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# Relational Ecosystems of Knowledge Brokers

## Support for Knowledge Mobilization

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There is increasing recognition that knowledge mobilization is key to educational change and improving outcomes for learners at all levels.<sup>1</sup> **Knowledge mobilization** is the process of moving knowledge, resources, and practices (KRP) to where they can be useful.<sup>2</sup> This process is iterative, multidirectional, and often collaborative and co-produced.<sup>3</sup> **Knowledge brokers**—those individuals and organizations that connect otherwise disconnected individuals or groups—are key in this process.<sup>4,5</sup>

Many researchers have investigated the relationship between knowledge brokers and their audiences and how the former mobilizes knowledge to the latter.<sup>6-9</sup> However, less is known about knowledge brokers' **relational ecosystems**, in particular, knowledge brokers' partner networks with organizations and individuals for collaboration, support, and resource exchange. We examine these relational ecosystems as research suggests the importance of social ties and exchanges in change and influence.<sup>10,11</sup> Our work examines knowledge brokers' relational ecosystems with their partners to answer the following research question: *How do knowledge brokers' partner networks support, shape and reshape the creation and mobilization of KRP?*

## Data & Methods

Our study examined the relationships of 12 well-known, equity-focused organizations in the United States working to mobilize evidence-based resources into different levels of the education system—from classroom teachers to state-level policymakers. We analyzed egocentric social network survey data and interviews from these knowledge brokers. **Egocentric social networks** form around the knowledge brokers (i.e., egos) and include other individuals and organizations (i.e., alters) with whom the egos have a relationship (i.e., tie).<sup>12,13</sup>

## Findings

First off, knowledge brokers partnered with a **diverse set of individuals and organizations**, including researchers, leaders, foundations, and intermediaries. Secondly, their relational ecosystems were characterized by many **trusting, long-lasting, and frequently engaged relationships**, which we characterize as “strong ties.” Thirdly, the relational ecosystems were, in part, **driven by individual team members'** social networks and were **well-connected**. Finally, partners in the brokers' relational ecosystems provided various forms of support, which knowledge brokers often reciprocated, resulting in **mutually beneficial relationships**. In addition, five forms of support were identified for each broker:

### Infrastructure and Financial Resources

Partners supplied funding and infrastructure to support knowledge brokers' projects and operations.

“We get funding from them for one of our largest teacher professional development programs.”



### Capacity Building

Partners offered professional learning opportunities to knowledge brokers, and, as such, supported capacity building within the knowledge broker organization.

“All of our coaches go through their coaching seminar ... the foundations of our work and shared language.”

### Strategic Advice

Partners contributed insights into policy contexts and the needs of the field and audiences.

“...we’ll vet ideas with them.”

### Knowledge Mobilization Support

Partners shared and amplified the knowledge brokers’ KRP within their networks and supported access to opportunities to share KRP (e.g., invite them to write a blog or be a keynote speaker). This also bolstered the knowledge brokers’ credibility.

“[The partners] have national conferences, newsletters, active social feeds... they’re part of our communication strategy.”

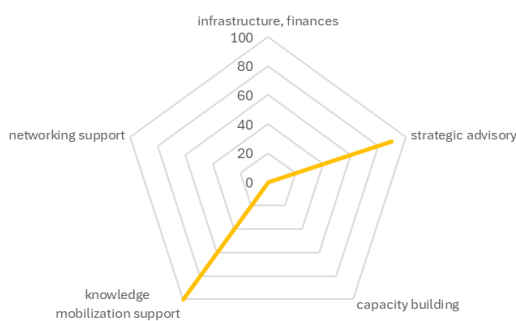
### Networking Support

Partners connected knowledge brokers to other organizations and people, supporting them in expanding their networks and opportunities.

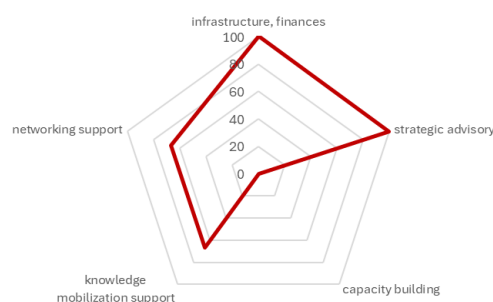
“He has a lab school that he uses, and we’ve been connected to them [through him].”

We learned that knowledge brokers’ levels of accessed support varied based on their needs, partners’ resources, and the contexts in which they are embedded. Given these differing levels of support, we crafted profiles of support. For example, the **self-sufficient mobilizer** operates without any funding or infrastructure support (Figure 1). Conversely, the **well-funded all-rounder** engages high levels of infrastructure and funding, networking and knowledge mobilization support, and strategic advice within their relational ecosystem (Figure 2). Understanding different support profiles may provide the opportunity for knowledge brokers to reflect on, and be intentional, about the composition of their relational ecosystems to support their goals.

**Figure 1: Self-Sufficient Mobilizer**



**Figure 2: Well-Funded All-Rounder**



## Looking Ahead

When reflecting on goals—like expanding reach beyond current audiences and improving one’s processes—knowledge brokers can consider their partners, the support they access, and any additional support they may need to achieve those goals.



This study offers a better understanding of *all* the processes, people, and ideas involved in educational change, including sometimes distant and unseen organizations and individuals that have a growing influence on educational processes. The work underscores that knowledge mobilization is not solely an attribute of the knowledge brokers, but is influenced by, and distributed throughout, a wider knowledge mobilization ecosystem.

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