

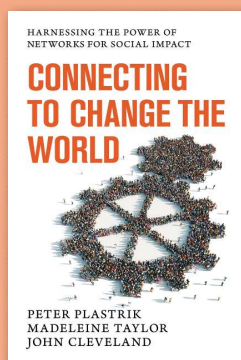
# RESOURCE REVIEW

## Connecting to Change the World

Harnessing The Power of Networks for Social Impact

by Peter Plastrik, Madeleine Taylor and John Cleveland

I became aware of the power of networks in the 1990s while working in the field of community economic development (CED). At that time the majority of microenterprise programs were supporting individual entrepreneurs to establish their own businesses to generate additional income for their households. Not the pioneers at the Appalachia Center for Economic Networks. They were weaving together small and medium enterprises into mutually supporting economic *networks*. The difference in revenue, profits and economic activity was dramatic: networks really exemplified the old adage that the whole can be greater than the sum of its parts.



The popularity and practice of networks has since exploded. People are building them for every possible reason: from developing personal connections to mobilizing diverse organizations to address complex environmental, social and economic challenges. Policy makers use network frameworks to understand the resiliency of terrorist groups; business analysts study networks to assess the buying habits of consumers. There is now a bewildering array of networking tools and techniques, such as network mapping software.

Despite the “mainstreaming” of network concepts and methods, few comprehensive resources have been at hand to help practitioners attend to all the

practical tasks of building and managing these productive webs. Until now. The book, *Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing The Power of Networks for Social Impact* more than fills the gap. Drawing from diverse examples of urban sustainability, manufacturing, homelessness, and faith-based community-building, the authors have put together what may well be the best practical guide to date.

The book is comprehensive. The first chapter discusses the many features that networks can add that to assist wouldbe changemakers. Chapter Two reviews the eight key characteristics of networks (e.g., purpose, governance, operating principles). Chapter Three explores the art of weaving together a network’s participants. Chapter Four lays out the phases of evolution of networks, while Chapter Five uncovers the key functions that network stewards require to manage the entire process. Chapter Six provides a clear framework for assessing frameworks. Chapters Seven and Eight offer a (brief) summary of key challenges and simple things to keep in mind when the going gets tough.

Beyond this comprehensive review of network practices, the book is also a gold mine of resources. The appendices include lists of relevant websites, books, case studies as well as a number of sample tools. The book’s own webpage is one of the most generous I’ve seen for a book of this kind and includes regular updates to keep people coming back.

*Connecting to Change the World* is a significant contribution to the field of social change. Whether your work focuses in the realm of creating policy coalitions, collective impact roundtables, social movements, or communities of practice, veteran and novice network builders alike will wonder how we ever managed without this rich resource.

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### Learn more:

Visit the Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing The Power of Networks for Social Impact website <http://connectingtochangethe-world.net/>

First published in Tamarack’s Engage Newsletter: [http://tamarackcommunity.ca/downloads/engage/Engage\\_July2015.pdf](http://tamarackcommunity.ca/downloads/engage/Engage_July2015.pdf)



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**Resource Reviews** are a series of documents exploring new frameworks, tools and resources for building communities and solving tough challenges.