# Sharing Big

## Community-Based Nonprofits and Their Digital Networks

by

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“I am the disturbance in the sea of your complacency, and I will never stop shaking your waves.”

- Muhammad Ali
  attributed by Natasha Mundkur while eulogizing Ali

*To those who shake our waves*

“

My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;

Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!

”

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## *Abstract*

This dissertation investigates how community-based nonprofits are integrating digital media into their communication strategies. The nonprofit sector plays an important role in civic communication ecologies, with nonprofits bridging the everyday lives of citizens to the complexities of institutional politics. A robust communication flow that links citizens, organizations, and the polity undergirds healthy democratic society. As such, understanding nonprofit communication illuminates a significant portion of contemporary civic life. Using Community Shares of Wisconsin (CSW), a network of 70 nonprofits that operate in Wisconsin, as a case study, I followed CSW nonprofits over three years as they implemented new digital strategies in conjunction with the collective Big Share online fundraiser. My research combines qualitative interviews, participant observation, and network analysis to explore how digital adoption has altered nonprofit communication. My key findings include: (1) Digital fundraising has a more egalitarian structure than the overall organizational field. (2) Successful campaigns employ staff and board enthusiasm, branded messaging, and previously untapped social networks. (3) Campaigns can be efficiently amplified by social media, but success hinges on purposely developed organizational identity more than any particular digital platform. Effective outreach communication requires cultivating a resonant identity to establish a relationship with the audience. Organizations who use continual communication, not just isolated campaigns, are better able to build and maintain relationships that can be leveraged for tangible civic outcomes.

## *I. The Big Search for Community*

In 2016, U.S. public attention was dedicated to the presidential race between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. The presidential election, however, did not pause the stream fatal police shootings that have been increasingly publicized in recent years. On July 5, 2016, Alton Sterling was fatally shot by police in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. On July 6, 2016, Philando Castile was fatally shot by police in Falcon Heights, Minnesota. Sterling and Castile were both Black men. Videos recorded by witnesses and published, initially on social media and then by professional outlets, prompted protests and debate throughout the nation, focused on the treatment of minorities, especially Black men, by police. The conversation extended into all realms of American life, as politicians, business leaders, celebrities, athletes, and ordinary citizens were forced to confront the controversial topic of race in the U.S. The debate proliferated through public discourse in traditional and social media, as citizens struggled to evaluate cultural and institutional factors and to theorize meaningful policy solutions.

When asked about athletes using social media to advocate for social justice, journalist LZ Granderson offered this advice to citizens wishing to effect change:

> Hashtags are great to raise awareness, but they don't move the needle. What you really need to move the needle are changes in leadership and changes in laws. So the first thing you need to do is pay attention locally. Pay attention to your local politics. I know that the White House right now is what has everyone's attention, but there are district attorneys, there are mayors, there are all sorts of local authorities that are up for election, and these are the individuals who are deciding who's going to file charges, what kind of policies should be in place, how do we punish police officers who don't follow proper policy. These are all things that happen from local politics. So before you start thinking about Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, you need to figure out who's on your city council, you need to figure out who's your DA, whether or not you approve of the job that they're doing, and then helping to mobilize, whether you're an athlete or not, to make sure that you get the right people in those places so that we can start having policy and criminal justice reform so that we can avoid this. (Clark 2016)

Here Granderson touched on a core dilemma of democracy: the nexus of civic engagement. As 2016 played out, the presidential election continued to dominate traditional media news cycles and social media dialogues. Still, only 59% of the U.S. voter-eligible population cast a

ballot for president in 2016 (McDonald, 2016). This is perfectly normal for the U.S. general election in a presidential year. Voter turnout has hovered around 60% in presidential elections since 2004, an increase from roughly 55% from 1972 through 2000 (McDonald, 2016). Those are, of course, the highest voter turnout rates in U.S. elections. For comparison, voter turnout has been around 40% in U.S. midterm general elections since 2002 (McDonald, 2016). Voting is often touted as the cornerstone of democratic civic engagement, and the simple fact is that Americans are not maximally engaged.

If Americans do not live up to the standard of the ideal democratic citizen, then where is the nexus of American civic engagement? There is no easy answer, but I want to posit the nonprofit organization as the bridge that connects variably engaged citizens to the political institutions of democratic life. The American nonprofit organization is often the link between citizen action and the mechanisms of U.S. democracy. This dissertation provides an investigation into how nonprofit organizations provide this bridge between citizens and their political institutions. The central premise of my research is that community-based nonprofit organizations play a vital role in the civic engagement ecology. Nonprofits often provide a link between national-level issues that exist in the abstract and the concrete forms of action that address these issues at the local level. In this sense, nonprofits occupy an important space in the information networks of their communities. From this premise, the overarching goal of my dissertation is to understand how this space in community information networks is changing along with civic engagement and technology.

In the remainder of this chapter, I begin my investigation with (1) academic conceptualizations of civic engagement and community activism, with a focus on the role of organizations in American democratic life. Of particular concern are (2) evolving forms of civic engagement in late-modern societies, which are altering traditional conceptions of *civicness*. A central component of these emergent forms of civic engagement is (3) the rise of

digital and mobile technologies, and their penetration into everyday life. This combination of social and technological shifts in late-modern societies has produced a new form of social organization that Rainie and Wellman (2012) referred to as *networked individualism*, which simultaneously presents new opportunities and obstacles for civic engagement.

My second chapter turns to how we should investigate the intersections of civic engagement, digital/mobile technology, networked individualism, and democratic life. I outline the value of an ecological approach, especially for investigating networked phenomena. My second chapter also introduces Community Shares of Wisconsin (CSW), a network of community-based nonprofit organizations that I employed as a case for investigating the contemporary role of nonprofits within local information ecologies and the impact of digital communication technologies on such nonprofits.

My third, fourth, and fifth chapters contain the investigation itself, using CSW as a case study. Chapter 3 explores the debate over *digital democracy*—whether digital technologies create a more egalitarian information ecology or simply perpetuate existing inequalities. I explore organizational and fundraising data to investigate if nonprofits with the most resources dominate digital fundraising.

In Chapter 4 I turn to the information network surrounding CSW nonprofits, focusing on network composition and structure. I use examples from the CSW case to illuminate the role of digital communication as a resource. Through interviews, participant observation, and network data, I explore the relationships that compose the CSW network and the strategies that are most effective for maintaining these relationships.

The fifth chapter reflects on how CSW communication networks and strategies have evolved over time. Tying together interview and network data, I explore the lessons that CSW staff members learned from their digital campaigns over the course of roughly 18 months. This chapter

provides insight into the evolution of communication strategies as nonprofits integrate digital technologies into their organizational routines.

The sixth chapter serves as a conclusion to review the fundamental threads introduced in the preceding pages. Of key emphasis are the lessons learned from my case study of CSW regarding (1) the impact of digital media on the communication strategies of community-based nonprofits, (2) the role of these nonprofits in civic information systems, and (3) the extent to which digital communication trends represent evolving conceptualizations of citizenship.

## The Great Community

*Community* is a core concept for the social sciences, with its foundation built on Ferdinand Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* from 1887 and Emile Durkheim's *The Division of Labor in Society* from 1893. Both works established *community* as a sociological phenomenon that becomes increasingly problematic as society grows more complex. Tönnies (1887/1963) outlined *Gemeinschaft* as the traditional community of dense, intimate, personal (often family) networks. *Gesellschaft* emerged as society proper evolved—looser networks of impersonal ties based on contract and association (Tönnies, 1887/1963). Durkheim (1893/1960) investigated the alleged decline of community in industrializing societies, positing that while *mechanical solidarity* had provided integration into *Gemeinschaft*, *organic solidarity* would provide integration into *Gesellschaft*. The debate Tönnies and Durkheim established regarding the strength of community in modern society has remained a crux of sociological inquiry ever since.

Although the intricacies of this debate are far too expansive to recount here, the state of community in contemporary society is the foundational topic of this dissertation. To focus the investigation at hand, John Dewey's conceptualization of community is most relevant. Although Dewey left the University of Chicago in 1904, his pragmatist academic approach certainly influenced the brand of urban sociology that came to characterize "the Chicago

School" of the 1920s and 1930s. By *pragmatism*, I am referring to the tradition of research in action—that is, the belief that research should not merely observe and describe reality, but that research properly utilized should be applied to solve problems in the world. To this end, Dewey oriented his research to resolving the problems of community in modern society.

Dewey's conceptualization of community was more particular than the general concepts established by Tönnies and Durkheim. Specifically, Dewey viewed community as the nexus of democracy. A strong and vibrant community is required for robust democracy and, conversely, declining or fracturing community will produce failing democratic institutions. Although a gridlocked U.S. Congress and heightened citizen partisanship may seem particular to the presidencies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump, every preceding American generation has grappled with the strains that modern life places on community, society, and democracy. At the beginning of the 20th century, urban industrialization and massive migration (both European immigration and the migration of African-Americans from the South) put great pressure on the sense of community in large American cities like Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia. Chicago School researchers grappled with the problem of integration: With so many different migrant and worker communities competing for resources, and with so many different cultural clashes in tight urban confines, was a coherent, integrated American community possible? Or had the idyllic, folksy American community that was perceived as previously monolithic fractured beyond repair?

Although study of the American community has merit in its own right, intellectuals (at all points in U.S. history) are often concerned with community as an extension of democracy. If U.S. democratic institutions are normatively meant to reflect the interests of U.S. communities, could those institutions withstand the growing complexity of the American community? Walter Lippmann (1922, 1925) famously asserted that no, in fact, democratic institutions could not meet their normative ideals within an increasingly complex society. He

argued that information systems had become too sophisticated for the average citizen to comprehend. Knowledge had grown more technical and specialized. As such, news media are incapable of producing an informed public. And the citizen, in Lippmann's view, is not particularly interested in making the effort to stay informed and active. Lippmann (1922, 1925) concluded, moreover, that the public is an unobtainable and even unnecessary ideal to pursue. He argued for a professional intelligentsia who would analyze and interpret social data for the political elite, who in turn would use that condensed knowledge to make policy (Lippmann, 1922). Citizens, for their part, remain relatively passive in policy-making, due to their insufficient capabilities for comprehension and general lack of interest. To the extent that citizens are involved, they are moderated by the persuasion of political elites and the guidance of the intelligentsia—hence Lippmann's (1925) use of the term *phantom public*, to denote a passive citizenry.

In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey (1927/1954) objected directly to Lippmann's assessment. Dewey recognized the obstacle of growing complexity, but he insisted that any progress in democratic institutions must be rooted in a realized public:

> Government exists to serve its community, and this purpose cannot be achieved unless the community itself shares in selecting its governors and determining their policies. The prime difficulty is that of discovering the means by which a scattered, mobile and manifold public may so recognize itself as to define and express its interests. (Dewey, 1927/1954, p. 146)

In Dewey's evaluation, community is the crux of democracy. Conceptualizations of democracy that privilege individualism above all other values are incorrect (Dewey, 1927/1954). Dewey (1927/1954) outlined a hierarchy of sorts in his "search for the conditions under which the Great Society may become the Great Community" (p. 147). He explained that associated action alone does not constitute a community. Associated action (mutual pursuit of individual interests) is inevitable for humans living in close proximity. Associated action only becomes *community* when shared interests are perceived and sought. And at the foundation of

community, the realization of shared interests requires *communication*. It is only when communicative signs and symbols are incorporated into associated action that cause and effect can be noted, planning can occur, and action can be regulated, thereby gaining meaning and "true force" (Dewey, 1927/1954).

As Dewey (1927/1954) put it, "The only possible solution [is] the perfecting of the means and ways of communication of meanings so that genuinely shared interest in the consequences of interdependent activities may inform desire and effort and thereby direct action" (p. 155). That is, the solution to the fracturing of democratic institutions amid growing complexity is *better communication*, to produce a more cohesive community (the Great Community). Through the Great Community, the Great Society takes genuinely democratic form, and the Public emerges from its eclipse (Dewey, 1927/1954). Arguing against Lippmann, Dewey (1927/1954) noted that intelligence is not an inherent trait; it is the product of social relations. Citizens are incapable of complete knowledge without effective education and communication of knowledge. An ill-informed public is not, therefore, an indictment of the intellectual capability or determination of the citizen, but a call for better communication.

To this end, Dewey (1927/1954) offered several recommendations to improve the democratic Public through communication. For example, he promoted applied science and research. Dewey (1927/1954) believed that the greatest failure of any knowledge occurs when its effects on humans is incommunicable. Although people often incorrectly privilege "pure" science over applied science, Dewey argued that science only truly gains value in its application to human life. We see this approach realized in the applied tradition of the Chicago School. Dewey also promoted the dissemination of knowledge, in forms that can be easily understood. "Knowledge is communication as well as understanding. A thing is fully known only when it is published, shared, socially accessible," (Dewey, 1927/1954, p. 176) he said. Dewey recognized the importance of news media in communicating knowledge to the

public. In response to Lippmann's claims of a disinterested public, though, Dewey highlighted the need for more than traditional news. Dewey recognized that how information is presented matters, and knowledge must be presented in ways that make it appealing to the public. To this end, Dewey recommended better incorporation of creativity into information systems. "Presentation is fundamentally important, and presentation is a question of art," (Dewey, 1927/1954, p. 183) he explained. Dewey (1927/1954) concluded, "[Democracy] will have its consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication" (p. 184). Here, then, we have the solution to the problem of a fractured public. Only through artful and compelling communication do shared interests coalesce into the kind of community that fosters an informed democratic public.

## Community Organizing

Dewey is foundational in the discussion of American democracy because he explicated an implicit argument adopted by numerous scholars: Democracy is a function of community, which is in turn a function of communication/information systems. Bimber (2003), for example, outlined four *information revolutions* throughout American history to illustrate how the structure of information systems influences the form of democratic institutions. In summary, (1) the newspaper industry, telegraph, and postal system allowed the first mass flows of political information, producing a centralized, simple party system in the 1820s and 1830s. (2) The socioeconomic complexity of industrialization at the turn of the 20th century created technical information that produced decentralized and specialized interest groups. (3) Broadcast technology then created a new form of mass communication, producing centralized, market-driven organizations beginning in the 1950s. (4) Most recently, the Internet has given rise to an era of information abundance, producing post-bureaucratic political networks. (Bimber, 2003)

Bimber is a technological determinist. His argument highlights the impact of new communication technologies in determining the form of democratic institutions. Other scholars focus more on the ways that community shapes democratic institutions. Schudson (1998), for example, argued that democratic institutions reflect shifting understandings of *the good citizen*. He outlined four eras of American citizenship. (1) The colonial era was dominated by politics of assent, in which republican virtue was the dominant value and deference to elites was the primary political form. (2) The 19th century was an era of mass democracy, in which political action was moderated through the party system and party loyalty was the dominant value. (3) The Progressive Era elevated informed citizenship to the dominant value for the first time in American history. The party system was reformed and interest groups rose to prominence, producing a new era in which the citizen was expected to formulate individual opinions. Schudson (1998) noted, however, that these Progressive reforms did not sufficiently help people manage the growing complexity of modern society and advanced capitalism, which led to the democratic disenchantment that Lippmann and Dewey sought to solve. In Schudson's (1998) opinion, Dewey could never formulate a way to link his idealized, pastoral community with modernity, science, and liberalism. Lippmann was the victor, as the government increasingly employed scientific experts, especially economists. (4) The final shift in American citizenship occurred during the Civil Rights Movement beginning in the 1950s. As the nexus of political action shifted from the community to the private citizen, rights-conscious citizenship became the dominant value. In this current era of citizenship, political action revolves around the rights of the individual citizen. (Schudson, 1998)

Although they focused on differing causal mechanisms, Bimber (2003) and Schudson (1998) traced roughly the same trajectory in American civic life. As community and communication systems evolved, American civic life transitioned from relatively

homogeneous communities and simple information systems to increasingly complex communities and specialized information systems. What, then, has been the dominant form of American political organization? The significant transitions outlined above indicate that there has not been a monolithic American polity. But I posit four key foci of political engagement throughout American history: (1) elected officials and the party system, (2) political organizations and interest groups, (3) noninstitutional civic groups (e.g., social movements), and (4) the private citizen. Of course, these are not clean or exhaustive categories. Political groups sometimes exist in both institutional and noninstitutional realms, and sometimes transition from one to the other. But these four categories roughly correspond to the information and citizenship eras outlined by Bimber (2003) and Schudson (1998), and they provide a useful framework for narrowing the current analysis.

With this framework, I want to establish a general communication *ecosystem* within the American polity. Ultimate decision-making authority rests with elected officials. The private citizen can influence officials through voting in the electoral process. However, this is an infrequent and inadequate form of political engagement. To exert influence on the polity beyond the polling place, citizens engage through political organizations and/or noninstitutional movements that reflect their interests. Finally, citizens may also embody their political views in their private lives, through individual lifestyle decisions.

In this conceptualization, there are several communication flows. Interests flow directly from citizens to elected officials through the vote. Officials communicate their interests (sometimes their personal interests and sometimes a reflection of their constituents) through the policies they implement. Interests also flow indirectly from citizens, moderated through political organizations and noninstitutional movements, to elected officials. Citizens can also communicate their interests through their private lifestyles. Sometimes lifestyle choices come at the recommendation of officials, organizations, or movements. Sometimes

lifestyle choices are signals to other levels of the polity. And sometimes lifestyle choices are meant to communicate interests to other private citizens. As such, communication of interests occurs across multiple levels of the polity, and in both directions, from citizens to officials and vice versa.

As for the structure undergirding this communication of interests, Tocqueville (1840/1969) famously praised voluntary association as a distinguishing feature of American democracy. This observation has had a lasting impact on scholars, who follow Tocqueville's precedent by using civic association as a proxy for democracy itself. And as democratic institutions have evolved, the dominant form of civic association has shifted over time as well. As explained above, increasingly complex communities and specialized information systems have produced new forms of association. While association once flowed almost exclusively through a simple two-party system, the political ecosystem of the past century has been dominated by specialized political organizations and noninstitutional movements. And the recent history of these forms of civic association holds important lessons about shifting communities and emerging trends in American democracy.

Dewey (1927/1954) observed that associated action (the mutual pursuit of individual interests) is inevitable for humans. But scholars of the early 20th century struggled to understand why voluntary associations were neither as common nor as efficacious as in Tocqueville's portrait. Beginning from the premise that individuals are rational and self-interested actors, Olson (1965) offered a simple, if counter-intuitive, explanation: Individuals often do not have sufficient incentive to join collective action in pursuit of a public good. Because an individual can benefit from a public good even if they do not work to achieve it, the individual has no incentive to join the collective action. Rather, it is most efficient for the individual to let others act, then reap the benefits of others' effort. This is known as the *free rider problem*. Following cost-benefit analysis, Olson (1965) showed that larger groups

struggle to coordinate action because as group size increases, each member has a smaller share of the benefits (therefore less incentive to participate) and organizational costs increase. According to *the logic of collective action*, the most effective groups for achieving common interests are small groups in which actors can monitor the actions of others, thereby encouraging everyone to contribute equally. To be successful, larger groups require either some form of coercion (e.g., social pressure) or selective incentives that reward individuals for their contributions to the collective (Olson, 1965).

McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977) applied Olson's logic of collective action along with other concepts from political sociology and economics when developing *resource mobilization theory* (RMT) to explain how differential resource structures influence social movement mobilization. RMT begins from Olson's (1965) premise of rational, self-interested actors and studies the aggregation of resources. Specifically, RMT emphasizes that resource aggregation requires organizations. In this way, applications of RMT generally focus not just on collectivities, but on formally organized *social movement organizations* (SMOs). RMT explicates how SMOs acquire resources, with attention to organizational interactions among SMOs, the influence of external individuals/organizations, the supply and demand of resources to and from a social movement, and the importance of costs and rewards (influenced by societal structures) for explaining individual and organizational involvement in a social movement (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). RMT has developed several propositions related to characteristics of SMOs, their constituents, and social movement environments in which they exist. These propositions generally employ economic principles. For example, McCarthy and Zald (1977) hypothesized that the more competitive the *social movement industry* surrounding an SMO, the more likely it is to develop specialized goals and strategies.

While acknowledging that Olson and RMT lean too heavily on rational actor theory assumptions of instrumental rationality and economic principles, I want to emphasize the

takeaway that formalized organizations are fundamental to pursuing common interests. McCarthy and Zald developed RMT to move social movement theory away from social psychology (exemplified by Smelser, 1963; Gurr, 1970; Turner & Killian, 1972), which rooted social movement activity in shared grievances and collective ideology. This approach was insufficient, as social movements were not always found to emerge in contexts of shared grievances. Like Dewey, Olson and RMT highlight that mutual interests are not sufficient for collective action. To gain meaningful political impact, mutual interests must coalesce into coherently organized associations.

I do not believe that civic associations must always be formally organized to gain political impact. Still, there has been a marked growth of organized political associations in recent decades. In their accounts of interest groups in the U.S., Walker (1983, 1991) and Berry (1999) observed a dramatic increase, beginning in the 1960s, in the number of citizen groups. Such citizen groups are characterized by open membership (rather than membership based on occupation, which had previously been the most common basis for civic membership). The expansion in this sector resulted from widespread citizen participation in related issues during the protest era of the 1960s and 1970s. Although the term *interest group* now has a negative connotation, Walker and Berry viewed the expansion of *citizen interest groups* favorably. Citizen groups represent the personal interests of their constituents within the formal structures of the American polity. Moreover, through analyzing three sessions of Congress (1963, 1979, and 1991), Berry (1999) found that citizen interest groups grew increasingly successful in giving citizens an effective voice in American politics. Although business advocacy remained more successful in influencing policy across these sessions, Berry (1999) found that citizen groups succeeded in getting their issues on the Congressional agenda, and by the 1991 session, citizen advocacy had grown to become a viable challenger to business advocacy.

In contrast, Skocpol (2003) viewed this growth of interest groups more skeptically. As the nexus of American civic life, political organizations had produced a state of *diminished democracy* in Skocpol's (2003) evaluation. Citizens had been summarily cut out of participation as the structure of political organization shifted from one built on membership (active involvement) to management (passive involvement called on strategically). Through primary (the Civic Engagement Project) and secondary (e.g., the General Social Survey) survey data and her own historical analyses of key interest groups, Skocpol (2003) also focused on changes caused by the protest era of the 1960s and 1970s. Even as late as the 1950s, American civic associations were largely single-gender: male-led fraternal and veterans' groups, and female-led religious and civic groups (Skocpol, 2003). The civil rights, women's, and environmental movements of the following decades coalesced into a new form of civic association involving grassroots protest, activist radicalism, professional lobbying, and flexible organizational structures. After these social movements dispersed, members did not return to the old fraternal/civic associations. Rather, the number of civic organizations expanded. More significantly, the nature of these civic organizations also shifted (into what we now commonly think of as interest groups), no longer focused on broad communal goals, but on narrow advocacy goals. In this way, civic organizations moved away from being rooted in community engagement and active membership. Civic organizations now more likely consist of a small, professional staff focused on policy lobbying and public education, who conceive of members as strategic tools to be selectively activated in support of these goals.

Walker (1983, 1991), Berry (1999), and Skocpol (2003) outlined an important shift in American citizenship based on changing forms of civic association and political organization. Most significantly, the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s were successful, resulting in a host of new federal social services and agencies to administer them. These agencies provided funding for the boom in citizen interest groups in the following decades. This funding had two

important effects: (1) political organizations no longer needed to cultivate intense relationships with members because membership dues became a less vital source of funding, and (2) because funding was tied to social services, organizations shifted to professional staffs that could conduct the type of research required to inform government agencies' decisions. In addition to these political-structural changes, there was also an element of technological-structural change involved in the shift from membership to management. The direct mail infrastructure that was innovated at this time allowed political organizations to maintain membership bases without the need to dedicate resources to maintaining community presences (Bimber, 2003; Skocpol, 2003).

Although the precise position and structure of civic association has shifted along with cultural and technological trends, political organizations and noninstitutional movements play a vital role in the American polity. For many decades, as society became increasingly complex, these civic associations were a lasting bastion of community activism. Civic associations helped individual citizens navigate complex social and information systems to find and fight for their shared interests. Civic associations provided an important bridge between the everyday lives of citizens and often inscrutable political institutions. What should we make, then, of Skocpol's (2003) claim that political organizations have become too specialized to represent truly communal needs? Has a transformation in civic association truly produced an era of diminished democracy?

## Organizing Alone

Optimizing the American citizen's civic engagement is a concern as old as the nation itself. Interestingly, the "Founding Fathers" were more concerned with too much engagement than too little. The Founders feared the citizenry is too vulnerable to manipulation and emotion, and therefore they designed several mechanisms of representation to prevent passion and whim from overrunning the polity (Schudson, 1998). One of their most enduring

safeguards against populism is the Electoral College, which moderates against the potential volatility of the pure popular vote, instead trusting the ultimate electoral decision to appointed representatives.

As explained above, changing conceptualizations of citizenship have flipped the concern over civic engagement. Since the Progressive Era, democratic scholars have feared declining engagement in the U.S. For Lippmann, Dewey, and their contemporaries in the early 20th century, the diagnosis was a fracturing of community. By the middle of the century, Olson and other social movement theorists grappled with the challenges of organizing effective collective action. Despite these challenges, the protest era of the 1960s and 1970s seemed like a definitive rebuttal to claims that American civicness had dissipated. But as the protests subsided, a new cohort of democratic alarmists emerged. Chief among them was Robert Putnam.

Putnam's legacy is *social capital* as a democratic concept. Graphing *Web of Science* citations of *social capital*, Kadushin (2012, p. 163) showed an exponential growth in the term's usage beginning in 1997, shortly after Putnam published the essay (1995) that would turn into the social capital manifesto (2000). Putnam did not take credit for the concept, tracing its history through Progressive Era political reformer L. J. Hanifan, urbanist Jane Jacobs in the 1960s, and sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and James S. Coleman in the 1980s. Nonetheless, all social capital roads lead to Putnam, primarily due to his provocative and unabashed assertion that American social capital vastly eroded in the decades since 1960, which in turn has greatly weakened American citizenship and the American polity as a whole. Although this assertion has been contested (as I will explain), it set the stage for further evolution in the conceptualization of citizenship and therefore merits a brief summary.

Putnam (2000) defined social capital as "connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (p. 19). This

is a relatively simple definition for what has become such a central concept. The basic premise is that social relationships have value, comparable to economic capital. Social connections can be deployed for a variety of ends, including economic ends (e.g., getting a job), but the primary emphasis with regard to citizenship is that social capital has important implications for political involvement. Putnam (1994) first demonstrated this in the context of newly-instituted Italian regional governments. He identified significant differences in participatory and efficacious functioning among the regions, and traced these differences to historical trends in social capital. He found that the Italian regions that had a history of religious confraternities and cooperative associations developed more participatory and efficacious regional governments, while less participatory and less efficacious governments emerged in regions characterized by histories of hierarchical exploitation (Putnam, 1994). His conclusion here was that cultures of (mis)trust and reciprocity (that is, social capital), have a real impact on the polities that emerge from these cultures.

Although Putnam's diagnosis was tempered in the Italian case (he showed positive and negative trends in social capital), his diagnosis in the American case was decidedly more apocalyptic. Drawing on a host of secondary data sources (primarily national surveys like Roper polls and the General Social Survey), Putnam (2000) built an overwhelming case that (1) participation in American voluntary associations dramatically declined in the decades since 1960, leading to (2) corresponding declines in political participation and general trust and reciprocity within the American population. Putnam was quite thorough in building a wide-ranging case, but the most significant aspect for the current investigation is that participation in voluntary associations is tied to political engagement. Even when voluntary associations are not specifically oriented to political issues, the social capital argument posits that face-to-face interaction in such associations is vital to developing social relationships. These social relationships and the accompanying networks of trust are necessary for effective

political involvement. Moreover, associations provide important interactional spaces whereby political issues are connected to personal lives. Even in apolitical associations like the titular bowling leagues, political issues are often integrated into everyday conversations, among apolitical topics like sports, food, and neighborhood gossip. In these ways, both through building social capital and connecting political issues to everyday life, voluntary associations provide important socio-cultural foundations for political engagement.

Putnam (1994) was relatively convincing in locating the historical causes of social capital differentials in Italy, but his causal attribution in the American context has proven much more controversial. Putnam (2000) attributed the decline in American voluntary associational life primarily to television. He admitted the influence of changing work patterns, urban sprawl, and generational (cultural) shifts, and even admitted that there were undoubtedly other factors which he did not include in his analysis. But Putnam (2000) identified television as the most prominent cause of declining social capital. In his rough summary estimation, he attributed 25% of the decline to television directly and another 10 to 15% to television's combined effect with generational trends to produce a "TV generation" (Putnam, 2000, p. 283-284). By moving leisure time from associational life to isolated television viewing, Putnam (2000) argued, new technology had destroyed American civicness.

Many scholars have taken issue with Putnam's evaluation, or at least his apportionment of causality. Technology has played a role in shifting forms of citizenship, to be sure. But television is hardly the most significant technology of the past 50 years, let alone the leading cause of changing civicness. What Putnam (2000) identified as generational factors have a greater impact than he estimated. I prefer to think of these factors more broadly as cultural trends, because new developments are not always isolated to younger generations, and they often spread from younger age cohorts to older cohorts. There are also myriad

overlapping and intermingling cultural trends influencing American civicness—too many to isolate to a particular generation. But indeed, Inglehart (1997); Bennett (1998, 2008, 2012); Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, and Delli Carpini (2006); and Wells (2015) all identified a changing orientation toward political life and civicness that is especially pronounced in more recent generations born after 1965—Generation X and the "DotNet Generation," as Zukin et al. (2006) categorized them. (Members of the DotNet Generation are now more commonly called Millennials.)

At the core of this collection of cultural trends are *postmaterialism* and *individualization*. Inglehart (1997) used data from the 1981 and 1990 World Values survey to identify a relatively predictable pattern in modernizing societies. Following a Weberian conceptualization, Inglehart (1997) outlined the process of modernization as shifting from traditional authority to secular-rational authority. Postmodernization occurs, then, as economic prosperity emerges and values shift from an emphasis on survival to an emphasis on well-being. The shift to postmaterialist values, in turn, causes a retreat from secular-rational authority. As such, the postmaterial trend involves movement away from institutional sources of authority.

This conceptualization is somewhat more benign than others have offered. While Inglehart (1997) focused primarily on economic factors, Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) offered a more nuanced characterization of individualization. The postmaterialist approach implies that postmodernization is characterized by relative prosperity. People are freed from material concerns to focus on their quality of life more broadly. But the individualization approach describes postmodernization as more problematic. The withering of traditional sources of identity and authority in late-modern societies means that the work formerly done by these institutions now falls to individual citizens (hence the term *individualization*). This is indeed a source of freedom, but also a source of uncertainty and risk. Beck (1992) has, in fact, characterized the result as a *risk society*. There is a dual problem of late-modernity. Precisely as societies become increasingly complex, the very institutions that formerly

helped individuals manage complexity have lost their capacity to do so. As such, individuals now bear the responsibility for composing their own identities in the midst of great uncertainty and risk, through only their own individual actions.

Postmaterialism and individualization have myriad implications on the ways (post)modern citizens live, but most relevant to the current investigation is the impact on political participation. In a broad sense, postmaterial/individualized citizens do not participate in politics, because the polity is one of many institutions that they have shed. In a clearer conceptualization, the focus of politics has shifted from traditional participation to new forms of civicness. Bennett (1998) actually called this an *uncivic culture* wherein citizens move away from political institutions and toward *lifestyle politics*. He used the term *uncivic* to denote that citizens are not so much anti-political, anti-public, or anti-government, but are simply indifferent to conventional political institutions. Still, Bennett (1998) was clear in his refutation of Putnam: "What is changing about politics is not a decline in citizen engagement, but a shift away from old forms that is complemented by the emergence of new forms of political interest and engagement" (p. 744).

This realization of emerging forms of civicness has been both promising and challenging for citizenship scholars. It is easy to measure voter turnout and organizational membership. But the full range of lifestyle politics is unclear, and how to measure this emergent phenomenon is even more unclear. *Political consumption* is a frequently studied form of lifestyle politics, with Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti (2005) finding that consumer choices based on political and ethical concerns are common. (Seventy-two percent of their student samples across Canada, Belgium, and Sweden had engaged in at least one act of political consumption.) Other forms of lifestyle politics are more difficult to articulate and operationalize. But scholars broadly recognize that a new set of citizenship norms have emerged, especially among Generation X and Millennials. This realization stands in sharp contrast to Putnam's (2000) portrait of crumbling civicness. Schudson (1998), for example, emphasized that a decline in associations does not necessarily equate to a

decline in engagement because "civic participation now takes place everywhere" (p. 298). Postmaterialism and individualization may have reoriented the nexus of political action by shifting it from institutions to the *private sphere* (Papacharissi, 2010), but the demise of civic engagement has been greatly exaggerated. On the contrary, a host of new forms of engagement have emerged. As Schudson (1998) emphasized:

> Whatever the measures on social capital may finally show, it will still be the case that individual political activity in the past quarter century has actually risen. It could scarcely be otherwise when the idea of citizenship has colonized so many of the territories of private life that once were beyond its jurisdiction. (p. 299)

Investigating these emergent forms of civicness, Dalton (2008) used data from the Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy survey to identify two distinct dimensions of what it means to be a good citizen. The *citizen duty* dimension is focused on norms of social order (like following the law, allegiance to the state, and voting). The *engaged citizenship* dimension is associated with participation in civil society, political autonomy, and a concern for social needs. Americans generally accept both modes of citizenship, but Dalton (2008) found a significant generational shift wherein older citizens align with the dutiful model and younger citizens align with the engaged model. Bennett (2008) and Wells (2015) (also Bennett, Wells, & Rank, 2009) have similarly contrasted dutiful/informed citizenship with actualizing citizenship. They emphasized that the understanding of actualizing citizenship increasingly held by youth remains disconnected from both civic education and political organizations/institutions, contributing to a growing gap between the participatory and expressive preferences of youth and their opportunities for political engagement.

In light of this scholarship, I want to revise Putnam's (2000) assertion that technology is to blame for declining civicness. More properly, we should say that a combination of cultural trends and technological innovations have produced new notions of citizenship that are tied less to political institutions and more to lifestyle politics. Putnam was correct that technology has a great impact on civic engagement. Putnam (2000) privileged television in his analysis, at a time

when the Internet had not quite reached saturation. In the intervening years, the Internet, digital media, and mobile technologies have become inseparable components of contemporary life, including civic engagement. The next section explores how these technologies complement recent cultural trends and the combined effect on civicness.

## America Online

The increasing prominence of networks is at the core of both cultural and technological trends of the past half century. The observation of increasing networks in contemporary society is sometimes met with the skeptical response that networks have always existed. While this is true, such a response understates the significant transformations to social structure that have unfolded. Simmel (1908/1955) described modernization as a transition from concentric social circles to crosscutting social circles. That is, identity in pre-modern societies is hierarchically defined. Membership in one group implies membership in many other groups. For example, membership in a particular family implies membership in a particular occupation, which implies membership in a particular town, which implies membership in a particular religion, etc. In modern societies, by contrast, identity is not defined by ascribed concentric circles, but rather by interest-based membership in crosscutting social circles. As social relations moved from being fully nested to un-nested but overlapping, society saw the emergence of modern social networks. The transition entailed an expansion of individuality, as individuals gained the freedom to choose multiple group memberships and achieved uniqueness by their multiple memberships in a distinctive set of groups (Simmel, 1908/1955).

The shift, of course, predates digital media, but it has been substantially enhanced by digital media. As outlined above, scholars have observed that citizens in late-capitalist societies began moving away from traditional social institutions in the 1960s (see Giddens, 1991; Inglehart, 1997; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). This trend in many ways set the stage for digital media, which have since accelerated the trend. Rainie and Wellman (2012; also

Wellman, 2001, 2002) identified a "triple revolution" of concurrent developments: (1) social relations organized into looser and broader personalized networks, (2) the communication and information infrastructure of the Internet, and (3) the constant connectivity and accessibility of mobile technologies. The confluence of these innovations has produced a new form of social organization, which Rainie and Wellman (2012) called *networked individualism*. This is essentially Simmel's concept of cross-cutting circles taken to its extreme. Through digital technologies, networked individuals maximize their individuality by maintaining loose and flexible affiliations with a wide range of networks.

In relation to civic engagement, networked individualism heightens the crucial problem of integration into community, harkening back to the central problem for Dewey (1927). Because networked individuals maintain so many multiple memberships, integrating their varied interests into common concern is extraordinarily difficult. The variation in interests is compounded by the fact that networked individuals in many ways buffer themselves from entry into the public sphere. Instead, they view their extended social networks as a forum for their self-expression—a *private sphere*—but do not generally enter into the public sphere where this expression can be converted into common concern (Papacharissi, 2010; Rojas, 2015). In the uncertainty of contemporary life (Beck, 1992), networked individuals meet their security needs (which were formerly met by institutions) by preserving their personal autonomy over their civic identities (Papacharissi, 2010). They do not like to sacrifice this personal autonomy for the formation of common concern.

The democratic tension embodied within networked individualism, then, revolves around the *public sphere* and *civil society*. These concepts have been developed most thoroughly by Jürgen Habermas, beginning with his dissertation, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962/1989), and continuing in *The Theory of Communicative Action* (translated in two volumes, 1981/1984 and 1981/1987). The public

sphere is “above all the sphere of private people come together as a public” (Habermas, 1962/1989, p. 27). Habermas rooted his conceptualization in the Ancient Greek understanding of a public composed of individuals who come together to participate in rational-critical debate about concerns relevant to all. The Greek origin contains two of the fundamental components of the public sphere: rational-critical debate (that is, deliberation) and common concerns/interests.

Habermas situated the modern formation of the public sphere in the 18th-century European bourgeoisie. The public sphere coalesced as the systems differentiation of modernity unfolded. Habermas (1981/1984) characterized modernization as the emergence of the modern state and the capitalist economy as distinct societal systems. As these systems differentiated, civil society also emerged as the third principle system, wherein citizens could negotiate their identities and rights in relation to the state and the economy. Effectively, civil society is the system that bridges citizens to the state, and the public sphere is the arena in which citizens collectively determine the content of the civil society-state connection. In the bourgeois form, the public sphere developed from citizens concerned with interests common to all, namely concerned with protecting private life from the state. In this way, the bourgeois public sphere became a means of critiquing state administration and served as opposition to undue state authority.

Under networked individualism, Habermas’ foundational premises are somewhat inverted. A Habermasian citizen joins the public sphere to generate a civil society (a collective action) that protects their shared interests against encroachment from the state. By contrast, a networked individual protects their autonomy by receding into their private sphere. Although the private sphere is a space of self-expression, realization of shared interests is not the goal of this expression. Self-expression within the private sphere is designed to maintain autonomy over personal identity, not sublimate individual identity to the collective

(Papacharissi, 2010). The core democratic dilemma for networked individuals, then, is that, in Dewey's terms, associated action is not converted into community and, in Habermas' terms, private interests do not coalesce into a civil society that expresses those interests to the state.

Intellectuals initially had high hopes for the Internet's potential to overcome these obstacles to democracy. Rheingold (1993) was at the forefront of asserting the significance of virtual/online communities. Just as crosscutting social networks provided greater individuality than concentric networks (Simmel, 1908/1955), the Internet allows even greater opportunity to freely associate with communities of shared interests, overcoming the constraints of ascribed characteristics and geography. Rheingold (2002) also posited that the combination of rapid information flow and nonhierarchical organization facilitated by networked mobile technologies has created a new and powerful form of political activism, which he termed *smart mobs*. Similarly, Shirky (2008) argued that network structures and technologies grant greater agency to individuals as they break away from organizational constraints. These network benefits allow citizens to organize more efficaciously and adapt to challenges with greater efficiency than previously possible.

Using economic analysis and focusing heavily on the dynamics of power laws, Benkler (2006) argued that networks have democratizing effects inherent in their structure. A power law is a common pattern in both the social and natural sciences whereby one quantity varies proportionally relative to another, specifically as a power of another. When graphed, a power law manifests as an exponential curve. Colloquially, many people are familiar with power laws through the Pareto principle (80/20 rule), as, for example, when 80% of a company's sales come from 20% of its customers. Power laws frequently occur throughout information systems as well, as when 80% of the audience share watches the top 20% of TV programming.

Anderson (2004, 2006) observed that digital media have altered power law dynamics in the economic marketplace, making content in *the long tail* of the power law (the bottom 80%) more profitable. The success of new business models employed by companies like Amazon, Apple, and Netflix derives in large part from the increased profitability of the long tail. Anderson (2004, 2006) observed that digital production and distribution allow companies to increasingly profit from selling relatively small quantities of niche products rather than depending solely on the high sales of a small set of mainstream products. The changing costs of production and distribution have made niche products profitable, thereby increasing diversity in the marketplace.

Benkler (2006) believed networked communication would similarly disrupt the power laws in information systems. The Internet has commoditized information at an unprecedented level, producing what Benkler (2006) termed a *network information economy*. The economic characteristics of digital information, however, lean toward a public good: high fixed costs (of a network infrastructure) but low marginal costs; the ability to be consumed without exhaustion; and the difficulty of excluding free riders. These traits support the widespread use of commons-based peer production. Benkler (2006) argued that this collaborative and egalitarian nature undergirding networked information systems is inherently democratizing. As in the economic marketplace, network structures allow for more diversity in the marketplace of ideas. When informational production and distribution costs fall, ideation is no longer limited to elites. New technologies of networked societies allow individual citizens to generate content, a role previously occupied solely by elite institutions. Moreover, network structures provide mechanisms for content that starts in the long tail to work up the power law, gaining greater exposure than previously possible. Through network mechanisms, peer production provides an alternative to traditional organizational modes rooted in hierarchy and the market. And peer production promotes individual liberty, as formerly passive consumers are empowered to become active participants in ideation (Benkler, 2006).

Networked society has also disrupted traditional pathways for the exercise of power, creating new dimensions of power and new degrees of freedom through the expansion of overlapping networks (Benkler, 2010). In Benkler's evaluation, network structures empower citizens. Networks remove hierarchical constraints, allow more voices to be heard, and facilitate greater engagement, thereby bolstering the public sphere and the quality of democratic life.

Benkler has evidence to support his theorizing (notably *Wikipedia* and open-source software like Linux), but his argument remains largely a normative ideal, as many have observed. Kreiss, Finn, and Turner (2010), for example, applied Max Weber's conceptualization of bureaucracy to temper the intellectual optimism surrounding peer production. Following Weber, Kreiss et al. (2010) observed that bureaucracy provides many rules that ensure fairness and inclusivity, without which charismatic leaders may be allowed to govern peer production by fiat. Additionally, bureaucracy protects the autonomy of private life. The bureaucrat rises above their private desires when they work in the public, in large part because a set of rules forces them to. In contrast, digital networks unify the private and public selves. In many instances, the convergence of private and professional roles means that people are working for psychological and social rewards rather than economic compensation (Kreiss et al., 2010), as when someone updates a *Wikipedia* entry. Moreover, companies often exploit this free network labor for their own economic gain (Kreiss et al., 2010), as when Amazon and eBay use peer reviews to govern their recommendation and reputation systems.

Moving from abstract Weberian lessons to the realities of contemporary information systems, several scholars have emphasized that the Internet has not lived up to its democratizing potential. Prior (2007, 2013) and Stroud (2011) highlighted selective exposure as a growing obstacle to digital democracy. With so many media options readily available, citizens frequently choose entertainment over news content. Politically motivated citizens who do seek news content are now able to customize their consumption according to their

political preferences. Such partisan selective exposure facilitated by the customization of digital media produces increasing political polarization, especially in the most active, albeit small, portion of the citizenry (Prior 2007, 2013; Stroud, 2011).

Pariser (2011) observed a more subtle mechanism of bias in digital life, which he referred to as *the filter bubble*. Whereas selective exposure refers to the conscious selection of particular content, filter bubbles arise from the algorithms that work in the background to deliver digital information. These algorithms (like Google search results and Facebook feeds) are designed to filter content based on Web history and other personal information. Although such filters provide an unprecedented level of personalization, Pariser (2011) warned that they also block new ideas, differing perspectives, and information that falls outside personal preferences.

Additionally, Hindman (2009) found that power laws continue to permeate Internet activity, particularly through Google searches where the top results receive the vast majority of clicks. These dynamics produce a winners-take-all structure, where the most popular sites dominate online traffic. Moreover, Hindman and Rogers (2010) demonstrated that online traffic inherently follows power-law distributions. Even if traffic among a set of sites starts from a completely egalitarian distribution, Hindman and Rogers (2010) found that the patterns of daily traffic will relatively quickly produce a power law among the sites. These results indicate not only that the Web is currently structured as a power law, but also that this power law structure will persist indefinitely. And while new technologies have lowered distribution costs, they have not lowered production costs in the same way. Hindman (2009) concluded, then, that the resulting state of online content is no more egalitarian than the structures of traditional media institutions. Far from an open marketplace of ideas, the Internet is dominated by a small set of elite sites that garner the vast majority of online attention.

Hindman's final diagnosis was a bleak one. Although he acknowledged that more voices can indeed be expressed on the Internet, his evidence refuted the claim that more voices are *heard*. Hindman (2009) referred to the resulting online structure as *the missing middle*, "the sharp divide between the biggest and smallest outlets" (p. 134). He elaborated:

> The audience for online news outlets and political Web sites is shaped by two powerful and countervailing trends: continued or accelerated concentration among the most popular outlets, combined with fragmentation among the least-read ones. In nearly every online niche, we see attention accruing overwhelmingly to two categories of sites: a small set of winners that receive the lion's share of the traffic, and a host of tiny Web sites that, collectively, receive most of the remaining visitors. (Hindman, 2009, p. 133-134)

Although democratic intellectuals initially lauded the Internet's potential to revolutionize civic engagement, the reality has been less dramatic. Networked communication like the Internet and smart phones have enabled emergent forms of activism and invigorated grassroots movements like Black Lives Matter. But the transition to networked individualism and still-growing complexity in information systems has also presented a host of obstacles, like increasing fragmentation and competition for attention, that make political organizing more difficult. If the individual has not been fully liberated by digital networks, where, then, is the nexus of civicness in modern America? In subsequent sections, I posit the continuing importance of political organizations as the nexus of civil society that connects citizen interests to democratic institutions.

## Connecting the Dots

As networked individualism coalesced through concurrent cultural and technological trends, political action scholars have worked to develop concepts that match changes in civic engagement. Theorizing has especially focused on expanded investigation into the importance of social and information networks. Social movement studies have long recognized the role of networks, but early applications focused on social networks primarily as predictors of participation. A common finding is that recruitment and mobilization flow

through personal networks. (See Snow, Zurcher, & Ekland-Olson, 1980; McAdam, 1986; Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; Fernandez & McAdam, 1988; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993.) Such social movement research gradually incorporated the identity work implicit in networks, which Diani (2000, 2004) articulated, emphasizing that a proper understanding of networks and participation captures the duality linking individuals and group memberships. The identity of a social movement activist is determined by the particular combination of their multiple group memberships, while simultaneously individuals represent linkages between different groups through their multiple memberships.

So while networks can certainly be analyzed as sources of opportunities and incentives to act, a more holistic conceptualization investigates networks as the pattern of relationships among individuals, organizations, and their historical and structural environments. Ansell (2003), for example, employed a network perspective to analyze whether social movement networks embedded in a geographic community or more broad social movement networks built on cause-specific identities were more conducive to collaborative governance. And Tilly and Wood (2003) used social network analysis to explore the spread of political repertoires during the creation of some of the first social movements in early-1800s Britain. These examples illustrate growing academic attention to how organizational network structures and individual network positions impact collective action.

A network approach also provides a foundation for considering recent transformations in social movements and collective action. In the social movement tradition, scholars have categorized non-labor movements that arose in the 1960s and 1970s as *new social movements*. (See Melucci, 1980; Habermas, 1981; Offe, 1985.) New social movements (e.g., civil rights, women's, and environmental movements) correspond with trends of postmaterialism and individualization that emerged in late-modern societies. These movements are focused more on culture and identity politics than economic objectives. And

in general, new social movements are structured less formally than labor movements. Whereas labor movements have defined memberships and active participants, new social movements are composed of loosely associated action networks. Members often slip in and out of movement participation, mixing a combination of collective political action and personal lifestyle politics into their involvement with a new social movement.

Diani (2000) challenged the common notion that the newness of social movements should be evaluated according to the goals and characteristics of participants. Rather, he provided a relational basis for newness by integrating Rokkan's conceptualization of political cleavage and Simmel's conceptualization of crosscutting social circles. Beyond the simple notion that individuals' values are shaped by social networks, Rokkan (1970) offered the insight that group and association membership combine along recurrent patterns that result from and reinforce political cleavages. Simmel (1908/1955), again, emphasized the transition in modern society from ascribed, concentric social circles to interest-based membership in crosscutting social circles.

Diani (2000) synthesized these concepts from Rokkan and Simmel, positing, "From a relational perspective, social movements in contemporary Western societies can be regarded as new to the extent that they draw upon, or generate, new solidarities *and* group memberships which cut across the boundaries of any specific traditional political cleavage" (p. 399). He drew examples from conventionally recognized new social movements to show that the defining factor is not simply rights or environmental goals, but that these movements draw on the complexity of contemporary identities to build coalitions that cut across traditional political divides (e.g., the women's movement building a coalition against domestic violence that does not conform to the Republican-Democrat cleavage). We can, in turn, understand new social movements as associations that tease out common interests from complex and even disparate networks. When such movements coalesce, the product is not

quite a Great Community in Dewey's terms, but there is nonetheless an important component of working through conflicting identities to find shared interests.

With the emergence of networked information and communication technologies (ICTs), scholars have increasingly integrated network concepts into (new) social movement theory. Castells (2015), for example, analyzed recent movements like the Egyptian revolution of 2011, the Arab Uprisings that began in 2010, *indignadas* in Spain, and Occupy Wall Street as *networked social movements*. These movements have incorporated a combination of rights and economic concerns to mobilize loosely coordinated networks of actors. The increasing role of ICTs has brought network structures, both communicative and organizational, to the fore; but these recent movements can still be accurately categorized as new social movements, in addition to networked social movements. Interestingly, Castells (2015) noted that the social movements named above met with modest success at best. The Arab Uprisings were often repressed by authoritarian regimes, which prevents fruitful extrapolation to the American context. The Occupy Wall Street case from the U.S., however, provides relevant insights into networked movements. As Castells (2015) described, "The movement demanded everything and nothing at the same time" (p. 188). Although the Occupy movement spread across the U.S., each occupation had local and regional specificity without much overarching coordination. Castells (2015) listed over 30 demands from occupations across the nation, ranging from financial policy reforms, to Internet privacy, to harsher punishment for BP and other oil spillers. Occupations shared similar consensus-building protocols, but participants brought in their own grievances and defined their own targets. Despite, or perhaps because of, these wide-ranging demands, occupiers made little effort to translate them into a policy campaign. Although Occupy Wall Street achieved success in some areas by, for example, reversing home foreclosures, the movement's ability to impact policy was in many ways hamstrung by its diffuse agenda.

Tarrow (2011) categorized Occupy as a "we are here" movement similar to the new women's movement of the 1970s, which foremost demanded recognition of gender inequity, more than it demanded specific policies. Ultimately, such movements must address their diffuse nature in order to persist. Tarrow (2011) observed that "we are here" movements can easily dissipate into pockets of particular interests. But some coalesce into organized sectors with specific policy demands and political identities, as the new women's movement did (Tarrow, 2011). In contrast, the Occupy movement largely dissipated, undone by its own contradictory foundations. As Castells (2015) diagnosed:

> The problem is that 'the movement' is not a single entity, but multiple streams that converge into a diverse challenge to the existing order. Furthermore, a very strong sentiment in the movement is that any pragmatic approach to achieving demands would be required to go through the mediation of the political system, and this would contradict the generalized distrust of the representativeness of political institutions as they presently exist in America. (p. 190)

The Occupy movement cannot be disregarded as a complete failure, because it did significantly articulate widespread dissatisfaction among the American citizenry. In Castells (2015) evaluation, the political effect of Occupy Wall Street should be assessed by its impact on public consciousness. By this measure, the Occupy movement's success was bringing debate about social inequality to the forefront of public discourse. Admittedly, though, the movement could not bridge discourse with policy, largely because occupiers explicitly chose not to engage with the polity proper. Although the Occupy movement set a tone that reverberated in the anti-establishment campaigns of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump in 2016, Occupy faded without any substantial policy impact. As a product of late-modern disillusionment with institutions, Occupy Wall Street embodied a core dilemma of contemporary civic engagement: a desire for change, but a mistrust of the institutional mechanisms necessary to effect change.

At the same time, political institutions have been battling a mirrored dilemma: a desire for engagement, but a refusal to adopt new strategies and methods that elicit engagement. Networked ICTs are at the heart of this dilemma, as political organizations lag behind their constituencies in the use of digital media. Formal collective action organizations are thriving. Globally, the number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and transnational SMOs has increased over the past 40 years (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2012). In the U.S., the number of interest groups swelled in the second half of the 20th century. The rate of new interest group creation has slowed in the new century, but existing organizations have stabilized and in many cases increased their size and infrastructure (Bimber et al., 2012). Despite this robust organizational context, political organizations have struggled with the shift toward individualized citizenship. Organizations were previously vital to the logic of collective action. Organizations were required to overcome the free rider problem, because they could deliver selective incentives and police members. But networked ICTs have disrupted this conventional logic, and in turn, they have disrupted the relationship between individuals and organizations relative to collective action.

When information and communication costs are high, effective collective action requires organizational infrastructures to manage complex information and coordinate participants. As networked ICTs lower these costs, collective action can be effectively organized by informal or semiformal collections of actors with shared interests, free from traditional organizational costs (Bimber et al., 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Earl & Kimport, 2011). As Bimber et al. (2012) said, "The fundamental solution to the challenges of collective action is not organization, but organizing" (p. 4-5). Organizing previously required a formal organizational apparatus, but networked ICTs now allow organizing without need for formal structures. This innovation has shifted agency away from central locations, like the leaders of formal organizations, to the citizens at the peripheries of civic networks (Bimber et

al., 2012). As a result, the success of collective action increasingly depends on individualized civic action, rather than following primarily from the resource management of an organization. When citizens gain more agency, the private-public and individual-collective boundaries break down. Citizens no longer need organizations to mediate their public identities, and organizational membership weakens.

Bimber et al. (2012) posited that (1) interaction with other members and (2) engagement with an organization are the two primary features of collective action most affected by weakened organizational boundaries. They drew this assessment from analysis of three differing political organizations: (1) the American Legion, a federated, community-based organization; (2) AARP, which functions primarily as an interest group; and (3) MoveOn, a largely online advocacy and petition network. Using membership surveys, Bimber et al. (2012) interestingly mapped a relatively similar *collective action space* for all three organizations, despite their differing organizational structures. They found that interaction with other members skews toward impersonal (rather than personal) and engagement with the organization skews toward entrepreneurial (rather than institutional). This indicates that all organizations, regardless of structure, are susceptible to the trend of weakened organizational membership. Bimber et al. (2012) also found a range of participatory styles in all three organizations. All three organizations have passive members alongside highly involved members. As such, Bimber et al. (2012) concluded that while organizational structures can constrain involvement, they do not fully determine civic engagement. Since engagement is equally a factor of organizational and individual factors, motivated citizens are able to realize high engagement in a variety of organizational settings.

Additionally, Bimber et al. (2012) found that digital media use is not associated with any particular participatory style. That is, citizens who use digital media more are not particularly engaged or disengaged. This underlines the important point that technology is a

contextual factor for shifting civicness, but changes in civic engagement are tied to broader cultural trends. As Bennett and Segerberg (2013) summarized:

> The shift in the underpinnings of contentious action is associated with the rise of more highly individualized publics. These individualized publics are not inclined to join formal political organizations and prefer not to adopt definitions of their problems that require trading off personal beliefs for more restrictive group identifications. (p. 1)

Bennett and Segerberg (2013) introduced *the logic of connective action* to explain this emergent form of civicness. This logic unites collective action with networked individualism and the private sphere, explaining how individualized publics organize collectively. Connective action represents the individualization of large-scale political action, as citizens customize their paths to engagement through social networks. Facilitated by networked ICTs, connective action uses broadly inclusive, easily personalized action frames as the basis for technology-assisted networking (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Networked citizens still have common interests and political concerns, but they seek flexible associations with causes, which often manifest as personalized brands of politics organized around lifestyles and social networks rather than formal organizational membership. Still, connective action movements can be stable, persistent, and effective because they combine the personalization of causes and the corresponding inclination toward scalable digital media in order to aggregate individual actions (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

Because connective action is individualized, personal action frames are the core component to successful connective action. These frames must be (1) symbolically inclusive, providing a variety of personal reasons to connect with a cause, and (2) technologically open, allowing for operation across a variety of media (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). When utilized correctly, personal action frames can give connective action power similar to conventionally organized collective action. Comparing collective and connective environmental protests in 2009, Bennett and Segerberg (2013) found that crowd-enabled connective movements had

better engagement strength than organizationally brokered movements. Their examples show that collective identity mediated through an organization is not a prerequisite for movement success. Personal action frames can, indeed, sustain movements.

However, returning to the dilemma of engagement, political organizations often remain rooted in models of collective action, disconnected from the civic preferences of networked citizens. Wells (2015) identified a tension between organizational communication strategies and the communication styles of networked citizens. Building on Bennett's (2008) differentiation between *dutiful citizenship* and *actualizing citizenship* (see also Bennett et al., 2009; Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011), Wells (2015) argued that civic organizations often still operate within the dutiful framework that privileges one-way mass media. Actualizing citizens, as networked individuals, prefer personalized, participatory, and interactive media. When he analyzed the websites of 90 civic organizations (including interest groups, government agencies, and community organizations), Wells (2015) found that only a handful of newer, online-only organizations offered engagement opportunities that meet the expressive preferences of networked citizens. By and large, organizational websites offered controlled messages that encourage instrumental, strategic action. Significantly, Wells (2015) found evidence that Facebook somewhat expanded messaging strategies, as organizations provided a broader range of engagement opportunities. Although organizational Facebook posts still predominantly appealed to dutiful sensibilities, Facebook posts were much more likely than websites to foster interactivity and encourage citizens to shape organizational messages to fit their individualized civic identities (Wells, 2015).

The present investigation proceeds from the premise Wells (2015) articulated, namely that there is a disconnect between the communication styles of civic organizations and those of networked citizens. In summary, civicness in late-modern democracies has experienced a significant transition over the past 50 years, moving away from the institutional polity and

formally organized collective action. A coalescence of cultural (postmaterialism and individualization) and technological (networked ICTs) trends has given rise to networked individualism as the new mode of social organization. Networked citizens prefer to maintain their civic autonomy by fostering personalized action frames and coordinating action through loosely affiliated social networks. Although political organizations are still an important component of the American polity, they remain largely committed to increasingly outdated models of dutiful citizenship and instrumental collective action. Recent research (like Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Wells, 2015) indicates that political organizations are gradually integrating emergent forms of actualizing citizenship and connective action through digital platforms like Facebook and Twitter. My investigation focuses on one such transition, using a case study to explore how civic organizations are adopting networked, actualizing, connective communication styles. In the following chapter I explain the specifics and methods of my case study revolving around Community Shares of Wisconsin.

## *II. The Big Share for Community Shares of Wisconsin*

Although turnout for the 2016 U.S. presidential election was an unremarkable 59% (McDonald, 2016), American civic organizations experienced a revival of sorts in the months following Donald Trump's victory. The Women's March on January 21, 2017 (the day after Trump's inauguration) and the March for Science on April 22, 2017 (Earth Day) spawned numerous demonstrations globally. Black Lives Matter, America's most prominent social movement since its formation in 2013, expanded its activist network and revised its strategies in light of Trump's election. Black Lives Matter operated primarily as a networked protest movement during its first three years, with local chapters demonstrating against police brutality and racial bias in policing. In 2016, Black Lives Matter was one of over 50 organizations that united to form the Movement for Black Lives, a coalition to promote equality for Black communities. Beginning in 2016, the Movement for Black Lives developed a policy platform and Black Lives Matter chapters began focusing on local elections (Meyerson, 2017; Ross & Lowery, 2017), signaling a shift toward the institutional polity. In 2017, the Movement for Black Lives joined with 37 more organizations to form The Majority, a broad coalition working for social and economic equality across Black, Brown, immigrant, and LGBTQIA+ communities.

Many nonprofit organizations, like those in The Majority, also benefitted from a large boost in volunteers and donations after Trump's victory on November 8, 2016. In the remainder of November 2016, the Anti-Defamation League received 20 times its average call volume from citizens wishing to volunteer and a 50-fold increase in online donations, with nearly 90% from first-time donors (Itkowitz, 2016). Planned Parenthood benefited from a social media meme that encouraged donations in the name of Vice President-elect Mike Pence, who worked against the organization when he was governor of Indiana. Of the 260,000 donations to Planned Parenthood in the three weeks after the election, 72,000 were

made in Pence's name (Itkowitz, 2016). The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) received $7.2 million in donations in the five days following Trump's election, compared to $27,806 in the five days after the 2012 presidential election (Itkowitz, 2016). By the end of November 2016, ACLU received more than $15 million from 241,480 donors (Itkowitz, 2016).

The intricacies of American voter turnout are beyond the scope of my current research. I do not know if all these nonprofit volunteers and donors voted in the presidential election. Regardless, the surge in volunteers and donations illustrates a key point from the previous chapter: Civic organizations bridge the everyday lives of citizens to the institutional mechanisms of the American polity. At the basest level, citizens engage with the American polity through democratic elections. Citizens elect representatives to create policies that embody their interests. But in the months between elections, when citizens do not have direct influence over their representatives, civic organizations channel citizen interests into the policy-making process. The evolution of Black Lives Matter reflects this premise. Citizen-based social movements often transition into formal organizations as they gain legitimacy and the ability to impact policy.

Much of resource mobilization theory (RMT) within social movement studies revolves around the interplay as movements coalesce into organizations and then compete for resources. The Weber-Michels model of social movement transformation—building from Weber's *routinization of charisma* and Michels' *iron law of oligarchy*—posits that as movements formalize, they increasingly prioritize organizational maintenance at the cost of movement goals (Zald & Ash, 1966). Early RMT scholars were particularly concerned with the problem of organizational maintenance and offered several hypotheses about stability based on the organizational resource environment. For example, organizations that can secure external funding are more likely to follow the Weber-Michels model; organizations with similar goals are more likely to come into conflict over resources than those with

dissimilar goals; and the more constituencies overlap, the more organizations are constrained toward cooperation (Zald & Ash, 1966; McCarthy & Zald, 1973; Zald & McCarthy, 1980). Contemporary civic organizations still struggle with these problems of organizational maintenance. The surge of support for Planned Parenthood after Trump's election, for example, highlights how vital government funding is for many nonprofit organizations. Planned Parenthood and donors feared that the Trump administration would cut funding for the organization, thereby necessitating higher direct contributions from citizens. Bennett & Segerberg (2013) identified a similar *professionalization dilemma* within civic organizations they studied. As economic justice and environmental organizations in the UK and Germany gained institutional opportunities, they often opted for institutional influence at the expense of engagement with the public.

Organizational maintenance is in many ways an ecological problem. Civic organizations operate in relation to citizens, other organizations, and political institutions. These relationships manifest in various forms, like cooperation, competition, influence, and power. It is important to remember that civic organizations do not operate in isolation, but in specific civic contexts. Following Dewey and the Chicago School, Friedland (2001, 2012) emphasized that the local community remains the nexus of American civic life, despite the evolutions of networked society. As such, the local community is the best context for studying American civic ecology—the network of relationships that connects citizens, organizations, and the polity. In the remainder of this chapter, I first summarize research on community civic ecologies, identifying a gap in the study of how civic organizations have adopted networked information and communication technologies (ICTs). Then I introduce Community Shares of Wisconsin, a network of community-based nonprofit organizations, as a case for investigating this research gap.

## Building a Civic Ecology

Hawley (1950) developed *human ecology* as an extension of the biological study of natural ecosystems. Just as Odum (1964, 1977; also Odum & Odum, 1953) promoted *ecology* as a way to expand the study of biological systems beyond individual organisms, Hawley (1950) promoted human ecology as a concept that captures the interactive nature of human life. Human life evolves as the product of both geographic space and social interactions, emerging from an adaptive process created by the interplay of environment, population, and organization (Hawley, 1950). The application of human ecology has produced a large body of scholarly research emphasizing the study of relationships as the central premise of an ecological perspective. Urban ecologies (see Molotch, 1976; Logan & Molotch, 2007; Neal, 2012), organizational ecologies (see Laumann, Galaskiewicz, & Marsden, 1978; Galaskiewicz, 1985; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004), and community ecologies (see Galaskiewicz, 1976; Laumann & Pappi, 1976; Rappaport, 1987; Christens 2012; Neal & Christens, 2014) all illustrate that to understand social life, we must investigate the relationships among individuals, organizations, and communities. Organizations cannot be conceptualized simply as aggregates of individuals, and communities cannot be conceptualized as aggregates of individuals and organizations. Rather, a community is a specific network of individuals and organizations. As such, we should understand a community ecology as a kind of meta-network. A community ecology is a particular set of individual networks and organizational networks that encompasses the interrelations among these networks.

Friedland (2001) conceptualized the *communicatively integrated community* to establish that community ecologies gain their civicness through their communication systems. That is, community ecologies become *civic* ecologies when the communication ecosystem encourages an orientation toward solidarity and common interests. Building on Dewey and Habermas, Friedland (2001) emphasized that citizens and organizations

coordinate their interests through the communication media that connect them. A communicatively integrated community achieves a civicness that, in Dewey's (1927/1954) terms, elevates its citizens above the mutual pursuit of shared interests by promoting truly communal action. The crux of a communicatively integrated community is a media ecosystem that promotes the development of solidarity and the realization of common interests. Friedland (2014) observed that throughout the 20th century, newspapers were the primary media that integrated communities. Especially at the local level, where the vast majority of civic engagement occurs, newspapers identified community problems, researched the causes of these problems, and conveyed actionable information that citizens could use to solve community problems. Local newspapers provided coverage of community issues as a public service, subsidized by the profit-generating components of their business, like the classified section. As profit margins shrank due to the emergence of online news, online classified sections, etc., community coverage was often one of the first casualties of cost-cutting. As such, community ecologies lost the media system most pivotal to generating a civic orientation (Friedland, 2014).

In response to the loss of this vital community resource, Friedland (2014) promoted the development of local civic news sites as a means of restoring the integrative communication void left by the decline of local newspapers. Certainly, the development of local news sites has great civic value, as Freidland (2014) demonstrated using the case of Seattle's civic media ecosystem. For the research at hand, I posit civic organizations as an increasingly vital source of integrative communication, often filling the role previously occupied by newspapers. Seattle represents an outlier, because its digital information ecosystem is much more robust and benefits from greater resources than the media ecosystems of most U.S. cities. This means Seattle's network of civic news sites would not be sustainable in many other cities. Almost all U.S. cities, however, are served by numerous civic

organizations, including local social clubs, community-based nonprofits, and federated national nonprofits. Lacking robust local news sources after the decline of local newspapers, communities increasingly depend on civic organizations to provide information related to community problems and their solutions.

## Analyzing Civic Ecologies through Community Networks

Although it seems obvious that organizations play an important role in their communities, studies of community power initially treated individuals as the nexus of power. Early in the academic history of the concept, community power was interpreted under two competing paradigms. (1) Sociological investigations (most prominently represented by Hunter, 1953) conceived power as the potential for influence, and they operationalized power using a reputational method of asking community members whom they perceived as influential. (2) Political science investigations (most prominently represented by Dahl, 1961) conceived power as influence in formal decision-making processes, and they operationalized power by studying which actors had the most success in influencing decision-making. Interestingly, these differing approaches yielded divergent conclusions. Reputational approaches tended to conclude that power is centralized in a relatively small set of elites. These elites are widely identified by many community members as influential, but they only identify a small set of community members (other elites) who have influence on them (Neal, 2012). Accordingly, the reputational approach produced an elitist model of community power, characterized by pyramidal power structures. Decisional approaches, however, tended to conclude that community power is more diffuse. Different coalitions have influence in particular issue areas, but a single coalition does not influence decision-making across the board. Accordingly, the decisional approach produced a pluralist model of community power, characterized by factional and coalitional power structures. Due to this discrepancy, Walton (1966) concluded that the type of power structure identified is as much an artifact of the

differing reputational and decisional methods as it is an accurate representation of the actual community power structure.

Representing an evolution in the study of community power, Laumann et al. (1978) sought to move the nexus of community studies away from individuals and toward organizations. They argued that the unit of analysis for community structure and decision-making should not be individuals (as it had been for Hunter, 1953 and Dahl, 1961), but formal organizational/corporate actors. Their work introduced a relational, ecological perspective into community studies and provided an early redefinition of social networks. Whereas a social network had previously been conceptualized as a set of linkages among persons, Laumann et al. (1978) expanded this definition: "A social network [should] be defined more generally as a set of nodes (e.g., persons, organizations) linked by a set of social relationships (e.g., friendship, transfer of funds, overlapping membership) of a specified type" (p. 458). In network terms, this means that a variety of entities (not just individuals) can serve as nodes and a variety of relationships can define the edges.

To avoid confusion, I want to briefly explicate *ecology* and *network*. Both are relational concepts, meaning they focus on the relationships among component parts, not simply the individual attributes of components. Through this similarity, the two concepts are intertwined and often overlap. To start from the most basic definition, a network is formed when a communication relation is established between any two *nodes* (Monge & Contractor, 2003). As Laumann et al. (1978) emphasized, nodes may be individuals, groups, or organizations. The type of communication relation, referred to as an *edge*, can vary widely: information, social support, social capital, material resources, power, and many other forms can be communicated in the relation. As such, the simplest network is a dyad (two nodes). But Monge and Contractor (2003) observed that social systems truly begin with the triad (three nodes).

An ecology is essentially a network of networks. As explained above, a community ecology consists of the citizens, social and civic organizations, businesses, and government agencies that inhabit a specific geography. Although these components can be studied in isolation, a full understanding of communities requires attention to the networks in which these components are embedded. And when these networks are considered, the research is inherently ecological, because a complete network approach embodies an ecological perspective. The ecological framework has the benefit of drawing explicit attention to the fact that networks exist within specific contexts, and these environments have tangible effects on the structures of networks.

The impact of ecological context has been demonstrated across numerous community studies. With an expanded definition of social networks that incorporated organizations, Laumann, Galaskiewicz, and their colleagues (see Galaskiewicz, 1976, 1985; Laumann & Pappi, 1976; Laumann et al., 1978) outlined a variety of characteristics that arise specifically from network-ecological properties. For example, (1) in ecological environments of competition when organizations are understood as competing interest groups, linkages generally form based on similarity. That is, organizations with similar goals and functions will form relationships. (2) In ecological environments defined by more scarce resources, interorganizational linkages become valuable resources for accomplishing system-level goals. As such, linkages are more likely to form between organizations with differing characteristics, such that one organization can help fill the resource gaps of the other. (3) Likewise, in a competitive ecology, organizations will most likely maintain autonomy; while in a cooperative ecology, organizations will be expected to yield some autonomy to the collective, which is viewed as more efficient for accomplishing goals (Laumann et al., 1978). (4) From a network-structural perspective, resource-rich organizations have been found to occupy central network positions. (5) However, while network positions often reflect resource dependency

patterns, environments of uncertainty result in organizations that are more likely to form linkages based on homophily rather than strictly based on resource needs. The implicit trust generated by homophily (I trust someone more when they share common characteristics with me) becomes more important as a buffer against uncertainty than pursuing relationships with the greatest potential material benefit (Galaskiewicz, 1985).

Other common network principles have been found to apply across levels of analysis. Galaskiewicz (2007) identified several network commonalities: centrality is correlated with power; homophily produces cooperative relationships; actors who interact with one another and actors who are structurally equivalent (they occupy the same network positions) are similar; and small-world properties have superior adaptive advantages. On this final principle, Neal (2012) posited that small-world properties are the primary defining characteristics for a wide array of networks. *Small-world networks* (or scale-free networks) are characterized by simultaneous clustering and connectivity. A few nodes have many connections, while many nodes have few connections. Small-world networks benefit from efficiencies in diffusion because central nodes can reach many clusters. They also promote innovation because clusters produce supportive environments for experimentation while central nodes help diffuse into clusters the diverse information necessary for new ideas. Small-world networks are also resilient against random breakdowns, because there are many alternate paths should a single node fail. (However, they are vulnerable to targeted attacks and often completely fall apart when a central node fails.)

Power often spawns from these various network principles. Again, a common finding is that central nodes tend to have more power. But centrality is not the only network mechanism of power. At the community level, for example, Walton (1968) posited that community power is inversely related to the community's interdependence within the national-urban ecology. To the extent that a community becomes dependent on extra-

community institutions (nonlocal firms, government agencies, etc.), that community must relinquish some of its autonomy to those extra-community leaders and norms. Communities thereby lose power (through lower autonomy) when they must depend more on noncommunity actors.

With such high complexity, community ecologies are difficult to study. The required intensive attention to myriad components is likely the reason that more scholars have not adopted an ecological perspective. But the increased accessibility of network data and methods provides expanded opportunities to investigate the many networked relationships that facilitate contemporary civic life. Interestingly, a book that predates digital network data delivers the most through model for networked-ecological community studies: Laumann and Pappi's (1976) *Networks of Collective Action*. In this impressive community survey (meaning an inventory of the community, not a survey method), they traced the structure of community influence in a small German town. Conceptualizing the community as composed of a population subsystem and an elite subsystem, they posited an influence model wherein interests emerge from the population subsystem, then those interests are negotiated in the elite subsystem, and the results of elite interest negotiations are enacted through formal decision-making.

Most relevant here is Laumann and Pappi's (1976) comprehensive portrayal of the community's network dynamics. They, for instance, identified occupation and religion as the most salient factors in social differentiation, and from this distinction they generated population clusters to guide subsequent network analysis. They also applied cultural analysis to characterize the population clusters based on their key value preferences. To investigate the elite subsystem, Laumann and Pappi (1976) interviewed 46 influential community members and they analyzed patterns among elites of business-professional relationships, social/expressive relationships, and community affairs relationships. This analysis produced

identifiable clusters based on sectors (e.g., education, economy, science) for the different relationships. For example, the business-professional network was dominated by city officials and the largest economic interests. The social/expressive network was dominated by longstanding residents and a key occupation-related coalition. And the community affairs network was dominated by a more heterogeneous set of leaders representing many types of influence (Laumann & Pappi, 1976). Finally, they investigated how the value-based clusters in the population interacted differently with the various elites in the community.

Ultimately, Laumann and Pappi (1976) derived a set of general propositions about system differentiation and integration based on their study of the civic ecology in this small German town. They proposed, for example, that (1) the axes of structural differentiation in a community will tend to be the axes of cleavage with regard to collective action. (2) Common axes of structural differentiation include ascribed solidarities and the prestige of differing social positions. (3) Further, value differentiation tends to mirror social structural differentiation, but not perfectly. That is, community clusters will generally form based on ascribed traits (family, heritage, etc.) and social role (occupation, economic status, etc.). Members of a given cluster, in turn, generally share similar values and tend to unite in the same collective causes.

(4) The more self-selective a community subgroup is, the more likely it is to be isolated and peripheral in the community network, and the more likely it is to have distinctive values. That is, groups that form intimate ties through self-selection are less likely to have ties connecting them to other community clusters. (5) Instances of high self-selection produce the maximum potential for community conflict. In such ecologies, self-selection reduces the number of out-group ties and thereby produces social segmentation and a state of structural crystallization without mediating central groups. Community conflict in this context tends to be highly expressive, episodic, and nonnegotiable. Contemporary research (e.g., Prior 2007,

2013; Stroud, 2011) has identified this trend in the combination of personalized media content and political polarization. (6) On the other hand, ecologies with large numbers of centrally located subgroups that lack strong self-selective tendencies will have many mediating links to join peripheral groups. Community conflict in this context tends to be instrumental, continuously adaptive, and oriented to bargaining. (Laumann & Pappi, 1976)

As for the elite subsystem, Laumann and Pappi (1976) proposed that (7) network analysis should distinguish between social/expressive relationships and instrumental relationships. (8) The bases of social relations among elites tend to mirror those bases among the general population. That is, elites tend to share similar cultural bases for social relationships with the rest of the community. (9) Instrumental relations tend to segregate elites into institutionally specialized subsectors (e.g., government elites, economic elites, religious elites). (10) When social and instrumental networks heavily overlap, stable coalitions for collective action emerge. (11) However, when social and instrumental networks do not correspond, coalitions for collective action will be more fluid and ad hoc, varying from issue to issue. (12) When elites' civic affairs are based on their social origins and value preferences, elite coalitions tend to be ideologically rooted and give rise to highly contested and recurrent expressive conflicts that are difficult to resolve. (13) But when elites' civic affairs are based on instrumental relations, elite coalitions tend to be nonideological and broadly consensual, with contending coalitions that are fluid from issue to issue and oriented toward compromise that helps resolve specific disputes. (Laumann & Pappi, 1976)

Finally, regarding the interface between population and elite subsystems, Laumann and Pappi (1976) proposed that (14) expressive issues that activate value cleavages within the community force elites to reflect their constituent citizens more than instrumental issues. (15) Similarly, the stability of the elite susbsystem is determined by the degree to which all significant population subgroups include elite members that represent their interests. When

all population subgroups have an elite to represent their interests, the elite subsystem remains relatively stable. However, if a subgroup does not have elite representation, they will agitate until their interests are represented at the elite level. (16) Finally, elites are constrained to reflect the values of population subgroups to the extent that their decision-making behavior is visible and that citizens have an institutionalized means of voicing their (dis)approval (Laumann & Pappi, 1976). In this way, elected government officials, who are subject to publicly-available voting records and regular approval through election, are more constrained than economic leaders, whose entrepreneurial behavior may be less visible and allow for fewer methods of citizen recourse.

Through their detailed research, Laumann & Pappi (1976) provided a model for comprehensive analysis of community civic ecologies. Unfortunately, only a handful of studies have endeavored to study civic networks in such depth. (See Knoke & Wood, 1981; Diani, 1995.) Most research on civic life adopts an aggregative approach, analyzing citizens, organizations, and institutions based on the presence or absence of certain traits, and in turn treating civil society as an aggregate of those individual characteristics. Certainly, the aggregative approach is less intensive, but as scholars integrate network analysis into their research, it is important to remember that networks are inherently *relational*, not aggregative. Diani (2015) emphasized the value of a relational approach in his study of civic networks in Britain, which provides a bridge between prior studies of community civic life and the research at hand.

In his research, Diani (2015) sought to understand the structure of civil society—not the characteristics (as in an aggregative approach), but the structural patterns of civic networks. Following a similar premise as I explicated in the preceding pages, Diani (2015) rooted his study of civil society in civic organizations. The networks formed through exchanges among civic organizations and political institutions represent the *cement of civil*

*society*, constituted as a distinct system of organizational interdependence (Diani, 2015). Whereas aggregative approaches treat civil society as an organizational population, Diani (2015) asserted that civil society should more properly be understood as an organizational field that captures not just the individual traits of organizations, but also how those organizations interact. Diani (2015) built from a foundation in collective action, explaining, "In the case of civil society, the field comprises all voluntary organizations engaged in the promotion of collective action and the production of collective goods" (p. 12-13). He outlined two key organizational relations, (1) resource allocation and (2) boundary definition. Resource allocation refers to the management of organizational resources (e.g., the choice of certain campaigns, of forms of action, or of certain partners) and the processes of membership and leadership selection. Boundary definition refers to the mechanisms of identity building—the framing and cultural processes that generate shared identity, solidarity, and social bonds.

Diani (2015) combined network and interview methods to analyze the civic organizations of Glasgow and Bristol based on the relationships established by resource allocation and/or boundary definition. Despite relative differences in Glasgow and Bristol, the two cities have remarkably similar civic network structures. Evaluating organizational networks based on resource and social (boundary definition) relations, Diani (2015) identified three *modes of collective action* present in the network structures of both cities. (1) One block consisted of relatively isolated organizations that did not build many interorganizational relations. Diani (2015) referred to this as an *organizational mode* of collective action. Although these organizations (charities, national and international nonprofits) had political influence, they did not engage in the local civic sectors, with resource allocation and boundary definition largely contained within each specific organization.

Glasgow and Bristol also had blocks of denser organizational networks. (2) The second set of advocacy organizations embodied a *coalitional mode* of collective action. Networks of poverty advocacy, housing advocacy, education advocacy, and immigrants' rights advocacy were defined by resource relations, with limited social relations. Coalitional networks tended to be built around temporary, instrumental relationships that organizations formed to accomplish specific tasks. (3) Finally, both cities had a block of organizations connected by both resource and social relations, embodying a *social movement mode* of collective action. This block included environmental networks, anti-war networks, and left-of-Labour networks. These interorganizational relationships tended to be sustained over time, developed over many years and through cooperation on multiple campaigns. (Diani, 2015)

Diani (2015) validated his categorization through surveys of organizational members, which revealed that people within the social movement mode were more likely to identify with social movements, define social/political opponents, and represent marginalized groups. Interestingly, the similar civil society network structures did not reflect equivalent political cultures in the two cities. In Glasgow, leadership positions derived from longstanding civic engagement, and civil leaders were often also political leaders. In Bristol, which had broader and more diverse issue agendas, civil leaders emerged to represent specific interests in immediate instrumental action, and the civil and political leadership were disconnected. These differences highlight the context-specific nature of civic networks and underline the importance of understanding local community culture and history when studying civil society.

Although Diani, as a social movement scholar, clearly has a preference for the social movement mode of collective action, he did not find that any mode has greater political access than another. Isolated organizations in the organizational mode and networked organizations in the coalitional and social movement modes all had equivalent levels of influence within the

institutional polity. He hypothesized that work by organizational networks in the 1960s through 1990s produced political reforms that helped integrate even once-radical causes (like environmentalism and feminism) into institutional politics. Although organizations across network positions had access to the polity, Diani (2015) found that formalization is a vital component of institutional access. That is, highly formalized and bureaucratized organizations are more likely to obtain political influence than informal civic associations. This finding emphasizes, again, the role that organizations play in bridging the interests of citizens with the mechanisms of the polity.

Diani (2015) admitted that his research predated the explosion of digital/networked ICTs. Eager to protect the *social movement* concept, he refuted Castells' (2015) *networked social movements* and Bennett and Segerberg's (2013) *connective action*. Although Diani (2015) acknowledged that networked ICTs have given rise to new forms of civic action, he categorized these forms as a fourth mode of collective action. (4) In this mode, which he termed the *subcultural/communitarian mode* of collective action, interorganizational connections are sparse (possibly because organizations are not formalized), but there is widespread identification with a collectivity that extends beyond any specific organization (Diani, 2015). That is, the communitarian mode is categorized by low resource relations but high social bonds. Diani (2015) did not identify this mode of collective action in his analysis, but that is likely due to (1) his reliance on actors in formalized organizations and (2) the timing of his research, with data collected before the rise of social networking sites and mobile ICTs.

As should be evident in my prior review of the literature, I give more credence to scholars like Castells, Bennett, and Segerberg than Diani did. Moving beyond Diani's concern with parsing the "modes" of collective action to preserve the *social movement* concept, I want to emphasize his concession that networked ICTs have broadened the scope of contemporary collective action. Amidst the development of concepts like *networked social movements*,

*connective action*, and *networked individualism*, Diani (2015), like Earl and Kimport (2011), Bimber et al. (2012), Bennett and Segerberg (2013), and Wells (2015), asserted that organizations maintain a pivotal role in civil society. However, academic study is lacking research that simultaneously investigates the effects of networked ICTs on civic engagement and the developing role of organizations within civic ecologies. The current project seeks to address that gap, by merging the study of organizational adoption of networked ICTs (Earl & Kimport, 2011; Bimber et al., 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Wells, 2015) with the study of community civic networks (Laumann & Pappi, 1976; Diani, 2015). My goal is to maintain the depth of relational community network studies while addressing the largely uninvestigated impact of networked ICTs on civic organizational fields. In the following section, I introduce Community Shares of Wisconsin, a network of community-based nonprofit organizations, as a case for executing this research agenda.

## Community Shares of Wisconsin

Community Shares of Wisconsin (CSW) is a social action fund for nonprofit organizations based in the U.S. state of Wisconsin. Founded in Madison, Wisconsin in 1971, CSW is in fact the nation's oldest social action fund, which is a nonprofit umbrella organization that helps raise money for other nonprofits. The Community Shares model has been applied throughout the U.S. In the mid-2000s, there were 22 Community Shares social actions funds operating in 18 states. Some have closed since then, leaving 17 Community Shares in 13 states as of this writing in 2019. As a social action fund, CSW is simultaneously a nonprofit organization and a network of nonprofits. As a nonprofit, their mission statement reads, "Community Shares of Wisconsin (CSW)—together with its donors and member nonprofits—addresses social, economic, and environmental problems through grassroots activities, advocacy, research, and public education" (Community Shares of Wisconsin, n.d.-a). As a nonprofit network, at the conclusion of my research in 2017, CSW comprised 65

nonprofits based in Wisconsin that advocate for social, economic, and environmental justice. As of this writing in 2019, CSW comprises 70 nonprofits.

CSW's member nonprofits are predominantly headquartered in Madison, the capital of Wisconsin, with some headquartered elsewhere in the state, like Milwaukee, Wisconsin's largest city. Madison is a mid-sized, liberal city in Southeast Wisconsin with a population of roughly 250,000 in 2017 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Milwaukee, also in Southeast Wisconsin, located 75 miles east of Madison and 100 miles north of Chicago, is a port city on Lake Michigan with strong manufacturing and beer brewing industries. Milwaukee's population was roughly 600,000 in 2017 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Like most urban areas in the U.S., Milwaukee leans Democratic.

Wisconsin overall, though, is a swing state. Wisconsin's electoral votes went to the Democratic presidential candidate in 1998 through 2012, but to Republican Donald Trump in 2016. Wisconsin's governor was Republican from 1987 through 2003, then Democratic from 2003 through 2011, and Republican from 2011 through 2018, with Democrat Tony Evers shifting the seat again in 2019. Since 1980, Wisconsin has elected three different U.S. senators to each of its two seats. The first seat has been held by three Democrats consecutively; the second seat has been held by a Republican, then a Democrat, and presently again by a Republican. In these ways, Wisconsin is a microcosm of the U.S. Elections are highly contested, margins of victory are slim, and power frequently shifts between Democrats and Republicans.

Within this political context, CSW's member nonprofits operate at all community levels. Some are focused on specific neighborhoods in Madison. Many are focused on Madison as a whole. Some, including local chapters of national federated nonprofits, serve broader regions of Wisconsin or the entire state. A few operate at the national level, and one at an international level. Although I would characterize CSW and its member nonprofits as

broadly progressive, for the most part they act as nonpartisan agencies working for equity and justice.

Below, I list all 67 CSW member nonprofits included in my research, organized by area of focus, as categorized on CSW's website (Community Shares of Wisconsin, n.d.-b). I also include the tagline that summarizes each nonprofit's mission.

*Sustainability*

1. 1000 Friends of Wisconsin: Promoting land use that fosters healthy communities
2. Center for Resilient Cities: Making cities better for everyone
3. Citizens for Safe Water Around Badger (CSWAB): Building a healthy and sustainable future by empowering and unifying communities whose lands and water have been contaminated by military or industrial pollution
4. Clean Wisconsin: Wisconsin's leading environmental voice—protecting the state's clean water and clean air, and advocating for clean energy
5. Community GroundWorks: Connecting people to nature and local food through hands-on education in community and youth gardening, urban farming, healthy eating, and land restoration
6. FairShare CSA Coalition: Working to strengthen the community-supported agriculture (CSA) movement, support small-scale vegetable farmers, and build local economies
7. Friends of Wisconsin State Parks (FWSP): Enhancing, preserving, restoring, protecting, and promoting the Wisconsin State Park System for future generations
8. Gathering Waters – Wisconsin's Alliance for Land Trusts: Helping land trusts, landowners, and communities protect the places that make Wisconsin special
9. Madison Audubon Society: Using the power of the law to protect our clean water, air, land, and government for this generation and the next

10. Midwest Environmental Advocates (MEA): A public interest law firm making environmental justice a reality
11. Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) – Wisconsin Chapter: Promoting a healthy environment, access to health care, and security through the abolition of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction
12. REAP Food Group: Building a healthy, just, local, and sustainable food system
13. River Alliance of Wisconsin: Empowering people to protect and restore water
14. Rock River Coalition: Preserving and improving local waterways through partnerships, citizen engagement, and community improvement efforts
15. Sierra Club Foundation – John Muir Chapter: Protecting Wisconsin's water, land, and wildlife
16. Sustain Dane: Collaborating for a just economy, a vibrant community, and a healthy environment in Greater Madison
17. Wisconsin Farmers Union Foundation: Championing policies that promote conservation, cooperative development, renewable energy and civic engagement in rural Wisconsin
18. Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters (WLCV) (now named Wisconsin Conservation Voices): Bringing people together to protect the Wisconsin we love
19. Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA): Helping people care for wetlands

*Housing*

20. Bayview Foundation: Providing housing, human service, arts appreciation, and cultural awareness in a multi-cultural setting
21. Common Wealth Development (CWD): Building community through affordable housing, youth programs, small business development, job creation, and the arts

22. Fair Housing Center of Greater Madison (a satellite of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council): Eradicating discrimination in the housing market through education and enforcement
23. Housing Initiatives: Providing permanent housing solutions to homeless people with mental illnesses
24. Madison Area Community Land Trust (MACLT): Creating perpetually affordable homes and protecting green spaces
25. Project Home: Improving the quality and affordability of housing for low- to moderate-income residents in Dane and Green counties
26. Tenant Resource Center (TRC): Offers free counseling, mediation, and other services for tenants and landlords interested in learning about their rental rights and responsibilities

*Civic Engagement*

27. Arts Wisconsin: Growing and strengthening Wisconsin through the arts, culture, creativity, and innovation
28. Citizens Utility Board (CUB): Advocating for reliable and affordable utility service
29. Dane County TimeBank: Creating a network whereby members earn credits by helping others, then spend those credits on help they need themselves
30. League of Women Voters (LWV) of Wisconsin: Helping citizens know the importance of their vote. Making Democracy Work™ in our state and our communities
31. *The Progressive*: A journalistic voice for peace and social justice at home and abroad
32. Wisconsin Democracy Campaign (WDC): Working for clean government and a fair democratic process

33. WORT 89.9 FM Community Radio: Community-oriented, noncommercial, listener-sponsored radio broadcasting to South Central Wisconsin on 89.9 FM and worldwide via the Web

*Women, Children, and Families*

34. ABC for Health: An innovative public interest law firm that facilitates improved access to health care coverage and services for low-income clients, especially those facing health disparities
35. Center for Family Policy and Practice (CFFPP): Addressing barriers affecting low-income, non-custodial parents and their families
36. End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin (EDAW): Giving voice to victims and working to prevent abuse in future generations
37. Freedom, Inc.: Building leadership in low-income communities of color—to challenge the root causes of violence, racism, and poverty
38. Legal Action of Wisconsin: Providing free civil legal services for low-income persons
39. Nuestro Mundo, Inc.: Improving academic success in the Latino community by implementing dual-language immersion, advocating more family involvement, and encouraging community support
40. Dane County Rape Crisis Center (RCC): Empowering victims of sexual assault and working to end sexual violence through crisis intervention, counseling, advocacy, and community outreach
41. UNIDOS Against Domestic Violence: Providing a bridge to a safe environment for Latino victims of domestic violence and sexual assault

42. Wheels for Winners: Teaches young (mostly disadvantaged) children about work ethics, personal responsibility, and biking safety by rewarding them—for their community service—with a bicycle
43. Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health (WAWH): Ensuring that policy happens with Wisconsin women rather than *to* them
44. Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA): Creating the social change necessary to end sexual violence
45. Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) (now named Kids Forward): A trusted voice for effective, proven policies aimed at improving outcomes for Wisconsin's kids
46. Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA): Meeting the professional needs of adults who nurture and teach Wisconsin's young children through a rich continuum of services
47. Wisconsin Literacy: Changing lives by strengthening literacy statewide

*People with Disabilities*

48. Chrysalis: Promoting the mental health of individuals and our community by supporting meaningful work opportunities
49. Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW): Protecting and advocating for the rights of people with disabilities throughout Wisconsin
50. Grassroots Empowerment Project: An organization run for and by people who are consumers of mental health services—to support recovery and wellness
51. Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired: Promoting independence of the blind and visually impaired by providing services, advocating for legislation, and educating the public

52. Wisconsin Family Ties: Enhancing lives by promoting children's mental health through support, education, and advocacy for families
53. Women in Transition: Where recovery is a reality—providing residential, case management, and social services to women with mental illness

*Social Justice*

54. American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Wisconsin: Working to protect and promote the civil liberties and civil rights of all Wisconsin residents
55. Center for Media and Democracy (CMD): National watchdog group that investigates and exposes corruption
56. Fair Wisconsin: Statewide organization dedicated to advancing and protecting the civil rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Wisconsinites
57. GSAFE (formerly named Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools): Creating safer schools for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning students of all identities
58. Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice (ICWJ) of South Central Wisconsin (now named Worker Justice Wisconsin): Individuals—along with religious, labor, and community groups—working for better wages, benefits, and working conditions for low-wage workers
59. NARAL Pro-Choice Wisconsin: Protecting women's reproductive rights, privacy rights, and access to the full range of reproductive healthcare choices
60. New Harvest Foundation: Providing support for South Central Wisconsin's gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community
61. OutReach LGBT Community Center: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community center that promotes equality, and quality of life, for LGBT people

62. Perfect Harmony Men's Chorus: Building a better world through song and sharing our lives as LGBT people
63. Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice (NPJ): Regional network of 172 member groups and hundreds of individuals working for peace and justice
64. Wisconsin Women's Network (WWN): Promoting the advancement of women and girls in Wisconsin
65. Working Capital for Community Needs (WCCN): Provides small businesses and family farmers in Latin America with access to micro-loans

Additionally, there are two former CSW member nonprofits that appear in my data, but left the CSW network by 2017:

66. Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups (CWAG): Providing elder services and promoting intergenerational communities
67. Linda and Gene Farley Center for Peace, Justice, and Sustainability: Promoting ecological sustainability, social justice, and peace

(For organizations that changed their names during the course of my research, I generally employ the name that was active for the bulk of data collection from 2015 to 2017. I use WLCV rather than Wisconsin Conservation Voices, WCCF rather than Kids Forward, and ICWJ rather than Worker Justice Wisconsin. There are some instances where the newer name appears in data collected in 2018 and 2019.)

CSW raises money for its member nonprofits primarily through workplace giving programs, wherein nearly 100 local employers allow employees to make tax-deductible donations through payroll contributions. CSW also coordinates various other fundraising campaigns and events, most notably the Community CHIP program, which allows shoppers at Willy Street Co-op (a popular Madison grocery) to make donations along with their purchases. In 2015, CSW raised almost $750,000 from workplace giving and $240,000 from

Community CHIP. In total, CSW raised nearly $1.5 million in 2015 (Community Shares of Wisconsin, 2016).

In addition to fundraising, CSW offers various services designed to build the organizational capacities of member nonprofits. Through its Center for Change, CSW coordinates with local leaders and entrepreneurs to offer seminars and consultations on topics like marketing, social media, volunteer engagement, cultural competence, and policy advocacy, among many others. Merging its goals of fundraising and capacity-building, in 2015 CSW launched its first online giving day, named "The Big Share." The Big Share was modeled after other nonprofit giving days, which came to prominence especially after the inaugural Giving Tuesday in 2012. Created by New York's 92nd Street Y and the United Nations Foundation, Giving Tuesday occurs on the Tuesday after U.S. Thanksgiving as a way to encourage charitable giving during the holiday season. The first Giving Tuesday raised over $10 million for 2,000 nonprofits, and #GivingTuesday became a national trending topic on Twitter (Gowen, 2012). Within the Midwest, GiveMN has hosted Give to the Max Day each November since 2009. For comparison at the time of the first Big Share, Give to the Max Day in 2015 raised $18 million and in 2016 raised $20.1 million for over 5,700 Minnesota nonprofits (GiveMN, n.d.; Combs, 2016).

With the expansion of digital transactions and online fundraising campaigns (including also entrepreneurial sites like GoFundMe, Kickstarter, and Indiegogo), giving days have become a prominent component of charitable donations in the U.S. CSW held its inaugural Big Share on March 3, 2015 as a culmination of seminars about social media and digital marketing. The Big Share was designed not just as another fundraising campaign, but also as an opportunity to elevate member nonprofits' understanding of digital/social media strategies. After a successful Big Share in 2015, CSW established the Big Share as an annual event on the first Tuesday of each March. My research spans the first Big Share on March 3,

2015, the second on March 1, 2016, and the third on March 7, 2017. The Big Share continued in 2018 and 2019, but I incorporate limited data from those years into this study. Building on a preexisting relationship with CSW, I used the Big Share to investigate my research questions regarding the impact of digital technologies on community civic ecologies. I outline these research questions and the data I gathered to answer them in the following section.

## Methods

In December 2011, University of Wisconsin-Madison Professor of Journalism Lewis Friedland and I hosted the first in a series of CSW social media workshops. We hosted the second in the series in February 2012, the third in March 2012, and the fourth in May 2012. Building sequentially on one another, the workshops served local nonprofits at all levels of social media competency. We designed the earlier workshops as introductions for CSW nonprofits that were new to social media. The later workshops focused on more sophisticated strategies for nonprofits familiar with the basics and looking to expand their social media repertoires.

This workshop series emerged from a preexisting relationship between CSW and Friedland. In addition to the personal and professional relations Friedland had built with various CSW nonprofits and staff members, CSW provided early funding for Friedland's *Madison Commons*, a community news site he founded in association with the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Journalism and Mass Communication. (See Robinson, DeShano, Kim, & Friedland, 2010 for a detailed academic explanation of *Madison Commons*.) CSW and Friedland thought social media would be a good workshop topic, as part of the training services CSW offers to its member nonprofits. At the time, I was the Community Outreach Editor for *Madison Commons*, and in this role one of my primary responsibilities was managing *Madison Commons*' social media presence on Facebook and

Twitter. As such, Friedland asked me to cohost the CSW social media workshops, which would allow me to share my knowledge of digital communication strategies for nonprofits.

For CSW, those social media workshops laid the foundation upon which the Big Share would be built. In the workshops, we emphasized that although investment in social media does not always have tangible benefits, social media are nonetheless valuable for nonprofits, increasingly so as networked ICTs become ingrained in everyday life. In many ways, the Big Share became the event that validated this lesson—the event that provided a tangible return on investment in digital media.

For me, the social media workshops began a lasting relationship with CSW. Primarily through my work with *Madison Commons*, I kept in touch with CSW nonprofits and their staffs. And when CSW began planning the Big Share in Fall 2014, they asked me to help with the training series. At this point, I saw an opportunity to study the progress CSW nonprofits had made since the workshops I hosted in 2012. CSW staff agreed to let me conduct research during the Big Share, and I began collecting data to address the question:

> RQ1. How are community-based nonprofits integrating digital media into their communication strategies?

Broadly, my research is an investigation of the effect of networked ICTs on civic communication ecologies. But all research needs a narrow focus. In this case, understanding that the community-based nonprofits of CSW represent a significant segment of Madison's civic ecology, I used CSW's first online giving day to explore the evolution of their digital communication strategies.

As a fundraiser, the Big Share provided a tangible measure for the *digital democracy* debate represented in, among others, Benkler (2006), Shirky (2008), Hindman (2009), Pariser (2011), and Stroud (2011). Traditional organizational theory holds that organizations with greater resources outperform organizations with lesser resources. Digital optimists (like

Benkler and Shirky) have argued networked ICTs level the proverbial organizational playing field. Networked ICTs provide communicative and organizational efficiencies that allow smaller collectives with limited resources to exceed expectations. To test the organizational impact of networked ICTs, I asked:

RQ2. What kind of organization has the most success during the Big Share?

At the most basic level, the digital democracy debate revolves around how networked ICTs compensate for smaller organizational size. So I asked:

RQ2a. Are large organizations more likely to have success during the Big Share than small organizations?

But organizational size is, of course, not the only factor in fundraising. As prior studies of organizational ecologies have revealed, network position is also a key factor for organizational success. So in addition to size, I inquired into the CSW network:

RQ2b. How does network position impact success during the Big Share?

Organizational size and network position are structural features. Any good community study also elucidates the cultural context that operates alongside structure. As such, I wanted to understand what organizational cultures and tactics contributed to fundraising success. I wanted to know:

RQ3. What are the features of a successful Big Share campaign? What organizational and communicative strategies drive greater success?

As part of my research, I also wanted to investigate evolution over time, which produced the following series of related questions:

RQ4. What did CSW nonprofits learn from the Big Share?

RQ4a. What digital strategies did CSW nonprofits develop after the first Big Share?

RQ4b. How did the CSW network and organizational ecology change following the first Big Share?

To answer these questions, I collected five categories of data over roughly three years.

1. Social media statistics: Each month from November 2014 through March 2017, I recorded raw statistics from all CSW organizational Facebook and Twitter pages. For Facebook, I recorded the number of likes on each nonprofit's page. For Twitter, I recorded the number of tweets and number of followers for each nonprofit, and the number of other accounts that each nonprofit followed. (In Twitter's terms, these appear as tweets, followers, and following.)
2. Network data: Using the NodeXL extension for Microsoft Excel, I captured Twitter networks related to CSW. Each month from November 2014 through March 2017, I captured the network comprising all CSW nonprofits and their followers and followings. NodeXL uses the Twitter API to capture tweet, follower, and following relations as network data. As such, I captured the network created by the nonprofits' tweets, followers, and followings. Additionally, in February and March 2015, February and March 2016, and February and March 2017, I captured the Twitter networks associated with #CSWBigShare, the official hashtag for the Big Share.
3. Fundraising data: For the Big Share in 2015, 2016, and 2017, CSW provided the fundraising totals for each CSW nonprofit. During each Big Share campaign, I also captured examples of the messaging employed by CSW nonprofits on Facebook and Twitter.
4. In-depth interviews: Following the first Big Share (in April and May 2015), I conducted 55 in-depth interviews (in person and by phone) with staff of various CSW nonprofits. Each interview lasted roughly 45 minutes, during which I inquired about goals and perceived success during the Big Share; strategies employed during the Big Share; lessons learned from the Big Share; and implementation of digital strategies

within overall communication plans. Appendix A contains the complete interview guide for this set of interviews.

Following the second Big Share (in April and May 2016), I conducted 10 interviews (by phone and email) with CSW nonprofits. I directed these interviews to nonprofits that had significantly more success in 2016 than in 2015, and I inquired into the sources of these improvements. Appendix B contains the complete interview guide for this set of interviews.

5. Participant observation: In addition to my research on CSW and the Big Share, I also participated in the Big Share. *Madison Commons* joined in the Big Share with CSW nonprofits, and I coordinated the *Madison Commons* fundraising campaigns in 2015, 2016, and 2017. In this way, I was a participant observer throughout these Big Share events. I participated in planning meetings, led and attended training workshops, and executed fundraising campaigns alongside the CSW nonprofits. As Lindlof and Taylor (2011) noted, "The value of participant observation derives from researchers' having *been there and done that*" (p. 136). Although *Madison Commons* is not a proper member of CSW and its fundraising structure differs from most CSW nonprofits, the firsthand experience of participating in the Big Share provided valuable insights into the role of networked ICTs within nonprofit communication strategies. In general, *Madison Commons* is not a subject of my following analysis. But I do use my experience with *Madison Commons* to inform my analysis of CSW nonprofits.

The following chapters apply these five categories of data to answer the four research questions outlined above. In Chapter 3, I employ social media statistics, network data, and fundraising data to investigate what kind of organization had the most success during the Big Share (RQ2). In Chapter 4, I use network data, in-depth interviews, and participant observation to explore the strategies that contributed to success during the Big Share (RQ3).

Chapter 5 draws on all forms of data to highlight significant changes and innovations over the first three years of the Big Share (RQ4). Finally, my concluding thoughts in Chapter 6 synthesize my analyses to address the use of digital media by community-based nonprofits and the impact of networked ICTs on civic communication ecologies (RQ1).

## *III. Small Fish in a Big Share*

Community Shares of Wisconsin (CSW) held its inaugural Big Share on March 3, 2015. During the 24-hour giving day, 1,749 unique donors made 2,340 donations, amounting to $211,890 raised for 69 Wisconsin-based nonprofit organizations. As explained in Chapter 2, these nonprofits vary substantially in scope, size, and resources. These results represented a significant success, as the Big Share easily surpassed CSW's goal of $180,000.

But was this success shared equally by all CSW groups? Conventional organizational theory would predict that it was not. In a given organizational field, the organizations with the most resources tend to dominate, often following power law dynamics. To test this conventional wisdom, I asked:

RQ2. What kind of organization has the most success during the Big Share?

RQ2a. Are large organizations more likely to have success during the Big Share than small organizations?

RQ2b. How does network position impact success during the Big Share?

Investigating these questions first requires operationalizing organizational size. The benefit of larger organizational size is greater resources, generally capital and human resources. Since the most fundamental resource is money, I begin by organizing the CSW nonprofits by their annual expenses. (I chose expenses rather than revenue because expenses, especially for nonprofit organizations, provide a better metric than revenue of the human, material, and communication resources at an organization's disposal.) Table 3.1 contains all organizational participants in the Big Share (the 67 CSW nonprofits, CSW itself, and *Madison Commons*), sorted by their expenses as reported on the 990 form for nonprofit organizations that is filed with the Internal Revenue Service. Nonprofit 990 forms are public record. I obtained them through GuideStar by Candid, an online database for nonprofit organizations. In most cases, the data in Table 3.1 corresponds to the fiscal year that included the first Big Share in 2015,

which for some organizations was fiscal year 2014 and for others was fiscal year 2015. In instances when the 990 for that fiscal year was not available, I included the reported expenses from the most recent 990 available.

With regard to fundraising, greater fiscal resources offer the advantages of (1) greater available budget for dedicated marketing and communications staff, (2) the ability to allocate funds for consultants, and (3) higher potential advertising spending. For a nonprofit organization, a larger overall budget also likely indicates past success in fundraising campaigns. As such, expenses are a simple way to operationalize internal resource availability. Successful outreach campaigns, of course, require more than organizational resources alone. Any successful outreach leverages both readily available organizational resources and the latent resources available through campaign audiences.

In layperson's terms, audience resources manifest as word of mouth. But ICTs have increasingly expanded the audience's contribution to outreach campaigns beyond simple word of mouth. We see expanded audience participation, for example, in the form of recommendation and review systems (e.g., those found on Amazon, eBay, Google, and Yelp) and sharing systems on social networking sites (e.g., sharing posts on Facebook and retweeting on Twitter). Word of mouth has, of course, always been a network phenomenon; but such online expansions have made digital networking an integral component of most contemporary outreach campaigns. Successful campaigns can no longer be built exclusively on well-designed one-way advertising, like a TV commercial. Success also requires careful thinking and targeting to amplify a campaign through audience participation.

Given the importance of audience as a latent resource, in order to analyze the outreach potential of the CSW organizations, I consider the audiences at their disposal, in addition to tangible financial resources. Table 3.2 again shows all organizational participants in the Big Share, this time sorted by social media audience size. The data in Table 3.2 was collected on

| Organization | 2014/2015 Expenses ($) |
|---|---|
| WECA | 15,968,649 |
| Legal Action of WI | 8,286,655 |
| Disability Rights WI | 4,796,912 |
| Project Home | 4,649,508 |
| River Alliance | 2,910,828 |
| EDAW | 2,816,299 |
| Clean WI | 2,006,383 |
| Fair Housing Council | 1,942,928 |
| Common Wealth Dev | 1,918,531 |
| Housing Initiatives | 1,679,954 |
| WCCF | 1,645,875 |
| CMD | 1,626,803 |
| WCCN | 1,564,796 |
| *The Progressive* | 1,535,240 |
| CSW | 1,496,349 |
| Center for Resilient Cities | 1,427,998 |
| Bayview Foundation | 1,198,846 |
| Council of the Blind | 1,101,592 |
| WCASA | 1,046,597 |
| ABC for Health | 856,075 |
| WORT | 777,641 |
| WI Family Ties | 768,295 |
| ACLU of WI | 747,052 |
| Community GroundWorks | 720,824 |
| Gathering Waters | 712,056 |
| CUB | 701,230 |
| RCC | 672,769 |
| Grassroots Empowerment | 655,887 |
| MEA | 632,206 |
| WI Literacy | 543,134 |
| 1000 Friends of WI | 534,810 |
| REAP | 521,853 |
| Madison Audubon Society | 506,679 |
| CWAG | 468,998 |
| WLCV | 462,125 |
| WWA | 452,184 |

| Organization | 2014/15 Expenses ($) |
|---|---|
| GSAFE | 432,661 |
| Women in Transition | 407,196 |
| Farley Center | 389,338 |
| Chrysalis | 387,161 |
| Tenant Resource Center | 382,710 |
| Freedom, Inc. | 381,154 |
| WI Democracy Campaign | 373,821 |
| Fair WI | 348,523 |
| Dane Co. TimeBank | 339,450 |
| FairShare | 328,575 |
| OutReach | 325,480 |
| WAWH | 323,039 |
| Sustain Dane | 307,662 |
| CFFPP | 268,005 |
| Sierra Club | 235,651 (2009) |
| LWV | 193,787 |
| WI Farmers Union | 193,210 |
| UNIDOS | 173,885 |
| Friends of WI State Parks | 151,513 |
| Arts WI | 114,362 |
| MACLT | 92,260 |
| CSWAB | 78,772 |
| New Harvest Foundation | 74,901 |
| Nuestro Mundo | 64,502 |
| WWN | 61,547 |
| ICWJ | 60,823 |
| Perfect Harmony | 54,128 (2016) |
| WI NPJ | 54,057 (2014) |
| Rock River Coalition | 53,439 |
| PSR WI | 53,171 (2016) |
| NARAL | 20,646 |
| Wheels for Winners | 12,140 (2016) |
| *Madison Commons* | 8,500 |

*Table 3.1.* CSW Nonprofits Sorted by Annual Expenses

| Organization | Facebook Likes | Twitter Followers | Additional Likes/Followers | Total Social Media Audience |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| CMD | 55,600 | 7,407 | 9,797 | 72,804 |
| *The Progressive* | 23,000 | 26,553 | | 49,553 |
| Clean WI | 19,391 | 2,801 | | 22,192 |
| WLCV | 18,745 | 2,252 | | 20,997 |
| ACLU of WI | 4,761 | 4,521 | 4,991 | 14,273 |
| WORT | 6,538 | 2,869 | 590 | 9,997 |
| Fair WI | 5,869 | 3,783 | | 9,652 |
| Arts WI | 5,314 | 4,150 | | 9,464 |
| Gathering Waters | 7,729 | 45 | | 7,774 |
| REAP | 3,113 | 855 | 1,538 | 5,506 |
| WCCF | 1,750 | 1,133 | 2,495 | 5,378 |
| WI Democracy Campaign | 3,239 | 2,127 | | 5,366 |
| WWA | 4,499 | 596 | | 5,095 |
| Sierra Club | 2,830 | 1,279 | | 4,109 |
| EDAW | 2,416 | 1,450 | | 3,866 |
| GSAFE | 3,450 | 360 | | 3,810 |
| NARAL | 2,863 | 875 | | 3,738 |
| WAWH | 2,932 | 458 | | 3,390 |
| River Alliance | 2,007 | 1,381 | | 3,388 |
| FairShare | 2,745 | 311 | | 3,056 |
| MEA | 2,062 | 930 | | 2,992 |
| WWN | 1,247 | 1,605 | | 2,852 |
| WCASA | 1,425 | 1,368 | | 2,793 |
| CSW | 1,425 | 1,356 | | 2,781 |
| Center for Resilient Cities | 1,337 | 1,006 | | 2,343 |
| Madison Audubon Society | 1,926 | 414 | | 2,340 |
| WI Literacy | 378 | 1,857 | | 2,235 |
| WECA | 1,992 | 190 | | 2,182 |
| Sustain Dane | 1,395 | 744 | | 2,139 |
| WI Farmers Union | 1,784 | 345 | | 2,129 |
| Tenant Resource Center | 1,888 | 124 | | 2,012 |
| OutReach | 1,676 | 250 | | 1,926 |
| Disability Rights WI | 1,342 | 531 | | 1,873 |
| LWV | 1,202 | 662 | | 1,864 |
| Community GroundWorks | 1,143 | 470 | | 1,613 |
| Farley Center | 1,567 | | | 1,567 |
| *Madison Commons* | 463 | 914 | | 1,377 |
| Freedom, Inc. | 1,208 | 87 | | 1,295 |
| WI NPJ | 751 | 269 | | 1,020 |
| WI Family Ties | 877 | 22 | | 899 |

| Organization | Facebook Likes | Twitter Followers | Additional Likes/Followers | Total Social Media Audience |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Friends of WI State Parks | 566 | 289 | | 855 |
| 1000 Friends of WI | 651 | 174 | | 825 |
| Dane Co. TimeBank | 773 | 23 | | 796 |
| ABC for Health | 281 | 346 | 164 | 791 |
| UNIDOS | 590 | 196 | | 786 |
| WCCN | 450 | 273 | | 723 |
| Project Home | 466 | 236 | | 702 |
| Council of the Blind | 558 | 126 | | 684 |
| CSWAB | 562 | 105 | | 667 |
| New Harvest Foundation | 584 | | | 584 |
| CUB | 284 | 291 | | 575 |
| Nuestro Mundo | 535 | 34 | | 569 |
| Legal Action of WI | 504 | 53 | | 557 |
| CWAG | 360 | 195 | | 555 |
| Perfect Harmony | 532 | 8 | | 540 |
| ICWJ | 450 | 48 | | 498 |
| RCC | 384 | | | 384 |
| Common Wealth Dev | 371 | | | 371 |
| MACLT | 338 | | | 338 |
| Grassroots Empowerment | 280 | | | 280 |
| Fair Housing Council | 262 | | | 262 |
| Housing Initiatives | 169 | 70 | | 239 |
| CFFPP | 110 | 110 | | 220 |
| Bayview Foundation | 202 | | | 202 |
| Chrysalis | 116 | 77 | | 193 |
| Rock River Coalition | 139 | | | 139 |
| Women in Transition | 122 | | | 122 |
| Wheels for Winners | 102 | | | 102 |
| PSR WI | 71 | | | 71 |

*Table 3.2*. CSW Organizations Sorted by Social Media Audience Size

March 2, 2015, five days before the Big Share. I have included (1) the number of likes received by the organization's Facebook page, (2) the number of followers to the organization's primary Twitter profile, and (3) the number of likes/followers for additional Facebook/Twitter profiles that I know to be run by the organization. (A null value indicates that the organization did not have a Facebook/Twitter account in March 2015.) Finally, the

organizations are sorted by (4) their combined Facebook and Twitter audiences. Sorting the organizations this way provides a snapshot, at the time of the Big Share, of which organizations had the most latent digital network resources available through online audiences.

A social media following naturally provides an audience that is potentially accessible via network mechanisms. But raw following size is not the only metric that contributes to the success of an outreach campaign. In addition to audience size, there are myriad network characteristics that influence the communication flows within a network and, in turn, influence the effectiveness of any given organization or actor within that network. Given the set of CSW organizations, one would reasonably expect that organizations with more central network positions would have greater success during the Big Share. Beyond raw following size, network centrality largely determines the potential reach of an organization. An organization with high centrality is able to more easily disseminate its message to a wide swathe of the network. Its central position gives it access to all sectors of the network through minimal mediating nodes. Conversely, an organization with low centrality, even if it has a large following, cannot reach multiple sectors of the network without numerous mediating nodes. Although organizations in both positions have potential access to all nodes in the network, high-centrality organizations can reach nodes with much greater efficiency, and as such, central organizations often have a reach that far exceeds their direct following.

The final metric, then, that I consider to predict success during the Big Share is network centrality. Table 3.3 shows the CSW organizations sorted by betweenness centrality. This data come from a Twitter snapshot taken March 1, 2015. Using NodeXL and the capture process described in Chapter 2, Table 3.3 is derived from the collective network composed by CSW organizations' Twitter follower and following networks. In addition to betweenness centrality, I have included eigenvector centrality and in-degree for reference. All three

measures indicate network influence in various ways. I chose to sort by betweenness centrality because it is the most useful for this segment of my data. As the data show, eigenvector centrality does not provide a lot of differentiation. In-degree is essentially the same measure provided in Table 3.2; however, because Table 3.2 includes Facebook data and Table 3.3 only contains Twitter data, Table 3.2 provides a more accurate sorting by in-degree. (Furthermore, NodeXL can only import a limited number of follower/following networks via the Twitter API, so the in-degree measures in Table 3.3 are truncated for organizations with the largest followings.) Organizations that did not have a Twitter account in March 2015 are omitted from Table 3.3.

| Organization | Betweenness Centrality | Eigenvector Centrality | In-Degree |
|---|---|---|---|
| *The Progressive* | 0.053989 | 0.001081 | 2,021 |
| WORT | 0.042515 | 0.002770 | 2,007 |
| CMD | 0.039084 | 0.001319 | 2,011 |
| WLCV | 0.033047 | 0.003178 | 2,009 |
| CSW | 0.032497 | 0.001869 | 1,351 |
| Clean WI | 0.031544 | 0.003429 | 2,009 |
| Arts WI | 0.027168 | 0.001698 | 2,009 |
| WWN | 0.027030 | 0.001911 | 1,607 |
| ACLU of WI | 0.026224 | 0.001837 | 2,014 |
| EDAW | 0.025691 | 0.000981 | 1,449 |
| Fair WI | 0.025686 | 0.001854 | 2,011 |
| WI Literacy | 0.024291 | 0.001136 | 1,861 |
| WI Democracy Campaign | 0.023450 | 0.002468 | 2,003 |
| ABC for Health | 0.020623 | 0.001481 | 348 |
| River Alliance | 0.018523 | 0.002016 | 1,378 |
| WCCN | 0.015810 | 0.000246 | 274 |
| Sustain Dane | 0.014269 | 0.001248 | 741 |
| WCASA | 0.013696 | 0.000375 | 1,367 |
| WCCF | 0.012670 | 0.001148 | 1,134 |
| MEA | 0.012211 | 0.001565 | 926 |
| Center for Resilient Cities | 0.011531 | 0.000544 | 1,008 |
| REAP | 0.011324 | 0.000719 | 856 |
| WAWH | 0.010929 | 0.000804 | 452 |
| Community GroundWorks | 0.010448 | 0.000854 | 471 |
| Sierra Club | 0.010236 | 0.002020 | 1,276 |

| Organization | Betweenness Centrality | Eigenvector Centrality | In-Degree |
|---|---|---|---|
| Disability Rights WI | 0.009378 | 0.000660 | 535 |
| Council of the Blind | 0.008974 | 0.000985 | 125 |
| NARAL | 0.008501 | 0.000838 | 875 |
| Madison Audubon Society | 0.008491 | 0.000662 | 412 |
| CUB | 0.008335 | 0.000427 | 292 |
| LWV | 0.007776 | 0.001233 | 661 |
| WORT 2 | 0.006688 | 0.000786 | 592 |
| UNIDOS | 0.006537 | 0.000636 | 197 |
| WWA | 0.005995 | 0.000740 | 590 |
| WECA | 0.004430 | 0.000423 | 191 |
| GSAFE | 0.004076 | 0.000255 | 360 |
| Friends of WI State Parks | 0.003820 | 0.000417 | 287 |
| CFFPP | 0.003623 | 0.000064 | 110 |
| 1000 Friends of WI | 0.003199 | 0.000684 | 175 |
| *Madison Commons* | 0.002931 | 0.000444 | 27 |
| WI Farmers Union | 0.002926 | 0.000218 | 345 |
| WI NPJ | 0.002523 | 0.000458 | 270 |
| Project Home | 0.002278 | 0.000406 | 236 |
| OutReach | 0.002177 | 0.000297 | 249 |
| FairShare | 0.001874 | 0.000332 | 313 |
| Freedom, Inc. | 0.001854 | 0.000135 | 87 |
| CSWAB | 0.001473 | 0.000622 | 104 |
| Nuestro Mundo | 0.001461 | 0.000255 | 36 |
| Chrysalis | 0.001378 | 0.000597 | 74 |
| WI Family Ties | 0.000898 | 0.000060 | 21 |
| Tenant Resource Center | 0.000804 | 0.000269 | 124 |
| Housing Initiatives | 0.000459 | 0.000212 | 70 |
| Dane Co. TimeBank | 0.000269 | 0.000154 | 23 |
| Perfect Harmony | 0.000195 | 0.000025 | 9 |
| CWAG | 0.000014 | 0.000083 | 5 |
| Legal Action of WI | 0.000000 | 0.000025 | 2 |
| Gathering Waters | 0.000000 | 0.000020 | 3 |
| ICWJ | 0.000000 | 0.000007 | 1 |

*Table 3.3*. CSW Organizations Sorted by Betweenness Centrality

As noted, Table 3.3 only includes Twitter data. Facebook network data is not publicly accessible, but I expect Facebook centrality to roughly mirror Twitter centrality, with some minor variation. Nonetheless, Twitter should provide a reasonably accurate portrait of

relative influence within the CSW network. As for the organizations that did not have Twitter accounts in March 2015 and are therefore omitted from the network data, Table 3.2 shows that these organizations did not have high Facebook followings, so they are unlikely to have high centrality even on Facebook.

Figures 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 depict the corresponding tables graphed as bar charts. These figures illustrate that while CSW does not precisely follow a power law, there are similar dynamics in expenses, social media audience, and betweenness centrality. As in a power law, a handful of organizations dominate each category. Significantly, note that organizations with the highest budgets do not necessarily have the strongest outreach and network metrics. Although audience size and betweenness are roughly correlated, expenses reflect a different pattern. Outreach, marketing, and communication budgets do not drive the expenses of nonprofit organizations as much as they do in the for-profit sector. Unlike for-profit businesses, "successful" nonprofits do not necessarily require large outreach campaigns to promote their goods or services. As one might expect, then, high annual budgets among CSW organizations primarily reflect the high costs of operating in a given sector, rather than greater investment in outreach.

Of the $77,100,630 aggregated expenses across all CSW organizations, the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA) accounts for over 20% with its $15,968,649 budget. Adding WECA with Legal Action of Wisconsin, Disability Rights Wisconsin, and Project Home, these top four organizations account for nearly 44% of the aggregated CSW expenses. Yet these organizations do not rank highly in the outreach metrics, falling in the middle of the pack or below in terms of audience size and network position. This represents an early indication that nonprofit outreach does not follow the most intuitive logic. Although one would expect for-profit businesses with the highest budgets to also have the largest outreach footprint, this is not necessarily the case for nonprofits.

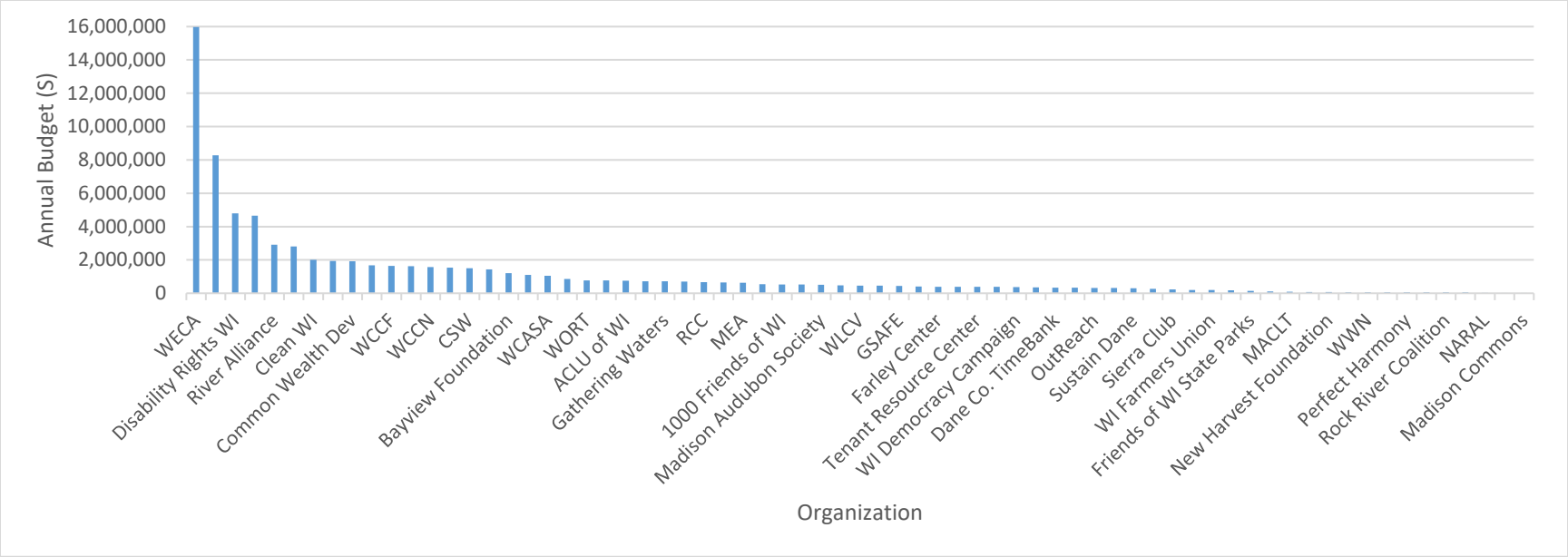


*Figure 3.1.* CSW Organizations' 2015 Annual Expenses

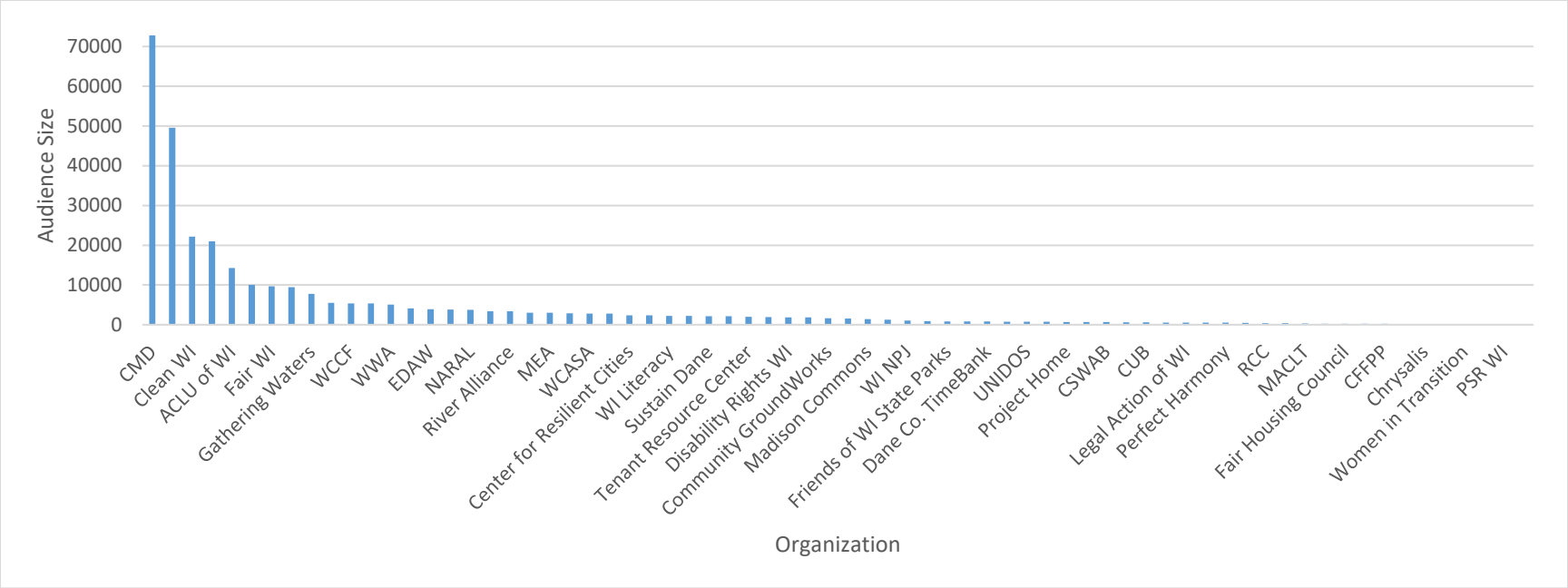


*Figure 3.2*. CSW Organizations' 2015 Social Media Audience Size

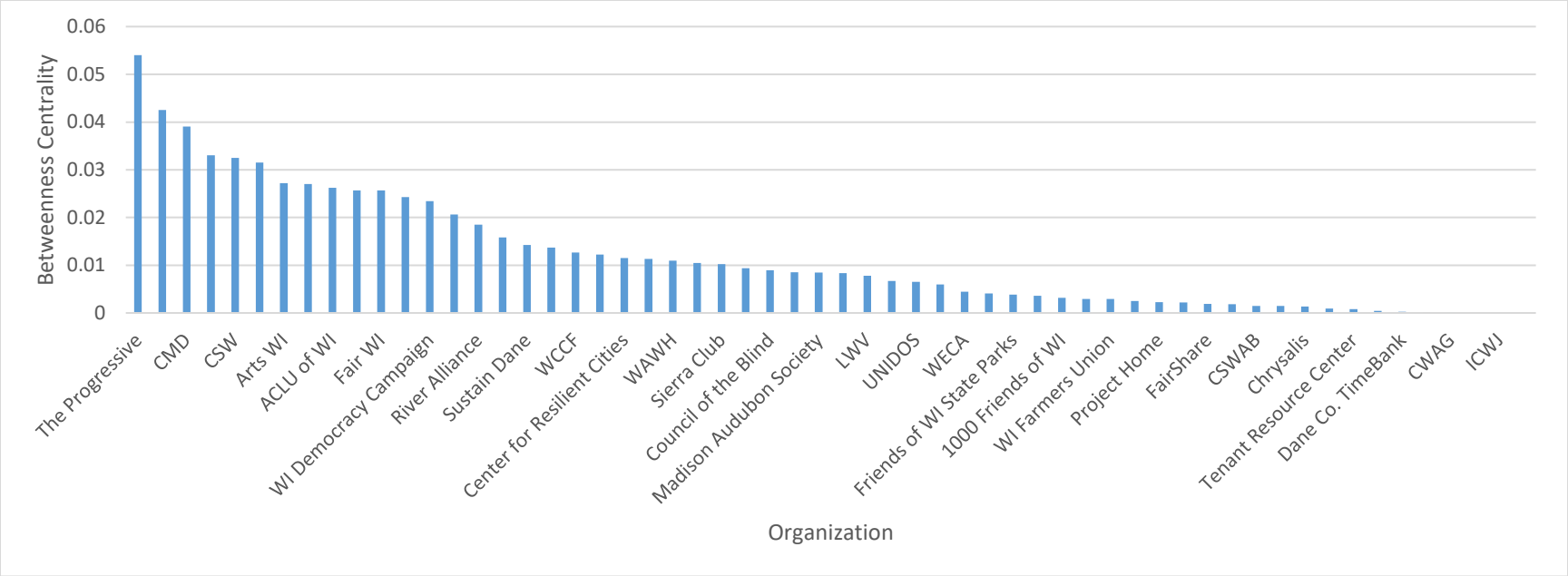


*Figure 3.3*. CSW Organizations' 2015 Twitter Betweenness Centrality

Still, the available budget is not completely detached from a nonprofit's outreach capacity. Of the eight CSW organizations that rank in the top 10 in both audience size and network centrality, three also have budgets in excess of $1.5 million, placing them among the 15 highest budgets. These three that ranking highly in audience size, network centrality, and budget are Clean Wisconsin, the Center for Media and Democracy (CMD), and *The Progressive*. WORT radio and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Wisconsin also have relatively high budgets, around $750,000, coupled with high audience size and network centrality. However, three organizations with top-10 ranks in both audience size and network centrality fall at or below the median CSW budget. (1) The Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters (WLCV) sets the median budget at roughly $450,000. (2) Fair Wisconsin falls a little below WLCV at $350,000. And (3) Arts Wisconsin captures a large audience and high network centrality despite its bottom-quarter budget just over $100,000.

These initial comparisons of CSW organizations reveal a combination of expected and somewhat surprising outcomes. The CSW network exhibits power law dynamics typical of any organizational field, but there are some significant exceptions that indicate network dynamics are not strictly dictated by traditional organizational resources. Specifically, there are a few organizations whose social media audience and network position exceed their relatively meager budgets. These cases provide early indications that digital networks do, indeed, have an equalizing effect. However, the dominance of resource-rich organizations also indicates that the equalizing effect of digital networks is not as substantial as Benkler and other digital optimists have posited.

Building on the data presented thus far, I can outline a set of expectations and predictions of success during the Big Share.

(1) Organizations with large budgets will raise the most money during the Big Share. Their superior financial, and by extension human, resources should allow them to leverage

the most success from their fundraising campaigns. Moreover, a high budget indicates a history of fundraising success.

The organizations with the highest budgets are WECA, Legal Action of Wisconsin, Disability Rights Wisconsin, Project Home, the Wisconsin River Alliance, End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin (EDAW), Clean Wisconsin, the Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council, and Common Wealth Development.

(2) Large social media audiences will boost success during the Big Share. Because the Big Share is an *online* giving day, CSW organizations tailored many of their fundraising appeals for social media. Although organizations also targeted "real-world" networks, CSW training placed particular emphasis on using the Big Share to bolster the digital fundraising capacities of member nonprofits. As such, I expect social media audience to amplify an organization's fundraising success. If two organizations have similar budgets, I expect the organization with the larger audience to raise more money. Organizations with smaller budgets but larger audiences should outperform expectations made based on budget alone.

The organizations with the largest social media audiences are CMD, *The Progressive*, Clean Wisconsin, WLCV, ACLU of Wisconsin, WORT, Fair Wisconsin, Arts Wisconsin, and Gathering Waters.

(3) Operating in a similar manor to audience size, high network centrality will also boost success during the Big Share. Centrality helps extend audience reach, especially on social media with built-in amplification mechanisms, like sharing on Facebook and retweeting on Twitter. Raw audience size provides direct access to potential donors, and centrality provides indirect access to the audiences of connected organizations. Because organizations with high centrality are "closer" to more audiences (they are connected by fewer degrees), these organizations have easier access to the tertiary audiences of other organizations.

In general, the most influential organizations have the highest centrality. I predict, though, that less influential organizations can exceed their influence if they manage to tap into a central organization's audience. I expect this type of influence-boosting to be more prevalent in the CSW network than in the average organizational or social network, because the CSW network is a preexisting collaborative network. I expect influential CSW organizations to be more likely to share content from less influential CSW organizations than one would expect, for example, Fortune 500 companies to share content from startups.

To summarize my network predictions, I predict that (1) influential organizations will leverage their high centrality to achieve greater success during the Big Share, and (2) less influential organizations that manage to get shares/retweets from central organizations will exceed the expected success of their relatively low influence.

The organizations with the highest betweenness centrality are *The Progressive*, WORT, CMD, WLCV, CSW, Clean Wisconsin, Arts Wisconsin, Wisconsin Women's Network (WWN), ACLU of Wisconsin, EDAW, Fair Wisconsin, Wisconsin Literacy, and the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign.

Considering all three factors of financial resources, audience size, and network centrality, I predict Clean Wisconsin, which is top-seven in all three categories, to raise the most money during the Big Share. No other organization appears at the top of all three categories. I expect EDAW, which has a high budget and high centrality, to have the second-highest fundraising total. Organizations that I expect to do well based on high budgets include WECA, Disability Rights Wisconsin, and the Wisconsin River Alliance. I do not expect as much success from organizations with high budgets that operate in high-expense sectors, like Legal Action of Wisconsin and Project Home, because their financial resources are not dedicated to outreach. Organizations that I expect to do well due to both large audiences and

high centrality include CMD, *The Progressive*, WLCV, ACLU of Wisconsin, WORT, Fair Wisconsin, and Arts Wisconsin.

**The Big Success**

Table 3.4 reveals a slew of unexpected results from the inaugural Big Share. Most significantly, very few of my predictions based on financial resources, audience reach, and network position are born out in the Big Share results. Of the 12 organizations I predicted to lead in fundraising totals, only three appear in the top 15 fundraisers; and only one, the Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters (WLCV), appears in the top 10. For easy review, Table 3.5 shows how the top-performing organizations rank on organizational metrics. The table includes color coding to denote relative rankings. Green indicates those organizations ranking in the top third, meaning they have the highest budgets, largest audiences, and/or highest centrality. Yellow indicates organizations ranking in the middle third, and red indicates those in the bottom third. This simple data visualization highlights the discrepancy between my predictions and the Big Share results. If my predictions were correct, the leading fundraisers would also rank highly in the organizational metrics and Table 3.5 would be filled with green cells. While there are numerous organizations with top-ranking metrics among the highest fundraisers, the highest fundraisers largely consist of organizations with mediocre metrics. Additionally, Table 3.5 reveals that audience size and centrality are more strongly correlated with successful Big Share campaigns than financial resources. The highest fundraisers rank in the top or middle third in both audience size and network centrality, with the sole exception of the Farley Center (which does not have a Twitter account). This suggests that having at least average audience and network resources contributed to Big Share success. By contrast, four of the top 15 fundraisers have a bottom-third annual budget. Although this by no means proves that financial resources did not contribute to Big Share success, it is

| Organization | Total Raised ($) |
|---|---|
| MEA | 20,313.06 |
| WLCV | 14,620.20 |
| CSW | 14,480.57 |
| Farley Center | 12,055.02 |
| WCCF | 11,984.00 |
| LWV | 10,886.88 |
| Outreach | 7,675.00 |
| WI Farmers Union | 7,055.00 |
| WWA | 6,690.00 |
| 1000 Friends of WI | 6,065.00 |
| Sustain Dane | 6,028.17 |
| GSAFE | 5,650.00 |
| WI Literacy | 5,307.42 |
| Clean WI | 5,023.00 |
| EDAW | 4,880.12 |
| Madison Audubon Society | 4,279.66 |
| Nuestro Mundo | 4,271.30 |
| Council of the Blind | 3,849.00 |
| Common Wealth Dev | 3,805.00 |
| Sierra Club | 3,779.06 |
| Women in Transition | 3,230.00 |
| FairShare | 2,941.72 |
| New Harvest Foundation | 2,704.02 |
| Freedom, Inc. | 2,675.00 |
| REAP | 2,484.00 |
| Arts WI | 2,395.44 |
| Wheels for Winners | 2,318.00 |
| *Madison Commons* | 2,215.00 |
| Fair WI | 2,146.79 |
| WAWH | 2,062.02 |
| WWN | 1,917.94 |
| River Alliance | 1,895.00 |
| WCASA | 1,886.10 |
| Dane Co. TimeBank | 1,618.00 |
| Community GroundWorks | 1,570.00 |

| Organization | Total Raised ($) |
|---|---|
| ACLU of WI | 1,406.80 |
| WI Democracy Campaign | 1,020.00 |
| Project Home | 985.00 |
| Center for Resilient Cities | 980.00 |
| Housing Initiatives | 980.00 |
| MACLT | 972.00 |
| Rock River Coalition | 940.00 |
| RCC | 913.00 |
| ICWJ | 870.00 |
| CUB | 841.00 |
| UNIDOS | 835.00 |
| WECA | 810.00 |
| CFFPP | 780.14 |
| NARAL | 751.99 |
| WCCN | 597.00 |
| Perfect Harmony | 565.00 |
| Disability Rights WI | 553.00 |
| CSWAB | 495.00 |
| ABC for Health | 465.00 |
| Gathering Waters | 421.06 |
| Legal Action of WI | 420.00 |
| WI Family Ties | 400.00 |
| Tenant Resource Center | 350.00 |
| Friends of WI State Parks | 310.00 |
| PSR WI | 310.00 |
| Fair Housing Council | 273.00 |
| CMD | 236.88 |
| WORT | 145.88 |
| Chrysalis | 135.00 |
| *The Progressive* | 120.00 |
| Bayview Foundation | 86.88 |
| CWAG | 80.00 |
| Grassroots Empowerment | 50.00 |
| WI NPJ | 35.00 |
| Aggregate Total | 211,890.12 |

*Table 3.4.* Total Raised during the Big Share 2015

| Organization | Fundraising Rank | Budget Rank | Audience Rank | Centrality Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| MEA | 1 | 29 | 21 | 20 |
| WLCV | 2 | 35 | 4 | 4 |
| CSW | 3 | 15 | 24 | 5 |
| Farley Center | 4 | 39 | 36 | N/A |
| WCCF | 5 | 11 | 19 | 19 |
| LWV | 6 | 52 | 34 | 31 |
| Outreach | 7 | 47 | 32 | 44 |
| WI Farmers Union | 8 | 53 | 30 | 41 |
| WWA | 9 | 36 | 12 | 34 |
| 1000 Friends of WI | 10 | 31 | 42 | 39 |
| Sustain Dane | 11 | 49 | 29 | 17 |
| GSAFE | 12 | 37 | 15 | 36 |
| WI Literacy | 13 | 30 | 27 | 12 |
| Clean WI | 14 | 7 | 3 | 6 |
| EDAW | 15 | 6 | 14 | 10 |

*Table 3.5*. Top Fundraisers' Rankings in Organizational Metrics
green: top third, yellow: middle third, red: bottom third

important evidence that the online fundraiser did not adhere to conventional organizational field dynamics wherein those with the greatest financial resources dominate the field.

Moreover, Big Share fundraising totals produce a curve that is much flatter than the traditional power cure, as illustrated in Figure 3.4. The top 20% (14 organizations) accounted for $133,833.32, which is 63% of the cumulative $211,890.12. This is a marked difference from the 80/20 relationship of a power curve, where the top 20% of organizations would account for 80% of the total.

Taken together, the data from the Big Share 2015 show limited but promising support for a moderate equalizing effect of digital media. The Big Share 2015 fundraising totals are by no means equally distributed. But even the most optimistic digital scholars would not expect digital media to remove all power dynamics. In any organizational field, digital or otherwise, some organizations will outperform others. However, the Big Share results indicate that digital platforms can support more egalitarian organizational fields. In this case, fundraising

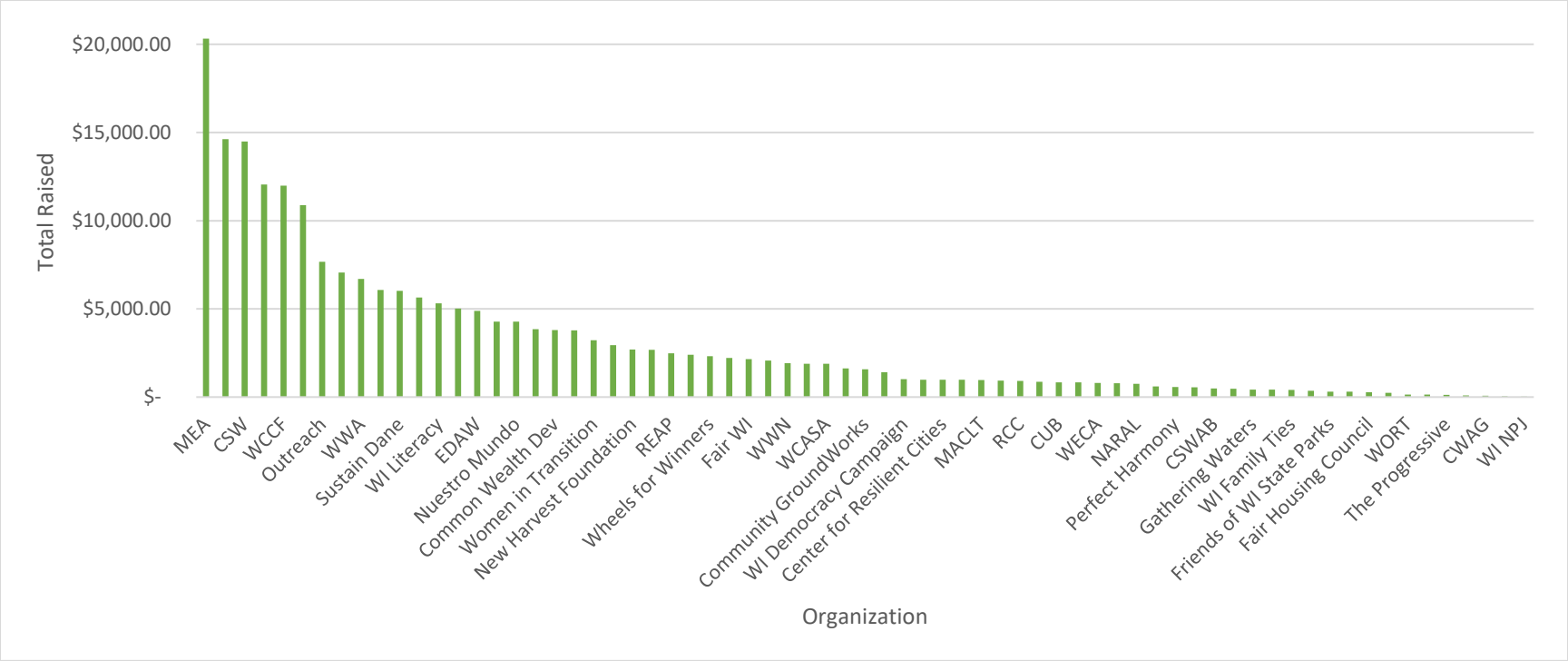


*Figure 3.4.* Big Share 2015 Fundraising Totals

was not dominated by a small set of resource-rich organizations. Digital fundraising success was more equally distributed than conventional organizational theory would predict, and even organizations with limited financial resources obtained substantial success.

With these observations in mind, I return to the research questions driving this chapter:

RQ2. What kind of organization has the most success during the Big Share?

RQ2a. Are large organizations more likely to have success during the Big Share than small organizations?

RQ2b. How does network position impact success during the Big Share?

Using a conventional definition that associates organizational size and capacity with resource availability, resource-rich organizations are not purely more likely to have success during the Big Share. It is especially true that organizations do not require high financial resources in order to have Big Share success. Although there is not a distinct profile among the most successful organizations, these organizations generally have an audience size and network centrality that give them a decent or above-average base for fundraising appeals. With such a wide variety of organizations achieving success during the Big Share, the data presented in this chapter do not fully elucidate the driving factors behind Big Share success. For the time being, I can conclude that digital platforms have an equalizing effect potent enough to allow success even for organizations poor in traditional resources. But it is unclear from the numbers alone precisely how organizations leveraged digital resources to produce this equalizing effect. In the next chapter, I incorporate qualitative analysis to further illuminate the mix of organizational and digital factors that contributed to Big Share success.

## *IV. The Big Strategy*

I concluded Chapter 3 by highlighting the CSW organizations that raised the most money during the inaugural Big Share in March 2015. Starting with the highest fundraiser, the top 15 organizations were Midwest Environmental Advocates (MEA); Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters (WLCV); Community Shares of Wisconsin (CSW) itself; Farley Center for Peace, Justice, and Sustainability; Wisconsin Council for Children and Families (WCCF); League of Women Voters (LWV) of Wisconsin; OutReach LGBT Community Center; Wisconsin Farmers Union; Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA); 1000 Friends of Wisconsin; Sustain Dane; GSAFE (formerly Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools); Wisconsin Literacy; Clean Wisconsin; and End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin (EDAW). Table 3.5 illustrates my conclusion that there is no single organizational or network feature that determined Big Share success. Theses top 15 fundraisers represent a range of organizational size and financial resources as well as network size and centrality.

The ability of smaller organizations to exceed the expectations of their budgets and network positions indicates that social media do, indeed, have an equalizing effect on organizational fields. In this chapter, I investigate how organizations leveraged digital and social media to maximize their fundraising capabilities, asking:

> RQ3. What are the features of a successful Big Share campaign? What organizational and communicative strategies drive greater success?

To this end, I employ interviews with staff members who led Big Share campaigns, sample posts from Facebook and Twitter, network graphs of CSW and Big Share Twitter activity, and my own experience as a participant-observer. Although these methods do not provide a definitive formula for digital fundraising, they do reveal important themes and common motifs that contributed to success. Ultimately, the Big Share provides proof that when guided by a clear vision and focused goals, digital and social media offer tools that require minimal

investment relative to their impact. And it is this efficiency that allows the resource-poor to perform competitively with the resource-rich.

This is not to say that social media are a proverbial magic bullet that equalizes organizational variance. Social media provide equalizing tools, but as with all tools, they require training and appropriate use. In this area, CSW was instrumental in establishing a foundation for success. Prior to the inaugural Big Share, CSW offered a three-part training series to bolster the online fundraising capabilities of member nonprofits. (1) In early November 2014, I hosted the first part, which focused on social media fundamentals for nonprofits. I provided training on Facebook and Twitter use, from basic skills like tagging and hashtags to more developed skills like analytics and networking strategies. (2) In late November 2014, the second part focused on development strategies. It included training on how to secure sponsors and matching donations and how to incorporate these larger donations into the overall campaign for personal donations.

(3) In early December 2014, the third part focused on nonprofit branding strategies and messaging campaigns. This third part was hosted by Tom Kuplic, a digital marketing consultant who had worked closely with CSW prior to the Big Share and continues to host CSW training workshops. Kuplic's workshop had the most value because he provided a communication timeline and message templates. Several nonprofits staffers cited the significance of these concrete tools.

For example, Adrienne Roach of EDAW said, "All the materials were there for us to use, which made it really easy. The timeline was really clear. 'On this day, two weeks out, do this.' That was extremely helpful." And Wenona Wolf from WCCF elaborated:

> The thing that helped me a lot for the Big Share was the timeline, saying by this date you want to have this done. Because we are small-staffed and we do so many things, I was probably doing four other projects at the same time as the Big Share. But since I had that little timeline, I could say, 'Okay, I know at least some time this week, I have to get these emails out, and I have to be thinking about social media.'


*Figure 4.1.* LWV Champion Post Example

Wolf added, "The most effective [training] was just Tom in general," alluding to the messaging recommendations and fundraising philosophy that Kuplic emphasized. Kuplic derived his timeline and templates from audience behavior research and used examples from the Obama 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns coordinated by Blue State Digital. These campaigns gained widespread attention for their use of digital media to invert the traditional fundraising model. They showed that online platforms could be used to raise large sums from many small donations, rather than relying solely on large contributions from a small set of donors. And Kuplic translated Blue State's strategies into recommendations that were tailored to the CSW network of community-based nonprofits. Some of these recommendations are foundational

fundraising standards, like including a clear call to action ("Donate to CSW on March 3.") and tangible goals ("We're $1,000 from our goal."). Kuplic also included more nuanced strategies, like using positive reinforcement in fundraising messages by first thanking those who had already donated, and then leveraging that thank you to encourage others to donate. ("Thanks to those who have donated. For those who haven't, there's still time!")

In addition to these traditional marketing strategies, Kuplic emphasized that CSW nonprofits should use the Big Share to transition to strategies tailored for social media. In terms of format, social media demand engaging photos and videos. In terms of content, Kuplic encouraged the CSW nonprofits to develop authentic narratives about the value of their causes. Because identity is central to the way that people use social media, authenticity is vital to a successful digital fundraising campaign. To merge these social media norms, Kuplic suggested using pictures of "champions" with an endorsement of the nonprofit organization and cause. Figure 4.1 shows an example champion post from LVW of Wisconsin.

As mentioned, many CSW nonprofits found Kuplic's concrete templates and examples very helpful in crafting their campaigns. But more broadly, Kuplic's advice embodied a shift toward more modern fundraising strategies. Stacy Harbaugh from MEA explained that Kuplic's workshop and MEA's experience with the Big Share prompted a complete change in their approach to fundraising:

> Tom's workshop on email was amazing and it really was a game-changer for me, not just with this campaign, but also with the work that I do here. And I should probably reiterate that: game-changer—*game-changer* of a workshop! We've got a fundraising approach here at MEA that's pretty old-school. We've always done the things that work. So it's returning to the same donors, with a piece of paper.
>
> We have been very selective about using electronic means, but especially email to ask people for solicitations. Our boss is really sensitive about asking people for money in general, which is the wrong thing to do if you're a fundraiser. You need to be not sensitive about that. You need to be different. It's about volume. People won't give unless they're asked. And so you have to find more frequent and more creative ways to ask people for money. It's the only way that this works.

> We've just really kept ourselves kind of small when it comes to fundraising. So the very idea that we would send our email list three emails in one day, when usually we send them maybe three emails in a month—oh my god, that was super scary. But it really did work.

Harbaugh's comments reference the tangible tools that Kuplic provided, like templates for three emails on the day of the Big Share, and also broader lessons that were fundamental to the Big Share. CSW refers to the latter component as *capacity building*, which was their central goal for the Big Share. CSW wanted to raise money, obviously. But more important than the money raised on that single day, CSW wanted to teach their member nonprofits how to be successful in the digital landscape.

When gauging factors that contributed to success, CSW's support structure was by far the most substantial. Beyond hosting the aforementioned training series, CSW coordinated the Big Share's central fundraising page; organized numerous real-world and virtual events to promote the Big Share; created branded images for social media posts that were available to all organizations; recruited business sponsorships to fund "power hour" prizes; and staffed interns who worked directly with nonprofits to create campaign content. As Steve Starkey of OutReach summarized, "Part of the reason this campaign was really successful was Community Shares. They put a lot of time and energy and money into doing this. They built a lot of community excitement about it. And everybody in town knew that this was going on." In comparison to a disappointing national fundraiser in which OutReach participated prior to the Big Share, Starkey emphasized the significance of local community to the Big Share. "Having it be locally based and having a big organization like Community Shares using their reputation and their clout to get media attention and organize events and all that—I think that's what made it really successful." Recognizing the knowledge gained from the Big Share, Michele Erikson of Wisconsin Literacy said:

> I just wanted to thank Community Shares. Everybody together just did a really great job. A lot of our nonprofits learned a lot about social media that they just didn't know.

> And then I think it creates the comfort level from experience and it gave members an opportunity to really figure out [strategies].

## The Best Successes

CSW invested a lot of resources into the Big Share, and the reward for this investment was that other participating organizations did not need to invest heavily. The greatest success of the Big Share was that many organizations raised sums that exceeded their expectations, often with minimal individual investment. Although success certainly was not free, the Big Share demonstrates that nonprofits do not need Blue State levels of coordination in order to be effective fundraisers. To the contrary, multiple organizations found great success despite admittedly poor planning and preparation. While there was no singular strategy that determined success, the common themes across the most successful organizations were (1) staff and/or board enthusiasm, (2) building awareness through the messaging structure suggested by CSW, and (3) leveraging new donors through social networks.

Most CSW organizations have extremely small staffs, usually less than 15 fulltime employees. Several organizations do not have a dedicated communications or marketing position. As such, a significant challenge during the Big Share was finding resources for the campaign. Even though Clean Wisconsin has a larger staff, Amanda Wegner explained, "Considering it's just one day, you need to put a lot more energy in that. And we just didn't necessarily have the support here, internally, to bring the energy that it needed." The smaller, successful organizations overcame resource scarcity by recruiting multiple staff champions. Clean Wisconsin ranked 14$^{th}$ in total raised, slightly below their budget, audience, and centrality ranks, which are all top 10. And although Wegner was satisfied with Clean Wisconsin's campaign, she recognized that staff and board support were factors that helped smaller organizations outperform their size:

> I was really happy with what we raised, but at the end of the day, I know some of the staff were frustrated because a lot of organizations that are much *smaller* than us did

> much *better* than us. But at the same time, they spent a lot of time cultivating their offline networks—their board, their staff—and getting them all rallied up. In terms of the money raised, I think that we did great. We definitely could have done better. And I think we definitely know, internally, a lot of that just comes down to staff support and board support.

The standout for staff support was WCCF, who crafted an incredibly popular superhero theme with high staff participation, as shown in Figure 4.2. As Wenona Wolf described:

> We did the superhero theme, and people *loved* it. The theme helped in so many ways. Aside from making it super fun, it allowed us to come up with so many different things to do with the videos and whatnot. And I think a lot of people ended up remembering our theme. I went out in the community after and a lot of people were talking about the superheroes.
>
> The other part of it that I thought was great was we ended up getting staff very engaged and we did a bit of a competition. So I think it was a really good teambuilding exercise for the staff. We made videos that were super corny and cheesy, but I think staff had a fun time doing them. That was a big plus for us.

EDAW similarly generated engagement by making their Big Share campaign fun for staff and board. Roach explained that because EDAW is a statewide organization with a large geographical footprint, board members often cannot attend real-world events. But EDAW got strong buy-in from their board during the Big Share because, as Roach explained, "We really pitched it as a way for our board members to reach out to their communities, because being online, it wasn't like they had to attend an event in Dane County." Likewise, EDAW staff travel frequently throughout the state, so they are rarely all together for events. But the Big Share was an exception, and EDAW explicitly focused on staff engagement. They dedicated their conference room to the Big Share for the entire day, filling it with food and displaying the leaderboard on the TV. Staff hung out to watch donations roll in, post about the Big Share on Facebook, and send reminders to friends and other potential donors. Roach felt this staff participation was a significant factor in EDAW's success. "We really did try to make it a fun

event for them, too, and get them involved," she said. "Ninety-eight percent of our staff participated, by donating and/or getting others to donate. That contributed to our success."


*Figure 4.2*. WCCF (now Kids Forward) Superhero Theme during the Big Share

Wisconsin Literacy also leveraged strong board support to outperform their organizational position. They dedicated their February board meeting to the Big Share. Staff shared tip sheets derived from the CSW trainings, and they emphasized the power hour that

Wisconsin Literacy targeted and won. Winning both power hour prizes accounted for $1,000 of Wisconsin Literacy's $5,307 total, so the time spent during their board meeting literally paid off. "If we didn't spend that time in that board meeting, we wouldn't have done the power hour at all," Erikson said as she told her favorite story from the Big Share:

> We had a board member—I love this story—who was in a meeting during the power hour, and he made the other eight employees in his meeting get out their phones during the power hour [laughs] and contribute online. So we had eight new donors, you know? It was just great!

As Wegner from Clean Wisconsin noted, though, CSW organizations did not all have strong staff and board support for the Big Share, revealing that there were other effective campaign strategies as well. Executing a branded messaging strategy offered another path to success. In this area, CSW's materials significantly reduced the burden of campaign coordination, allowing resource-scarce organizations to compete with the resource-rich. As mentioned, CSW provided timelines and email templates to establish a framework that organizations could adapt. And CSW created branded pictures, banners, and posts that organizations could simply post from their own accounts, with no additional effort. Figure 4.3 shows two tweets that WWA created using CSW's stock content. The first tweet used a strictly stock graphic that CSW provided for all organizations to use. The second tweet used an image created from a CSW template, combining stock CSW content on the right with a customized WWA picture on the left.

Sustain Dane had a five-person staff and no dedicated communications position, but Amy Kesling explained that they combined the tools provided by CSW with board support to drive a successful campaign:

> We didn't know what another kind of campaign would look like, beyond our annual mailing. But Community Shares did the bulk of the organizing, so they basically set us up with a readymade structure. And [the structure] was a good rallying point for our board, especially. So this is pretty little input, comparatively, to what it could have been if Community Shares did not do that for us.


*Figure 4.3*. CSW Stock Content, as Used by WWA

In contrast, OutReach did not have strong board support. "I had a representative from Community Shares talk to our development committee. They were not particularly

impressed, and I didn't get a lot of enthusiasm from my board," recalled Starkey. OutReach participated in a national online giving day about a year before the Big Share, but only raised $300. So when Starkey presented the Big Share to his board, they thought, "Lots of work and not very much money." And Starkey even agreed, "It seemed very daunting. [CSW] wanted to raise $180,000. It was a big goal for the first time. So going into it I was skeptical." Nonetheless, Starkey used CSW's campaign template, and OutReach had surprising results. "We followed all of Community Shares' guidelines. I tried to comply with every project or outreach effort that they identified. And it was wildly successful, *way* beyond what we thought it was going to be."

Organizations employed a range of messaging strategies, some more aggressive than others, but a common factor among the most successful is that they executed Kuplic's advice to brand their Big Share campaigns with an authentic identity. As illustrated above, WCCF used a superhero theme. Wisconsin Literacy focused their campaign around the human services they provide, like ESL classes, then supplemented their original content with the premade content from CSW. The Wisconsin Farmers Union built their campaign around a summer camp that they organize. Sustain Dane used the Big Share to launch new messaging about their approach to sustainability at the nexus of the environment, society, and the economy. They also focused on *sustainability champions*, which Amy described as "people in their neighborhood, school, or business who can drive change because they're already in those systems." Sustain Dane incorporated the personal stories of these champions in line with Kuplic's recommendation to highlight donor stories. Harbaugh from MEA said, "This was a throw everything at the wall and see what sticks sort of approach, and we learned from it." Specifically, MEA learned about a new constituency in La Crosse, Wisconsin. Around the same time as the Big Share, MEA filed a legal challenge against the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources related to environmental impact in the La Crosse area. They used the legal

challenge to encourage donations from La Crosse residents, who donated around $5,000 of MEA's $20,300 total. "We made all these new friends in La Crosse of people who are engaged in that issue, but who hadn't given to us before," Harbaugh said.

These La Crosse donations to MEA tie into the third common theme of Big Share success, reaching new donors through social networks. In some cases, organizations activated existing relationships that were previously untapped. Several of the examples discussed above revolve around soliciting board and staff support in unique ways. Through board and staff, CSW organizations were able to leverage their personal social networks more effectively during the Big Share. While this is not a wholly online phenomenon, activity on Facebook and Twitter certainly made the Big Share more visible, shareable, and in some cases viral. Kesling said that Sustain Dane used the Big Share to target friends who do not fall into their usual audiences. "Where we are lacking is people who don't connect to us through their employer or through their neighborhood. So our friends, and our friends' friends—those Millennial-age people that care about the city." And the Big Share provided an excellent opportunity for the Sustain Dane staff, who are roughly Millennials, to ask their social networks for support.

Caroline Farley from the Farley Center noted that even though they did not raise much money directly through social media, their online campaign still played an important role. Interestingly, the Farley Center did not perform particularly well throughout much of the day. Around 7 p.m. Farley noticed how low the Farley Center was on the leaderboard, so her and her husband called people directly to solicit donations. "What actually closed the sale was we called that night and said, 'We're getting so close. We have a matching donor. Even if you just donate $10.' It worked mostly because we called people we know," she explained. "But the Facebook posts helped create awareness. The constant bombardment every day really gained awareness. And a lot of the donors we called, who are friends and relatives, knew about the Big Share [before we called] from Facebook."

WCCF also found a new donor base via social media. They hoped to recruit donors from ages 25 to 40, and Wolf credited staff and personal networks with their success among this demographic. New donors accounted for 52% of WCCF donations, and these new donors skewed younger than the typical WCCF donor base. “I know a lot of my older donors are on social media, but I don’t think they’re on the levels that the younger generations are,” Wolf said. “[On social media], there were people that could constantly see what we were doing, so I think that was a big help in getting a younger donor base.”

Beyond personal networks, CSW organizations also found new donors among existing constituents. Sustain Dane likely had the highest success in this area. Eighty-five percent of their donors either had not given in the past two years or were completely new donors. They found many of these donors were program participants who support Sustain Dane through their businesses. “But they as individuals hadn't [donated] before,” Kesling said. “So the Big Share was a cool way for them to get involved at the individual level.” The Wisconsin Farmers Union had a similar experience with their summer camp campaign. As taught during the CSW workshops, they combined a unique brand with an explicit ask. “We managed to pull on this group of past campers that actually is passionate if we ask them,” Danielle Endvick said as she reflected on what should have been an obvious strategy. “We just, apparently, hadn’t asked them before.” Again, these examples are not inherently tied to social media. Sustain Dane could have solicited program participants through a workplace giving campaign. The Wisconsin Farmers Union could have reach camp alumni through the mail. But the Big Share encouraged organizations to reevaluate their fundraising campaigns and experiment with new strategies, facilitated by relatively minimal investment into digital media. In many cases, this experimentation allowed organizations to activate latent networks, both real-world and online.

In still other cases, CSW's support allowed organizations to reach completely novel audiences. Half of WWA's donors were "completely brand new," as Katie Beilfuss put it. They were not in WWA's prospects database, so they presumably were drawn by the community publicity that the Big Share generated. And for MEA too, "We got all these new people! Who are all these people that are giving us money all of a sudden? They had to find us some way, and I don't think it was all social media," Harbaugh recognized. "Community Shares was the driving force of general publicity on this day, introducing us to strangers in our community and encouraging them to give, which is miraculous."

### The Case of *Madison Commons*

I experienced firsthand the relative ease of fundraising during the Big Share while I worked for *Madison Commons*. *Madison Commons* is a community news site that operates within the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Journalism and Mass Communication. *Madison Commons* was founded by Professor Lewis A. Friedland, who oversees a team of roughly 10 students who edit and write for the site. CSW was an early sponsor of *Madison Commons*, and even though *Madison Commons* is not a proper member of the CSW network, CSW allowed the site to participate in the Big Share. As social media manager, I coordinated the *Madison Commons* fundraising campaigns in 2015, 2016, and 2017.

In 2015 especially, *Madison Commons* was in a particularly poor position for fundraising. We confirmed participation in the Big Share less than two weeks before the event, so we did not have time to execute the full campaign that CSW suggested. *Madison Commons* had never collected donations, so we had no donor list. Nonetheless, using CSW's training resources, we executed an ad hoc campaign that raised $2,215 with no budget and roughly 20 hours of work. Our campaign had four facets: articles on the site, matching grants, email, and social media. (1) I wrote two articles for *Madison Commons*, one that summarized the event and one that was a hub for links to all CSW organizational fundraising pages. The

articles included information about *Madison Commons'* campaign, but they were both more broadly focused on the Big Share in general. (2) Friedland donated a $500 match and secured another $500 match from his professional network. Following CSW's advice, in our email and social media campaigns, we emphasized the matches as a way for donors to "double your donation." (3) Prior to the Big Share, Friedland sent an email, modeled after CSW's template, to his professional and personal networks. He then sent another on the day of the Big Share. (4) On social media, I posted approximately 20 times each on Facebook and Twitter during the 10 days leading up to the Big Share. I was active on social media the day of the Big Share, posting another 20 times on each platform. I balanced posts targeted to the *Madison Commons* campaign with posts, retweets, and shares promoting CSW organizations. Figure 4.4 contains a sample of my social media posts for *Madison Commons*.

Ultimately, *Madison Commons* ranked 28th in total raised during the Big Share. Table 4.1 shows *Madison Commons* in comparison to CSW organizations that raised similar amounts. This comparison highlights particularly that online fundraising is not strictly determined by organizational resources. *Madison Commons* raised an amount on par with organizations that have, in some cases, higher budgets by hundreds of thousands of dollars. *Madison Commons* also performed as well as organizations with much larger social media audiences and much higher network centrality. These factors certainly influence, and may even restrict, fundraising potential. However, the campaign I coordinated for *Madison Commons*, in addition to many examples outlined above, demonstrates that focused digital messaging and proper leveraging of social networks determine online fundraising success far more than traditional organizational metrics. The Facebook posts in the lower-right of Figure 4.4 illustrate the effectiveness of targeted messaging on social media. I first posted that *Madison Commons* was $132 from meeting our matching grant, and I asked for donations to meet the match. Within 10 minutes, a donor contributed exactly $132 dollars in response to

this post. I then posted an update thanking all donors for helping reach our goal (while still encouraging further donations).


*Figure 4.4. Madison Commons* Facebook and Twitter Posts

| Organization | Total Raised | Annual Expenses | Social Media Audience | Centrality Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| REAP | $2,484 | $521,853 | 5,506 | 22 |
| Arts WI | $2,395 | $114,362 | 9,464 | 7 |
| Wheels for Winners | $2,318 | $12,140 | 102 | N/A |
| Madison Commons | $2,215 | $8,500 | 1,377 | 40 |
| Fair WI | $2,146 | $348,523 | 9,652 | 11 |
| WAWH | $2,062 | $323,039 | 3,390 | 23 |
| WWN | $1,917 | $61,547 | 2,852 | 8 |

*Table 4.1. Madison Commons* Fundraising, Compared to Similar Fundraising Totals
green: top third, yellow: middle third, red: bottom third

Table 4.1 further indicates the equalizing potential of social media by highlighting the discrepancy between budget and network position. These organizations represent ranks 25 through 31 (out of 69) in fundraising total, placing them just outside the top third, or at the

top of the middle third. In contrast, these seven organizations have budgets in the middle and bottom thirds. Their network positions, in the top and middle thirds except Wheels for Winners, indicate that these organization are able to leverage digital networks to exceed the constraints of traditional organizational resources. The impact of social media is obviously amplified during online events like the Big Share, but these examples demonstrate that social media can indeed have a tangible equalizing effect. In the next section, I further discuss the role of social media by exploring changes in the CSW social network during the Big Share.

**#CSWBigShare**

Table 3.3 contains data for the CSW Twitter network, with organizations sorted by their betweenness centrality to provide a sense of their position in the network. Figure 4.5 is a visualization of the CSW organizational Twitter network, derived from the same March 2015 snapshot represented in Table 3.3. I created this visualization using Gephi's ForceAtlas2 algorithm, with clustering based on modularity and eigenvector centrality. Each color captures a modularity class, and node size is derived from in-degree. For consistency, I created all network visualizations in this and the next chapter using the same method.

As discussed above, network position did not necessarily predict success during the Big Share. Figure 4.5 provides some clues about the discrepancy between the two. For example, *The Progressive* (@theprogressive) and the Center for Media and Democracy (CMD) (@prwatch) rank in the top three for betweenness centrality and for in-degree. But both organizations are in the lower third of fundraising total. Their relatively distant positions in the network visualization indicate a lack of overlap with the Twitter followings of other CSW nonprofits. Indeed, these two organizations have much larger national audiences than other CSW organizations. Staff from both *The Progressive* and CMD revealed that they dedicated very limited resources to the Big Share, precisely because they felt the local focus of the Big Share would not resonate as much with constituents outside Wisconsin. Of course,


*Figure 4.5*. CSW Organizational Twitter Network in 2015
Color represents modularity class, and node size represents in-degree.

networks alone do not dictate fundraising strategies. Either organization might have leveraged their substantial audiences more effectively with an appropriately branded messaging campaign. And all else being equal, *The Progressive* and CMD could likely raise more money than organizations with smaller audiences. But this example further emphasizes how the Big Share provided an equalizing framework that allowed unique opportunities for niche nonprofits.

Comparing the overall CSW network to #CSWBigShare further elucidates the difference between general network position and Big Share performance. Figure 4.6 shows the same type of visualization for #CSWBigShare on Twitter in the two weeks prior to and one week after the Big Share. Like all other Twitter data in this study, I collected #CSWBigShare data using NodeXL. The data incorporate mentions and follower networks. (The follower networks are more limited in my hashtag data than my organizational data. In hashtag data, edges only connect users mentioned in tweets and/or mutual followers of hashtag participants. "External" users who do not share two hashtag participants are not included in the hashtag data, unless they were directly mentioned. In contrast, these external users with only a single CSW contact are included in my organizational networks.)

Tables 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 compile organizational and #CSWBigShare network data for comparison. For eigenvector centrality, in-degree, and betweenness centrality, respectively, each table provides (1) the value from #CSWBigShare, sorted highest to lowest; (2) the organization's rank within the overall CSW Twitter network; and (3) the difference in rank between #CSWBigShare and the overall network. The last column highlights in green organizations that were more prominent in #CSWBigShare than the overall network and highlights in red organizations that were relatively less prominent in #CSWBigShare. Reviewing the hashtag data, CSW, ABC for Health, Sustain Dane, Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired, REAP, UNIDOS, Wisconsin Family Ties, Project Home, and

*Madison Commons* stand out for their substantial prominence in #CSWBigShare, especially relative to their positions in the organizational network. However, activity in #CSWBigShare was not correlated with fundraising success. Table 4.5 shows that these organizations represent the full range of fundraising success, with CSW ranked third and Wisconsin Family Ties at rank 57.

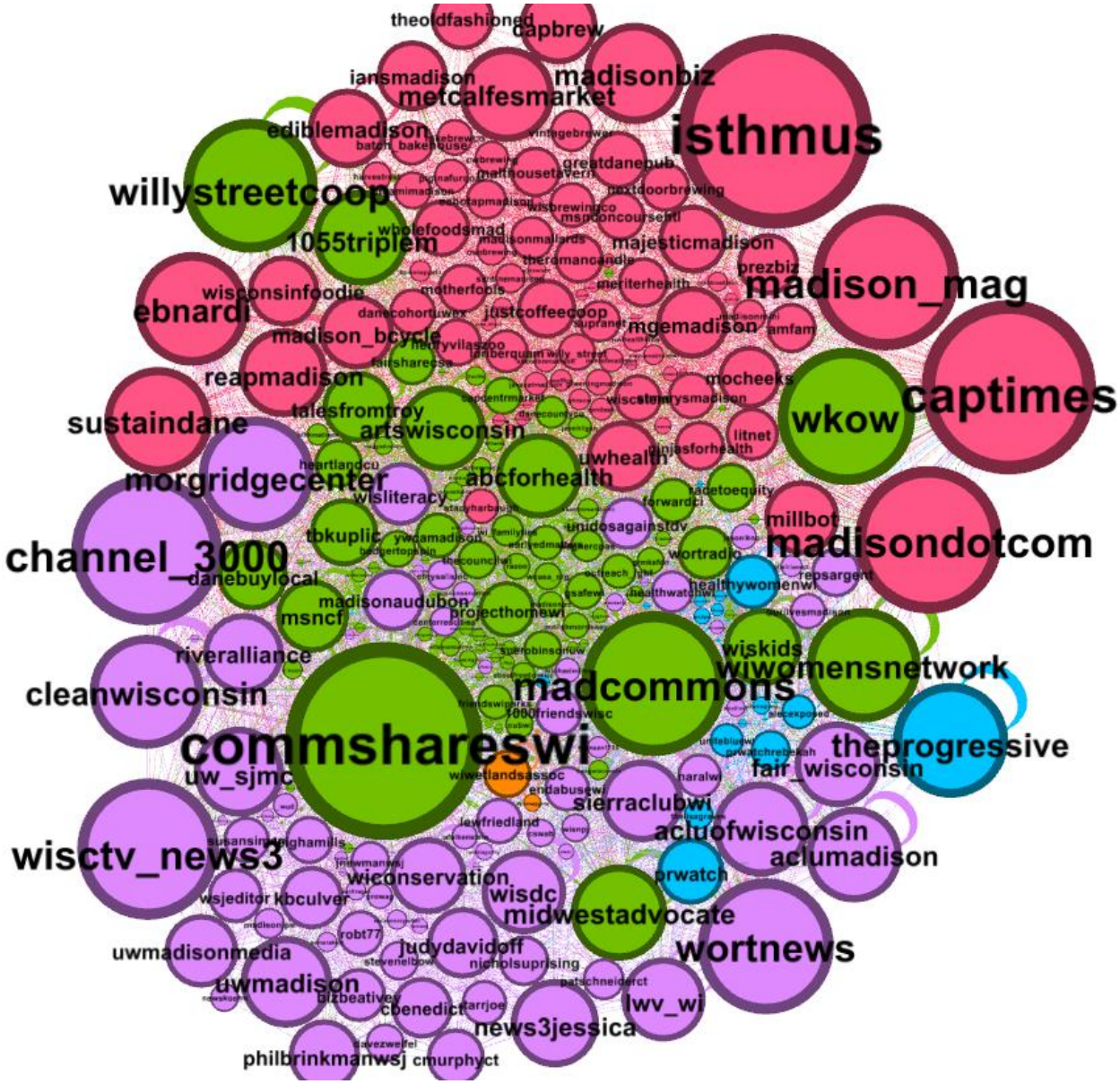


*Figure 4.6.* #CSWBigShare Twitter Network in 2015
Color represents modularity class, and node size represents in-degree.

| Twitter Handle | Organization | #CSWBigShare Eigenvector Centrality | Organizational Eigenvector Centrality Rank | Rank Change in #CSWBigShare |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| commshareswi | CSW | 0.013488 | 8 | 7 |
| madcommons | *Madison Commons* | 0.012011 | 36 | 34 |
| abcforhealth | ABC for Health | 0.011511 | 13 | 10 |
| cleanwisconsin | Clean WI | 0.010215 | 1 | -3 |
| sustaindane | Sustain Dane | 0.010213 | 15 | 10 |
| wortnews | WORT | 0.010130 | 3 | -3 |
| wiwomensnetwork | WWN | 0.008472 | 7 | 0 |
| thecouncilwi | Council of the Blind | 0.008190 | 20 | 12 |
| artswisconsin | Arts WI | 0.008028 | 11 | 2 |
| reapmadison | REAP | 0.007615 | 27 | 17 |
| talesfromtroy | Community GroundWorks | 0.007539 | 22 | 11 |
| wisdc | WI Democracy Campaign | 0.007515 | 4 | -8 |
| midwestadvocate | MEA | 0.007165 | 12 | -1 |
| theprogressive | *The Progressive* | 0.007060 | 19 | 5 |
| riveralliance | River Alliance | 0.006975 | 6 | -9 |
| aclumadison | ACLU of WI 2 | 0.006657 | N/A | N/A |
| wiconservation | WLCV | 0.006528 | 2 | -15 |
| sierraclubwi | Sierra Club | 0.006364 | 5 | -13 |
| acluofwisconsin | ACLU of WI | 0.006192 | 10 | -9 |
| wiskids | WCCF | 0.006107 | 17 | -3 |
| unidosagainstdv | UNIDOS | 0.005959 | 31 | 10 |
| wi_familyties | WI Family Ties | 0.005942 | 54 | 32 |
| wisliteracy | WI Literacy | 0.005855 | 18 | -5 |
| fair_wisconsin | Fair WI | 0.005843 | 9 | -15 |
| madisonaudubon | Madison Audubon Society | 0.005439 | 29 | 4 |
| lwv_wi | LWV | 0.005433 | 16 | -10 |
| healthywomenwi | WAWH | 0.005305 | 24 | -3 |
| wortradio | WORT 2 | 0.005277 | 25 | -3 |
| projecthomewi | Project Home | 0.005266 | 40 | 11 |
| prwatch | CMD | 0.005178 | 14 | -16 |
| chrysalisinc | Chrysalis | 0.004705 | 33 | 2 |
| 1000friendswisc | 1000 Friends of WI | 0.004101 | 28 | -4 |
| earlyedmatters | WECA | 0.003977 | 38 | 5 |
| fairsharecsa | FairShare | 0.003725 | 42 | 8 |
| nuestromundoinc | Nuestro Mundo | 0.003499 | 46 | 11 |
| wiwetlandsassoc | WWA | 0.003490 | 26 | -10 |
| endabusewi | EDAW | 0.003240 | 21 | -16 |
| cswab | CSWAB | 0.003145 | 32 | -6 |
| naralwi | NARAL | 0.003049 | 23 | -16 |

| Twitter Handle | Organization | #CSWBigShare Eigenvector Centrality | Organizational Eigenvector Centrality Rank | Rank Change in #CSWBigShare |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| outreach_lgbt | OutReach | 0.003046 | 43 | 3 |
| gsafewi | GSAFE | 0.002986 | 45 | 4 |
| madisontrc | Tenant Resource Center | 0.002811 | 44 | 2 |
| friendswiparks | Friends of WI State Parks | 0.002451 | 39 | -4 |
| cubwi | CUB | 0.002183 | 37 | -7 |
| centerrescities | Center for Resilient Cities | 0.002059 | 34 | -11 |
| wisnpj | WI NPJ | 0.001835 | 35 | -11 |
| wcasa_org | WCASA | 0.001832 | 41 | -6 |
| aboutfreedominc | Freedom, Inc. | 0.001827 | 51 | 3 |
| danecotimebank | Dane Co. TimeBank | 0.001777 | 50 | 1 |
| cwagwisconsin | CWAG | 0.001688 | 52 | 2 |
| wisdispolicy | Disability Rights WI | 0.001628 | 30 | -21 |
| cffpp | CFFPP | 0.001166 | 53 | 1 |
| housinginit | Housing Initiatives | 0.001109 | 49 | -4 |
| wifarmersunion | WI Farmers Union | 0.001101 | 48 | -6 |
| wccn_tweets | WCCN | 0.000759 | 47 | -8 |
| legalactionwi | Legal Action of WI | 0.000341 | 55 | -1 |

*Table 4.2.* #CSWBigShare Eigenvector Centrality in 2015
green: centrality rank increased and red: centrality rank decreased in #CSWBigShare

| Twitter Handle | Organization | #CSWBigShare In-Degree | Organizational In-Degree Rank | Rank Change in #CSWBigShare |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| commshareswi | CSW | 183 | 15 | 14 |
| madcommons | *Madison Commons* | 111 | 51 | 49 |
| wortnews | WORT | 99 | 8 | 5 |
| theprogressive | *The Progressive* | 93 | 1 | -3 |
| cleanwisconsin | Clean WI | 90 | 5 | 0 |
| wiwomensnetwork | WWN | 84 | 11 | 5 |
| sustaindane | Sustain Dane | 72 | 22 | 15 |
| aclumadison | ACLU of WI 2 | 69 | N/A | N/A |
| reapmadison | REAP | 68 | 21 | 12 |
| wisdc | WI Democracy Campaign | 67 | 9 | -1 |
| acluofwisconsin | ACLU of WI | 66 | 2 | -9 |
| midwestadvocate | MEA | 63 | 19 | 7 |
| sierraclubwi | Sierra Club | 59 | 16 | 3 |
| abcforhealth | ABC for Health | 58 | 31 | 17 |
| artswisconsin | Arts WI | 57 | 7 | -8 |
| riveralliance | River Alliance | 57 | 13 | -3 |

| Twitter Handle | Organization | #CSWBigShare In-Degree | Organizational In-Degree Rank | Rank Change in #CSWBigShare |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| fair_wisconsin | Fair WI | 57 | 3 | -14 |
| wiskids | WCCF | 54 | 17 | -1 |
| wiconservation | WLCV | 52 | 6 | -13 |
| lwv_wi | LWV | 49 | 23 | 3 |
| prwatch | CMD | 47 | 4 | -17 |
| talesfromtroy | Community GroundWorks | 46 | 27 | 5 |
| wisliteracy | WI Literacy | 39 | 10 | -13 |
| wiwetlandsassoc | WWA | 36 | 25 | 1 |
| healthywomenwi | WAWH | 35 | 28 | 3 |
| unidosagainstdv | UNIDOS | 33 | 40 | 14 |
| madisonaudubon | Madison Audubon Society | 31 | 29 | 2 |
| projecthomewi | Project Home | 31 | 39 | 11 |
| wortradio | WORT 2 | 29 | 24 | -5 |
| fairsharecsa | FairShare | 27 | 33 | 3 |
| thecouncilwi | Council of the Blind | 26 | 43 | 12 |
| gsafewi | GSAFE | 26 | 30 | -2 |
| endabusewi | EDAW | 25 | 12 | -21 |
| naralwi | NARAL | 25 | 20 | -14 |
| 1000friendswisc | 1000 Friends of WI | 24 | 42 | 7 |
| earlyedmatters | WECA | 20 | 41 | 5 |
| outreach_lgbt | OutReach | 19 | 38 | 1 |
| wcasa_org | WCASA | 19 | 14 | -24 |
| wi_familyties | WI Family Ties | 18 | 53 | 14 |
| cubwi | CUB | 18 | 34 | -6 |
| friendswiparks | Friends of WI State Parks | 17 | 35 | -6 |
| aboutfreedominc | Freedom, Inc. | 17 | 47 | 5 |
| chrysalisinc | Chrysalis | 15 | 48 | 5 |
| madisontrc | Tenant Resource Center | 14 | 44 | 0 |
| wisnpj | WI NPJ | 14 | 37 | -8 |
| nuestromundoinc | Nuestro Mundo | 13 | 50 | 4 |
| cswab | CSWAB | 13 | 46 | -1 |
| centerrescities | Center for Resilient Cities | 13 | 18 | -30 |
| cffpp | CFFPP | 11 | 45 | -4 |
| cwagwisconsin | CWAG | 10 | 55 | 5 |
| wifarmersunion | WI Farmers Union | 9 | 32 | -19 |
| wisdispolicy | Disability Rights WI | 8 | 26 | -26 |
| danecotimebank | Dane Co. TimeBank | 7 | 52 | -1 |
| housinginit | Housing Initiatives | 7 | 49 | -5 |
| wccn_tweets | WCCN | 3 | 36 | -19 |

| Twitter Handle | Organization | #CSWBigShare In-Degree | Organizational In-Degree Rank | Rank Change in #CSWBigShare |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| legalactionwi | Legal Action of WI | 2 | 57 | 1 |

*Table 4.3.* #CSWBigShare In-Degree in 2015
green: in-degree rank increased and red: in-degree rank decreased in #CSWBigShare

| Twitter Handle | Organization | #CSWBigShare Betweenness Centrality | Organizational Betweenness Centrality Rank | Rank Change in #CSWBigShare |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| commshareswi | CSW | 0.202415 | 5 | 4 |
| madcommons | Madison Commons | 0.095428 | 40 | 38 |
| abcforhealth | ABC for Health | 0.040129 | 14 | 11 |
| wortnews | WORT | 0.027961 | 2 | -2 |
| cleanwisconsin | Clean WI | 0.026115 | 6 | 1 |
| sustaindane | Sustain Dane | 0.023241 | 17 | 11 |
| theprogressive | The Progressive | 0.022453 | 1 | -6 |
| wiwomensnetwork | WWN | 0.018659 | 8 | 0 |
| prwatch | CMD | 0.018406 | 3 | -6 |
| healthywomenwi | WAWH | 0.015906 | 23 | 13 |
| wiskids | WCCF | 0.014068 | 19 | 8 |
| riveralliance | River Alliance | 0.013359 | 15 | 3 |
| midwestadvocate | MEA | 0.012456 | 20 | 7 |
| wisdc | WI Democracy Campaign | 0.010566 | 13 | -1 |
| acluofwisconsin | ACLU of WI | 0.010143 | 9 | -6 |
| reapmadison | REAP | 0.009978 | 22 | 6 |
| aboutfreedominc | Freedom, Inc. | 0.009639 | 46 | 29 |
| thecouncilwi | Council of the Blind | 0.008739 | 27 | 9 |
| wcasa_org | WCASA | 0.008461 | 18 | -1 |
| aclumadison | ACLU of WI 2 | 0.007315 | N/A | N/A |
| wiwetlandsassoc | WWA | 0.006652 | 34 | 13 |
| wiconservation | WLCV | 0.005748 | 4 | -18 |
| artswisconsin | Arts WI | 0.005705 | 7 | -16 |
| talesfromtroy | Community GroundWorks | 0.005670 | 24 | 0 |
| wisliteracy | WI Literacy | 0.004343 | 12 | -13 |
| lwv_wi | LWV | 0.004008 | 31 | 5 |
| sierraclubwi | Sierra Club | 0.003747 | 25 | -2 |
| gsafewi | GSAFE | 0.003614 | 36 | 8 |
| fair_wisconsin | Fair WI | 0.003380 | 11 | -18 |
| wi_familyties | WI Family Ties | 0.003340 | 50 | 20 |
| unidosagainstdv | UNIDOS | 0.003271 | 33 | 2 |
| endabusewi | EDAW | 0.001996 | 10 | -22 |

| Twitter Handle | Organization | #CSWBigShare Betweenness Centrality | Organizational Betweenness Centrality Rank | Rank Change in #CSWBigShare |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| madisonaudubon | Madison Audubon Society | 0.001224 | 29 | -4 |
| wortradio | WORT 2 | 0.001082 | 32 | -2 |
| projecthomewi | Project Home | 0.001061 | 43 | 8 |
| cubwi | CUB | 0.001025 | 30 | -6 |
| earlyedmatters | WECA | 0.000797 | 35 | -2 |
| madisontrc | Tenant Resource Center | 0.000595 | 51 | 13 |
| fairsharecsa | FairShare | 0.000465 | 45 | 6 |
| 1000friendswisc | 1000 Friends of WI | 0.000389 | 39 | -1 |
| nuestromundoinc | Nuestro Mundo | 0.000356 | 48 | 7 |
| naralwi | NARAL | 0.000343 | 28 | -14 |
| cffpp | CFFPP | 0.000307 | 38 | -5 |
| chrysalisinc | Chrysalis | 0.000264 | 49 | 5 |
| outreach_lgbt | OutReach | 0.000236 | 44 | -1 |
| cswab | CSWAB | 0.000175 | 47 | 1 |
| cwagwisconsin | CWAG | 0.000132 | 55 | 8 |
| wisnpj | WI NPJ | 0.000101 | 42 | -6 |
| friendswiparks | Friends of WI State Parks | 0.000085 | 37 | -12 |
| danecotimebank | Dane Co. TimeBank | 0.000027 | 53 | 3 |
| wisdispolicy | Disability Rights WI | 0.000013 | 26 | -25 |
| centerrescities | Center for Resilient Cities | 0.000013 | 21 | -31 |
| housinginit | Housing Initiatives | 0.000008 | 52 | -1 |
| wifarmersunion | WI Farmers Union | 0.000000 | 41 | -13 |
| wccn_tweets | WCCN | 0.000000 | 16 | -39 |
| legalactionwi | Legal Action of WI | 0.000000 | 56 | 0 |

*Table 4.4.* #CSWBigShare Betweenness Centrality in 2015
green: centrality rank increased and red: centrality rank decreased in #CSWBigShare

| Organization | Total Raised | Fundraise Rank | Budget Rank | Audience Rank | Centrality Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CSW | $14,481 | 3 | 15 | 24 | 5 |
| Sustain Dane | $6,028 | 11 | 49 | 29 | 17 |
| Council of Blind | $3,849 | 18 | 18 | 46 | 27 |
| REAP | $2,484 | 25 | 32 | 10 | 22 |
| Project Home | $985 | 38 | 4 | 45 | 43 |
| UNIDOS | $835 | 46 | 54 | 43 | 33 |
| ABC for Health | $465 | 54 | 20 | 42 | 14 |
| WI Family Ties | $400 | 57 | 22 | 40 | 50 |

*Table 4.5.* Organizations with High Prominence in #CSWBigShare
green: top third, yellow: middle third, red: bottom third

It is noteworthy that these organizations (except REAP) rank in the middle third of audience size, but were nonetheless able to have a greater impact in #CSWBigShare. Again, though, hashtag impact did not directly translate into donations. As such, #CSWBigShare illustrates from multiple angles that network performance is not purely indicative of outcome. Demonstrating that digital networks are egalitarian, this hashtag shows that noncentral organizations can break out of their network position with a dedicated strategy. Network position is not a pure constraint on campaign visibility. In contrast, varied success across organizations indicates that digital networks have limited value in isolation. While poor #CSWBigShare performance did not preclude successful outcomes, neither did strong network performance guarantee successful outcomes. Further review of #CSWBigShare reveals that network position is less of a determinant than network strategy. The sample of tweets in Figure 4.7 reiterates the importance of messaging strategy in fundraising success. Project Home, ABC for Health, and Wisconsin Family Ties were very active in #CSWBigShare, but their tweets were not as effectively crafted as those by Sustain Dane, Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired, and REAP. The former organizations relied heavily on direct solicitations and thank you messages, which are certainly an important component of fundraising campaigns. However, more successful organizations balanced those message types with images and testimonials to build a robust and effective campaign.

Overall #CSWBigShare further illustrates that success during the Big Share was by no means guaranteed. And there was no single foolproof strategy that attracted donations. Nonetheless, my investigation of Big Share campaigns reveals common themes that answer the research question of this chapter:

> RQ3. What are the features of a successful Big Share campaign? What organizational and communicative strategies drive greater success?


*Figure 4.7*. Sample Tweets by Organizations with High Prominence in #CSWBigShare

The Big Share provided a forum where CSW nonprofits learned how to execute online fundraising campaigns. They experimented with new strategies and, with CSW's guidance, built successful campaigns around staff and board enthusiasm, branded messaging, and previously untapped social networks. It is important to note that organizations did not need to excel in all areas. The examples above demonstrate that even the most successful campaigns were by no means ideal types. Organizations generally found success through partial combinations of campaign recommendations. Nonetheless, the novel approach to fundraising that CSW imparted allowed many organizations to outperform both their

expectations and the success predicted by organizational and network constraints. The community organizing and publicity that CSW coordinated laid a strong foundation, and Facebook and Twitter amplified the Big Share through social networks. Significantly, though, the Big Share could not have succeeded without the real-world efforts of CSW and member nonprofits. Ultimately, the Big Share is not proof of the power of social media in a vacuum. Rather, the Big Share embodies the symbiotic relationship between real-world and online networks, illustrating the ways in which social media can foster new relationships in a changing media ecology. As Beilfuss from WWA said:

> Everybody says you can't raise money on social media, and so the fact that we could raise some money—some of those people didn't even give all that much, but now we know how to reach them and we can have a different relationship with them than we did before.

In the following chapter, I explore how CSW nonprofits have developed different relationships, as Beilfuss put it, in the years after the inaugural Big Share. I discuss what CSW staff members learned from their first experience with the Big Share, and how that new knowledge has shaped their communication strategies. I also compare the Big Share 2015 with the Big Shares 2016 and 2017 to investigate how trends and themes from 2015 evolved in subsequent years.

## *V. The Big Outcomes*

Chapters 3 and 4 focus exclusively on the inaugural Big Share in 2015. In this chapter, I explore lessons learned from the Big Share 2015 and how Community Shares of Wisconsin (CSW) nonprofits applied those lessons to their general communication strategies and to subsequent Big Shares. Following the pattern established by the first Big Share, the fundraiser as become an annual event on the first Tuesday of each March. Given CSW's goal of capacity building and the novelty of online fundraising for many CSW nonprofits, I continued studying the CSW network after the Big Share 2015 to investigate this cluster of research questions:

RQ4. What did CSW nonprofits learn from the Big Share?

RQ4a. What digital strategies did CSW nonprofits develop after the first Big Share?

RQ4b. How did the CSW network and organizational ecology change following the first Big Share?

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the Big Share 2015 was an incredible applied learning experience. At the very least, nonprofit staffs learned how to execute more efficacious fundraising campaigns. Some nonprofits adopted new communication philosophies. But CSW nonprofits also face challenges of low staffing and limited resources, especially for communications. It was difficult to predict the extent to which these nonprofits would be able to enact their gained knowledge.

Some of the lessons learned reinforced foundational principles from CSW training resources. Jim Stickels from Wisconsin Literacy expected, "I'm going to make better Facebook posts because I learned the types of things that people really are interested in: pictures and videos." And Amy Kesling of Sustain Dane echoed Stickels, "It was helpful to get advice about how to use graphics and videos to maximize engagement through social media." Some nonprofits discovered specifically what types of pictures and videos people enjoy most. Andrea Kaminski from the League of Women Voters (LWV) of Wisconsin found that success

"did seem to be attached to whose picture was there. That's why you use real people." This observation confirms CSW's emphasis on highlighting champions, because they provide social endorsement and allow nonprofits to tap into the champion's personal networks. These lessons may seem obvious to digital natives, but it is important to remember that nonprofits often have difficulty merging their community and policy causes with savvy social media strategies. The Big Share provided an opportunity for CSW organizations to discover firsthand the best ways to present themselves on social media. Wenona Wolf had such an experience with the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF). "We picked up on these little things, like we can tell what people like," she said. "People like pictures of kids." Obvious as this revelation may seem, the Big Share was the first time that WCCF thought to combine pictures of kids with policy work that Wolf admitted can appear boring. Wolf continued, "After seeing what happened with the Big Share, and seeing how people liked the videos and liked the kids, and even some of the goofy staff pictures, I always try to incorporate human beings into our posts."

Stacy Harbaugh from Midwest Environmental Advocates (MEA) summarized several lessons that she learned from the Big Share. Significantly, she prefaced her list by emphasizing that the Big Share was successful for MEA not only due to the money they raised, but also due to the shift in communication philosophy that the Big Share initiated. She began, "It was successful because of all the support that Community Shares gave, but also it forced us to do things differently, to try something new, and now we're starting to incorporate those strategies in the rest of our fundraising plan for the year." She continued, describing some of the specific knowledge gained:

> It changed the way that I did fundraising emails, which is huge. And we didn't have as many unsubscribes as I thought.
>
> Don't lock in your schedule for fundraising for matches. It was a terrible mistake. Don't do it.

> I need more help with tracking and data and analytics, and reporting that.
>
> On Facebook, you have to boost posts. You *have to*. If you have a couple of really good posts that you love, that have really compelling pictures, that are really shareable, you have to boost them. We had no budget for this, because we had no idea what to expect. If people could just put in 25, 50, 75 bucks, you're going to make it back in two seconds, if you just boost these posts. It's worth it especially if you have a halfway decent Facebook following. It's just worth it. We didn't even think about ads. You don't even have to do that. You just have to boost a post, so that it gets in people's feeds. We'll definitely do that next year.
>
> Those are the big things that were either really surprising or have really changed the way that we do things.

Harbaugh's point about a new strategy for email refers to digital marketing consultant Tom Kuplic's training that emphasized frequent email asks, even at the risk of losing subscribers. MEA applied this knowledge during the Big Share 2015. Notice, though, that Harbaugh derived the other lessons from mistakes she made in that first year. She planned her messaging strategy around predicted totals throughout the day, and when those predictions became wrong, she had to revise her strategy for the rest of the day. She realized that she did not use tools that would allow her to track click-throughs and post performance. She realized the value of boosting posts after MEA did not budget for it.

Many other staff echoed Harbaugh's experience. Although the vast majority of CSW nonprofits were satisfied with the Big Share 2015, the experience also raised questions and highlighted areas where they could improve. Kesling explained:

> Some of the things that really worked, I don't know if we would use more widely. For example, if we saw one of our friends or family members donating, on our personal pages we would tag them and say, 'Thanks.' I don't really know how we would apply that to a more general campaign. The Big Share made sense, because it was fundraising, and it was trying to get more and more donors. So we could potentially use that strategy around events. But something about the Big Share just made you feel like you had permission to do that.

This indicates that the Big Share was not always easy to interpret, which reflects the fact that digital communication is still unfamiliar territory for many nonprofits. It requires more than

a single campaign to master digital strategies. I noticed in many of my interviews that nonprofit staffs and boards, even those impressed by the Big Share, still did not grasp the value of social media. Yes, they were willing to dedicate resources to social media in the pursuit of tangible outcomes like donations; but the value of social media as an ongoing project remained inscrutable. When staff expressed skepticism about the benefits of social media relative to the time required, I emphasized that they should not evaluate social media with a strict return-on-investment approach. At their core, social media revolve around identity expression and relationship building. Nonprofit social media cannot somehow exist beyond these principles. Like any corporate Facebook page or Instagram influencer, effective nonprofit social media must first and foremost cultivate an identity. A nonprofit should utilize social media as one tool for constructing an identity that will resonate with constituents. Kuplic emphasized narrative as a foundational component of fundraising campaigns, but the importance extends to truly all outreach communication. Especially as group membership has shifted from ascribed identity to self-selected identity (Simmel 1908/1955; Rheingold, 1993; Rainie and Wellman, 2012), organizational communication must match the identity management of its audience. A nonprofit must first present an identity that captures the audience's attention. Then, the nonprofit can convert attention into a relationship, which is of course maintained through repeated interaction and reinforcement of the identity bond. And finally, on the strength of the shared identity, the nonprofit can *occasionally* leverage the relationship for tangible outcomes.

Amanda Wegner from Clean Wisconsin recognized that CSW nonprofits often emphasize the outcomes of discrete campaigns, but struggle to understand organizational communication as a process. "There needs to be a little bit of expectation management. A lot of the smaller groups, they might be new to online fundraising," Wegner said. She continued:

> It's really important that we keep pushing online fundraising, especially with an avenue like the Big Share. That's really great for raising awareness and getting people to think more about that online. But the reality is you're only going to have a handful of people who are willing to give up five hundred, a thousand dollars online. Otherwise they're going to be small, and that's a great first step to getting those people involved in your organization. So you raise all this money on the Big Share. What do you do after? How can you cultivate them?

Renata Solan from the Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters (WLCV) also articulated these same sentiments of expectation management and relationship cultivation. She began simply, "You need to build trust among your audience. You can't ask for something on social media if you haven't been on social media." And she elaborated:

> From what I heard from groups, there was a lot of disappointment that when they did do something on social media, there weren't better results. But what I have found with Twitter, and trying to build our Twitter following, is you basically have to expect nothing, and slowly build up an audience and a personality.
>
> I think, for some groups, it's helpful to compare it to emails. Nobody expects their email open rate to be around, even, 50%. That would be crazy. And it's the same with social media. Not everybody is going to look at it, so you have to have that in mind, and not feel like that's a failure of the post. It's the system that you're working with.

Again, the Big Share was a valuable learning experience not simply because of the three-month fundraising campaigns, but because the event highlighted opportunities for improvement in year-round communication. As Wolf said, "The Big Share forced me to be in constant communication with a lot of our donors. It ended up helping me cultivate a lot of relationships." There were certainly obstacles and growing pains, especially for nonprofits who were newer to social media, and the Big Share did not deliver any foolproof strategies for success. Rather, the Big Share demonstrated that social media are a valuable nonprofit tool when embraced alongside a flexible and relationship-oriented communication process. Social media will never be the primary impetus for action, because nonprofits do not generally have goals that can be accomplished on social media. Policy change occurs in the real world. Nonetheless, social media foster relationships by constructing identity and building awareness. When maintained properly, nonprofits can leverage their relationships with social

media audiences for tangible real-world outcomes, like fundraising, petitioning, and voting. But these relationships must indeed be maintained through regular activity. Moreover, active experimentation is the only way to determine what strategies are effective with a given audience. As Solan put it, "Through the Community Shares trainings and through ongoing conversations, people will get more comfortable with [experimentation and failure]." At the most fundamental level, the greatest lesson from the Big Share is that in order to be successful on social media, you have to be active on social media.

Given CSW's heavy involvement in training, the Big Share also highlighted a need for educational resources. As CSW nonprofits realized social media opportunities, they wanted more information and more guidance. Harbaugh explained:

> The Big Share has this really great potential, and we've seen that so far, to teach these nonprofits how to use social media as nonprofits. So many of the resources that talk about how to use social media are really geared for a business audience. It's hard for us to find the gurus of how to retrofit this increasingly for-profit tool to nonprofit issues, and how to use it for community organizing. And it's just hard to find good advice. For moving away from this ROI model, we're looking for more advice, more ideas, more success stories, and those gurus who are blogging on a regular basis or tweeting about trends and positive uses of nonprofit social media.

CSW somewhat inadvertently provided a foundation for these resources too, through their Big Share Facebook group. CSW started a closed group, titled The Big Share-CSW, in 2015 as a resource hub for the first Big Share. Emily Winecke, first Membership Coordinator and then Communications and Marketing Director for CSW, administered the group, which had a largely technical focus leading up to the Big Share 2015. CSW posted their stock content and answered questions about how to set up fundraising pages. Nonprofit staff found the Facebook group incredibly useful as a forum for their technical and logistic questions. "I *loved* the Facebook group. That was awesome," Kesling said. "I'm sure Emily hated it, because if I spent two minutes looking for something and couldn't find it, I was like, 'Emily Winecke, help me!' [laughs] But I found that super helpful."

During my interviews, as I heard that nonprofit staff wanted more guidance regarding social media, I encouraged them and CSW to repurpose the Big Share Facebook group to meet those needs. And gradually the group has indeed become an ongoing crowdsourced resource hub. CSW continues to use the group for training and technical resources each year prior to the Big Share. But in March through December, the Facebook group hosts a steady, if not always vibrant, discussion about best practices for nonprofit communication. CSW staff often lead the conversation, but several participants from other nonprofits also post relevant resources like training seminars and instructional blog posts.

Through my interviews I learned that collaboration among CSW nonprofits was another area for improvement. As discussed in the previous chapter, nonprofit staff recognized the Big Share as a community event that encompassed all CSW organizations. But this sense of community did not manifest in their digital strategies. I expected CSW nonprofits to be regularly interacting with and promoting one another on social media, but they said they were not. To a certain extent, nonprofit staff said they interact minimally with other nonprofits due to time constraints. Because CSW nonprofits struggle to dedicate time to social media, the resources they do allocate to social media are largely focused on their own pages, with little time to monitor other nonprofits.

Engagement across organizations is also hampered by a subtle tension. “I hate to say it, but the environmental nonprofit community can be a little competitive,” explained Wegner. “We also have a lot of overlapping supporters. So I'm always very cognizant. I don't want us to seem like we're copying, even as I take note of what they do." At the simplest level, nonprofits are often concerned that fundraising is a zero-sum game. By promoting another organization, they think, a nonprofit risks losing a donation. Kuplic emphasized in his training that fundraising is not strictly zero-sum. In the U.S., charitable giving tends to correlate with overall economic performance. Over the past 40 years, Giving USA has found

that charitable donations equal approximately two percent of gross domestic product each year (Gunther, 2017). While that means poor economic years see lower donations, charitable giving has increased during the growth market since 2010. Giving USA (2018) estimated a 5.2% increase in charitable giving in 2017, with a record $410.02 billion in contributions. Americans also spread their donations across multiple organizations, with 62% of donors giving to three or more organizations (Yu & Adkins, 2016a). At the same time, 73% of donors make *regular* donations to only one or two organizations (Yu & Adkins, 2016a). So competition is certainly not a trivial concern, and CSW nonprofits' reluctance to promote others is warranted. But national data show ample opportunities for nonprofits to solicit their own donations while also promoting other organizations.

Indeed, the Big Share has proven this opportunity, raising more each year, from $211,890 in 2015, to $280,663 in 2016, $322,028 in 2017, $431,351 in 2018, and $456,175 in 2019. The Big Share has also revealed benefits of collaboration that outweigh the exaggerated sense of competition. Nonprofit staff indicated that the Big Share was helpful in breaking out of their "weird mindset," as Wegner described it:

> [The environmental groups] all get along really well. We work on a lot of the same things. We have pretty similar audiences. Knowing the politics of the situation, I would be much more inclined and accepting of promoting their work for something like the Big Share. But outside of it, there's kind of this proprietary thought process. So it's just slightly uncomfortable. I have to give pause to think, 'Okay, this group is also working on this. Do I share that post that they put out?' As much as we want to work together collaboratively—and we do. Don't get me wrong, we do—there's also kind of lines in the sand.

As Wegner mentioned, the Big Share prompted a fresh perspective on the tension among environmental groups caused by not wanting to infringe on one another. The Big Share was explicitly a collective endeavor, and Wegner acknowledged that Clean Wisconsin could have leveraged the community better. "I realize, in retrospect, we didn't really do a good job of [interacting with other nonprofits]. Tagging like-minded organizations or giving them kudos,

that was one thing that we probably should have done more." Sean Hoey, also from Clean Wisconsin, even recalled that their only example of interaction was quite successful. “We didn't do any [tagging] on Facebook. But I did that once in the morning on Twitter, with the environmental groups. They all took a picture [at Java Cat]. And that was actually really popular.” The tweet was so memorable, in fact, that Kesling mentioned it independently when I interviewed her. The tweet was popular across multiple organizations, and Kesling identified it as an example of how the Big Share promotes all CSW nonprofits simultaneously. “Tagging everybody else in the picture made sure that the Sierra Club’s and Clean Wisconsin’s and whoever else’s audience knows that Sustain Dane is part of this too. That's a great thing about the Big Share is you can give to everybody.”

Even Harbaugh, who enthusiastically interacted with other organizations, learned from the Big Share that the CSW network should be interacting more. “We should be commenting on everybody’s stuff,” she said. She tagged several other CSW nonprofits in MEA posts, to say, “Here are other groups you may be interested in.” She reflected:

> It was cool, but we could do so much more of that and I think we could really help each other out. This was the first time that we have been faced with this idea that we’re raising money for each other in a very different way, and that everybody’s success here plays off each other’s. I’m not saying that it was not like that before, but this was a whole new way of looking at things. Everybody was sort of siloed and they’re like, ‘I have to have this plan, and I have to have this timeline, and I have to keep this timeline,’ if they were even that organized.

Harbaugh concluded that the other nonprofits needed to learn from CSW’s example of how to promote the entire CSW network as part of their individual campaigns. Wegner articulated a similar shifting perspective after the Big Share:

> We definitely, within the environmental community, realize [competition] is a shortcoming. We are trying to hash out a plan within a specific campaign to be more collaborative and really join together. Because, yes, there's strength in numbers and collaboration. And we *do* have all these great environmental groups. And yes, it is *really* tough political times from an environmental perspective—any progressive issue, really. And if we band all our people together, that's going to take us further.

As we discussed the topics of interaction and collaboration, I outlined in numerous interviews four principle benefits of interaction on social media. (1) As the picture from Java Cat indicates, interacting with other organizations extends your reach into their audience. Sustain Dane sees this benefit when they tag business partners. “There's definitely a visibility to it, when we're tagging businesses. It's a relatively low-input way to scatter out visibility,” Kesling said. (2) Interaction also builds organizational relationships that encourage reciprocity. Wolf said that WCCF became more reciprocal even in the short Big Share campaign. When I asked if she felt like her interactions on social media were reciprocated, she said that in fact it was interactions from other organizations that had encouraged her to engage more. “I saw some of the other organizations liking our Big Share posts, so that got me on board to search hashtags and look for other organizations that we might not regularly follow and then start following them and liking their posts,” she explained. (3) Ultimately, promoting similar organizations promotes the overall cause, even when it does not directly promote your organization. (4) In turn, promoting a cause independent of organizational affiliation builds a stronger relationship with your audience. It simultaneously provides value as an informational hub for the cause, and it positions your organization with a collaborative identity within a cooperative community. An identity that privileges cause over strict organizational allegiance is particularly appealing to younger demographics that engage through lifestyle politics rather than organizational affiliation. (See Bennett, 1998; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Bimber et al., 2012; Inglehart, 1997; Wells, 2015.; Zukin et al., 2006.)

When explaining these benefits, I also emphasized that interorganizational relationships, similar to relationships with constituents, do not exist on social media sites in a vacuum. I encouraged CSW nonprofits to leverage their existing real-world relationships with one another as opportunities to develop mutually beneficial digital relationships. Again, the combination of online fundraising with real-world promotional events during the Big

Share helped reinforce the opportunity for improvement. “[Collaboration] is something from an offline perspective that we definitely realize, yes, we can do better,” Wegner recognized. “But like you said, it's reciprocal and there needs to be understanding. It's a really interesting consideration to see how those things work offline and online, and how they can be of benefit to everyone involved.”

Indeed, the Big Share 2015 presented a wealth of opportunities that all CSW nonprofits benefited from to a certain extent. Obviously, some nonprofits exceled in that first year and others struggled. Still, successful nonprofits felt like they had plenty of missed opportunities and areas for improvement. And even less successful nonprofits thought that the Big Share provided a valuable learning opportunity that would improve their digital communication strategies in the future. In the following section, I explore how CSW nonprofits evolved their campaigns in subsequent years.

## The Big Changes

Table 5.1 compiles fundraising data across the Big Shares 2015, 2016, and 2017. The table is sorted by 2016 fundraising totals, which reveals significant changes from 2015 to 2016. First, the Farley Center, which raised the fourth highest total in 2015, did not participate in the Big Share after that first year. Caroline Farley explained that board support for online fundraising remained low even after the Big Share. And the Farley Center’s donor base is not closely aligned with their online presence. As I discussed in the previous chapter, even their success in 2015 was driven primarily by phone calls to personal contacts. Due to this combination of factors, the Farley Center decided not to participate in the Big Share after 2015 and eventually left the CSW network altogether.

The Farley Center, however, is an outlier. The Big Share 2016 had many more improvements than regressions. As one might expect, many of the top performers in 2015 remained top performers in 2016. Leaders like WCCF, Wisconsin Literacy, CSW, Clean

Wisconsin, Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA), End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin (EDAW), and Sustain Dane improved on their 2015 fundraising to remain in the top third. Among this group, Wisconsin Literacy (208%) and Clean Wisconsin (134%) posted the largest relative gains. Some nonprofits remained toward the top of the leaderboard despite a significant decrease. MEA, WLCV, LWV of Wisconsin, OutReach, and the Wisconsin Farmers Union all persisted in the top third despite raising 80% or less of their 2015 totals. There were also numerous CSW nonprofits who substantially improved on their 2015 fundraising. Wheels for Winners, Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health (WAWH), Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA), River Alliance of Wisconsin, Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice (ICWJ), and Legal Action of Wisconsin all climbed into the top third with fundraising increases ranging from 259% to 1,086%.

The "climber" nonprofits credited their improvements to two primary strategies: matching grants and power hour campaigns. Cassie Mordini from the River Alliance of Wisconsin, Caroline Oldershaw from WECA, Emily Meier from the Madison Audubon Society, and Alicia Jepson from Wheels for Winners named a matching grant as a primary factor in their 2016 improvements. Meier said, "Having a match was *key* for us. We had a $1,750 match from members of our board of directors for the Big Share and it was *huge*. We wouldn't do the Big Share without some sort of a match." Jepson explained that the most important lesson Wheels for Winners learned from the Big Share was "don't be afraid to ask our partners and local businesses for matching contributions. The worst thing that can happen is that they say, 'No.'" Anna Varriano of Community GroundWorks also recognized the importance of matching grants, from the perspective of an organization that did not secure a match. Because they were unable to find a match donor, Community GroundWorks hosted a live event at a local brewery for the Big Share 2016. The event helped drive a moderate 61% improvement for Community GroundWorks, but Varriano said, "We really

| Organization | 2015 Fundraising ($) | 2016 Fundraising ($) | Fundraising Change 2015 > 2016 | 2017 Fundraising ($) | Fundraising Change 2016 > 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| WCCF | 11,984.00 | 17,476.00 | 45.83% | 23,715.00 | 35.70% |
| WI Literacy | 5,307.42 | 16,368.00 | 208.40% | 16,186.00 | -1.11% |
| CSW | 14,480.57 | 16,237.00 | 12.13% | 18,937.98 | 16.63% |
| MEA | 20,313.06 | 12,962.00 | -36.19% | 21,416.00 | 65.22% |
| Clean WI | 5,023.00 | 11,769.00 | 134.30% | 26,202.66 | 122.64% |
| WLCV | 14,620.20 | 11,629.00 | -20.46% | 9,595.00 | -17.49% |
| WWA | 6,690.00 | 11,139.00 | 66.50% | 15,000.00 | 34.66% |
| EDAW | 4,880.12 | 10,900.00 | 123.36% | 10,086.00 | -7.47% |
| Wheels for Winners | 2,318.00 | 10,490.00 | 352.55% | 7,565.00 | -27.88% |
| WAWH | 2,062.02 | 9,830.00 | 376.72% | 8,585.00 | -12.67% |
| Sustain Dane | 6,028.17 | 8,629.00 | 43.14% | 7,668.00 | -11.14% |
| WECA | 810.00 | 7,395.00 | 812.96% | 4,360.00 | -41.04% |
| River Alliance | 1,895.00 | 6,808.00 | 259.26% | 10,705.00 | 57.24% |
| Madison Audubon Society | 4,279.66 | 5,847.00 | 36.62% | 4,513.50 | -22.81% |
| Nuestro Mundo | 4,271.30 | 5,690.00 | 33.21% | 4,360.00 | -23.37% |
| LWV | 10,886.88 | 5,674.00 | -47.88% | 11,739.50 | 106.90% |
| OutReach | 7,675.00 | 5,485.00 | -28.53% | 1,645.19 | -70.01% |
| Sierra Club | 3,779.06 | 5,232.00 | 38.45% | 4,183.00 | -20.05% |
| ICWJ | 870.00 | 5,098.00 | 485.98% | 2,126.08 | -58.30% |
| Legal Action of WI | 420.00 | 4,980.00 | 1085.71% | 350.00 | -92.97% |
| Common Wealth Dev | 3,805.00 | 4,965.00 | 30.49% | 490.00 | -90.13% |
| 1000 Friends of WI | 6,065.00 | 4,895.00 | -19.29% | 1,620.00 | -66.91% |
| Freedom, Inc. | 2,675.00 | 4,561.00 | 70.50% | 8,995.00 | 97.22% |
| ACLU of WI | 1,406.80 | 4,480.00 | 218.45% | 1,195.00 | -73.33% |
| WWN | 1,917.94 | 4,465.00 | 132.80% | 8,540.00 | 91.27% |
| Council of the Blind | 3,849.00 | 4,250.00 | 10.42% | 3,249.00 | -23.55% |
| GSAFE | 5,650.00 | 3,855.00 | -31.77% | 12,949.00 | 235.90% |
| Housing Initiatives | 980.00 | 3,803.00 | 288.06% | 4,155.74 | 9.28% |

| Organization | 2015 Fundraising ($) | 2016 Fundraising ($) | Fundraising Change 2015 > 2016 | 2017 Fundraising ($) | Fundraising Change 2016 > 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Disability Rights WI | 553.00 | 3,741.00 | 576.49% | 1,055.00 | -71.80% |
| WI Farmers Union | 7,055.00 | 3,319.00 | -52.96% | 7,725.00 | 132.75% |
| FairShare | 2,941.72 | 3,171.00 | 7.79% | 2,620.00 | -17.38% |
| REAP | 2,484.00 | 2,725.00 | 9.70% | 3,967.00 | 45.58% |
| Women in Transition | 3,230.00 | 2,710.00 | -16.10% | 2,170.00 | -19.93% |
| WCCN | 597.00 | 2,675.00 | 348.07% | 1,853.00 | -30.73% |
| Community GroundWorks | 1,570.00 | 2,525.00 | 60.83% | 1,530.00 | -39.41% |
| Center for Resilient Cities | 980.00 | 2,420.00 | 146.94% | 210.00 | -91.32% |
| Dane Co. TimeBank | 1,618.00 | 2,365.00 | 46.17% | 2,838.00 | 20.00% |
| Tenant Resource Center | 350.00 | 2,295.00 | 555.71% | 1,780.00 | -22.44% |
| WI Democracy Campaign | 1,020.00 | 2,275.00 | 123.04% | 8,755.00 | 284.84% |
| Project Home | 985.00 | 2,158.00 | 119.09% | 2,095.00 | -2.92% |
| New Harvest Foundation | 2,704.02 | 2,005.00 | -25.85% | 430.00 | -78.55% |
| Arts WI | 2,395.44 | 1,870.00 | -21.94% | 2,708.00 | 44.81% |
| UNIDOS | 835.00 | 1,870.00 | 123.95% | 830.00 | -55.61% |
| *Madison Commons* | 2,215.00 | 1,730.00 | -21.90% | 1,690.00 | -2.31% |
| Friends of WI State Parks | 310.00 | 1,685.00 | 443.55% | 450.00 | -73.29% |
| Gathering Waters | 421.06 | 1,565.00 | 271.68% | 1,176.00 | -24.86% |
| Perfect Harmony | 565.00 | 1,560.00 | 176.11% | 600.00 | -61.54% |
| Rock River Coalition | 940.00 | 1,422.00 | 51.28% | 1,140.00 | -19.83% |
| Fair WI | 2,146.79 | 1,295.00 | -39.68% | 730.00 | -43.63% |
| RCC | 913.00 | 1,210.00 | 32.53% | 1,813.00 | 49.83% |
| *The Progressive* | 120.00 | 1,140.00 | 850.00% | 2,419.00 | 112.19% |
| WI NPJ | 35.00 | 880.00 | 2414.29% | 75.00 | -91.48% |
| NARAL | 751.99 | 698.00 | -7.18% | 5,535.14 | 693.00% |
| MACLT | 972.00 | 695.00 | -28.50% | 350.00 | -49.64% |
| CMD | 236.88 | 600.00 | 153.29% | 1,470.00 | 145.00% |
| Bayview Foundation | 86.88 | 565.00 | 550.32% | 6,726.67 | 1090.56% |

| Organization | 2015 Fundraising ($) | 2016 Fundraising ($) | Fundraising Change 2015 > 2016 | 2017 Fundraising ($) | Fundraising Change 2016 > 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fair Housing Council | 273.00 | 420.00 | 53.85% | 670.00 | 59.52% |
| CUB | 841.00 | 420.00 | -50.06% | 650.00 | 54.76% |
| ABC for Health | 465.00 | 330.00 | -29.03% | 1,150.00 | 248.48% |
| Chrysalis | 135.00 | 325.00 | 140.74% | 715.00 | 120.00% |
| WCASA | 1,886.10 | 287.00 | -84.78% | 685.00 | 138.68% |
| CFFPP | 780.14 | 230.00 | -70.52% | 650.00 | 182.61% |
| CSWAB | 495.00 | 175.00 | -64.65% | 0.00 | -100.00% |
| WORT | 145.88 | 135.00 | -7.46% | 2,040.00 | 1411.11% |
| WI Family Ties | 400.00 | 100.00 | -75.00% | 370.00 | 270.00% |
| CWAG | 80.00 | 65.00 | -18.75% | 0.00 | -100.00% |
| PSR WI | 310.00 | 60.00 | -80.65% | 140.00 | 133.33% |
| Grassroots Empowerment | 50.00 | 35.00 | -30.00% | 85.00 | 142.86% |
| Farley Center | 12,055.02 | 0.00 | -100.00% | 0.00 | 0.00% |
| The Big Share Total | 211,890.12 | 280,663.00 | 32.46% | 322,028.46 | 14.74% |

*Table 5.1*. Big Share Fundraising in 2015, 2016, 2017
green: top third, yellow: middle third, red: bottom third

want to try to get a matching grant. It seems like the organizations that do have more success overall, in terms of prizes, leaderboard visibility, et cetera."

Meier from the Madison Audubon Society and Sara Finger from WAWH also highlighted their targeted power hour campaigns. "Focusing on the power hour was *huge*!" Finger explained. "Letting our supporters know that their donation could help us earn a bonus $1,000 was a great incentive." WAWH's power hour campaign was particularly sophisticated.


*Figure 5.1*. ICWJ Tweet from the Big Share 2016

Throughout the hour, board members texted, emailed, and called contacts to solicit donations. WAWH also coordinated their campaign with CSW partners to ensure they were not competing for the same power hour. But this level of sophistication was not necessarily required. The Madison Audubon Society executed a winning power hour campaign with less effort. Meier said that they largely reused their power hour content from the previous year. She added, "No one seemed to notice and it saved us a lot of work!"

The second Big Share demonstrated that CSW nonprofits had, indeed, built on the knowledge gained the previous year. While nonprofit staff still recognized the significant role of CSW in coordinating the Big Share and providing training, by the Big Share 2016, CSW nonprofits had cultivated and were able to leverage unique bodies of knowledge. Varriano said that Community GroundWorks' 2016 strategies emerged from a combination of CSW trainings and their own original ideas, like the brewery event. Finger said, "We did most of our planning [in 2016] outside CSW. We learned a lot from our initial year and played off our existing social media experience and reach." Meier echoed this sentiment. "We relied less heavily on the CSW trainings, as compared to 2015, and more from our own experimentation. We know what communication channels work for our organization, and we capitalized on them!"

The Big Share 2016 also embodied evolving digital media strategies. CSW nonprofits became savvier in their social media messaging and generated more unique and engaging content. The use of images and videos expanded significantly in the second year. ICWJ, for example, built their Big Share 2016 around the Fight for 15 campaign. The example tweet in Figure 5.1 shows multiple levels of sophistication: (1) use of #CSWBigShare to integrate with the Big Share; (2) use the #FightFor15 to integrate with a preexisting cause and network; (3) creation of #ShareFor15 to build their own unique brand as a combination of the two campaigns; (4) a compelling image of activism in action; and (5) use of a shortened URL for

online analytics. As illustrated in Figure 5.2, WECA also greatly expanded their digital sophistication by employing more images with testimonials and combining #CSWBigShare with #ece (early childhood education) to maximize their visibility across both networks.


*Figure 5.2*. WECA Tweet from the Big Share 2016

These two examples further illustrate my conclusion in the previous chapter that digital success does not necessarily correlate with network performance. Table 5.2 compiles #CSWBigShare network and fundraising metrics across 2015, 2016, and 2017, sorted by 2016 eigenvector centrality. Despite their substantial fundraising improvements and the campaign

evolution exemplified in Figures 5.1 and 5.2, ICWJ and WECA had lowest-third centrality in #CSWBigShare 2016. In fairness, ICWJ created their Twitter account only shortly before the Big Share 2015, and their lagging network position belies an otherwise quick and effective adoption of digital techniques. Although there is some variability, Table 5.2 highlights remarkable consistency across the three years. Each year, organizations like CSW, Clean Wisconsin, and Sustain Dane rank highly in fundraising and #CSWBigShare centrality; organizations like *Madison Commons*, ABC for Health, and Wisconsin Family Ties rank highly in centrality but lower in fundraising; and organizations like Wisconsin Literacy and WWA rank highly in fundraising despite mediocre centrality. This is further evidence that social media play a role in digital fundraising, but they are by no means the determining factor. As discussed above, nonprofit staff credited matching grants and power hours as far more stimulating than social media on their own. Certainly, social media can contribute to visibility and publicity, but social media alone cannot substitute for a robust and multifaceted campaign.

My own experience with *Madison Commons* aligns with this conclusion as well. In 2016, I executed a much more sophisticated social media campaign. I employed more images and memes. We also added a small budget of $70 for boosting Facebook posts. These boosted posts were effective. Nine boosted posts obtained 4,758 paid reach, compared to 4,035 organic reach across 18 posts. And the *Madison Commons* Facebook page received 18 new likes during the 10 days of boosted posts, compared to zero to four new likes in an average 10-day span. However, this success on social media did not translate into increased donations. In 2016, *Madison Commons* raised $1,730, down from $2,215 the year prior. The primary cause for this change was a smaller matching grant, which decreased from $1,000 to $500. In the same way that matching grants and power hours drove increased fundraising for Wheels for Winners, WECA, and River Alliance of Wisconsin, *Madison Commons*' decreased

| Twitter Handle | Organization | 2015 Eigenvector Centrality | 2015 Fundraising Rank | 2016 Eigenvector Centrality | 2016 Fundraising Rank | 2017 Eigenvector Centrality | 2017 Fundraising Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| commshareswi | CSW | 0.013488 | 3 | 0.015453 | 3 | 0.013375 | 4 |
| madcommons | *Madison Commons* | 0.012011 | 28 | 0.013408 | 44 | 0.010482 | 39 |
| abcforhealth | ABC for Health | 0.011511 | 54 | 0.012420 | 59 | 0.009383 | 46 |
| cleanwisconsin | Clean WI | 0.010215 | 14 | 0.011860 | 5 | 0.008928 | 1 |
| sustaindane | Sustain Dane | 0.010213 | 11 | 0.011017 | 11 | 0.011009 | 17 |
| wi_familyties | WI Family Ties | 0.005942 | 57 | 0.010001 | 65 | 0.008364 | 60 |
| wiskids | WCCF | 0.006107 | 5 | 0.009842 | 1 | 0.008212 | 2 |
| artswisconsin | Arts WI | 0.008028 | 26 | 0.009128 | 42 | 0.006985 | 29 |
| talesfromtroy | Community GroundWorks | 0.007539 | 35 | 0.009084 | 35 | 0.007338 | 42 |
| thecouncilwi | Council of the Blind | 0.008190 | 18 | 0.009039 | 26 | 0.006696 | 27 |
| wiconservation | WLCV | 0.006528 | 2 | 0.008869 | 6 | 0.006715 | 11 |
| riveralliance | River Alliance | 0.006975 | 32 | 0.008867 | 13 | 0.007663 | 9 |
| lwv_wi | LWV | 0.005433 | 6 | 0.008467 | 16 | 0.006993 | 8 |
| midwestadvocate | MEA | 0.007165 | 1 | 0.008349 | 4 | 0.006988 | 3 |
| sierraclubwi | Sierra Club | 0.006364 | 20 | 0.008243 | 18 | 0.006717 | 24 |
| wisdc | WI Democracy Campaign | 0.007515 | 37 | 0.008039 | 39 | 0.005997 | 13 |
| theprogressive | *The Progressive* | 0.007060 | 65 | 0.007815 | 51 | 0.005808 | 31 |
| reapmadison | REAP | 0.007615 | 25 | 0.007810 | 32 | 0.006591 | 26 |
| healthywomenwi | WAWH | 0.005305 | 30 | 0.007381 | 10 | 0.005980 | 14 |
| aclumadison | ACLU of WI 2 | 0.006657 | 36 | 0.007302 | 24 | 0.005833 | 44 |
| madisonaudubon | Madison Audubon Society | 0.005439 | 16 | 0.007098 | 14 | 0.005729 | 21 |
| acluofwisconsin | ACLU of WI | 0.006192 | 36 | 0.007062 | 24 | 0.005602 | 44 |
| wortradio | WORT 2 | 0.005277 | 63 | 0.007056 | 64 | 0.006921 | 35 |
| unidosagainstdv | UNIDOS | 0.005959 | 46 | 0.007048 | 43 | 0.007023 | 49 |
| chrysalisinc | Chrysalis | 0.004705 | 64 | 0.006721 | 60 | 0.006225 | 51 |
| wisliteracy | WI Literacy | 0.005855 | 13 | 0.006645 | 2 | 0.005637 | 5 |

| Twitter Handle | Organization | 2015 Eigenvector Centrality | 2015 Fundraising Rank | 2016 Eigenvector Centrality | 2016 Fundraising Rank | 2017 Eigenvector Centrality | 2017 Fundraising Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| wiwetlandsassoc | WWA | 0.003490 | 9 | 0.006532 | 7 | 0.004939 | 6 |
| fair_wisconsin | Fair WI | 0.005843 | 29 | 0.006502 | 49 | 0.004701 | 50 |
| cffpp | CFFPP | 0.001166 | 48 | 0.006205 | 62 | 0.003515 | 55 |
| 1000friendswisc | 1000 Friends of WI | 0.004101 | 10 | 0.005555 | 22 | 0.004967 | 41 |
| centerrescities | Center for Resilient Cities | 0.002059 | 40 | 0.005397 | 36 | 0.004593 | 63 |
| projecthomewi | Project Home | 0.005266 | 38 | 0.005356 | 40 | 0.005369 | 34 |
| gsafewi | GSAFE | 0.002986 | 12 | 0.005029 | 27 | 0.004205 | 7 |
| endabusewi | EDAW | 0.003240 | 15 | 0.004855 | 8 | 0.005308 | 10 |
| wcasa_org | WCASA | 0.001832 | 33 | 0.004325 | 61 | 0.003338 | 52 |
| earlyedmatters | WECA | 0.003977 | 47 | 0.004271 | 12 | 0.003784 | 22 |
| fairsharecsa | FairShare | 0.003725 | 22 | 0.004092 | 31 | 0.003212 | 30 |
| wccn_tweets | WCCN | 0.000759 | 50 | 0.003926 | 34 | 0.007217 | 36 |
| gatheringwaters | Gathering Waters | N/A | 55 | 0.003564 | 46 | 0.004591 | 45 |
| workerjusticewi | ICWJ | N/A | 44 | 0.003319 | 19 | 0.003998 | 33 |
| rapecrisisdane | RCC | N/A | 43 | 0.003279 | 50 | 0.006022 | 37 |
| aboutfreedominc | Freedom, Inc. | 0.001827 | 24 | 0.003175 | 23 | 0.002203 | 12 |
| cubwi | CUB | 0.002183 | 45 | 0.003035 | 57 | 0.002053 | 54 |
| danecotimebank | Dane Co. TimeBank | 0.001777 | 34 | 0.002581 | 37 | 0.004590 | 28 |
| cwagwisconsin | CWAG | 0.001688 | 67 | 0.001988 | 66 | 0.001243 | 68 |
| wifarmersunion | WI Farmers Union | 0.001101 | 8 | 0.001620 | 30 | 0.001094 | 16 |
| outreachlgbt | OutReach | 0.003046 | 7 | 0.001453 | 17 | 0.002424 | 40 |
| wortnews | WORT | 0.010130 | 63 | N/A | 64 | 0.009016 | 35 |
| wiwomensnetwork | WWN | 0.008472 | 31 | N/A | 25 | 0.006971 | 15 |
| prwatch | CMD | 0.005178 | 62 | N/A | 55 | 0.003826 | 43 |
| cswab | CSWAB | 0.003145 | 53 | N/A | 63 | 0.003809 | 67 |
| naralwi | NARAL | 0.003049 | 49 | N/A | 53 | 0.002701 | 20 |

| Twitter Handle | Organization | 2015 Eigenvector Centrality | 2015 Fundraising Rank | 2016 Eigenvector Centrality | 2016 Fundraising Rank | 2017 Eigenvector Centrality | 2017 Fundraising Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| madisontrc | Tenant Resource Center | 0.002811 | 58 | N/A | 38 | 0.002636 | 38 |
| nuestromundoinc | Nuestro Mundo | 0.003499 | 17 | N/A | 15 | 0.002418 | 23 |
| wisnpj | WI NPJ | 0.001835 | 69 | N/A | 52 | 0.002209 | 66 |
| housinginit | Housing Initiatives | 0.001109 | 39 | N/A | 28 | 0.001989 | 25 |
| friendswiparks | Friends of WI State Parks | 0.002451 | 59 | N/A | 45 | 0.001925 | 58 |
| wisdispolicy | Disability Rights WI | 0.001628 | 52 | N/A | 29 | 0.001706 | 48 |
| phmenschorus | Perfect Harmony | N/A | 51 | N/A | 47 | 0.001289 | 56 |
| legalactionwi | Legal Action of WI | 0.000341 | 56 | N/A | 20 | 0.000848 | 61 |

*Table 5.2.* #CSWBigShare Centrality in 2015, 2016, 2017
green: top third, yellow: middle third, red: bottom third

matching grant resulted in a less successful campaign. (*Madison Commons* was not eligible for power hour prizes, because it is not a proper CSW organization.)

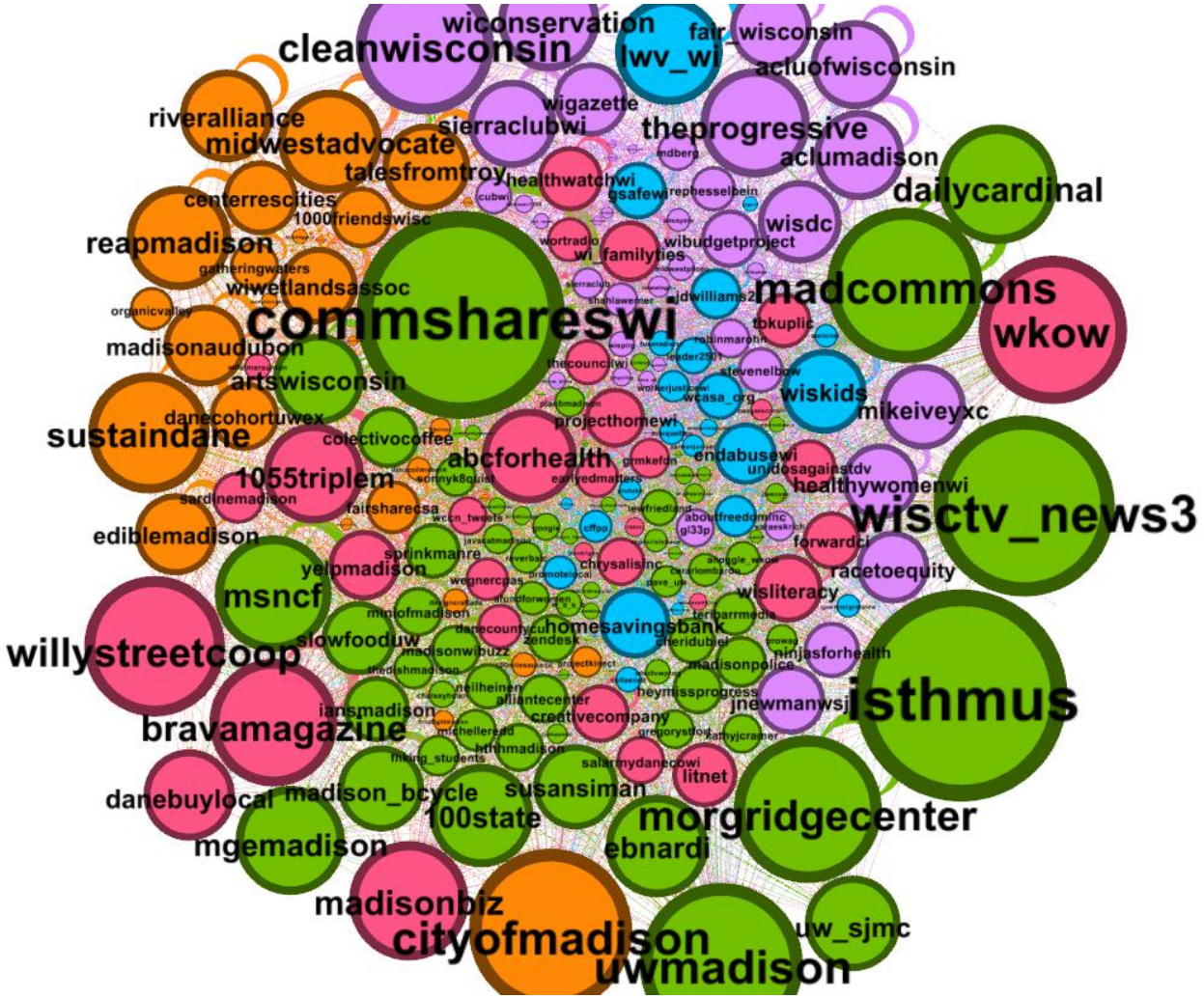


*Figure 5.3.* #CSWBigShare Twitter Network in 2016
Color represents modularity class, and node size represents in-degree.

Visualizations of #CSWBigShare do not indicate any significant trends across the first three years. Figure 5.3 shows the emergence in 2016 of a new cluster involving Sustain Dane, REAP, MEA, the River Alliance of Wisconsin, Community GroundWorks, and the Madison Audubon Society. But in 2017, these organizations redistributed into more general clusters, as shown in Figure 5.4. As mentioned, the #CSWBigShare network shows minor variability from year to year, and alterations in strategy can have greater impact within this network due

to its smaller, focused purpose. But in general, #CSWBigShare network metrics are heavily influenced by the broader organizational network. And again, network performance, in isolation, is not an accurate indicator of fundraising.

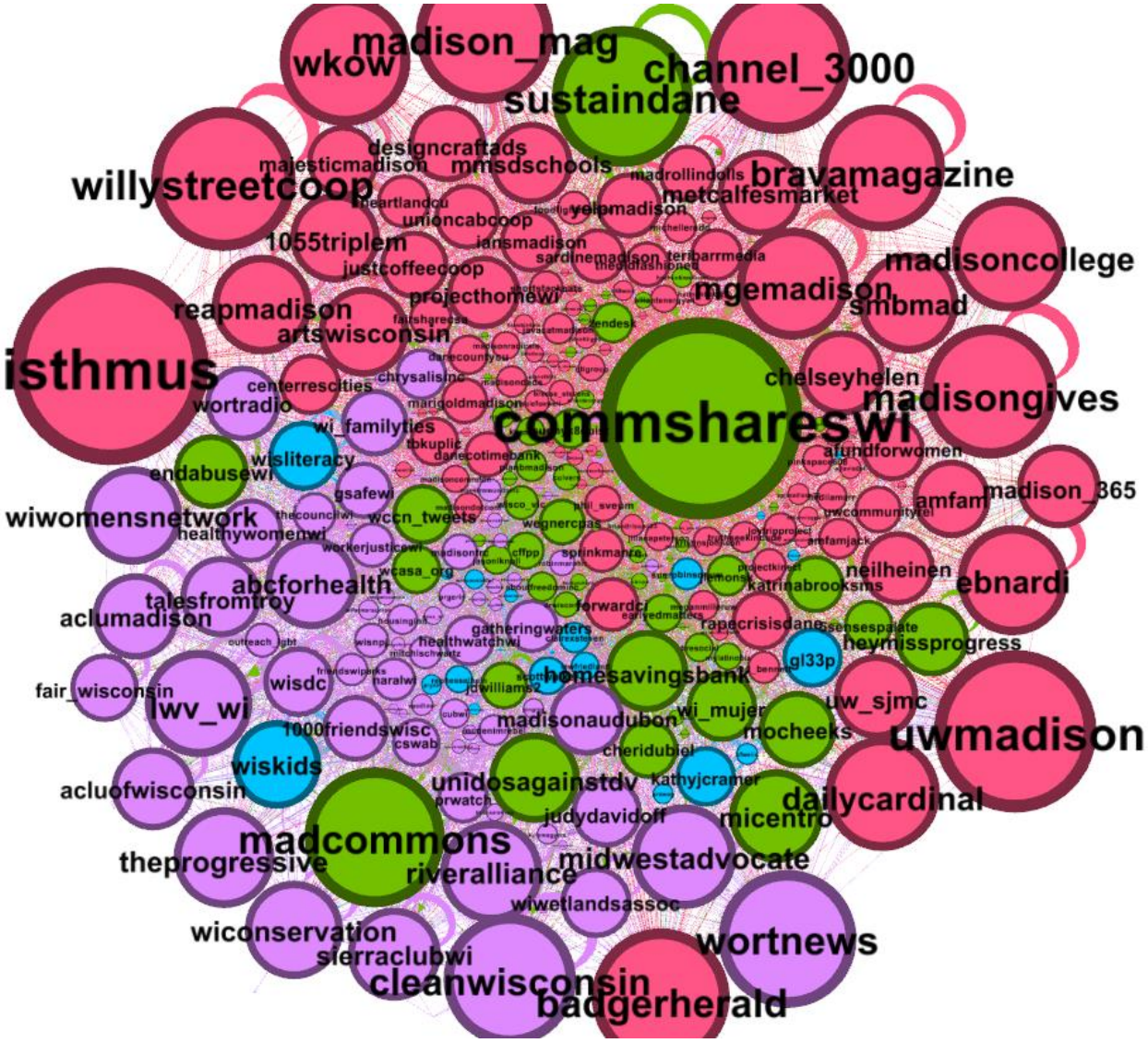


*Figure 5.4.* #CSWBigShare Twitter Network in 2017
Color represents modularity class, and node size represents in-degree.

The CSW organizational network, on the other hand, does contain some significant trends from 2015 through 2017. Figures 5.5 and 5.6 visualize the network in February 2016 and March 2017, respectively, just before each Big Share. The network is generally stable from 2015 through 2017. The notable patterns include: *The Progressive* and Center for Media and

Democracy (CMD) maintain large but distant networks; a substantial cluster of environmental organizations including WLCV, Clean Wisconsin, the Sierra Club, the River Alliance of Wisconsin, WWA, and the Madison Audubon Society; a cluster of women's organizations including the Wisconsin Women's Network (WWN), NARAL, and WAWH; and a cluster of organizations that combat domestic abuse including EDAW and the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA). A new cluster including REAP, Community GroundWorks, the Wisconsin Farmers Union, and FairShare CSA emerged in 2016 and persisted through 2017. These organizations were in the CSW-Sustain Dane cluster in 2015, but coalesced into a unique cluster by 2016.

All CSW organizations grew their social media networks between 2015 and 2017. This is evident in Figures 5.5 and 5.6. Table 5.3 provides more tangible data, compiling audience and fundraising data from the three years, sorted by raw audience growth across Facebook and Twitter combined. The top of this list provides evidence for the "rich get richer" conclusion that Hindman (2008) and others have drawn. *The Progressive* and CMD began with substantially higher audiences in 2015 and their audience growth in subsequent years thoroughly outpaced the other CSW nonprofits, further increasing the gap at the top of the network. Organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Wisconsin, WORT, WWA, Clean Wisconsin, and MEA also expanded their already large audiences. At the same time, there are some notable exceptions in the CSW network that reveal a level of nuance in digital trends. WCCF, for example, on the strength of the Big Share campaigns and an increased dedication to social media, added 5,830 followers, which represents 183% growth and moved them from rank 19 to rank 10 in audience size. The Madison Audubon Society increased their audience by 5,267 followers, a remarkable 225% over two years. Meier said that the growth was partially due to a concerted effort to post engaging content, but the Madison Audubon Society also benefited from the unexpected virality of a post. "It's funny—

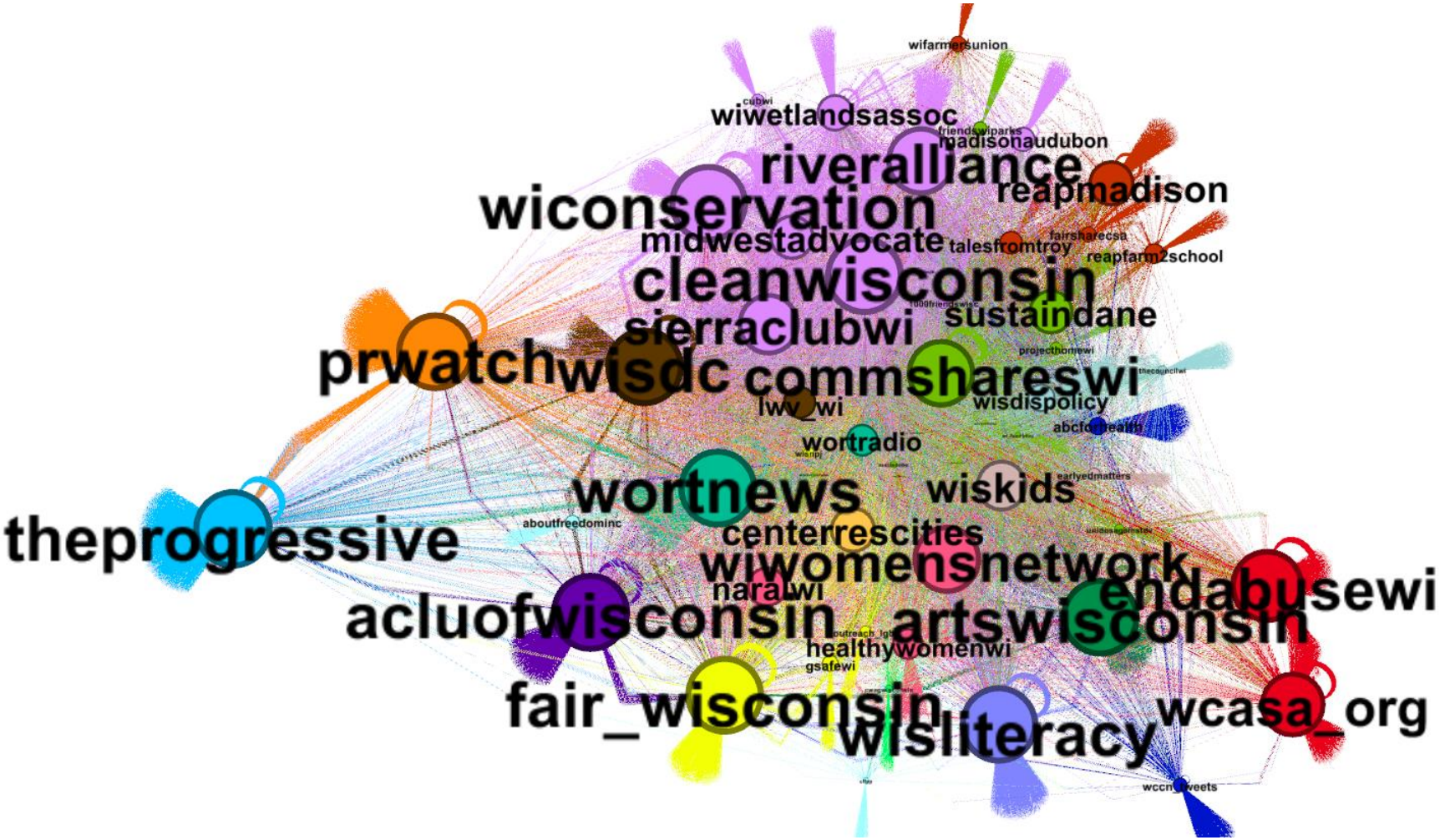


*Figure 5.5*. CSW Organizational Twitter Network in 2016
Color represents modularity class, and node size represents in-degree.

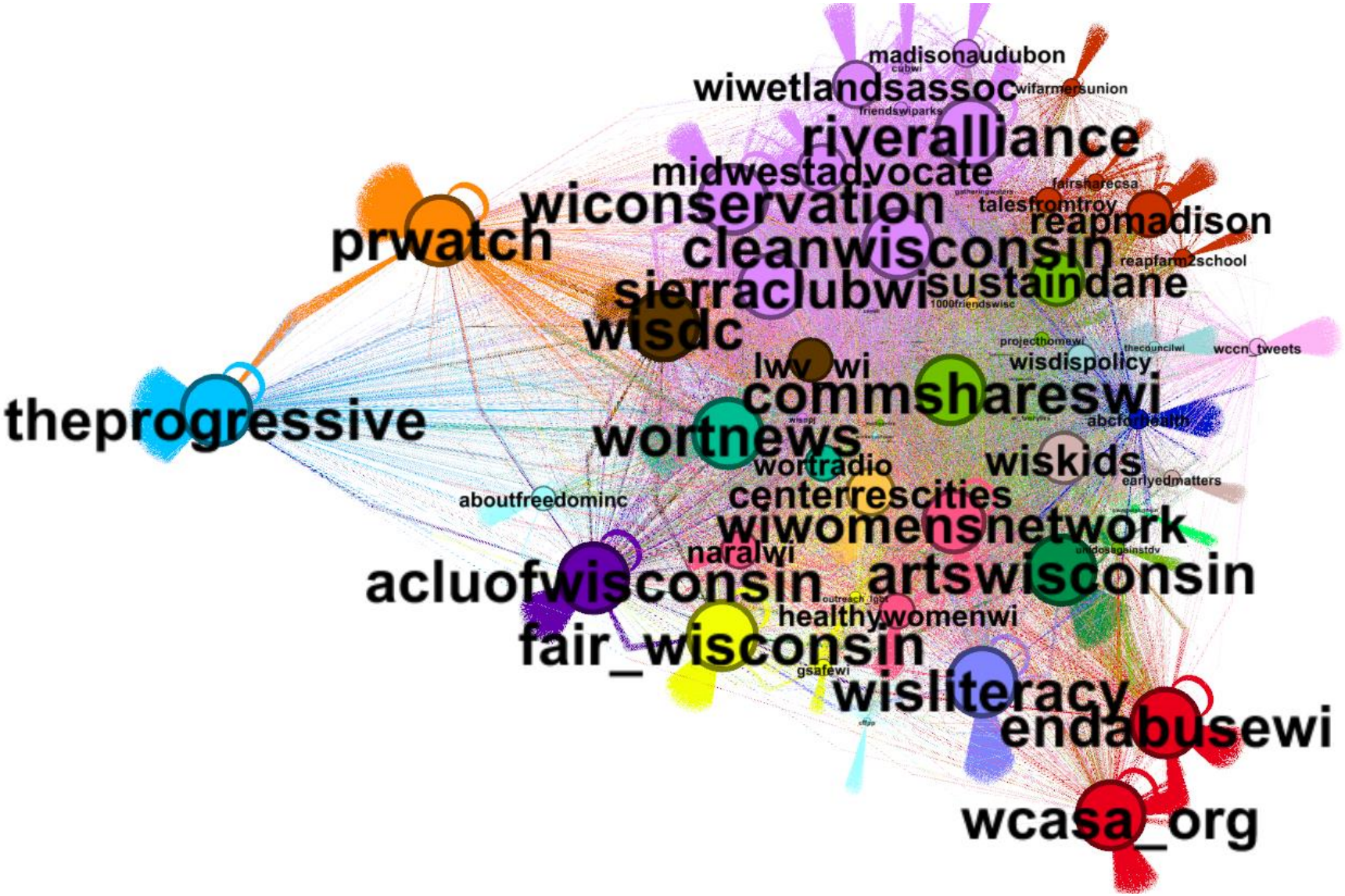


*Figure 5.6*. CSW Organizational Twitter Network in 2017
Color represents modularity class, and node size represents in-degree.

| Organization | 2015 Total Audience | 2016 Total Audience | 2017 Total Audience | Audience Change 2015 > 2017 | Audience Raw Growth 2015 > 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *The Progressive* | 49,553 | 61,193 | 70,385 | 42.04% | 20,832 |
| CMD | 72,804 | 75,494 | 87,187 | 19.76% | 14,383 |
| ACLU of WI | 14,273 | 15,139 | 21,125 | 48.01% | 6,852 |
| WCCF | 3,182 | 7,553 | 9,012 | 183.22% | 5,830 |
| Madison Audubon Society | 2,340 | 3,276 | 7,607 | 225.09% | 5,267 |
| Freedom, Inc. | 1,295 | 3,215 | 4,873 | 276.29% | 3,578 |
| River Alliance | 3,388 | 4,733 | 6,631 | 95.72% | 3,243 |
| WORT | 9,997 | 11,758 | 13,106 | 31.10% | 3,109 |
| WWA | 5,095 | 6,207 | 7,690 | 50.93% | 2,595 |
| Clean WI | 22,192 | 23,331 | 24,311 | 9.55% | 2,119 |
| MEA | 2,992 | 3,937 | 5,106 | 70.66% | 2,114 |
| Gathering Waters | 7,774 | 9,585 | 9,794 | 25.98% | 2,020 |
| Arts WI | 9,464 | 10,296 | 11,463 | 21.12% | 1,999 |
| CSW | 2,781 | 3,673 | 4,776 | 71.74% | 1,995 |
| Sierra Club | 4,109 | 4,957 | 6,007 | 46.19% | 1,898 |
| LWV | 1,864 | 2,432 | 3,657 | 96.19% | 1,793 |
| EDAW | 3,866 | 4,641 | 5,549 | 43.53% | 1,683 |
| REAP | 5,506 | 6,368 | 7,065 | 28.31% | 1,559 |
| OutReach | 1,926 | 2,495 | 3,479 | 80.63% | 1,553 |
| WLCV | 20,997 | 21,278 | 22,495 | 7.13% | 1,498 |
| WAWH | 3,390 | 4,085 | 4,878 | 43.89% | 1,488 |
| WCASA | 2,793 | 3,452 | 4,210 | 50.73% | 1,417 |
| Sustain Dane | 2,139 | 2,854 | 3,534 | 65.22% | 1,395 |
| WI Democracy Campaign | 5,366 | 5,937 | 6,700 | 24.86% | 1,334 |
| WI Family Ties | 899 | 1,562 | 2,168 | 141.16% | 1,269 |
| FairShare | 3,056 | 3,604 | 4,318 | 41.30% | 1,262 |
| Disability Rights WI | 1,873 | 2,526 | 3,122 | 66.68% | 1,249 |
| WECA | 2,182 | 2,844 | 3,429 | 57.15% | 1,247 |

| Organization | 2015 Total Audience | 2016 Total Audience | 2017 Total Audience | Audience Change 2015 > 2017 | Audience Raw Growth 2015 > 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NARAL | 3,738 | 4,394 | 4,971 | 32.99% | 1,233 |
| WWN | 2,852 | 3,376 | 4,043 | 41.76% | 1,191 |
| Community GroundWorks | 1,613 | 2,244 | 2,677 | 65.96% | 1,064 |
| WI Farmers Union | 2,129 | 2,598 | 3,077 | 44.53% | 948 |
| Housing Initiatives | 239 | 967 | 1,105 | 362.34% | 866 |
| Fair WI | 9,652 | 9,906 | 10,485 | 8.63% | 833 |
| GSAFE | 3,810 | 4,092 | 4,603 | 20.81% | 793 |
| ABC for Health | 791 | 1,226 | 1,574 | 98.99% | 783 |
| WI Literacy | 2,235 | 2,587 | 2,897 | 29.62% | 662 |
| Center for Resilient Cities | 2,343 | 2,656 | 2,998 | 27.96% | 655 |
| Tenant Resource Center | 2,012 | 2,441 | 2,666 | 32.50% | 654 |
| CSWAB | 667 | 1,148 | 1,293 | 93.85% | 626 |
| *Madison Commons* | 1,377 | 1,758 | 1,980 | 43.79% | 603 |
| UNIDOS | 786 | 1,087 | 1,383 | 75.95% | 597 |
| RCC | 384 | 608 | 980 | 155.21% | 596 |
| Farley Center | 1,567 | 1,906 | 2,123 | 35.48% | 556 |
| Friends of WI State Parks | 855 | 1,193 | 1,410 | 64.91% | 555 |
| WI NPJ | 1,020 | 1,196 | 1,562 | 53.14% | 542 |
| 1000 Friends of WI | 825 | 1,107 | 1,298 | 57.33% | 473 |
| Council of the Blind | 684 | 926 | 1,128 | 64.91% | 444 |
| Common Wealth Dev | 371 | 536 | 809 | 118.06% | 438 |
| ICWJ | 498 | 707 | 880 | 76.71% | 382 |
| Project Home | 702 | 901 | 1,075 | 53.13% | 373 |
| WCCN | 723 | 903 | 1,082 | 49.65% | 359 |
| Grassroots Empowerment | 280 | 505 | 613 | 118.93% | 333 |
| Dane Co. TimeBank | 796 | 949 | 1,117 | 40.33% | 321 |
| Fair Housing Council | 262 | 376 | 531 | 102.67% | 269 |
| Chrysalis | 193 | 281 | 431 | 123.32% | 238 |

| Organization | 2015 Total Audience | 2016 Total Audience | 2017 Total Audience | Audience Change 2015 > 2017 | Audience Raw Growth 2015 > 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Legal Action of WI | 557 | 622 | 769 | 38.06% | 212 |
| Nuestro Mundo | 569 | 670 | 765 | 34.45% | 196 |
| CFFPP | 220 | 285 | 401 | 82.27% | 181 |
| Rock River Coalition | 139 | 204 | 301 | 116.55% | 162 |
| Perfect Harmony | 540 | 617 | 693 | 28.33% | 153 |
| CUB | 575 | 659 | 704 | 22.43% | 129 |
| New Harvest Foundation | 584 | 675 | 687 | 17.64% | 103 |
| CWAG | 555 | 614 | 657 | 18.38% | 102 |
| MACLT | 338 | 400 | 436 | 28.99% | 98 |
| Bayview Foundation | 202 | 251 | 296 | 46.53% | 94 |
| Women in Transition | 122 | 160 | 181 | 48.36% | 59 |
| PSR WI | 71 | 90 | 124 | 74.65% | 53 |
| Wheels for Winners | 102 | 131 | 150 | 47.06% | 48 |

*Table 5.3*. CSW Social Media Audience in 2015, 2016, 2017
green: top third, yellow: middle third, red: bottom third


*Figure 5.7.* Madison Audubon Society Viral Owl Video

and strange—but it was a slow-motion owl video that skyrocketed us through the roof," she explained. "I gave up on trying to keep track of comments and notifications!" Figure 5.7 shows the particularly popular post. Meier confirmed that they had not boosted the post, so its virality was entirely organic. The Madison Audubon Society leveraged posts like this to rapidly expand their social networks. "I continued posting videos to keep interest high, and so far it has worked pretty well. Our engagement has been better than ever," Meier said. She did, however, acknowledge, "The bummer is that most of the new fans don't even live in Wisconsin, so they are less likely to convert to donors, et cetera."

Indeed, the Madison Audubon Society's Big Share fundraising did not match their network growth, as it hovered around $5,000 across all three years, even as their social

networks expanded. In contrast, Freedom, Inc. is a notable exception in the CSW network. In 2015, they had both modest fundraising totals ($2,675, which was rank 24) and audience size (1,295 and rank 38). By 2017, they moved to 12th with $8,995 raised and 21st with 4,873 total audience. This represents a 276% increase in audience size, the second highest relative growth in the CSW network. Figures 4.4, 5.5, and 5.6 capture this growth visually. In Figure 4.4, Freedom, Inc. is not visible in the 2015 CSW Twitter network. In Figure 5.5 for 2016, Freedom, Inc. (aboutfreedominc) is small but noticeable, colored neon blue and positioned to the left of WORT (wortnews). By 2017, Freedom, Inc. is much more prominent, now clearly visible in Figure 5.6. The example of Freedom, Inc. demonstrates that even though the CSW network and Big Share fundraising are largely consistent over time, there is space for variation. To be clear, though, the correlation between Freedom, Inc. fundraising and social network growth should not be interpreted causally. There are far too many examples in the CSW network, like the Madison Audubon Society, that indicate social networks do not directly translate into donations. Rather, Freedom, Inc. is another example of the importance of identity to nonprofits. My sample of data from 2015 through 2017 also corresponds with the expansion of the Black Lives Matter movement. Freedom, Inc. has been actively involved in Black Lives Matter and the related cluster of racial equity causes, and they are by far the CSW nonprofit most connected to these causes. In turn, the Freedom, Inc. identity rooted in racial equity has been the driving factor behind their increased fundraising and social network growth.

The example of Freedom, Inc. provides a good opportunity to revisit the research questions driving this chapter, because Freedom, Inc. demonstrates a central lesson of the Big Share that captures both the opportunities and the constraints of nonprofit digital communication.

RQ4. What did CSW nonprofits learn from the Big Share?

RQ4a. What digital strategies did CSW nonprofits develop after the first Big Share?

RQ4b. How did the CSW network and organizational ecology change following the first Big Share?

Through the Big Share, CSW nonprofits learned the technical and logistic components of digital fundraising campaigns. Although no one, to my knowledge, was ever able to divine a foolproof rule for successful social media posts, they learned that images, video, and testimonials are crucial to engagement. They also learned that targeted strategies for matching grants and power hour prizes have significant impact. Over multiple years, the Big Share shows that these elements can be effectively combined in many variations, but "intentional planning and a theme are key," as Finger put it. No organization was successful without the intentionality of a dedicated campaign. Meier articulated a similar summary of logistic and thematic lessons:

> We've learned that having a video to share on social media is key, as is targeting a power hour. We'll continue to do both of those things. And we'll also continue the lighthearted, fun tone of our Big Share campaigns. It seems like donors like to see uplifting stories about kids, beautiful pictures of birds, and generally positive things in this form of a campaign.
>
> We've learned that our donors are receptive to this new form of fundraising, and in fact, some of them prefer it. I think the time-sensitive, fun factor of being part of a 'day of giving' is something that they enjoy and take pride in.

GSAFE (formerly Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools) and Friends of Wisconsin State Parks (FWSP) illustrate the impact of a focused campaign through a simple comparison. In 2015, Kuplic and his adolescent son executed a campaign supporting GSAFE, employing the same methods from Kuplic's CSW trainings. In 2016, they executed a similar campaign supporting FWSP. GSAFE raised $5,650 in 2015 and $3,855 in 2016. FWSP raised $310 in 2015 and $1,685 in 2016. Patty Loosen of FWSP acknowledged that Kuplic's campaign was the source of their 2016 increase. These examples, then, indicate that the base value of a well-focused campaign is around $1,500.

However, digital communication cannot produce value in a vacuum. The core lesson of the Big Share is successful digital communication emerges from and enhances organizational identity. Returning to Freedom, Inc., the principle reason for their growth is their identity as a racial justice organization. Fundraising campaigns and digital communication strategies can enhance organizational identity, but they are not a substitute for identity. First and foremost, outreach communication must articulate and leverage a preexisting identity in a way that resonates with constituents. Freedom, Inc. and the many other CSW nonprofits who expanded their digital capacity since 2015 were successful because they created a powerful organizational identity and then communicated that identity effectively, not because digital communication is a proverbial magic bullet that can instantly convert bystanders into dedicated constituents. From their experience with organizational identity and social media surrounding the Big Share, CSW nonprofits learned that digital communication is a process not an event. Wolf explained that even successful communication campaigns rely on consistent non-campaign communication. "You don't just give us money and not hear from us for three months. I always let you know what we're doing and that we're using your money wisely and we're working hard. That's one way social media helps in relation to fundraising."

More broadly, the Big Share also emphasized that there are many networking opportunities that CSW nonprofits do not always utilize to their fullest potential. As Kaminski described, "The relationship is sort of there in the real world, but I haven't had time to work on it and so forth." Due to time constraints and limited human resources, CSW nonprofits continually struggle to build their organizational networks. But the Big Share has certainly stimulated their awareness of networking opportunities. "Then you do this mutually positive, supportive, nice thing online, and that progresses the relationship a little bit," Kaminski

continued. “So that’s what Facebook is good for, in my view: not reaching out to our members as much as reaching out to others—potential members and partners.”

By and large, the CSW organizational network was stable during the span I collected data from 2015 through 2017. Similarly, the same organizations experienced repeated Big Share success year after year. However, the set of successful organizations does not perfectly match what one would have predicted prior to the first Big Share, based on organizational and network characteristics. More accurately, the Big Share demonstrates that success often begets success. Organizations that had campaign experience prior to the Big Share were able to leverage that experience to achieve initial success and then add to that level of success in subsequent years. At the same time, the structure of digital fundraising did leave space for inexperienced organizations to foster success in the first year, through a combination of intentional strategizing and unanticipated luck. And organizations who had a successful 2015, whether anticipated or not, were more likely to invest in 2016 and 2017 to continue building success.

Wisconsin Literacy is the best example of this trajectory. They never had particularly high organizational or network resources. But in the first year, Wisconsin Literacy unexpectedly won power hour prizes, which prompted higher satisfaction and future investment in subsequent Big Shares. Interestingly, Wisconsin Literacy’s performance in the top third of fundraising quickly shifted to an expected status quo, even though their performance was quite surprising in 2015. Their example reiterates the general trend of predictability within the CSW network, punctuated with space for unexpected variation. And this observation captures the overall conclusion of my research: This set of CSW nonprofits illustrates that commentators should not ignore the nuances of digital communication networks. Viewed in the aggregate, digital communication does indeed often follow conventional organizational power laws. But more complete analysis reveals equalizing

network effects that, while they may not be pervasive, are nonetheless significant and disruptive. In the final chapter, I explore the implications of my research beyond the specific CSW context that I studied.

## *VI. The Big Summary*

Without explicitly answering my overarching research question, hopefully it is obvious that my data and analysis in the preceding three chapters have addressed:

> RQ1. How are community-based nonprofits integrating digital media into their communication strategies?

I will first review the key observations from previous chapters, and then return to RQ1 to synthesize these pieces into a broader conclusion. Chapter 3 asked:

> RQ2. What kind of organization has the most success during the Big Share?
>
> RQ2a. Are large organizations more likely to have success during the Big Share than small organizations?
>
> RQ2b. How does network position impact success during the Big Share?

To operationalize organizational resources, I compiled the annual expenses, social media audience from Facebook and Twitter, and Twitter network centrality of the 69 nonprofits that participated in the Big Share. In the results of the Big Share 2015, I found that resource-rich organizations are not purely more likely to have fundraising success. High annual expenses, large social media audience, and high network centrality are not primary indicators of total fundraising. It is especially true that organizations do not require high financial resources in order to execute effective digital fundraising campaigns. This contradicts conventional organizational research that expects resource availability to strongly predict performance. Although I did not find a distinct profile among the most successful Community Shares of Wisconsin (CSW) organizations, they generally have an audience size and network centrality that provide a decent or above-average base for fundraising appeals.

In Chapter 4, I investigated how these fundraising appeals were structured, asking:

> RQ3. What are the features of a successful Big Share campaign? What organizational and communicative strategies drive greater success?

Through interviews with nonprofit staff members, campaign examples from Facebook and Twitter, and my own participant observation while executing a Big Share campaign, I found that successful campaigns exhibit three common themes: (1) staff and board enthusiasm, (2) branded messaging, and (3) previously untapped social networks. In many cases, CSW nonprofits learned strategies to excel in these areas from CSW training resources, and all nonprofits benefited from the logistic and promotional foundation that CSW created. However, even the most successful Big Share 2015 campaigns were by no means ideal types. The first Big Share especially was an opportunity for CSW nonprofits to learn how to execute online fundraising campaigns, through a combination of CSW guidance and their own experimentation. The novel approach to fundraising that CSW imparted allowed many organizations to outperform both their expectations and the success predicted by organizational and network constraints.

Chapters 3 and 4 focused on the inaugural Big Share 2015. In Chapter 5, I explored the evolution of CSW nonprofits through 2017. I asked:

RQ4. What did CSW nonprofits learn from the Big Share?

RQ4a. What digital strategies did CSW nonprofits develop after the first Big Share?

RQ4b. How did the CSW network and organizational ecology change following the first Big Share?

Through the Big Share, CSW nonprofits have learned the technical and logistic components of digital fundraising campaigns. Although no one, in CSW or otherwise, has yet divined a foolproof rule for successful social media posts, CSW nonprofits have found that images, video, and testimonials are crucial to engagement. They have also learned that targeted strategies for matching grants and power hour prizes have significant impact. Over multiple years, the Big Share shows that these elements can be effectively combined in many variations, but nonprofits must purposely consider their methods and employ strategic

messaging. Even though there is some randomness to digital virality, no organization was a successful fundraiser without the intentionality of a dedicated campaign.

By and large, the CSW organizational network was stable during the span I collected data from 2015 through 2017. Similarly, the same organizations experienced repeated Big Share success year after year. However, the set of successful organizations does not perfectly match what one would have predicted prior to the first Big Share, based on organizational and network characteristics. More accurately, the Big Share demonstrates that success often begets success. Organizations that had campaign experience prior to the Big Share were able to leverage that experience to achieve initial success and then add to that level of success in subsequent years. At the same time, the structure of digital fundraising did leave space for inexperienced organizations to foster success in the first year, through a combination of intentional strategizing and unanticipated luck. And organizations who had a successful 2015, whether anticipated or not, were more likely to invest in 2016 and 2017 to continue building success. Overall, the Big Share data embody a general trend of predictability within the CSW network, punctuated with space for unexpected variation

Returning to RQ1 and the evolution of digital communication among community-based nonprofits, my research on the CSW network reveals that nonprofits are, indeed, expanding their use of social media and digital strategies. However, community-based nonprofits are often heavily constrained by low human and capital resources to invest in digital communication. With single-digit staffs and tight budgets, nonprofits struggle to make time for social media. These constraints also make it particularly difficult for nonprofits to stay current with the fast-changing landscape of online trends and memes.

At the same time, digital media do offer distinct advantages that can greatly enhance the impact of relatively minimal investment. Although online networks are by no means democratic utopias, I found in the CSW case that digital platforms have an equalizing effect

potent enough to allow success even for organizations poor in traditional resources. Big Share fundraising exhibits a more egalitarian distribution than the overall CSW organizational field. Social media can also more efficiently amplify messages across networks, compared to other communication platforms. CSW nonprofits admitted that they do not always fully leverage their digital networking potential, but given the training resources provided by CSW and the learning opportunity provided by the Big Share, CSW nonprofits have shown remarkable growth in a short amount of time.

Table 6.1 shows fundraising totals for the Big Share 2019, which reflect truly unexpected results, especially considering that many CSW organizations conducted their first online fundraiser only five years prior. Wisconsin Literacy continued as the exemplar of digital potential in 2019, raising $34,911 to take the top spot. Their sustained Big Share success illustrates that digital media, used strategically, can indeed raise organizations above their place in the organizational field. The case of the CSW nonprofit network emphasizes that commentators should not ignore the nuances of digital communication. And the five years of growth since the inaugural Big Share in 2015 inform the central conclusions of my research: Viewed in the aggregate, digital communication may often follow conventional organizational power laws. But more complete analysis reveals equalizing network effects that, while they may not be pervasive, are nonetheless significant and disruptive. Moreover, the expanded success of *all* CSW nonprofits over five years proves that nonprofit fundraising (and digital network dynamics in general) is not a zero-sum game.

The Big Share 2015 raised $211,890 total, with 37 organizations raising over $1,000. The Big Share 2019 raised $456,175 total. Contradicting digital skeptics, these gains were not isolated at the top of the leaderboard. In 2019, the top 37 organizations raised over $3,800 each, and 51 organizations raised over $1,000. After five years, many CSW nonprofits have become so adept at digital fundraising that the Big Share provides a large portion of their

| Organization | Total Raised ($) |
|---|---|
| WI Literacy | 34,910.88 |
| Clean WI | 25,211.00 |
| CSW | 23,656.68 |
| Freedom, Inc. | 22,341.00 |
| GSAFE | 21,435.99 |
| River Alliance | 21,011.00 |
| Kids Forward (WCCF) | 19,235.00 |
| Conservation Voices (WLCV) | 18,155.50 |
| MEA | 17,799.00 |
| WAWH | 16,258.00 |
| Wheels for Winners | 15,221.00 |
| LWV | 13,433.00 |
| WWA | 13,182.00 |
| WI Democracy Campaign | 11,780.00 |
| Gathering Waters | 11,400.00 |
| REAP | 10,260.00 |
| WWN | 9,285.00 |
| EDAW | 9,210.00 |
| Sustain Dane | 8,048.00 |
| Common Wealth Dev | 7,332.00 |
| Disability Rights WI | 7,330.00 |
| WECA | 7,195.00 |
| Madison Audubon Society | 7,061.00 |
| Bayview Foundation | 5,850.00 |
| Tenant Resource Center | 5,600.38 |
| FairShare | 5,580.00 |
| *The Progressive* | 5,520.00 |
| MOSES | 5,520.00 |
| Mentoring Positives | 5,224.00 |
| 1000 Friends of WI | 5,191.00 |
| Sierra Club | 5,054.00 |
| Nuestro Mundo | 4,914.88 |
| UNIDOS | 4,423.29 |
| Council of the Blind | 4,401.00 |
| Voces de la Frontera | 4,170.88 |
| Project Home | 4,050.00 |

| Organization | Total Raised ($) |
|---|---|
| Women in Transition | 3,885.00 |
| Dane Co. TimeBank | 3,100.00 |
| Fair WI | 2,505.00 |
| ACLU of WI | 2,500.00 |
| Arts WI | 2,415.00 |
| Outreach | 2,133.22 |
| CMD | 2,000.00 |
| RCC | 1,618.88 |
| Housing Initiatives | 1,475.00 |
| Community GroundWorks | 1,389.00 |
| Rebalanced-Life Wellness | 1,215.00 |
| Center for Resilient Cities | 1,177.00 |
| WCASA | 1,158.88 |
| Positive Women for Change | 1,055.00 |
| MACLT | 1,033.18 |
| Rock River Coalition | 991.00 |
| WI Farmers Union | 900.00 |
| Friends of WI State Parks | 870.00 |
| Pivotal Transitions | 800.00 |
| Chrysalis | 780.19 |
| Fair Housing Council | 730.00 |
| NAACP Dane Co. | 680.00 |
| Perfect Harmony | 590.00 |
| Lilada's Livingroom | 545.00 |
| ABC for Health | 535.00 |
| WCCN | 525.00 |
| Omega School | 480.00 |
| Orgullo Latinx LGBT+ | 473.88 |
| PSR WI | 460.00 |
| Legal Action of WI | 435.00 |
| CUB | 355.00 |
| CSWAB | 320.00 |
| WI Family Ties | 310.00 |
| ICWJ | 250.00 |
| WORT | 233.88 |
| Aggregate Total | 456,174.59 |

*Table 6.1.* Total Raised during the Big Share 2019

annual budgets. Karyl Rice of the Wisconsin Women's Network (WWN) explained that the ability to fundraise so much money through one event is vital to their organization, which has no paid staff. "The Big Share represents almost one-fifth of our fundraising in one day. So the Big Share is crucial to keeping our programs going," she said (Community Shares of Wisconsin, 2019). Among the numerous success stories, Wheels for Winners is perhaps the most illustrative of the impact of digital fundraising on the CSW nonprofit network. Wheels for Winners is another all-volunteer organization. As of this writing in 2019, they have a modest Facebook following of 709 and no Twitter page. During the Big Share 2019, Wheels for Winners raised $15,221, which was rank 11. Alan Crossley enthusiastically explained, "Our operating budget is 12 to 14,000, so we're raising our entire operating budget in one day, which is pretty amazing. It's awesome!" (Community Shares of Wisconsin, 2019)

Overall, CSW and the Big Share demonstrate that digital communication has significant value, but the potential is not unlimited and, most importantly, does not arise from digital communication in isolation. As I emphasized in my literature review, communication is a vital component of community, but communication should not be privileged over community. The Big Share reinforces this approach, providing an example of a digital campaign built upon a preexisting community. The community organizing and publicity that CSW has coordinated provide a prerequisite foundation for the Big Share. Facebook and Twitter have amplified the Big Share through social networks, but, significantly, the Big Share could not have succeeded without the real-world efforts of CSW and member nonprofits. Reflecting on five years of the Big Share, CSW Executive Director Cheri Dubiel summarized the combined effect of digital and real-world communities:

> Every year, we've progressively raised more and more. We know that the secret to that is all of our member groups are working so hard, and learning how to communicate through social media, and how to communicate through digital communications. And we also know that it's because this community supports these values and these issues. (Community Shares of Wisconsin, 2019)

Ultimately, the Big Share is not proof of the power of social media in a vacuum. Rather, the Big Share embodies the symbiotic relationship between online and real-world networks, illustrating the ways in which social media can foster new relationships in a changing media ecology.

And the Big Share reveals a similar lesson in relation to the digital strategies of community-based nonprofits, or indeed any organization. Effective digital communication emerges from and enhances organizational identity. Fundraising campaigns and digital communication strategies can enhance organizational identity, but they are not a substitute for identity. As Yu and Adkins (2016b) concluded based on survey data of motivations for charitable giving, "a strong organizational identity attracts donations." First and foremost, outreach communication must articulate and leverage a preexisting identity in a way that resonates with constituents. The many CSW nonprofits who expanded their digital capacity since 2015 have been successful because they created a powerful organizational identity and then communicated that identity effectively, not because digital communication is a proverbial magic bullet that can instantly convert bystanders into dedicated constituents. In the same way that no organization expects 100% conversion from an advertisement, nonprofits should not be discouraged because a single social media post, or even many posts, has low visibility or engagement. Tempering their social media expectations was an important lesson that helped CSW nonprofits persist through the reality of a highly competitive attention economy.

Obviously, social media fame is not the goal for community-based nonprofits. These nonprofits seek real-world policy changes that cannot be achieved even through an infinite number of likes and retweets. But the Big Share shows how social media can be a tool that supports nonprofit goals. With a strong organizational identity as a foundation, social media provide a platform for that identity to catch the audience's attention. Then a nonprofit can

convert attention into a relationship through repeated interaction, including but not limited to social media, that fosters an identity bond. And finally, the nonprofit can *occasionally* convert the relationship into tangible action that affects policy, like voting, volunteering, and fundraising. Ultimately, from their experience with organizational identity and social media surrounding the Big Share, CSW nonprofits have learned that digital communication is a process not an event. Not every post will go viral. Not every interaction will secure a policy decision. Many interactions will "simply" communicate a relationship with constituents. But that communication is a prerequisite for stimulating action. Yu and Adkins (2016b) found that people are most motivated to support a nonprofit when it (1) presents a clear and consistent purpose, (2) creates and acts on a compelling brand or service promise, and (3) communicates *consistently*. Without a continual process of relationship building, nonprofits cannot connect with the supporters that drive their success. And because social media are increasingly integral in citizens' lives, nonprofits cannot ignore them as a mode of communication.

All relationships—whether organizational or personal, nonprofit or for-profit—require robust and continued communication as a means of building a shared identity. This is the crux of community: shared identity through communication. To the extent that nonprofit organizations want to maintain their position as mediators between citizens and the democratic polity, nonprofits must build and foster shared identities with citizens using the communication platforms that citizens use. In order to communicate *on behalf of* citizens, nonprofits must communicate *with* citizens. Constrained as nonprofit staffs may be, their obligation to communicate with citizens demands that nonprofits adapt to emergent communication trends. It is vital that community-based nonprofits remain open and inquisitive to digital communication, not just for the health of their own fundraising campaigns, but for the health of their communities overall. Community-based nonprofits

remain an indispensable steward of civic communication ecologies. And through this role, all democratic citizens rely on the ability of nonprofits to bolster civic ecologies through adaptive communicative strategies, lest nonprofits follow the demise of local newspapers.

A noteworthy limitation of my current research project is my inability to capture the complete ecological context of CSW. Unfortunately, I was not able to fully replicate the depth of community network research conducted by Laumann and Pappi (1976) and Diani (2015). Admittedly, the CSW network is a particular segment of Madison's civic ecology, and it was beyond the scope of my research to fully analyze how CSW interacts with other segments of the ecology. CSW represents a community-based nonprofit model, and I acknowledge that my analysis and conclusions may not apply to nonprofits that employ a different structure. The United Way of Dane County, for example, employs a more hierarchical network structure. While I believe that the communication strategies discussed herein are relevant for other organizations, strategies that were successful for CSW would likely not perfectly transfer to other networks. Similarly, highly centralized organizations that focus on lobbying rather than community organizing presumably apply their own unique communication strategies.

The ways that these differently structured nonprofits interact with one another and the varying ways that they interact with citizens and the polity merit further investigation. Particularly relevant to CSW, my research is lacking the historical breadth to fully capture the ecological impact of digital communication. My academic perspective builds on the premise that better communication bolsters community democracy. Based on the work that CSW nonprofits do (e.g., rights-based advocacy, environmental and social justice initiatives, legal action on behalf of vulnerable populations), I truly believe that their increased digital fundraising has had tangible community benefits. But I was not able to fully explore the ways in which digital communication translated into community development.

Roughly speaking, I categorize CSW digital communication into three phases: (1) the pre-digital phase, when CSW nonprofits had low utilization of digital media; (2) the adoption phase, when CSW nonprofits learned and implemented digital strategies; and (3) the integrated phase, when digital communication became fully merged with their community outreach. My research covers the end of the pre-digital phase and the majority of the adoption phase. But my research does not capture much of the integrated phase. As such, when I studied the CSW network, digital communication was still somewhat isolated from their community organizing. During my research, they employed digital strategies for isolated campaigns like the Big Share; but CSW nonprofits had not fully realized the value of digital media for building and maintaining community relationships. This is why I emphasized social media's relational value in my conversations with nonprofit staff, in order to encourage their transition to the integrated phase.

I saw some evidence of integration in my data, particularly in my conversations with Stacy Harbaugh from the Midwest Environmental Advocates, Amanda Wegner from Clean Wisconsin, and Renata Solan from the Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters. But for the most part, my research captures the phase when CSW nonprofits were not fully leveraging digital communication to maximize their community impact. I believe the consistently increasing success of the Big Share demonstrates that these nonprofits are, indeed, building stronger relationships in the Madison community. And my informed suspicion is that these stronger relationships are helping CSW nonprofits better translate citizen interests into the institutional polity. But further research is required to fully articulate the ways in which CSW nonprofits are employing communication to foster more robust civic ecologies. Reflecting on the civic impact of contemporary communication, in the final section, I offer concluding thoughts on the role of digital media in democratic life.

## Changing Civic Communication

Malcolm Gladwell famously quipped, "The revolution will not be tweeted" (2010). Siding with digital skeptics, he explained that the new form of social organization embodied in networked individualism may foster efficient communication, but it does not effect substantial social change. He elaborated:

> [This model of activism] is simply a form of organizing which favors the weak-tie connections that give us access to information over the strong-tie connections that help us persevere in the face of danger. It shifts our energies from organizations that promote strategic and disciplined activity and toward those which promote resilience and adaptability. It makes it easier for activists to express themselves, and harder for that expression to have any impact. (Gladwell, 2010)

Gladwell's assessment is accurate to an extent, but it represents another example of the preference to ignore nuance in digital communication. His point is the same that I have made through my research: digital communication does not exist in a vacuum free from identity. Gladwell, however, incorrectly implied that networked individualism and civic engagement are mutually exclusive. This tension is represented in at least the past century of democratic philosophy, as outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. The evolution of digital communication in the CSW nonprofit network, however, undermines Gladwell's implication. When organizational digital communication promotes a shared identity that resonates with citizens, substantial change can indeed be achieved. Certainly the $34,911 that Wisconsin Literacy raised during the Big Share 2019 cannot be disregarded as inconsequential. The Big Share provides an excellent example of the coalescence between networked individualism and Gladwell's "revolution." In Gladwell's language, the CSW case shows that resilient and adaptable information networks can be employed to support organizations that promote strategic and disciplined activity.

Indeed, the past decade has numerous instances where digital networks have complemented social change. The Pew Research Center found that 53% of Americans were

civically active on social media in the 12 months prior to their survey (Anderson, Toor, Rainie, & Smith, 2018). Sixty-eight percent of respondents said that social media are important for getting elected officials to pay attention to issues and creating sustained movements, and a slightly lower 58% felt social media are important for influencing policy (Anderson, Toor, Rainie, & Smith, 2018). Blacks and Hispanics found social media more important for civic engagement, promoting issues that do not get enough attention, and giving a voice to underrepresented groups. At the same time, the Pew survey confirmed the tension in academic literature. Around 64% of respondents recognized positive civic impacts of social media, but a larger 77%, and particularly Whites, felt that social media distract from truly important issues (Anderson, Toor, Rainie, & Smith, 2018). Of course, both observations can be true. Social media are not monolithic. They can in some instances promote civic engagement and in others hinder it.

The Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, and Me Too movements are all recent examples when social media have promoted civic engagement. Although these movements may have had only limited policy impact thus far, the movements are still early in their institutionalization, and they have undeniably influenced civic discourse in ways that will have lasting impact in the coming years. Perhaps ironically, given the skepticism of Whites, the most impactful digital network complement in recent years is represented in the Make American Great Again (MAGA) movement that propelled Donald Trump to the presidency in 2016. Furthering the irony, Trump's election simultaneously confirmed the political effectiveness of social media and the incivility of social media. During the 2016 campaign, consulting firm Cambridge Analytica used a model built from Facebook data collected without user permission to target pro-Trump advertising (Rosenberg, Confessore, & Cadwalladr, 2018; Hindman, 2018). Further, literal fake news proliferated on social media during the 2016 campaign, especially on Facebook (Lee, 2016; Kurtzleben, 2018).

It is difficult to precisely assess the impact of uncivil social media on voting during the 2016 election, but the perceived effect has already forced a substantial shift in social media policies. The high-profile scrutiny of civic perversion during the 2016 campaign forced social media sites to reevaluate their democratic obligations. Facebook and Twitter had previously positioned their sites as only content platforms. They were not publishers, who would be responsible for policing the content on their sites (Jarvis, 2018; Levin, 2018). But these sites have recently acknowledged that they have a greater role in public discourse. For example, Google, then Facebook, offered $300 million each to fund journalism (Kafka, 2019). Facebook and Twitter now more aggressively ban hate speech (Coaston, 2019; Hayes, 2019). And even Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg admitted to the U.S. Congress:

> We didn't do enough to prevent these tools from being used for harm. That goes for fake news, foreign interference in elections, and hate speech, as well as developers and data privacy. We didn't take a broad enough view of our responsibility, and that was a big mistake. It was my mistake, and I'm sorry. (Kurtzleben, 2018)

Overall, fallout from the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign has left Facebook in a precarious position. (See Thompson & Vogelstein, 2018, 2019.) The company has set aside $3 billion in preparation for a fine from the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (Statt, 2019a). Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes (2019) recently wrote in a *New York Times* op-ed that Facebook has become too powerful and should be broken up. “Mark is a good, kind person. But I’m angry that his focus on growth led him to sacrifice security and civility for clicks,” Hughes (2019) said. Democratic presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren has already incorporated breaking up Facebook, Google, and Amazon into her platform (Beauchamp, 2019).

Perhaps recognizing that social media are not prepared to serve as a democratic public commons, Facebook has been shifting the site’s structure away from organizational content in the News Feed. Facebook first sought to emphasize “meaningful social interactions” in the

News Feed, meaning fewer posts from organizations and more posts from friends (Thompson & Vogelstein, 2019). And more recently, Facebook announced an overhaul that privileges group messaging and events over the News Feed (Statt, 2019b). (In reality, this transition is presumably the result of business interests more than democratic interests.) Exemplifying the evolution of social media among CSW nonprofits, staff members have been keenly monitoring these developments and regularly use the Big Share Facebook group to discuss their impact. Although obviously no one can predict exactly how site changes will impact nonprofit strategies, staff members are hopeful that an emphasis on conversation will allow nonprofits to cut through the noise and better connect with constituents.

Elsewhere in U.S. democracy, many continue to leverage social media to properly promote civicness. Even as skepticism abounds, elected officials like U.S. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have leveraged social media to build enthusiastic and engaged online followings who simultaneously have tangible political impact. In Ocasio-Cortez's case, her 4.17 million Twitter followers (Ocasio-Cortez, n.d.-a) and 3.4 million Instagram (Ocasio-Cortez, n.d.-b) followers get equally excited about the Green New Deal policy proposal as about her chili recipe. Of course, social media were only a small component of her upset victory to become a U.S. representative. Her election was won through true grassroots organizing (Alter, 2019). But as I have emphasized throughout my research, the value of social media is its ability to amplify resonant identity. And at a time when democratic scholars bemoan (as they have always) an inattentive public, Ocasio-Cortez provides a template for how to effectively use social media to engage citizens in political issues. "Yes, her support of policies such as the Green New Deal and her willingness to stand up to Republicans are exceptionally popular among young people and the Left," said Luke O'Neil (2019) of *The Guardian*. "But she also happens to be one of the first politicians to understand how to properly use social media. Her engagement on Twitter and Instagram feels authentic to how

a young person might actually use them." This is precisely a point that I conveyed in my conversations with CSW staff members. Nonprofits should use social media the same way that the average person uses social media.

This is an important lesson for nonprofits to learn, both for their own success and for the overall health of our democracy. As I have discussed, the decline of local newspapers leaves community-based nonprofit organizations as an indispensable link in civic communication ecologies. Recognizing the importance of communication, Report for America is even explicitly using the nonprofit sector to revitalize local journalism. Co-founder Charles Sennott explained that the loss of newspapers, especially in less populous areas of the U.S., has greatly disrupted civic communication. "We're seeing that even within states that are in the middle of the country, those communities themselves are not listening to each other," he said (CNN, 2019). Noticing the need for more robust communication ecologies, Report for America aims to use nonprofit funding to support local journalism, thereby offsetting the loss of advertising revenue. "There's a need to think about local journalism as a binding agent for our democracy, or our communities," Sennott continued (CNN, 2019). "There's a new era of journalism where nonprofit is playing a bigger and bigger role, and has to" (CNN, 2019).

Sennott said that Report for America intends to follow the Public Broadcasting Service's model of nonprofit funding for local journalism (CNN, 2019). His observations, however, extend beyond journalism. Community-based nonprofits fill this same space in civic communication ecologies. Whether delivered by journalists or nonprofit staff, the information provided by this sector of the civic communication ecology links the everyday lives of citizens to the institutional mechanisms that effect change. Sennott used the example of *Lexington Herald-Leader* coverage supported by Report for America prompting funding for clean water in Eastern Kentucky. And REAP's Farm to School program provided 113,000

pounds of local fruits and vegetables to the Madison Metropolitan School District in the 2017-2018 school year (REAP Food Group, n.d.), to name a single example of the tangible community impact of the CSW network.

The work of community-based nonprofits supports robust and healthy local communities, but it also depends on support from community members. As in any ecology, the health of the whole is tied to the health of each constituent part. Citizens, mediating civic organizations, and the institutionalized polity all rely on one another to maintain a functioning, well-balanced democracy. It has always been a challenge of democracy to simultaneously foster the types of shared identity that give life meaning while mediating when those shared identities conflict. This balance is maintained through responsive communication among all three levels of the polity. And because communication is central to the forms of community that undergird democracy, nonprofit organizations must be dedicated to learning and using forms of communication that connect them to citizens. I hope that my research on the CSW network shows that nonprofits can adapt to digital communication and, moreover, that digital communication has a significant role in civic communication. Although the role of digital communication in democracy is by no means unequivocally egalitarian, it is important that democratic scholars recognize the equalizing potential where it exists and help civic organizations leverage that potential for the benefit of all.

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## *Appendix A. 2015 Interview Guide*

1. Which Community Shares of Wisconsin nonprofit(s) do you work with?

2. Do you work with any other Madison nonprofit(s)?

3. What is your position/role within the nonprofit(s)?

4. Did the CSW nonprofit(s) participate in the Big Share?

5. If not, why didn't they participate in the Big Share? Lack of resources? Conflict with another fundraiser? Concern about bombarding constituency?

If so:

6. Did someone from the nonprofit(s) attend CSW's Big Share training sessions?

7. How did the nonprofit(s) promote the Big Share?

8. Did they get any local groups/businesses to contribute matching donations? If so, how was this relationship established? Was it a preexisting or new partnership?

9. What were the e-mail, Facebook, Twitter strategies? Post frequency? Type of content?

10. Did they use any other digital/social media?

11. What digital networking strategies did they use? Mentions/tagging? Liking/commenting/sharing/retweeting? Hashtags? #CSWBigShare?

12. Did they promote other CSW nonprofits as part of the Big Share? How so?

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13. How did digital media fit into the nonprofit(s) communication plan before the Big Share?

14. What did the nonprofit(s) learn from the Big Share? About real-world networking? About digital media/networking?

15. Are any new strategies being employed following the Big Share?

16. Are there any areas of concern/confusion regarding digital strategies?

17. Do they want further advice/assistance in developing/evaluating digital strategies?

## *Appendix B. 2016 Interview Guide*

1. [Your organization] raised roughly [dollar amount] more during the 2016 Big Share than in 2015. What was your goal for the 2016 Big Share?

2. What strategies do you think were responsible for your increased success?

3. If they won a power hour: [Your organization] won the [time] power hour for most donors/money raised. Was that the result of a focused effort? If so, what did your power hour campaign consist of?

4. How did you develop your strategies for the 2016 Big Share? (from CSW trainings? from your own experimentation? from outside consultants?)

5. Despite your increased success, were there any problems/obstacles during the 2016 Big Share?

6. What have been the most valuable lessons [your organization] has learned from the 2015 and 2016 Big Shares?

7. How do you plan on building on your success during the 2016 Big Share? (Are you planning additional digital campaigns? Adding any new digital/social platforms? Implementing new strategies for the future?)

8. Are there any additional resources or future workshop topics (from CSW or partners) that would be helpful?