



# Constellations Not Stars

**The Sterling Network Impact Report:  
Key Findings**

**Robert Sterling Clark Foundation  
February 2020**

# Contents

<b>Welcome</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Theory of Change</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>What is a Network?</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Evidence-Based Impact</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Time and Space for Growth</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Impactful Collaborations</b>	<b>10</b>

# Welcome

The Robert Sterling Clark Foundation is a private foundation committed to helping create a vibrant New York City — one that is strong, healthy, livable, and just. We have been making grants in New York City since 1952. We engage in an array of programmatic and grantmaking initiatives that focus on leadership development.

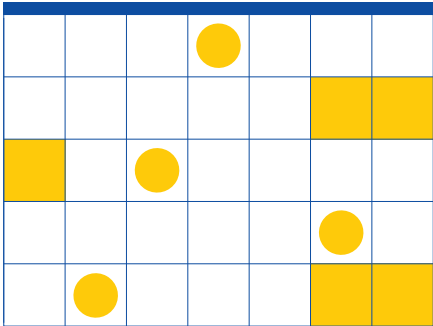
About two years ago we began a journey to explore: What happens when you bring together a group of action-oriented systems leaders from multiple sectors, each of whom has the ability to influence and move resources, build their trust and capacity to work across difference, and provide space and support for them to think of powerful ways to collaborate to improve economic mobility at the intersection of racial equity?

The Sterling Network NYC is the Foundation's endeavor to answer that question.

We are now almost two years into the initiative, and have undergone an intentional evaluation of our progress to date. This document contains some of the key findings of that evaluation.

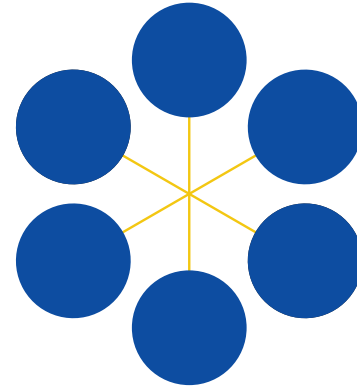
# Sterling Network Theory of Change

## Activities



- Three multi-day immersive retreats
- One-day end-of-year convening
- Activities Between Convenings
- Participant Partnership Projects

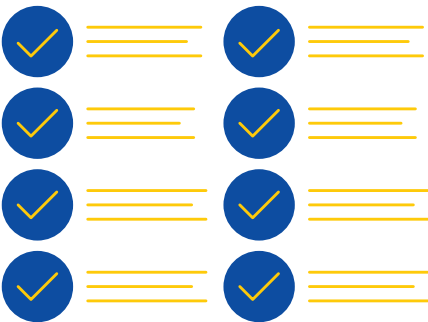
## Short-Term Outcomes



- Network mindset develops among participants
- Network develops in healthy way; members well connected
- Economic mobility-related partnerships develop

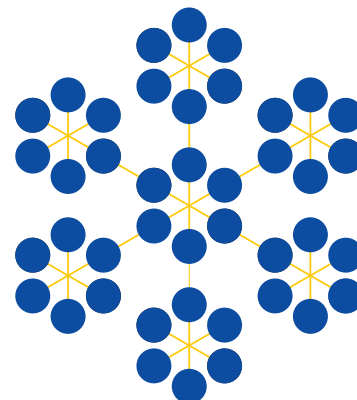


## Evaluation Metrics



- Special Network Analysis (SNA)
- Participant Surveys
- Interviews
- Convening Surveys

## Long-Term Outcomes



- Network changes the way in which New York City organizations / systems approach economic mobility
- More network-minded leaders addressing economic mobility

# What is a Network?

## What is the Sterling Network NYC?

The Sterling Network NYC is a cross-sector network leadership initiative bringing together a diverse group of action-oriented systems leaders to share ideas and resources to tackle the problem of economic mobility in New York City.

## What do we mean by “network”?

Networks are a unique form of collaboration. They reflect a way of working together that emphasizes the ability to understand both the root causes and the system-level implications of social problems, to work across difference, and to elevate the power and capacity of others over one’s own. Different types of networks exist. Some focus on connecting people socially, others focus on learning. The Sterling Network focuses on action: specifically on catalyzing collaboration among New York City leaders across sectors to advance economic mobility.

## Why take a network-based approach?

We chose to explore Networks as a strategy because we believe that they represent a powerful approach to addressing the City’s most complex, entrenched social problems—problems like the growing income and wealth gap, and the reduction in pathways to economic mobility. Specifically, networks emphasize:

- **Mission over organization**

Helping people and institutions involved focus on the social change intended rather than on organizational needs and wants.

- **Trust not control**

Propelling collective action using trust, rather than clearly defined lines of authority or power.

- **Promotion of others, not self**

Creating space for individuals and institutions to demonstrate humility and emphasize the needs and successes of the network as a whole over their own needs and successes.

- **Constellations not stars**

The network as a whole is the driver and the unit of change (not the individuals), and success is collective, not individual.

In sum, networks help individuals step outside themselves and their own institutional imperatives and explore broader, systemic ones.

## What will I learn?

In the key takeaways below, we hope you find answers to the following questions:

- **Are the Sterling Fellows indeed forming a well-connected, healthy network?**
- **Is the Sterling Network having an impact on the Sterling Fellows as people?**
- **Is the network having an impact on the city?**

We also share our thoughts on where we go from here—where the network will continue to improve and grow. Thank you so much for your interest in the work of the Sterling Network NYC.

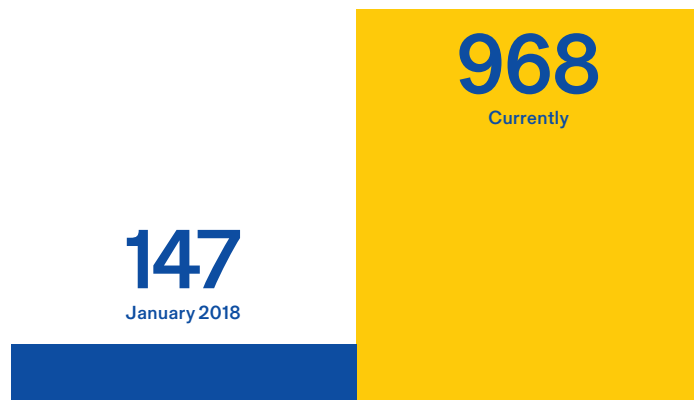
# A Summary of Evidence-Based Impact

## A well-connected, healthy network is growing

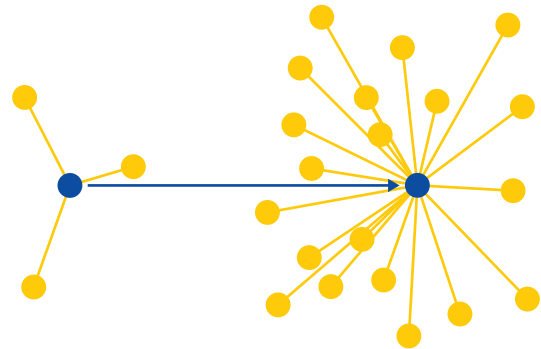
Three key markers for healthy and well-connected networks are 1) an increase in relationships between members, 2) network members communicating regularly, and 3) an increase in active collaborations between members.

The Sterling Network is thriving in all key areas.

### Relationships

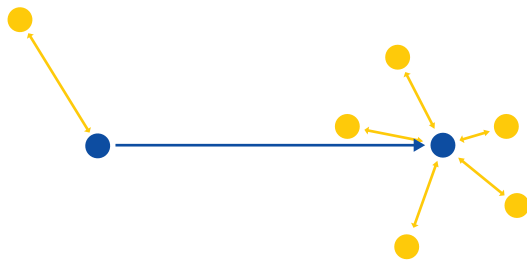


Since January 2018, the total number of relationships among participants has increased from 147 to 968 – a growth of 659%



The average number of relationships for each participant grew from 3 to 21 for each participant.

### Communication



Since the start of the Network, on average each participant started with regular communication with an average of about 1 participants, and as of April 2019 each has an average of regular communication with over 5 participants.

### Collaborations



As of April 2019, Network participants reported 214 active collaborations between participants, up from 39 when the network started. This is an increase of 549%.

## A network mindset is emerging

The four essential elements of a network mindset are: mission over organization, trust not control, promotion of others not self, and focus on constellations not stars.

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A network mission exists, as does an increasing sense of the collective purpose of the network.

**Sterling Network NYC is a network of systems leaders from different sectors who collaborate to advance economic mobility in NYC**

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Consistently, fellows say they feel trust for one another.

**Not only do I have access to like-minded systems leaders across industries, but we've also developed a deep sense of trust. This trust means I can reach out to any network fellow and I feel comfortable asking for partnership, support, and honest opinion.**

**Stepping into a space and all offering vulnerability is ultimately going to bring us to a place where not only will we transform each other. It will inform how we collaborate and generate positive change.**

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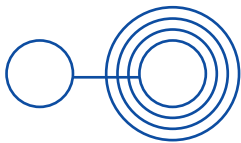
Partnerships have emerged that emphasize humility and the shared purpose of the network (advancing economic mobility) over those of any particular organization.

**There are holistic ways of thinking about economic mobility that require us to take off our organizational hats and think about how all the work that we do is interlinked with economic mobility.**

# There has been an increase in partnerships (large and small) intended to impact economic mobility in NYC

Fellows have reported the emergence of many partnerships over the past two years. They fall generally into three categories. All three of these types of partnerships demonstrate the types of value and impact that the Network creates at an individual, organization and city-wide level.

## Individual Partnerships

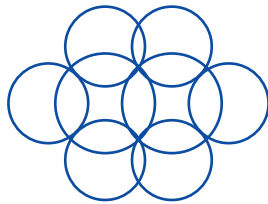


**Those where an individual network member was supporting another participant's development or work**

Many partnerships among individuals exist, with Fellows giving specific examples of how they've given and received personal and professional support.

Examples include attending other fellows' programs; joining the boards of other fellows' organizations; helping navigate job and career transitions; Providing data or expertise to support the work of other fellows; Providing access to volunteers and personnel; and providing logistical support (such as work space) to support another fellow.

## Organizational Partnerships



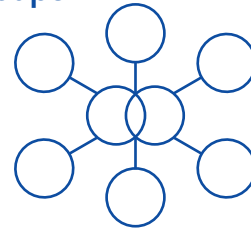
**Those where participants' organizations were partnering together on a project**

Access to safe and affordable banking products for Central Brooklyn residents (The Concord Baptist Church Federal Credit Union + Bed Stuy Restoration)

**Culinary program for youth** (Child Center of NY + Red Hook Initiative)

**Green Jobs for Residents of Public Housing** (The Mayor's Office of Workforce Development + The Hope Program + Bed Stuy Restoration)

## Issue-specific Working Groups



**Those where participants were working together on something relatively separate from their organizations but aligned with the network's goals.**

Issue-specific working groups have formed and are making progress to advance economic mobility systemically across NYC. The network has various project teams which fellows opt into to do this work.

**Alternative Public Housing Models** exploring utilizing a reparations model to increase wealth generation for public housing residents;

**Re-imagining and Strengthening the Organized Labor Movement** exploring methods for building a worker-controlled economy

**The Census working group** coordinating and leveraging the Network to ensure a full and accurate census count.



# Time and Space for Growth

While many positive indicators were found related to the key network outcomes, some areas inspire additional questions and require further observation and analysis. We see these “indicators to watch for,” as we’ve dubbed them, as a natural part of the evolution of the network. We are committed to being transparent about the areas in which we still seek to grow.

## Indicators to watch for:

The Network continues to navigate issues of membership, e.g. Who are the right people to be in the proverbial “room” and how to make sure that the coordination of the network does not result in unintended exclusion of certain groups of people. These membership issues focus on demographics, sector engagement, and differing levels of professional autonomy and time ability to participate in convenings and other activities.

There is also ongoing discussion around how well Network participants address and engage in controversial conversations.

Response rates to surveys decreased over time, raising questions about how to ensure strong assessment throughout all life cycles of a growing network.

As the network continues to grow, we will continue to work on developing strategies for measuring “network mindset.” This includes determining how to account for factors outside of the network that impact network mindset.

## Our ears are open for feedback and dialogue.

Have a question about what you’ve read? Inspired by a takeaway from these findings? We’d love to hear from you. Please feel free to reach out to Brooke Richie-Babbage, Director of Network Initiatives, at [brichiebabbage@rsclark.org](mailto:brichiebabbage@rsclark.org).

# Sterling Network Impactful Collaborations: Perspectives from Three Fellows



## Toby Sheppard Bloch

Chief Venture Officer,  
The HOPE Project

### The Project/Work

An effort to garner press attention for and expand the reach of the NYC °CoolRoofs program. In partnership with NYC Small Business Services, The HOPE Program operates the NYC °CoolRoofs program which installs reflective roof coatings on affordable housing and nonprofit owned buildings. °CoolRoofs reduce energy consumption, extend the lifespan of the roof membrane, and mitigate the urban heat island effect. NYC °CoolRoofs trains 70 job-seeking New Yorkers a year implementing these projects, providing 10 weeks of employment, industry-recognized certifications, and subsequent job placement services.

### The Participants

Tracey Capers

Executive Vice President,  
Programs, Organizational  
Development, Bedford Stuyvesant  
Restoration Corporation

### The Collaboration

Shortly after Tracey and I started exploring opportunities, City Hall reached out asking us to host a City Hall in your Borough event in Brooklyn. While we have coated many buildings in Brooklyn, we didn't have one in our pipeline that was suitable for a press event. I reached out to Tracey and shared our predicament, and she was able to leverage Restoration's relationship with a property manager of a building they used to own to facilitate the event, which was a huge success and resulted in television coverage that ran on affiliate stations across the country.

Subsequently Tracey was able to make some additional introductions that led to a property management company that manages scores of buildings considering participating in the program. In recognition of these efforts I committed to earmark slots in the training program for participants Tracey's program serves, which led to a formal referral agreement between Restoration and HOPE.

### The Impact

Access to a portfolio of 126 more homes! While we had previously targeted the portfolio Tracey connected us to, we hadn't been successful in engaging them, and absent Restoration's relationship with them and Tracey's advocacy on our behalf I don't think we would have.



## Rasmia Kirmani-Frye

Independent Consultant, Founder,  
Fund for Public Housing

### The Project/Work

A day-long convening called "Revitalizing Public Housing for a Vibrant New York." sponsored by the Ford Foundation and planned by me. The convening brought together multiple constituencies from across the country—residents, other public housing authorities, funders, nonprofits and CBOs, NYCHA and the City of New York, real estate developers and others to create a movement and generate radical optimism with real solutions to the problems of public housing in New York City. We sought to encourage political and civic will to create change. Six Sterling Network Fellows acted as facilitators for the breakout sessions in the middle of the day. With over 160 participants, it was a big job.

### The Participants

Rose de Stefano  
Alexa Kasden  
Betsy Plum  
Elena Conte  
Debra-Ellen Glickstein  
Toby Shepherd Block

## The Collaboration

There were seven breakout sessions each lasting two hours, and six of them were facilitated by Sterling Fellows: Sustainability (Toby), Education (Debra-Ellen), Health (Elena), Operations and Property Management (Rose), Finance and Redevelopment (Alexa), and Workforce (Betsy). They all went through facilitation training that I created with Hester Street and had to really move their group through questions to get to a statement/solution to share with the whole convening, and had to foster deep community-building in a short period of time.

## The Impact

The impact is huge. What came out of those breakout sessions will inform all of the next steps in New York City and national public housing reform. All the Sterling folks are coming to my house tonight so we can deep dive and debrief on everything they learned! I will cook for them, but that is hardly enough thanks. They are amazing and generous and brilliant. I did not know any of them well before the Sterling Network—that is the power of the network.



## Emma Jordan-Simpson

Executive Pastor, The Concord Baptist Church of Christ

### The Project/Work

The project was a partnership between the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation and the Concord Federal Credit Union (a separately incorporated subsidiary of my church chartered in 1951 with close to ten million in assets). The goal of the project is to help Central Brooklyn residents access safe, fair, and affordable financial services while growing the capacity of this historic African American credit union.

This partnership has the potential to reach an additional 2000 Central Brooklyn households with access to affordable loans, credit building, savings accounts, and financial services—all while strengthening and potentially tripling the size of the Concord Federal Credit Union. This is a big deal, as approximately one-in-five households in Bedford-Stuyvesant are unbanked and an additional nearly 30 percent are under-banked (meaning they have a checking or savings account but still use alternative financial services such as expensive check cashing and high-interest predatory loans).

### The Participants

Tracey Capers

Executive Vice President, Programs, Organizational Development, Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation

Colvin Grannum

President, Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation (Non-Network Participant)

Ronne L. Brandon

President, The Concord Federal Credit Union (Non-Network Participant)

Cathie Mahon

CEO, Inclusiv (Non-Network Collaborator)

Gregory Schiefelbein

NY Tri-State Director, Citi Community Development (Non-Network Collaborator)

## The Collaboration

This partnership between Restoration and Concord happened because Tracey and I are participants in the Sterling Network. It would not have happened otherwise. We work in the same neighborhood but had not been working together. The road for this partnership was paved at the speed of trust that developed through our Sterling Network relationship. The interesting thing is that various colleagues from Restoration and Concord had been saying for some time that there were projects we should be working on together. I think that would have remained wishful thinking had Tracey and I not been walking together in the Sterling Network.

## The Impact

We have seen an increase in Credit Union accounts opened by members of our target community—accounts opened and loans approved. It is still too early to identify longer-term impact, but we are energized by the results to date.



**Mission over organization**  
**Trust not control**  
**Promotion of others not self**  
**Focus on constellations not stars**

**Robert Sterling Clark Foundation**