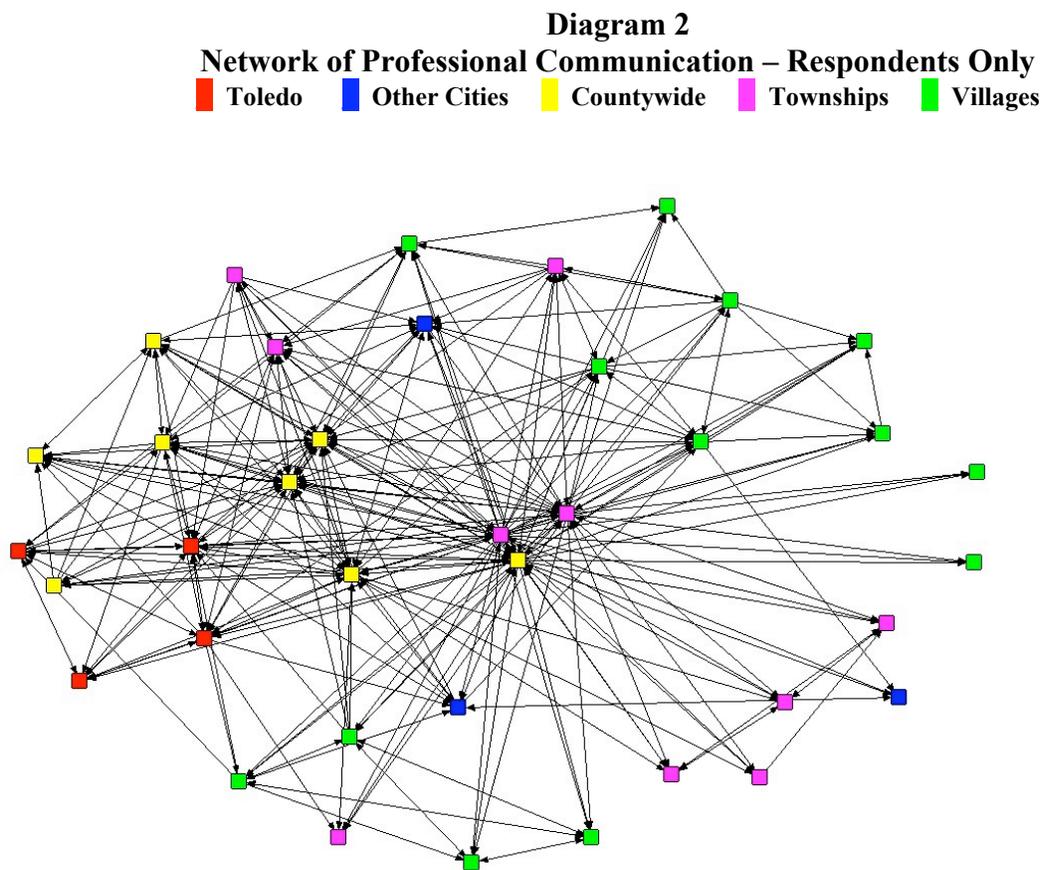
We received 38 responses (25% response rate). Although response rate was disproportionately high among county-wide officials (73%), and response rate from cities other than Toledo was low (13%), responses from the city of Toledo, townships, and villages were in line with overall response rate (See Table 1).

Table 1

Subgroups	Universe	Responses	Response Rate	Total Representation	Response Representation
Countywide	11	8	73%	7%	21%
Toledo	15	4	27%	10%	11%
Other cities	24	3	13%	16%	8%
Townships	44	10	23%	29%	26%
Villages	57	13	23%	38%	34%
Total	151	38	25%	100%	100%

As a result, countywide officials are over-represented in our analysis and jurisdictions, of those with whom they report communicating, all 151 individuals (universe) are a part of the network studied. In other respects, the 38 respondents provide a representative subset of our universe. In Table 1, ‘total representation’ refers to reported communication among all 151 individuals and ‘response In Table 1, ‘total representation’ refers to the proportion of the universe represented by each entity type and ‘response representation’ refers to the proportion of total responses represented by each entity.

In the following analysis, “total” refers to reported communication among all 151 individuals and “respondents” refers to communications between those 38 individuals who responded to the survey



Using Ucinet and Netdraw, networks were compared with regard to two standard measures: density (a measure of how many potential connections are made in actuality i.e. the number of reported ties as a percentage of the number of potential ties) and homophily (a measure of whether ties are within sub-groups or between sub-groups i.e. the extent to which *birds of a feather flock together*). Density can range from 0 (no ties) to 1 (members are all directly connected to each other). Homophily can range from -1 (all ties are within sub-groups) to 1 (all ties are between sub-groups). A network with a homophily score of 1 exhibits heterophily, i.e. all ties are between sub-groups.

Density

Almost twice as many professional (1049) ties as personal ties (551) were reported. Both networks were sparse. Fewer than 5% of the possible connections have been made in the professional communication network.

Among respondents, the density of the personal network was 15% and in the professional network density was 24%, indicating that among the 38 individuals who responded to our survey, 24% of the possible professional communication connections are actual. (See Table 2)

Homophily

All networks show communication between groups, i.e. slightly more communication is reported between those who represent different types of entities than between those who represent the same type of entity (again, homophily = -1 and heterophily = 1). (See Table 2)

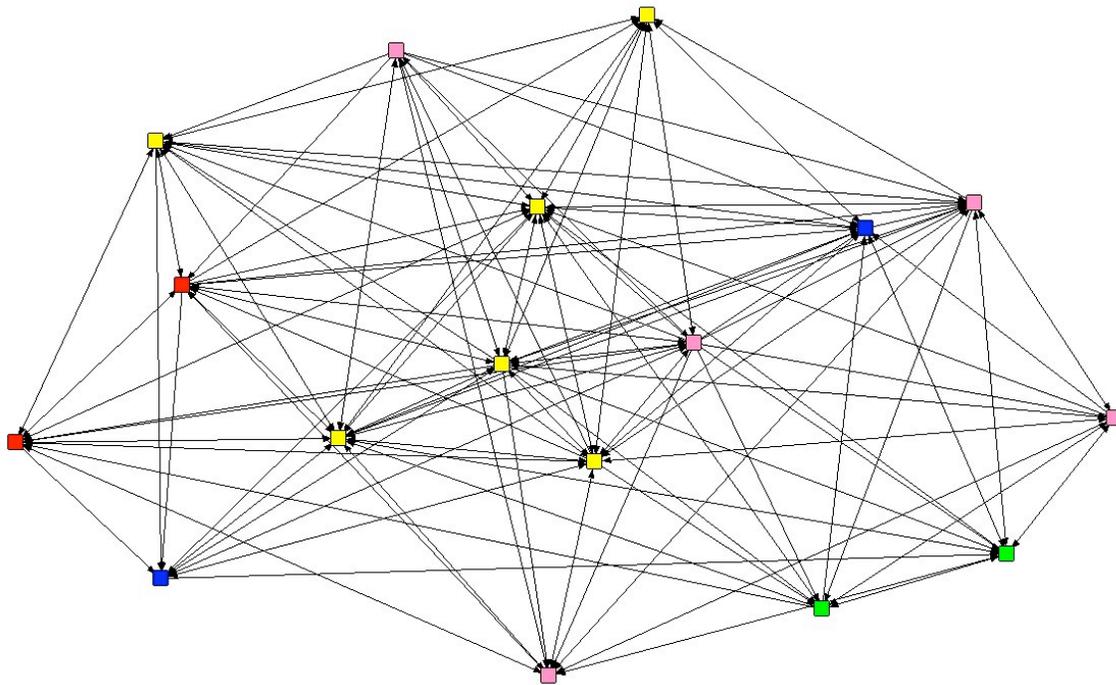
Table 2

	Whole Network		Respondents Only	
	Personal	Professional	Personal	Professional
Density	2%	5%	15%	24%
Homophily	0.2341	0.245	0.3396	0.2553

The Network Core

Next we looked at the structure of the professional communication network of respondents. Of the 38 respondents, 17 individuals formed the core, i.e. they communicated among themselves more than with those non-core members who make up the periphery of the respondent network.

Diagram 3
Network of Professional Communication – Respondents only
■ Toledo ■ Other Cities ■ Countywide ■ Townships ■ Villages



Among this core, 60% of possible connections have been made, and the network shows even more tendency for between-subgroups communication. Two thirds of this core is made up of countywide (35%) and township (29%) officials.

Table 3

	Core	% of Core
Countywide	6	35%
Toledo	2	12%
Other cities	2	12%
Townships	5	29%
Villages	2	12%
Total	17	100%
Density	60%	
Homophily	0.44	

Subgroups

Because of the small numbers of respondents, analysis of the subgroups is difficult and the following analysis is merely suggestive, not indicative. Because of the nature of the relationship, it is reasonable to assume that communication is symmetric (i.e. if I communicate with you, you communicate with me.) By beginning with the communication reported by our 38 respondents between themselves and with the remaining 113 individuals in the network and assuming symmetry, we arrive at a network of 151 elected officials.

The following table (Table 4) suggests that countywide officials' internal communication network is the most dense of any subgroup (86%), followed by Toledo. This may simply reflect the fact that these sub-groups consist of only one entity. Among the other subgroups, township officials enjoy a network that is much more dense (17%) than that among representatives of cities other than Toledo (7%) or of villages (4%). This may be related to the strength of the County Township Trustees' Association, which regularly convenes these officials.

Representatives from Toledo report regular communication with countywide officials (44%) but very little communication with officials of other cities (4%), townships (5%), or villages (1%). Village officials report less communication with countywide officials than do other groups (13%) and virtually no communication between themselves or with representatives of Toledo, other cities, or townships.

Table 4

Density of Professional Communication	Countywide	Toledo	Other Cities	Townships	Villages
Countywide	86%	44%	23%	28%	13%
Toledo	44%	40%	4%	5%	1%
Other Cities	23%	44%	7%	4%	2%
Townships	29%	45%	4%	17%	5%
Villages	13%	1%	2%	5%	4%

Chapter V: Telephone Interview with Government Agencies Representatives

As mentioned in the Methodology Chapter, the research team selected a group of 48 government agencies representatives to conduct extended telephone survey/interview. There were two representatives selected for each entity: an elected official and an appointed administrator. When selecting individuals, the research team gave preference to the representatives who had longer history of service and who, based on SNA results, appeared to be well-connected with other entities/representatives. Such an approach to sampling allowed the research team to obtain informed and diverse perspectives on the issues related to government collaborations.

The script for the interviews consisted of 11 questions. Of a particular interest for the researchers were the objectives of the existing collaborations, metrics for measuring the benefits/successes of collaborative projects, incentives and impediments for collaborations (including local policies), and areas for potential collaborations as recognized by the selected group of officials and administrators.

According to the existing research, government collaborations can include a number of service delivery areas ranging from public safety services to joint port management and public facility operations (Rosenbaum, 2006). However, public safety – fire, police, Emergency

Response (EMS) – and economic development projects remain the leading sectors because the service provision in this area requires extensive tangible resources (human labor, money, and information) and because the pool of clients/service beneficiaries includes all residents of the locality, not a specific subgroup (Takahashi, 2009).

The findings of the survey corroborate the prior empirical studies; in particular, every respondent mentioned at least one of the highlighted areas (fire, police, EMS, or economic development) and half of the respondents mentioned two, usually, as a combination of police and fire collaboration projects. The other areas of collaborative relationships among the governments included:

- Joint management of recreation facilities
- Joint purchasing of salt
- Joint mutual aid pacts
- Mortgage/foreclosure mitigation strategies
- Court case fee collections
- Imaging lab services related to document storage
- Non-violent offenders after-hours bail/bond program.

Depending on the type and the goal of collaboration, the number of participants ranged between two and 24+ (all the governments in Lucas County plus private organizations in/outside Lucas County or public partners outside Lucas County). There are collaborations that include participants from just one type of government, for example, the collaborations among Lucas County townships. There are also collaborations in which government agencies work jointly subcontract with the private sector to deliver services.

According to Lackey, Freshwater and Rupasingha (2009), there are several factors that predispose governments' interest in collaborating with each other and define the expectations toward collaborative efforts:

- Scarcity of the resources
- Need to reduce transaction costs between organizations and increase efficiency of service provision
- Desire to improve the quality/quantity of delivered services
- The power symmetry: and the desire of a weak collaborator will be able to benefit from the powers of a stronger collaborator
- Expectation of reciprocity when sharing risks and benefits, transition from competition to cooperation
- Developed inter and intra-governmental networks
- Prevalence of “soft” service provision, in which the outcomes are intangible and difficult to measure
- The governments are resource dependent, autonomous or semi-autonomous; and they do not have in-house professional capacity to deliver quality service by themselves.
- Potential collaborators are experienced in providing the same or similar services, viewed as a possessor of and possess complimentary service-provision competencies
- The government has positive past collaboration

Based on the outcomes of this survey, there are three main reasons for Lucas County government collaboration: save money (i.e., scarcity of resources), improve the quality of services, and increase the efficiency of service-provision activities. Among other

reasons/incentives to engage in collaboration were encouragement of economic development, job-creation, job-reduction (reduction of governmental staff), and tax-sharing.

Only one survey respondent mentioned the mandatory nature of the collaboration as an incentive for engagement. This fact, combined with the research team's knowledge of a high number of mandatory or highly incentivized collaborations among Lucas County governments (e.g. transportation planning through the Metropolitan Planning Organization and criminal justice planning through the Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee), might mean that even though recognizing the obligatory nature of such collaborations, the governments do not view this as a leading incentive to collaborating.

In addition, all respondents consider their current collaborative projects successful. When asked to evaluate their collaborations on a scale from 1 (very unsuccessful) to 5 (very successful), 100% of the participants chose 5 (very successful) or 4 (successful). Cost savings due to shared resources (money, facilities, equipment, and employees) were the leading measurable benefit of the majority of collaborative projects. Efficiency as the ability to provide more services with better quality or as the ability to finish projects faster was the second leading benefit. The third most frequent positive outcome of collaborative projects was the enhanced mutually supportive relationships between the collaborating governments ("we are good neighbors").

When asked about the impediments that prevent the governments from entering the collaborations that they view as beneficial, the answers fall into three big categories:

- The perception that collective bargaining laws/agreements in Ohio are a large barrier to the improvement of efficiency. Public employee labor unions, understandably, object to efforts to improve efficiency by reducing numbers of public sector jobs.

- There is a sense that JEDD and JEDZ's are more effective for greenfield development rather than for the projects within more developed or urban areas where land must be re-used/re-purposed. Redeveloping property that is already served by services and infrastructure is more efficient and economical but current JEDD/JEDZ rules incentivize more sprawling development on suburban or rural greenfields.
- Fiscal issues related to townships make it hard to sustain long-term collaborative projects. Townships cannot impose an income /payroll tax (unless engaged in a JEDD); thus, they have to be creative in finding ways to pay for and provide services.

Finally, through the telephone interviews, it became apparent that the government representatives see even more benefits in collaborating in the current context of economic uncertainty. Therefore, they continuously evaluate other governments as potential partners. Thus, when asked about potential future collaboration, government representatives had at least one in mind. In particular, the participants expressed a strong interest in collaborating more with Lucas County governments on sharing facilities and equipment. In addition, many representatives expressed an opinion that more collaborative projects with the City of Toledo would be beneficial and that the City of Toledo needs to be more proactive and take on the role of the Hub in the region by facilitating relationships among the other smaller governments within the county and the region.

Chapter VI: Conclusions and Recommendations

The goal of this study was to provide information that could be used to help improve frequency and effectiveness of local government collaboration within Lucas County and the State of Ohio. In order to achieve this goal the UAC employed traditional research methods and also chose to include Social Network Analysis in its methodology. Social Network Analysis

(SNA) is an approach that has not often been employed in the analysis of collaborative efforts between local governments in the United States. By using SNA the UAC researchers sought to understand how the networks between and among elected officials (based on communication patterns) may impact the culture of collaboration within Lucas County.

The traditional techniques employed in this study resulted in the identification of specific collaborative efforts, what motivates those collaborative efforts, partners, perceived success of those efforts, and some sense of what impedes and/or incentivizes those efforts and collaboration in general. The results indicate that the type of collaborations and what motivates collaboration within Lucas County is consistent with findings of other researchers on this topic. The main topics of collaboration include fire, police or economic development and the three main motivations for local collaboration are to save money (i.e., scarcity of resources), improve quality of services, and increase the efficiency of service-provision.

With regards to SNA, we found that there was much variation among the frequency and patterns of communications reported by respondents. Although patterns are suggested, the low response rate makes it impossible to draw firm conclusions about differences related to the offices held by the respondents or the specific entities they represent. For example we cannot compare specific entities to each other but we can compare types of entities. As expected, the densest networks are those among officials within a common entity such as Toledo or Lucas County. However the network between township officials is denser than that between representatives of small cities or of villages, perhaps because of the robustness of the Lucas County Township Association.

We believe that SNA is a promising approach to understanding and influencing the culture of collaboration between local governments. However additional data within counties and

allowing the comparison between counties is required. The data collected by the other research teams associated with the Ohio Commission on Local Government Reform and Collaboration's research projects could be used generate network maps for purposes of comparison and the identification of patterns which might suggest strategic intervention.

Suggestions for Further Research

1. Our research was limited to networking among elected and appointed officials from local governments within Lucas County, it would be interesting to explore networks that include private sector partners, non-profits, and public service agencies.
2. As additional collaborations are identified, it would be instructive to examine whether collaboration between entities is more likely when communication between elected officials is more robust.
3. Some collaboration may be initiated by administrators or staff. Adding these individuals to the network of study might provide more insight into relevant communication patterns.
4. Local government entities also collaborate with school districts and with a range of private or public-private agencies. Examining these collaborations and the associated communication networks could provide additional perspective on collaboration.
5. By comparing communication and collaboration networks across different counties, it may be possible to identify larger patterns.
6. We used a roster survey of elected officials, i.e. we asked respondents to identify those with whom they communicate ***from a list included with the survey***. An open-ended survey could be used to identify individuals (or organizations or publications) whom elected officials trust or turn to for advice. In any given county or region, certain names

are likely to recur. These “influentials” could be helpful in creating a more collaboration-friendly culture among elected officials. With sufficient time and resources, influentials could be interviewed to determine their attitudes toward collaborations, allowing for a more strategic approach to utilizing existing networks to drive change.

Suggestions for Policy Review or Change

1. The State government needs to review collective bargaining laws/agreements to identify and facilitate the development of collaborative projects aiming at cost/job-reduction.
2. The State government need to reduce the number of governmental units specifically, the number of small municipalities (townships). More mergers, consolidations, and incorporation would result in more effective governance.
3. There need to be more financial incentives for collaborating governments, especially, at the initial stages of collaboration development.
4. In particular, the participants expressed a strong interest in collaborating more with Lucas County governments on sharing facilities and equipment. In addition,

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