DC Bar Foundation's

FAMILY LAW LEARNING NETWORK (FLLN)

Summary Report

October 2022

CONTENTS

AT A GLANCE

The DC Bar Foundation launched the Family Law Learning Network (FLLN) in April 2020. The network, coordinated by NPC Research, included staff from 6 legal services providers working on family law cases in DC. The FLLN's purpose was threefold:

Build grantees' **capacity to use data** for program monitoring, impact evaluation, and organizational decision making

Connect legal services professionals to **support knowledge sharing and collaboration**, for both evaluation/data practice and family law practice

Help grantees **apply data-related principles in real world contexts** that impact their legal services work

While in operation for 2.5 years, the FLLN actively addressed each of these goals. Below is a summary of the network's progress and accomplishments during this time.

1. **Build grantees' capacity to use data for program monitoring, impact evaluation, and organizational decision making**

Network partners gained or developed:

- Knowledge of program monitoring, impact evaluation, and data-informed decision making
- Customized logic model articulating key outputs, outcomes, and impacts
- Customized data collection framework identifying data sources and needs
- Best practices for data collection and data management, including tips for developing local instruments and protocols
- Effective approaches for client survey administration, including a bank of questions
- Knowledge of trauma-informed approaches to data collection
- Strategies to use existing case management system data
- Best practices for data analysis and reporting
- Tips for communicating results to different audiences

2. Connect legal services professionals to support knowledge sharing and collaboration, for both evaluation/data practices and family law practice

Network partners participated in:

- Ongoing relationship building and connectivity
- Monthly calls with high attendance, including
    - Small group discussions to strengthen relationships
    - Partners reporting on their organization's practices
    - Partners sharing resources with network
- Regular Social Network Analysis, showing increased number of connections among FLLN partners over time
- FLLN Teams channel and resource repository
- Partner presentations on special topics
- Space to generate ideas for further collaboration

3. Help grantees apply data-related principles in real world contexts that impact their legal services work

Network partners participated in:

- Individualized technical assistance with NPC, including refinement of intake forms, customization of case management systems, and tailoring of other data collection efforts
- Remote Hearings Litigant Survey Study design and implementation
    - Collaborative study design and survey instrument development
    - Collaborative recruitment of litigants to participate, data collection, and follow-up
    - Collaborative review of data analysis done by NPC and joint results interpretation
    - Collaborative review and revision of final report
    - Collaborative generation of dissemination plan
    - Multi-partner presentation to Domestic Relations Branch of the DC Superior Court

In September 2022, after 2.5 years of regular meetings and notable activity, the FLLN ended. However, the collaboration did not: Network partners were invited to continue their work together as part of the Family and Probate Group of the DC Legal Aid Transformations Network.

INTRODUCTION

The DC Bar Foundation (DCBF) exists to support and strengthen civil legal services in the District of Columbia (DC) to ensure that these critical services remain accessible and effective for those who need them. In addition to being the largest funder of legal services providers in the District, DCBF also endeavors to advance the broader field of civil legal aid by fostering, and in some cases leading, system-level initiatives. The **Family Law Learning Network (FLLN)** was one such initiative.

Most fields—including civil legal aid—are fragmented, with organizations working in silos or competing with each other for limited resources. Information sharing and cross-organizational communication is rare, which restricts the intelligence and flexibility of the overall system. Learning networks are groups of connected professionals, across multiple organizations or sectors, who share information, ideas, best practices, and lessons learned. These networks are based on a culture of learning, shared principles, and trusting relationships. Members benefit from one another's knowledge and experience, and they can take what they learn through the network back to their home organizations to increase their internal capacity and amplify their impact. Often, this open dialogue and collective learning leads to new ideas for innovative practices and gives rise to collaborative projects among partners—with this step, a *learning* network becomes an *action* network.[1] While network membership holds benefit for individual members, the true power resides in the collective: Networks are more likely to move the needle on big problems, like access to justice, than any individual organization can accomplish alone.

The FLLN built upon DCBF's experience facilitating the Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program (CLCPP), an action network of legal services organizations funded to provide eviction defense services for low-income renters in DC. These networks reflect DCBF's priorities of collaboration and evaluation to inform decision-making, program development, and policy advocacy. The FLLN combined effective network practice and capacity for data-driven decision-making as a way to strengthen civil legal services in family law. Through the FLLN, DCBF extended this collaborative, capacity-building opportunity to selected grantees. This effort, along with the ongoing stewardship of the CLCPP network, helped to pave the way for DCBF's subsequent launch of the District-wide DC Legal Aid Transformations Network (DC LATN).

As part of the FLLN, partners learned about evaluation and data, increasing their capacity to monitor their programs, make data-informed decisions, and understand the impact of their services. They also learned from their peers in the network. The intention was for the FLLN to become a place where legal services providers could share ideas, inspiration, lessons learned, and promising practices—for both evaluation and family law issues—for the betterment of the larger civil legal system in DC. The FLLLN

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[1] *Action* networks are unified behind a purpose of changing the system and espouse an expectation of active collaboration among partners to do that. *Learning* networks have a primary purpose of sharing information and do not necessarily expect active collaboration among partners in the field. Notably, all action networks are learning networks, but all learning networks are not action networks.

was launched in April 2020 with 6 legal services providers participating. These partners met monthly for 2.5 years. In September 2022, the FLLN formally ended and partners were invited to continue their work together in the Family and Probate group within the DC Legal Aid Transformation Network.

FLLN PARTNERS

From April 2020 through September 2022, DCBF convened staff from 6 legal services organizations to form the FLLN. The cohort consisted of organizations with DCBF grants to provide assistance with various types of family law matters. These grantees included:

NPC RESEARCH'S ROLE

DCBF contracted with NPC Research to launch, cultivate, and manage the FLLN. NPC provided extensive training on evaluation and data-related issues, as well as individualized technical assistance (TA), to FLLN partners. NPC also served as the network coordinator, which entailed organizing and scheduling network meetings, creating meeting agendas and presentations, facilitating network meetings, coordinating with network members, developing infrastructure for network governance, and gathering data on network health and connectivity to strengthen the network. To support network communication and access to resources to enhance learning, NPC established and maintained an online repository of materials and a dedicated Microsoft Teams channel. NPC also provided focused technical assistance to individual partners as requested, building grantees' capacity to collect and analyze data related to their particular service model and data system.

In the FLLN's second year, NPC continued to provide data-related training and technical assistance and perform network coordination duties. At the same time, NPC began to shift the responsibility for envisioning the network's future to the partners themselves—because a healthy network defines and refines its own purpose over time. This transfer of "ownership" took root, as evidenced by two FLLN

partners developing an idea for a collaborative research project and pitching it to the network for implementation (the *Remote Hearings Survey Study* discussed later). Throughout this year, partners collaborated on the joint study with NPC managing the effort, putting the data-related principles they had learned into practice. After the study was complete, NPC continued to foster partners' development of the network's evolving purpose by centering network meeting agendas around presentations by partners on topics that were relevant to the group, such as trauma-informed lawyering, using case management system data to inform services, and intake protocols.

FLLN GOALS

The FLLN operated with three overarching goals:

1. to build grantees' **capacity to use data** for monitoring their program's activities,[2]
2. to connect legal services professionals to **support knowledge sharing** and collaboration, and
3. to help grantees **apply data-related principles** to real world contexts that impact their legal services work.

Goal #1: Build grantees' capacity to use data for monitoring their programs

Legal services organizations typically collect a lot of data about the clients they serve, but they often lack the capacity to routinely analyze these data and use them to inform operations or communicate impact. Through the FLLN, NPC educated network partners about evaluation and program monitoring, providing them with a fundamental understanding of how they can integrate evaluation practices into their programs and better use the data they are collecting. In addition to group trainings, NPC also provided network partners with individualized technical assistance customized for their local systems. As a result of FLLN participation, network members gained the understanding and skills to increase their organization's capacity for data collection, management, and usage.

Goal #2: Connect legal services professionals to share knowledge and collaborate

NPC cultivated a successful learning network, through which partners gained a supportive cohort of colleagues with whom they could share and learn. Through the FLLN, NPC provided the opportunity and support for network members to learn, develop meaningful relationships, and share information and insights with each other, as well as to establish an open dialogue for members to benefit from each other's knowledge and experiences. The exchange of information related to the implementation of data-related protocols in busy legal aid environments, as well as to emerging family law practice issues. The goal was to increase the individual and collective capacity of the network by creating robust connections among knowledgeable professionals working in the same field.

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[2] Partners focus their FLLN activities on one family law program within their organization. For smaller organizations, this may encompass all of their work. For larger organizations, this focuses on a single program or set of services within the organization's portfolio.

Goal #3: Help grantees apply data-related principles in real world contexts that impact their legal services work

During the first year of the FLLN, partners developed a strong foundation of knowledge about the principles of effective data collection, management, and use. In the second year, partners were encouraged to apply this learning to their work in their own organizations, augmenting the collection and utilization of their own data to monitor their programs, improve their services, and communicate their impact. NPC offered individualized TA to support these organization-specific efforts.

Throughout the second year, NPC also coordinated FLLN partners to collectively implement the *Remote Hearings Survey Study*, an idea that was sparked by the network. With NPC's technical support and guidance, FLLN partners administered an online survey to their clients and reported their findings to the Domestic Relations Branch (DRB) of the DC Superior Court. This study presented an opportunity for FLLN partners to experientially learn the data-related concepts covered during the first year of the network, to benefit from doing active data collection with NPC's support and guidance, and to collectively generate a research product that had the potential to influence system change for their clients. (The *Remote Hearings Survey Study* is discussed in more detail later in this report.)

Participation Goals for FLLN Partners

As a result of participating in the FLLN, the goals were for network members to have:

- An understanding of evaluation and how it can benefit their organization,
- A program logic model and a framework for evaluating their family law services,
- Workable program monitoring protocols for data collection, management, and analysis that they can implement independently,
- The ability to produce internal reports of their data to support program monitoring over time,
- A cohort of colleagues with whom they can share ideas and strategies for improving their family law practices and collaborate to improve the system,
- Experience applying knowledge about data collection, management, and analysis in their work,
- Access to a repository of resources to support ongoing learning.

NETWORK COORDINATION AND ACTIVITIES

NPC organized the network activities in alignment with the above goals. The overarching FLLN project structure involved: (a) quarterly network meetings, (b) asynchronous tasks between meetings, (c) monthly group calls, (d) individualized TA provided by NPC, (e) peer consults among partners, and (f) the collaborative implementation of a litigant survey study. Each activity is described briefly below, and additional detail on the results of these activities is discussed in the following section of this report.

Quarterly Network Meetings

The initial FLLN project plan involved quarterly network meetings that were half-day and in-person, held in DC and facilitated by NPC. However, COVID-19 pandemic restrictions shifted all network activities to virtual spaces. When the quarterly meetings became virtual, they were shortened (instead of 4 hours in person, they were 2 hours online). During Year 1, each quarterly meeting introduced an evaluation and data-related topic to be worked on during the quarter. (Specific topics are outlined in the Progress and Accomplishments section.) Subsequent meetings built on previous information. During Year 2, quarterly meetings focused on collaborative work for the Remote Hearings Survey Study implementation and showcased presentations by network partners about a range of topics.

Importantly, quarterly meetings (and monthly calls, described below) were designed to build and strengthen relationships between network partners and therefore included time for the partners to interact, get to know each other, and share information. Meetings involved time for small group breakout conversations, question and answer periods, and discussions driven by the partners.

After selected quarterly meetings, NPC administered a network survey to gather information from partners about their perceptions of the utility of the information presented, additional topics they would like to cover, their level of collaboration with each other, and their perceptions of the FLLN and the value of their participation in it. (Results of these surveys are presented throughout the Progress and Accomplishments section.)

Asynchronous Tasks

During each quarterly meeting, NPC provided general training and facilitated discussion about a specific data-related topic. Partners were then encouraged to work asynchronously on the topic between meetings. Throughout the first year, this generally took the form of take-home exercises to apply data-related principles to their home organizations. For example, after a quarterly meeting about logic models and the specification of outcomes, partners were given an exercise to guide their development of a logic model for their program. NPC then reviewed each partner's logic model with them and provided individualized technical assistance to refine it. In the second year, asynchronous activities included reviewing drafts of the Remote Hearing Study litigant survey instrument and developing their local data collection protocols for the survey.

Monthly Group Calls

In the months without a quarterly meeting, NPC planned and facilitated a 1-hour video call with the network. These calls dove deeper into the topic introduced during the quarterly meeting, addressed questions raised by partners, and included time for partner discussion of other topics. The intention was to provide partners with a space to share their successes, challenges, and lessons learned in terms of integrating evaluation into their organization and other issues related to family law practice—and a space for partners to learn from the experiences of others working in the same space. This open discourse set the stage for relationship building, information sharing, and potential collaboration.

Individualized Technical Assistance

NPC's approach to building partners' individual and collective capacity entailed a combination of group learning and individualized technical assistance. In addition to the group calls, NPC worked with partners individually and provided technical assistance to help customize the application of the content. Network members varied in terms of their organization's capacity for data collection and reporting, as well as in their goals. When TA was requested, NPC sought to tailor the assistance to the capacity level and goals of the partner.

Peer Consults

To encourage deeper sharing of knowledge between network members, partners were encouraged to make themselves available for peer consults with other partners. For example, if one organization was considering changing their case management system, they were encouraged to reach out to another partner who uses that system to get their input on the decision. The goal was to build relationships and to strengthen the capacity of the overall system by sharing expertise and leveraging organization-specific strengths and knowledge.

The Remote Hearings Survey Study

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, the DC Superior Court began conducting most of its business (including hearings) virtually. In summer 2021, as pandemic restrictions began to lift, leadership within the Court's Domestic Relations Branch (DRB) began planning to "re-open" and resume in-person hearings later in the year. Two FLLN partners saw an opportunity and pitched an idea to the network— *What if FLLN members collaboratively collected data from their clients, NPC aggregated and analyzed the data, and then the results were presented to the Court to inform its plans? Could this be a viable way to ensure that litigant voice was incorporated into the Court's planning process?* Other network members were keen to participate, and the Remote Hearings Survey Study was born. The study provided FLLN partners with the chance to apply the data-related principles that they learned during the first year, to collaborate as a group to advocate on behalf of their client population, and to leverage NPC's expertise in data collection and analysis. While the study was initiated and led by network members, NPC stewarded the overall effort from design to reporting. (Results of the Remote Hearings Survey Study are described in more detail in the Progress and Accomplishments section.)

THIS REPORT

This report summarizes the work done by NPC Research and the 6 FLLN partners during the lifespan of the Family Law Learning Network. The FLLN was launched in April 2020 and was active for 2.5 years. It ended in September 2022, when partners were invited to transition their collaboration to the Family and Probate group within the DC Legal Aid Transformations Network.

PROGRESS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

This report describes the progress and accomplishments of the FLLN in 3 general areas that align with the overarching project goals:
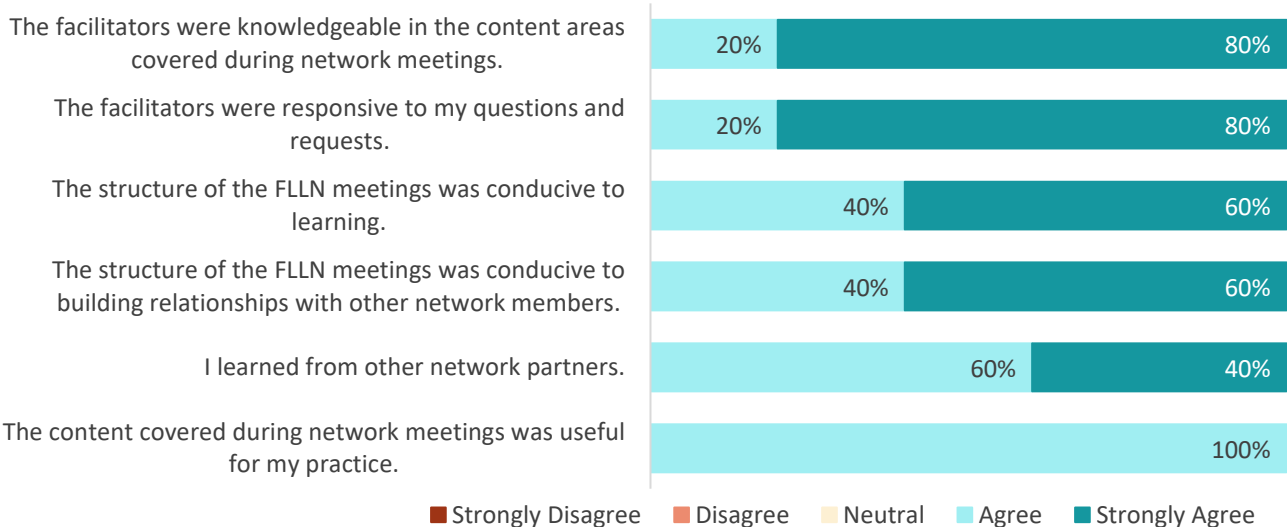
- **Network development and health**, specifically the successful cultivation of a robust and active network among multiple legal services providers (Goal #2),

- **Partners' capacity for data and evaluation**, specifically changes in partners' knowledge and ability to incorporate data-driven practices in their home organizations (Goal #1),

- **Remote Hearings Survey Study**, the collaborative project that was sparked by the network and enabled partners to work together to apply the data-related principles to real work (Goal #3).

NETWORK DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH

Network Development and Coordination

Positive network development requires effective network coordination. Throughout the project, partners were asked for feedback on NPC's role and the network structure. Overall, feedback was positive (see Exhibit 1), with all partners agreeing that NPC staff were knowledgeable and responsive, network meetings supported learning and relationship building, and the content was useful.

Exhibit 1. Partners appreciated FLLN coordination and structure.

Statement	Agree	Strongly Agree
The facilitators were knowledgeable in the content areas covered during network meetings.	20%	80%
The facilitators were responsive to my questions and requests.	20%	80%
The structure of the FLLN meetings was conducive to learning.	40%	60%
The structure of the FLLN meetings was conducive to building relationships with other network members.	40%	60%
I learned from other network partners.	60%	40%
The content covered during network meetings was useful for my practice.	100%	

Legend: ■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ▢ Neutral ▢ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

Note. Results are from August 2022 survey, completed by 5 partners (from 5 organizations).

Network Health

Assessing network health is important to understand a network's capacity to support collective action toward its purpose and ultimately lead to positive outcomes for participants and systems. To assess the FLLN's health, NPC utilized a framework that identifies 6 domains of participant experience that reflect a network's overall health.[3] These domains, along with brief descriptions, are listed below.

Exhibit 2. Data reflect six domains of network health.

Purpose	• The network has a clear purpose that aligns with participants' professional goals and their organizations' objectives. Network activities are aligned with the network purpose.
Participation & Engagement	• Network partners are engaged and contribute the necessary time and resources to the network. Partners are able to fulfill their commitments to the network as part of their professional duties and their organizations support them to do so.
Relationships & Trust	• Network partners develop meaningful relationships with one another, are open and inclusive, and share information. Partners feel respected and appreciated for the skills, knowledge, and connections they bring to the network.
Communication	• Communications to partners about network news and activities are timely, effective, and easily accessible. The networks' communications tools serve partners' needs for information sharing and collaboration.
Governance	• Network decision making is informed, timely, and inclusive. Partners feel they have authority to help define network activities.
Benefits & Impact	• Network partners create new knowledge together. Participation in the network creates value for the participants, their organizations, and the people they serve.

To assess network health, FLLN partners were invited to complete an online survey about their experience in the network three times during the project period: (1) shortly after launch in July 2020, (2) at the end of the first year in February 2021, and (3) just before closeout in August 2022. The survey included 18 questions designed to assess the 6 domains of network health. Partners responded to questions using a 5-point scale, with higher ratings indicating more positive responses. Specifically, responses ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *agree*, to 5 = *strongly agree*.
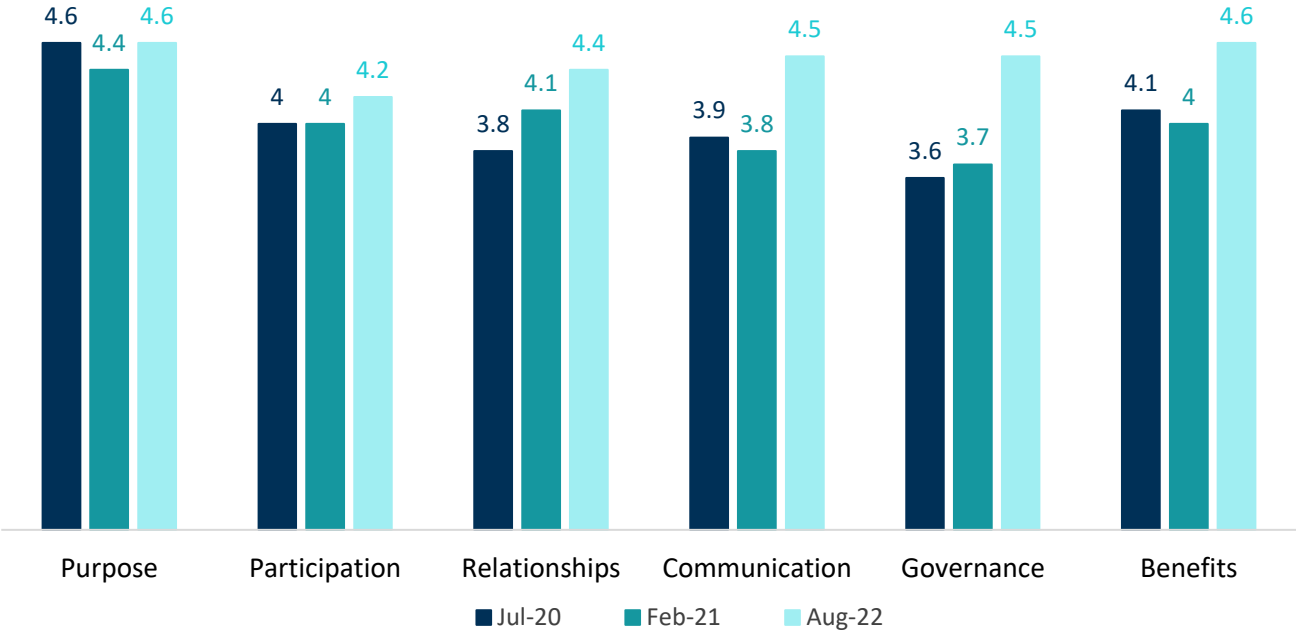
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[3] The framework was originally developed by Converge: www.converge.net.

Exhibit 3 shows the average ratings for each domain, at each time point. Average scores for most domains increased from July 2020 to August 2022, indicating improvements in network health over time. Partners' perceptions of the network's *purpose* and the level of *participation and engagement* among members stayed relatively high and stable over time. Partners' perceptions of the quality of their *relationships* with other FLLN members steadily increased with each survey administration, demonstrating the cumulative value of monthly meetings with dedicated time for relationship building.

Average scores for communication and governance were low compared to the other domains in 2021 and then increased notably in 2022. This jump likely reflects the network's collaborative work on the Remote Hearings Survey Study, an activity identified and implemented by network members (*governance*) that entailed consistent information sharing with each other and NPC (*communication*). The effects of this collaborative project served to further strengthen the network. This work likely also led to partners perceiving stronger *benefits* to participating in the network, evidenced by the increased average rating for that domain.

Overall, in August 2022, partners rated the FLLN highly in each of the 6 domains of network health, underscoring the overall relevance of the purpose, strength of the collaboration, effectiveness of the structure, and value of their participation in the network.

Exhibit 3. The health of the FLLN increased over time.

Legend: Jul-20, Feb-21, Aug-22

Domain	Jul-20	Feb-21	Aug-22
Purpose	4.6	4.4	4.6
Participation	4	4	4.2
Relationships	3.8	4.1	4.4
Communication	3.9	3.8	4.5
Governance	3.6	3.7	4.5
Benefits	4.1	4	4.6

Note. Figure shows average ratings for each domain. Scale ranged from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating more positive assessment. In August 2020, 7 partners (from 6 organizations) completed a survey. In February 2021, 6 partners (from 6 organizations) completed a survey. In August 2022, 5 partners (from 5 organizations) completed a survey.

Network Connectivity

Network connectivity—the degree of connectedness among network members—is a critical ingredient of network health. Ideally, network activities lead to members building relationships with each other that transcend the network and change the system—that is, members start to share information or collaborate with each other outside of networks events and, in doing so, fundamentally change the underlying structure of the system.

Connectivity is typically assessed using Social Network Analysis (SNA). While SNA can illustrate the density of relationships throughout a system, this methodology can be challenging to use with very small or very large networks. With only 6 partner organizations, the FLLN qualifies as very small. However, for the sake of learning and modeling a network approach, NPC conducted SNA twice during the FLLN's first year. As part of the SNA survey, partners reported whether they had communicated, shared information, or actively collaborated with each person in the network in the past 6 months. The first survey was conducted in June 2020 and inquired about the 6 months before the launch of the FLLN, yielding "baseline" estimates of connectivity. The second survey was conducted in December 2020 and inquired about the past 6 months, reflecting connectivity during FLLN participation.

SNA results indicated that the network connectivity increased notably in the first year. In Exhibit 4, each circle represents a person (FLLN partner) and each color represents an organization. (In year 1, some organizations had more than one staff member participate.) Arrows indicate when a partner reported having shared information or collaborated with another partner. Results from June 2020 (left) show few arrows, suggesting little cross-organization communication in the months prior to the FLLN. Results from December 2020 (right) show more arrows and an increased density of connections, indicating that partners were more often connecting with each other outside of the FLLN meetings.

Exhibit 4. Connections among FLLN partners increased from June to December 2020.
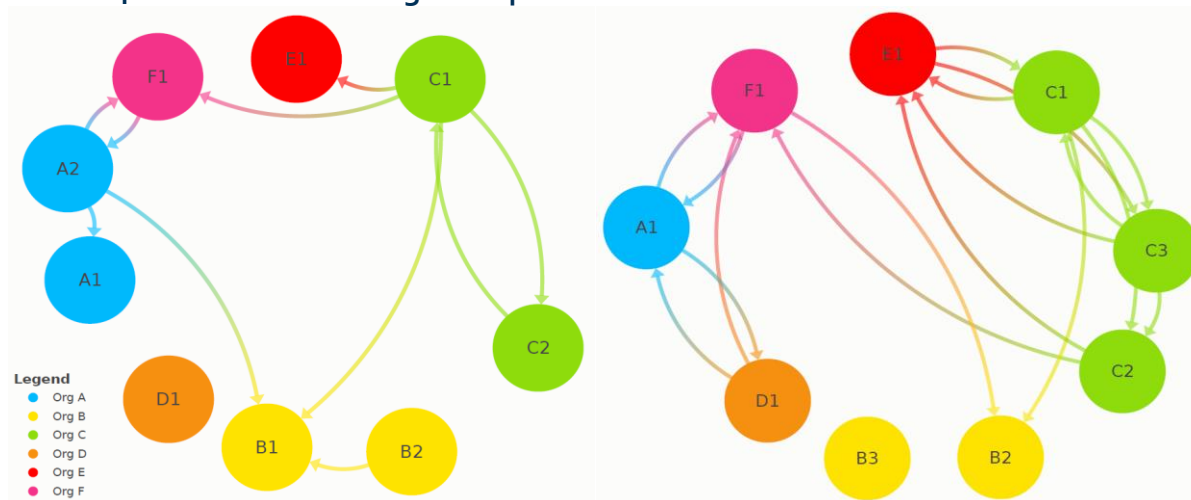
Note. Left figure is based on June 2020 survey data. Right figure is based on December 2020 survey data.

PARTNERS' CAPACITY FOR DATA AND EVALUATION

Group Training and Individualized Technical Assistance

To achieve the first network goal of increasing partners' capacity for using data and conducting evaluation with their own organizations, NPC employed a combination of two approaches: **group training** to enhance the general knowledge among partners and **individualized technical assistance** to address specific needs of individual partners inside their own organizational context.

Group training. Group training occurred during network meetings and calls when NPC introduced and explained data-related principles. For these meetings, NPC created an agenda to address one or more relevant topics and delivered the content in a way accessible to all partners. Exhibit 5 on the following page lists the main topics covered in group trainings during each quarter. Throughout Year 1, trainings covered the fundamentals of program monitoring and evaluation and built knowledge over time. Quarter 1 introduced program monitoring and evaluation and guided partners to develop their own program logic models and specify their outcomes, which are necessary first steps for any evaluation. Quarter 2 covered best practices for data collection and management and included a framework for partners to review their existing data sources (e.g., case management systems) and identify data they had and data they needed to assess their program. Quarter 3 addressed best practices for data analysis and reporting and provided in-depth discussion on conducting client surveys and using case management system data. Quarter 4 focused on how to implement and sustain data practices and how to present results and use them for program improvement. In all group training sessions, NPC prepared a slide deck and supplementary materials, and conducted an interactive session with equal parts lecture and group discussion to facilitate partners' grasp of the content.

In the second year, group training topics centered around the collective implementation of the Remote Hearings Survey Study and revisited the data principles covered during Year 1 using the study as a live example. The content followed a similar trajectory: (1) study design, including the collective identification key study questions and specification of outcomes, (2) data collection, including the collaborative development of a survey instrument and data collection protocol used by each partner, (3) data analysis, including the co-creation of an analysis plan and collaborative review of the analytic results generated by NPC, and (4) reporting, including a review of the report drafted by NPC and the co-creation of a broader dissemination plan.

Group sessions in the first half of the third year were primarily led by partners, who used the sessions to educate the network on a topic on which they had particular expertise, such as trauma-informed lawyering and results of another recent research study.

Although not shown in Exhibit 5, during group sessions, NPC also reported the results of the Social Network Analysis maps, as well as the results of the broader network health surveys each time they were conducted. In doing this, NPC strove to lead by example, collecting data, analyzing it, reflecting it back to the network, and transparently using the results to inform next steps.

Exhibit 5. Group training provided information about key data and evaluation topics.

Quarter	Topics
Apr. – June 2020	Introduction to evaluation & program monitoring Development of program logic models and specification of program outcomes
July – Sep. 2020	Data collection and management best practices Development of data collection frameworks Alignment of data needs with case management systems and any new instruments
Oct. – Dec. 2020	Considerations for data analysis and reporting, including Excel dashboards Development of a client satisfaction survey, including a collective bank of survey questions Use of data stored in case management systems for program monitoring Discussion of trauma-informed practices for data collection and data use
Jan. – Mar. 2021	Implementation and sustainability of data protocols Using data for program improvement; translating data into actionable steps Tips for discussing data with staff and leadership Review of past year topics and plans for next year
Apr. – June 2021	Application of data-related principles and Y1 content to the Remote Hearing Survey Study Collaborative development of main study questions, discerning lines of inquiry Collaborative development and iteration of survey instrument
July – Sep. 2021	Finalization of the survey instrument Development of Remote Hearing Study cross-organizational data collection protocol Best practices for online participant recruitment, online survey administration, follow-up and response rate, and data security/confidentiality Benefits of providing incentives for clients to complete survey
Oct. – Dec. 2021	Collaborative planning for analysis of the Remote Hearings Survey Study data Focus group with partners about their experiences with remote hearings Discussion of study results, collaborative refinement of interpretation of results, identification of additional analyses
Jan. – Mar. 2022	Collaborative development of distribution plan for the Remote Hearing Study Report Discussion of the DRB's implementation of study recommendations
Apr. – June 2022	Review of federal report (by SAMHSA) on trauma-competent courtroom and processes Presentations by FLLN partners, including (1) Amara Legal Center on trauma-informed lawyering, and (2) DC Volunteer Lawyers' Project on using case management system data
July – Sep. 2022	Presentation by FLLN partners, including Bread for the City on the Domestic Violence Action Research Collective report on survivors' access to housing assistance Discussion of intake and screening processes and tools used by partners Transition of FLLN collaboration to the Family and Probate group within the DC Legal Aid Transformations Network

Note. Topics listed are the main, but not the only, content addressed during network calls in each quarter.

Individualized technical assistance. Throughout the FLLN, NPC remained available to provide data-related individualized technical assistance to any FLLN partner. In the first year, NPC worked individually with each partner to finalize their program logic model and data collection framework. This gave each partner a solid foundation from which to develop their broader program monitoring plans. After these early exercises, technical assistance was available upon request and several partners made such requests. Over the course of the FLLN, NPC helped individual partners with the development of client intake questionnaires, refinement of client survey instruments and protocols (including following up with clients after services have ended), consultation on case management system design, and discerning when there is a need for external evaluation support for survey work (versus having legal services staff conduct these tasks).

Partners' Reported Data Capacity

Organizational data capacity. A goal of the FLLN is that network members gain the knowledge and skills to increase their organization's capacity for data collection, management, and usage. To measure change over time on these outcomes, partners answered a set of 10 questions about data capacity at 3 timepoints: June 2020, December 2020, and February 2022. Exhibit 6 on the following page shows the results. Each statement was rated by partners on a scale of 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, and 4 = *strongly agree*.

At the beginning of FLLN participation, on the June 2020 survey, the average scores for items were just below 3.0, in the middle of scale slightly tilting toward "agree." This finding suggests that partners saw their organizations as having some data-related capacity, but not strongly. In December 2020, after 9 months of FLLN participation, the average ratings for 9 items decreased. This result is likely a reflection of a change in partners' knowledge, not a change in their organizations' capacity. Specifically, with a better understanding of data best practices, they were better equipped to assess the robustness of their organizations' practices. At this same time, the average rating for one item increased—"My organization collects standardized information on every case we serve"—which may be due to the work done by FLLN partners early in Year 1 to develop comprehensive data collection frameworks.

In February 2022, after nearly 2 years of FLLN participation, average ratings across the 10 items either increased or stayed flat, suggesting that partners had been able to improve at least some of the data protocols in their organizations. Overall, partners agreed that they collected standardized data for every case and that they collected data about the outcomes specified in their program logic model. Most partners agreed that their organization analyzed the data they collect, shared the results with leadership, and supported training staff to make data-informed decisions. Overall, partners were less likely to endorse (i.e., average scores were between "agree" and "disagree") that their organization used data to inform decisions or regularly reviewed data for completeness and accuracy, and that they reviewed their own program's data. Most partners generally disagreed that their organization shared the results of data analysis broadly with all staff.
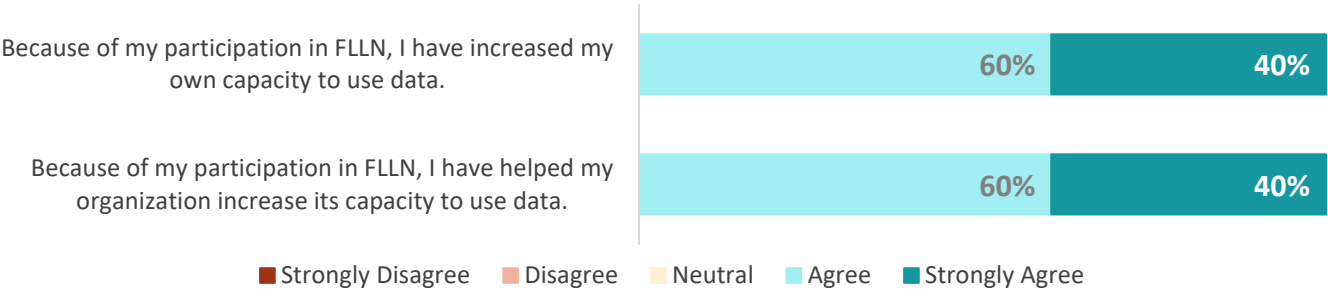
Exhibit 6. Partners' average reports of organizational data capacity varied modestly over time.

Statements	June 2020	Dec 2020	Feb 2022
My organization collects standardized data on every case we serve.	2.7	2.9	3.2
My organization collects data about the outcomes in my FLLN logic model.	2.8	2.4	3.0
My organization analyzes the data we collect.	2.6	2.3	2.8
My organization shares the results of our data analysis with leadership staff.	2.8	2.6	2.8
My organization supports training staff in skills for making data-informed decisions.	2.8	2.6	2.8
My organization uses data to inform decisions.	2.9	2.6	2.6
I review my own data.	2.8	2.6	2.6
My organization regularly reviews data we collect for completeness and accuracy.	2.7	2.4	2.6
I use data to inform decisions regarding the team that I supervise.	3.0	2.3	2.4
My organization shares the results of our data analysis broadly with all staff.	2.7	2.0	2.2

Note. Response scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree.
June 2020 survey was completed by 7 partners (from 6 organizations). December 2020 survey was completed by 9 partners (from 6 organizations). February 2022 survey was completed by 5 partners (from 5 organizations).

Partner data capacity. Although the results of the organizational data capacity assessment (Exhibit 6) did not show striking improvements at the organizational level, at the end of the FLLN, partners reported that their personal capacity to use data had increased as a result of their network participation (see Exhibit 7). Moreover, they agreed that they had used their newly gained knowledge and skills to positively impact their organization's capacity to use data. It may be that the benefits of this influence, reported on the August 2022 survey, were not yet in action when the last organizational assessment was completed (February 2022).

Exhibit 7. Partners felt that FLLN participation increased their capacity to use data.

Because of my participation in FLLN, I have increased my own capacity to use data.	60%	40%
Because of my participation in FLLN, I have helped my organization increase its capacity to use data.	60%	40%

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

Note. Results are from August 2022 survey, completed by 5 partners (from 5 organizations).

REMOTE HEARINGS SURVEY STUDY

When the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, the DC Superior Court started conducting most of its business "virtually," either online or by phone, while the courthouse was closed to prevent the spread of disease. During this time, network partners and others in their organizations noticed that remote services benefitted many low-income litigants by seeming to remove conventional barriers to participation in the court process. When the Court's Domestic Relations Branch (DRB) began to plan for "re-opening" and resuming business as usual, two FLLN partners saw an opportunity to leverage the collective power of the FLLN to gather data about litigants' experiences with virtual court services and to share this information with the Court to ensure the litigants' voices were included in the planning process. These two partners proposed the idea of conducting a collaborative client survey study to the other network members and enlisted the technical and analytical support of NPC to guide the study. All network members agreed on the considerable value of the project and agreed to collaborate. NPC then structured the Year 2 network activities to use this study as the vehicle for partners to experientially learn about data-related principles.

The Remote Hearings Survey Study presented multiple opportunities:

- For FLLN partners to deepen their understanding of the data-related concepts they had learned by applying them to an active study,

- For FLLN partners to leverage the power of the network—both their relationships with each other and the technical expertise of NPC—to advance their collective goal of increasing access to justice and to actively collaborate with each other to do so,

- For legal services providers to advocate on behalf of low-income litigants and provide the Court with actionable recommendations based on litigant experience and feedback,

- For the Court to incorporate litigant input into their plans to support the development of protocols that better address the needs of litigants.

The Remote Hearings Survey Study entailed all FLLN partners[4] collecting data from their clients using a standardized survey instrument and protocol and enabling NPC to aggregate and analyze these data. Partners understood that joint data collection would yield a larger and more representative sample than any single organization could produce alone, and they recognized the benefit of having NPC help steward the research and analysis process. These partnerships allowed the effort to be shared across many people and organizations, limiting the burden on any one organization and maximizing the quality of the final document. Indeed, the final report was a significant collaborative product that would likely not have occurred without the FLLN.

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[4] One legal services organization that was not a formal FLLN partner, the DC Bar Pro Bono Center, participated in the Remote Hearings Survey Study. The Pro Bono Center was actively collaborating with two FLLN partner organizations as part of the Family Law Assistance Network, which presented the possibility for Pro Bono Center staff to administer the survey to their clients and have these data aggregated with data from the FLLN partners. We are grateful for their collaboration.

Work on the Remote Hearings Survey Study entailed collaboration on every step of the study process, including: discerning key study questions, developing a standardized survey instrument, developing a basic data collection protocol that each partner could customize to meet their organizational context, recruiting clients to participate and following up with non-responders, administering the survey to clients, tracking participation, reviewing preliminary analytic results, clarifying interpretations of findings, reviewing the final report with actionable recommendations, and providing suggestions for revisions. While all study activities were collaborative, FLLN partners were responsible for data collection (i.e., administering the survey to their clients) and NPC was responsible for managing the online survey platform, tracking participation, delivering incentives to clients who completed a survey,[5] aggregating and analyzing the data, presenting preliminary analytic results for review by the network, and preparing the final report. In February 2022, NPC and two FLLN partners jointly presented the study's results to the DRB leadership.

Brief Overview of Study Results

Partners collected data from July 27 to November 12, 2021. Attorneys from these organizations administered an online survey to clients who had participated in a remote hearing for a family law matter. **A total of 189 litigants completed a survey.** They represented:

- Clientele from 6 legal services organizations;
- Diverse case types, including child custody, child support, domestic violence, and divorce, with a small number having received advocacy in criminal cases related to sex trafficking;
- A mix of remote proceedings: short hearings (e.g., status hearings), long hearings (e.g., evidentiary hearings), and trials;
- Notably, 76% of litigants reported connecting to their remote hearing from home, and 14% needed language interpretation services. Therefore, the study sample is composed primarily of English speakers with internet access and some technological capacity.

Remote hearings worked well for most people. Most study participants reported being satisfied with their remote proceedings. Specifically, litigants generally agreed that:

- They had the necessary technology and were able to connect without much difficulty.
- They were able to hear well, could understand what was happening, and felt comfortable.
- They felt heard by the judge and satisfied with the time they had to tell their side of the story.
- While litigants' experiences did not vary significantly by the type of proceeding, satisfaction was lowest among litigants who participated in a remote trial.

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[5] As a thank you for their time and input, clients who completed a survey were given a $25 Visa gift card.

Virtual court appearances eased several challenges that low-income litigants often face with in-person court appearances, thereby facilitating their access to justice. Compared to in-person hearings, litigants reported that remote hearings:

- **Alleviated logistical & financial challenges.**
  - 73% appreciated not having to find and pay for transportation to/from the courthouse,
  - 62% appreciated not having to take time off work or school,
  - 60% appreciated not having to find childcare.
- **Increased feelings of safety and security, especially among those with domestic violence cases.**
  - 72% felt safer and less threatened by the opposing party.
  - Legal aid attorneys observed that litigants seemed less nervous, as compared to being in the physical courtroom, and were therefore better able to articulate their statements.
- **Saved time and resources.**
  - 61% appreciated having to wait less time for the hearing to start,
  - 54% liked having a more precise appointment time for their hearing.
  - Legal aid attorneys mentioned that the virtual courtroom calendar enabled them to spend less time in transit or waiting for their case to be called and more time on case work.

Despite the benefits of remote hearings, virtual courtrooms still had some limitations. Litigants and attorneys noted that remote environments cannot fully replace in-person interactions. Virtual appearances can make it easier to miss important nonverbal cues, especially when parties join without video, which can complicate the assessment of credibility. Virtual courtrooms can challenge some types of communication—for example, having quick, private exchanges between attorneys and clients and hearing language interpretation. Videoconferencing can also leave some litigants feeling unheard.

> **Overall, litigants and attorneys agreed that, because of these benefits, the virtual platform was preferable for shorter hearings and those that do not involve the issuance of permanent orders. However, in-person settings were preferable for evidentiary hearings and trials.**

Results highlighted the notable benefits of remote court appearances, particularly in supporting low-income litigants' ability to meaningfully engage with the family law court without forcing them to make unsustainable trade-offs. Results also underscored the challenges of conducting court proceedings virtually and how these drawbacks might impact litigants' access to justice and the quality of justice the Court is able to dispense.
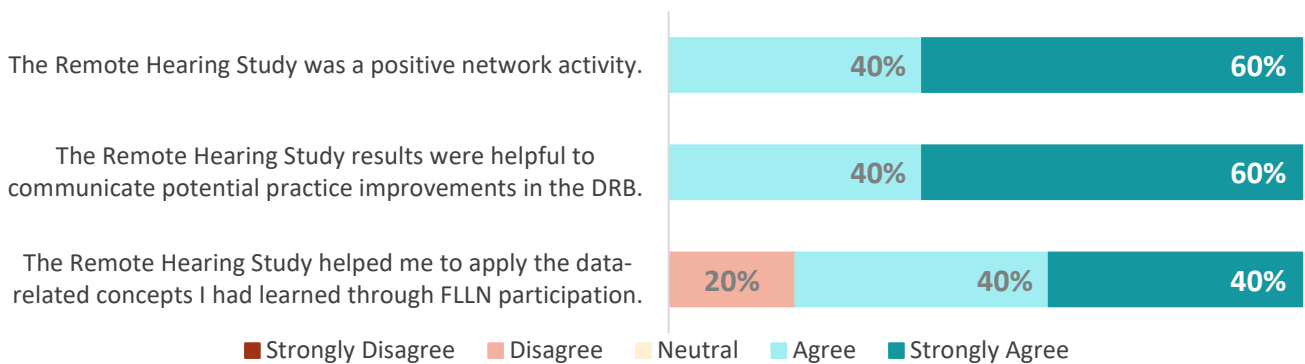
The report recommended that, as part of its planning, the Court might consider: (1) making remote platforms the default venue for non-evidentiary hearings, especially those that are brief, to check status or schedule a future appearance date; (2) once it is safe to do so, reinstituting in-person venues as the default for evidentiary hearings, trials, and any other proceedings that involve the introduction of evidence or the issuance of permanent orders; and (3) enhancing the Court's capacity to provide

technical support to litigants with remote hearings, especially those in need of language interpretation. For more detailed results, readers should read the full report, available on DCBF's website.[6]

Partners' Perspectives on the Study

At the close of the FLLN, in August 2022, partners were asked about their opinions of the Remote Hearings Survey Study. As shown in Exhibit 7, all partners agreed (60% strongly) that the study was a positive network activity and that the results were helpful to communicate potential practice improvements to the DRB. When asked whether implementing the study helped to integrate the data-related concepts taught during the earlier group trainings, 80% (4 of the 5 respondents) agreed, and one person disagreed.

Exhibit 7. Partners felt that the Remote Hearings Survey Study was a positive network activity.

The Remote Hearing Study was a positive network activity. — 40% Agree, 60% Strongly Agree

The Remote Hearing Study results were helpful to communicate potential practice improvements in the DRB. — 40% Agree, 60% Strongly Agree

The Remote Hearing Study helped me to apply the data-related concepts I had learned through FLLN participation. — 20% Disagree, 40% Agree, 40% Strongly Agree

Legend: Strongly Disagree · Disagree · Neutral · Agree · Strongly Agree

Note. Results are from August 2022 survey, completed by 5 partners (from 5 organizations).

[6] Full Remote Hearings Survey Study report can be found here: https://3ddb4979-d4c1-40ef-8b00-8c061c453377.usrfiles.com/ugd/3ddb49_2c2da451535e4f9f8de6ab2baf575a54.pdf
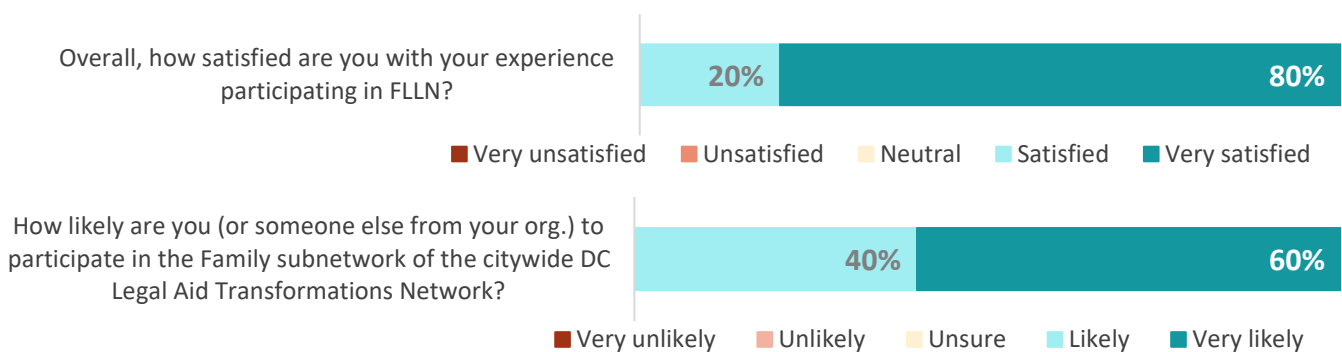
PARTNER FEEDBACK

ONGOING INPUT ON FLLN DIRECTION

At their core, networks are participant-led. While the network coordinator manages the operations and infrastructure, the direction and activities of the network are largely derived from its members. Due to the FLLN's initial goals related to increasing data capacity, the early direction of the FLLN was largely "led" by NPC. However, NPC also sought feedback and input from FLLN members to incorporate into the network's direction and activities. For example, at the end of every network survey, partners were asked for feedback on the network structure and progress. They were asked about their opinions of the most recent quarterly meeting, including the usefulness of the content and effectiveness of the format. They were also asked for any topics about which they wanted more information and any new topics that they thought future network meetings should address. Lastly, they were provided a place to offer any suggestions for improvement of the FLLN. To co-create the network's direction with the members, NPC reviewed this feedback after each survey and incorporated it into the upcoming plans.

SUMMATIVE FEEDBACK ON FLLN PARTICIPATION

At the FLLN's close, partners were once again asked for their feedback. This time, they were asked to reflect on their time in the network and to rate how satisfied they were with their participation, what they liked most, and how their participation benefitted them or their organization. As shown in Exhibit 8, all partners were satisfied (4 out of 5 were very satisfied) with their FLLN participation experience, highlighting the usefulness of being in a cross-organizational collaboration centered around capacity building and relationship development. All partners reported being likely to participate in the Family group within the DC LATN, an indication of interest in keeping their collaborative momentum going.

Exhibit 8. Partners appreciated their FLLN experience and were inclined to join the DC LATN.

Overall, how satisfied are you with your experience participating in FLLN?
20% | 80%

■ Very unsatisfied ■ Unsatisfied ■ Neutral ■ Satisfied ■ Very satisfied

How likely are you (or someone else from your org.) to participate in the Family subnetwork of the citywide DC Legal Aid Transformations Network?
40% | 60%

■ Very unlikely ■ Unlikely ■ Unsure ■ Likely ■ Very likely

Note. Results are from August 2022 survey, completed by 5 partners (from 5 organizations).

What did you like most about participating in the FLLN?

When partners described what they liked most, two general themes emerged that aligned with the network's initial goals: (1) developing relationships with other legal services providers in DC working in family law, and (2) learning about data-related best practices.

- *"Particularly during a pandemic existence, it was very easy for organizations to silo or turn inward to focus on immediate needs. The FLLN was the right thing at the right time - it presented an opportunity to forge cross-organization connections, deepen learning, and find creative ways to work together. The FLLN only worked as well as it did because of Kelly Jarvis's role. She was a linchpin to the network's success and in maintaining a steady rhythm of meetings and work together. Without her leadership, the FLLN would not have had the successes it has -- but the soil is now fertile for continued growth of the network because of the investment DCBF and Kelly made in intentionally pulling this network together, facilitating learning, and keeping the network responsive to members' desires and activities. I am deeply grateful for my personal involvement in this network, as well as that of our organization."*

- *"Connecting with other legal orgs in DC and exchanging ideas and resources."*

- *"Getting to learn about data collection, intake process, and working with network partners on a more intimate level in family law."*

- *"Learning about litigants' experiences in remote court hearings, learning about other organizations' practices during the pandemic, getting to know leaders in other legal aid organizations in DC."*

- *"Learning about data collection models."*

In what ways did FLLN participation benefit you and/or your organization?

When describing the benefits of their network participation, partners mentioned increased skills and knowledge regarding data-related practices and evaluation.

- *"It helped us develop a logic model and data collection tools."*

- *"I have a new understanding of data management practices."*

- *"FLLN provided a space for me to understand new ways that data can be used internally and externally for the organization or broader client base."*

They also mentioned the benefits of direct technical assistance provided by NPC, including the management of the Remote Hearings Survey Study.

- *"The remote hearing survey has been integral in thinking about reopening post covid."*

- *"[FLLN provided] the opportunity to take a fledgling idea that I couldn't have implemented in-house (like a litigant survey), and see it through to execution."*

- *"Professionally, Kelly helped me to set up my database for clients so we could best collect intake info and run reports as she could more clearly see how data could be best collected. I would not have had set up my database without her!"*

They also expressed the benefits of learning from and with other legal services providers in DC.

- *"It helped me network with other nonprofit leaders and understand the legal aid framework of DC as a whole."*

- *"Helping our organization gain more solid footing as an institutional player in the family law arena."*

How could the FLLN has been better? What lessons would you share with DCBF to support its other network efforts?

When asked about how the FLLN could have been improved, two partners offered feedback.

- *"I would have liked to better understand each organization's goals for participating in the network, what they hoped to achieve, what they were able to bring to the table, etc. Towards the end, it was a bit difficult to understand what everyone's shared goals were."*

- *"In person would have been better, but I understand why it wasn't."*

When asked if they had advice for DCBF's other network efforts, a couple of partners offered thoughts that pertained to the necessity of creating the infrastructure to support strong relationships.

- *"One of the key benefits [of the FLLN] was the consistency in attendees. I appreciated that, for the most part, the same org representatives showed up and participated each month. This was essential to keeping the work moving forward and building the relationships necessary to foster big ideas and collaborative undertakings."*

- *"Working together and listening to network partners and being authentic in conversations."*

WHAT WE LEARNED

In funding the Family Law Learning Network, the DC Bar Foundation embarked on an experiment to assess the impact of a network approach within civil legal aid. The FLLN was initially founded as a *learning network*, which aimed to increase the data-related capacity and knowledge sharing among providers. With intentional relationship building and steady engagement of the partners, the FLLN evolved into an *action network* when the partners sparked and collectively implemented a litigant survey study, yielding a major product that would not have happened otherwise. This transformation into action, and the organic emergence of innovative ideas for collaborative work to improve the system, is a strong indicator of a healthy network. Moreover, the relationships built between partners will endure beyond the FLLN, yielding a more connected civil justice community in DC. In its 2.5 years of operation, the FLLN provided ample evidence of the value of a network approach for civil legal aid.

There were many lessons learned over the course of the FLLN. A few learnings, and associated recommendations for future network efforts led by DCBF, are highlighted below.

Relationships are key to success.

When it comes to impacting systems-level change, like improving access to justice for low-income people and those from marginalized populations, networks are essential. Moving the needle on problems of this magnitude require a multi-pronged and multi-disciplinary approach—more than any single organization can do alone. This type of multi-organization response requires a different model of working together, one that prioritizes the building of relationships that are reliable and trustworthy as the foundation for effective and sustainable collaboration.

➢ *Prioritize relationship building and create the conditions to support it.*

o Create opportunities for staff from different organizations to get to know each other beyond their roles and affiliations and create space for them to build relationships based on trust. (A sidenote: "Trust" does not mean that network partners need to become personal friends. Instead, it means that they trust that all members of the network are aligned behind a shared purpose and are willing to work toward it together. Members trust that, even if they are not personally close with another member, they are both committed to same larger goals.)

o Ensure that the cadence of network meetings is regular and that the participant list is consistent, so that members connect regularly to reinforce relationship development.

Network coordination must provide sufficient, but not excessive, structure.

Network coordination refers to the set of actions, performed by a single dedicated network coordinator or a small team of partners, that creates and maintains an infrastructure to support network health, growth, and collaboration. Every network requires some level of coordination to

provide sufficient collaborative infrastructure. There needs to be enough structure so that there is a guide for the network cultivation process (especially early on) that supports members' engagement without driving the direction. With too little infrastructure, members can become confused about the purpose of the network, which can lead to frustration and lack of participation. With too much infrastructure, members may lack agency to catalyze new ideas and innovation can be stifled.

> *Ensure adequate resources for network coordination to support network health.*

   o Dedicate appropriate resources and support for the skillful coordination of each network (e.g., funding, staff FTE, staff training or professional development, external consultation). Ensure these resources are sustainable. Build in feedback loops for the network coordinator to advance their skills and grow with the network.

Integrating evaluation into legal services environments will require both training and resources.

The FLLN demonstrated that it is possible to increase the data-related knowledge and competence of legal services staff. Legal aid attorneys and staff are skilled professionals with inherent aptitude for logic and linear thinking, positioning them well to develop research skills. The FLLN showed that even a relatively small investment of time (e.g., 1 hour per month) can yield knowledge gains for providers.

> *Offer opportunities for legal aid staff and attorneys to continue to learn about data.*

   o Offer data-related trainings and technical assistance that are context-relevant and speak directly to the types of data legal services providers need and have.

   o Provide opportunities for grantees to obtain resources for limited-scope data-related technical assistance to help build organizational data infrastructure (e.g., grants to set up case management system reports).

Even with increases in knowledge among specific staff, the capacity for evaluation within busy legal services organizations will still depend on administrative capacity. Lawyers and other legal staff often cannot prioritize data tasks in the face of a broad and unrelenting demand for legal assistance. For many legal services providers, capacity for evaluation will increase when resources are available to support staff positions that can focus, all or in part, on data-related tasks.

> *Offer ways for grantees to sustainably support in-house data-related positions.*

Legal services providers in the District have an appetite for collaboration.

DC legal services providers understand the need for, and the potential benefits of, better coordination among the civil justice community. When invited into a collaborative context that does not require them to sacrifice their organization's interests, providers are inclined to generate innovative approaches to better serve the client community. This was true for the Family Law Learning Network and for the Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program Network. Emphasizing this inclination to collaborate and the momentum of existing partnerships, DCBF can successfully leverage the power of these early network efforts to create momentum within the DC Legal Aid Transformations Network.

ABOUT NPC RESEARCH

NPC Research provides quality social services evaluation, policy analysis, research, and training. We are dedicated to improving the effectiveness of human services offered to children, families, and communities.

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