

# **Building and Sustaining a University-Anchored Collaborative Public Safety Data Network: The Northwest Indiana Model**

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## **Abstract**

This article details the Northwest Indiana Public Safety Data Consortium (NWIPSDC), a privately funded data-sharing network housed at Indiana University Northwest, an anchor institution, that includes several private-sector participants and over 30 public safety agencies at all levels of government (local, county, state, and federal). The NWIPSDC is fully explained, as are the academic underpinnings that supported its foundation (anchor institutions, network governance, and organizational and systems theory). The consortium is then detailed. The article concludes by overviewing, from the faculty perspective, the benefits and opportunities as well as challenges and drawbacks for those considering this type of community-engaged service/research on such a scale and how administrators can help to alleviate these issues and concerns.

*Keywords:* university-community networks, anchor institutions, governance

## **Introduction**

This article details the Northwest Indiana Public Safety Data Consortium (NWIPSDC), a public/private collaborative information-sharing network managed and administered at Indiana University Northwest, an anchor institution in the northwest region of Indiana. The community-engaged network consists of private companies, a university professor, over 30 law enforcement agencies across the four counties of northwest Indiana, and several other specific organizational nodes that supply and/or utilize information produced by the consortium, including the second-largest newspaper in the state.

The article first discusses what the NWIPSDC is, how the network was built, and how it is now structured and managed in accordance with the academic foundations and influences that framed and supported its creation. The article then details the advantages and the drawbacks of the consortium from the faculty perspective to add to our understanding of intensive community-engaged applied research relationships and networks as they become more commonplace for both institutions and their faculty. This includes

suggestions for administrators to help overcome the drawbacks and disadvantages, especially for institutions that value and want to encourage this type of intensive community engagement among faculty.

## What Is the NWIPSDC?

### The Origins

Like most community engagement activities, the NWIPSDC started as a single relationship in January 2012 between the Gary Police Department and one professor at Indiana University Northwest. A new chief of police, the eighth in 5 years, had been hired from outside the department and met with the professor through intermediaries at the department and the university's Center for Urban and Regional Excellence. During a 2-hour meeting, a relationship was born in which the department would share much of its data with the professor, who would then use GIS and other tools not available at the police department to turn their data into timely and ongoing information to be utilized for several purposes.

For context, the population of Gary (where the university is located) declined from 102,000 to 80,294 from 2000 to 2010 (*U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.*). A recent parcel study by the city revealed that 6,902 of the 58,235 parcels surveyed (11.9%) contained a vacant and abandoned structure (*City of Gary, 2014*). The city, which is home to the ailing American steel industry, saw the percentage of people in poverty increase from 25% in 2000 to 35.9% in 2010 (*U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.*). These socioeconomic factors led to Gary's being dubbed the nation's "murder capital" in the 1990s. Over the past 5 years alone, Gary has experienced 231 homicides in a city with an estimated 77,858 residents as of 2016 (*US Census Bureau, n.d.*) for an average annual ratio of 1 murder for every 1,732 residents. Between 2005 and 2011, 15.5% of all the homicides in Indiana (361 of 2,322) occurred in Gary, which comprises just 1.2% of the state's population. In 2007, one of every five Indiana homicides occurred in Gary. However, the Gary Police Department in January 2012 had depleted resources and tools to track crime. As a service, the professor agreed to store, analyze, map, and transform their data into usable information at no charge while working with them to build their own capacity internally. The scope of this work included analyzing all of their calls for service, current and historical homicides and shootings, and Shotspotter confirmations (a gunfire

locator); creating hot spots; evaluating proactivity, staffing levels, and response times; and providing general objective consultation to the new administration.

As soon as the data collaborative began, it was clear that much more information needed to be mapped, so the professor and police department contact reached out to other city departments, receiving records of historical fire and EMS calls, business licenses, and other information. Over the course of the following 13 months, all analytical work for the department was performed at the university, which provided use of the software, and information was supplied to the department mainly in PDF format via e-mail. However, the wealth of information being created was leading to the necessity of acquiring other data to enable more effective public safety. It also became clear that the collaboration needed to transition from reliance on university technical assistance to greater intradepartmental analytical capabilities, and that the technology being used needed to be reconsidered to enable greater impact within the department and between the university, department, and community.

## The Evolution

The “region” (as Northwest Indiana is referred to locally) is far more than just Gary. Lake County, where Gary sits in the north along Lake Michigan, has 19 different municipalities and more than 21 different policing jurisdictions. The population of 490,228 represents 7.4% of Indiana’s population, but the wider four-county region that includes Porter, LaPorte, and St. Joseph counties has a population of 1,036,366, or 15.7% of the state population (*U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.*). Crime and its effects, including influences from the greater Chicagoland area, are a persistent and pervasive regional issue.

In February 2013, the NWIPSDC added a second police department in East Chicago, a densely populated, historically violent, majority Hispanic city adjacent to Gary’s western border on Lake Michigan. The same services were offered as those given to Gary PD, and East Chicago began sharing their data as well. In short order, five more police departments joined, and the NWIPSDC began to take form. At this juncture, all of the work was being done as a service for and within each criminal justice agency individually.

As the consortium grew in numbers, reach, scope, population served, and public attention, a local energy company (NIPSCO, Northern Indiana Public Services Company, a NiSource subsidiary)

began to access some of the NWIPSDC data in hopes of working toward ensuring employee safety when working in Gary and East Chicago. At the time, the consortium was still centered in the university, where data would come in and be processed, with the result sent to each department as information, but this approach limited the potential impact of the entire NWIPSDC. In order to reach the regional data-sharing network envisioned, NIPSCO donated to the NWIPSDC \$10,000 to purchase a single ESRI ArcGIS Online Organizational account for 50 users for 1 year (thus far, NIPSCO has funded the project for 6 years). This account is administered by the university but includes multiple log-ins for each department to share while keeping information secure on the system. Overnight, the consortium became an information-sharing and analytical hub that brought the university's technological capabilities into each participating criminal justice agency, with all information seamlessly integrated between agencies at no cost to them.

Most of the agencies use different information systems, so the NWIPSDC account was able to convert all data into a single format and share information across all member agencies at once. This allowed jurisdictions to analyze internally and externally developed data within their communities as well as being informed regarding the surrounding communities. Within the year, there were 30 total agencies across four counties participating in the NWIPSDC, representing the private sector, local police, county police and probation, state police and parole, and federal partners. The persistent problems faced in the region—differing data formats used by agencies, reluctance to share data, and a lack of funding to create or buy new data—have been acknowledged throughout the public sector in utilizing GIS (*Huque, 2001, p. 259*) and are simultaneously addressed through the NWIPSDC.

## **The Current Iteration**

The NWIPSDC still consists of a single professor on the university side, which is less than ideal. Two agencies have become entirely self-sufficient in utilizing the system, with only the occasional need for technical assistance or support, which is provided as part of being a member of the consortium. Information is uploaded into the system to feed into “commonality of picture” applications that are being built or have been built for each agency. These applications permit the agencies to analyze data, query information, summarize information, and create their own layers of editable information with the application. Applications are customized to each agency, given its mission and function, and are shared with

others in the network that need access to that information to formulate strategies and evaluate their actions.

In 2014 the NWIPSDC entered into an agreement to have the second-largest newspaper in the state, *The Times of Northwest Indiana*, host public crime map applications. This mutually free-of-charge arrangement offers residents of 17 jurisdictions full access to interactive crime maps they can search as needed. These maps are updated each week and have had over 700,000 total views. The newspaper created a landing page for these maps as an informational hub on serious crime in the region, with each agency selecting the type of information disseminated and the applications maintained by the professor spearheading the project. Currently, the NWIPSDC has grown to support local, county, state, federal, and private partners in ways that were never considered when the network was born.

## **Academic Foundations of the NWIPSDC**

Academia, in its most common form, is governmental in nature, and many of the changes in the academy reflect the wider societal, economic, political, organizational, and cultural struggles facing the public sector generally. This is especially true of urban-based universities in challenging environments. Despite experiencing often significant internal institutional problems on campus, universities are increasingly expected to provide services externally in the wider regional community. This transition requires application of established frameworks to guide these increasingly boundary-blurring, fast-moving action networks that span institutions, sectors, jurisdictions, disciplines, and comfort levels. The NWIPSDC reflects this transition in urban regional public universities, and the following section details its academic foundations from a perspective that blends the concepts of anchor institutions, network governance, organizational theory, and systems theory.

## **Anchor Institutions**

The reality and conceptual framework of anchor institutions was the starting place for creating and building the NWIPSDC. An “anchor” is a noun and can be a person (such as one that is relied on and needed by others for strength or support), a place (such as an anchor store in a shopping plaza that supports and provides lifeblood for other businesses moored to it), or a thing (such as a heavy metal device that holds ships of any size in place, providing stability). Universities, especially in postindustrial urban locales,

are increasingly being referred to and relied on as “anchor” institutions to provide economic lifeblood and support for other organizations, including resource-depleted governmental agencies, nonprofits, and even private sector entities. Furthermore, the term also describes the emerging permanence of the campus’s responsibility in keeping the reliant local and regional organizations tethered and afloat in increasingly rough seas.

The move toward building or enhancing external engagement between universities and their communities accompanies an internal focus on applied research on many campuses, which makes sense as the two concepts are largely complementary and dependent in nature. Both community engagement and applied research require the building of collaborative, open networks with the university playing an increasingly central role in this process as an “anchor institution” in many urban areas (*Birch, 2009; Birch, Perry, & Taylor, 2013; Cantor, Englot, & Higgins, 2013; Kronick & Cunningham, 2013; Langseth & McVeety, 2007*). The view of metropolitan universities as anchor institutions is founded on the principle of making a sustainable difference in the community anchored to them and extending beyond cities to wider regions (*Birch et al., 2013; Cantor et al., 2013*). Thus, anchor institutions are created by the abundance of network hubs based in the university with nodes and ties extending outward. These network hubs eventually and essentially form institutional anchors that provide a framework for community engagement initiatives.

In accord with the anchor institution framework, the NWIPSDC was structured as an anchor entity for a regional public safety network. Rather than being housed within any one agency, the NWIPSDC is anchored at Indiana University Northwest, which provides technical support for each agency that joins, acts as a cornerstone that attracts other agencies, and provides a permanent structure that can be relied on by participating agencies for the foreseeable future. It is an anchor with nearly 40 tethers and reflects the university’s emergent commitment to community-engaged service through applied research. This structure provides access to the NWIPSDC throughout the region served by the university and has been essential in its growth.

## **New Governance**

Anchor institutions have not developed in isolation. The move toward a “new public management” paradigm and its focus on tool-based network governance has permitted anchor institutions

to reinvent themselves as network anchors that provide essential tools within the local governmental, nonprofit, and private sector organizational network. At its core, new governance represents the inclusion of “third parties” to govern effectively in modern systems, especially relative to the alleviation of social problems (see *Salamon, 2002*). Agranoff (2003) stated that “no single agency or organization at any level of government or the private sector has a monopoly on the mandate, resources, or information to deal with the most vexing of public problems” (p. 7). This framework has influenced many governmental agencies, especially those in urban areas, to reciprocally address chronic issues and social problems in ways that combine university expertise and resources with local government power and authority.

The NWIPSDC reflects all of the tenets of new governance (see *Salamon, 2002*) rather than traditional public administration. For example, the Consortium is funded by a private-sector donation and combines the public and private sectors across four counties to address the pressing social issues of crime, violence, and public safety as well as the delivery of these services. The collaborative network structure of the NWIPSDC has no hierarchy, is flexible in permitting new agencies to join, is tool based rather than program based, and enables agencies and participants in multiple ways with no added structure. In fact, the NWIPSDC is so “new governance” that it does not actually exist outside new nodes and ties within long-existing public and private organizations.

The NWIPSDC has a structure that reflects several different types of networks simultaneously. By its own underpinnings, the NWIPSDC is a public-safety network that was created by rational choice on the part of the actors, and previous research reported that Indiana had only one such network prior (see *Williams et al., 2009*). The consortium also meets the definition of an information dissemination network in that it is designed to facilitate the exchange of data and information across agencies and sectors to enhance knowledge (*Agranoff, 2006; Eggers & Goldsmith, 2004*). The network is also developmental in that it increases, through partner information exchange, the “member’s capacity to implement solutions within their home agencies or organizations” and meets the criteria of an action network “wherein partners came together to make interagency adjustments, formally adopt collaborative courses of action, and deliver services, along with information exchanges and enhanced technology capability” (*Agranoff, 2006, p. 59*). It can also be viewed to some degree as a collaborative policy network (*Weare,*



Lichterman, & Esparza, 2014), as it focuses on making changes within partner agencies where they are sought by the agencies themselves.

## **Organizational and Systems Theory**

Institutional anchors and governance-based networks such as the NWIPSDC cannot be created or effectively function in a vacuum and need to be guided by a strong theoretical framework that integrates organizational and systems theories. Criminal justice organizations, especially police organizations, are highly institutional and resource-intensive. By nature and tradition, the “system” is mainly closed-rational at worst and open-natural at best. Police departments strongly exhibit the rational system hallmarks of rigid hierarchical bureaucracy and goal specificity, and many are still closed off from their environments (see *Scott & Davis, 2007, for broader systems discussion; Ferrandino, 2014, as it applies to policing agencies*). However, in the “community-oriented” era, many departments have become more natural, acquiring more complex goals (service rather than law enforcement and reducing crime, for example) and adding a layer of informal structures as departments became more open with community members and universities, for example (*Ferrandino, 2014*).

The existence of the NWIPSDC is evidence of movement toward a more open criminal justice system in northwest Indiana. Accordingly, the entity was created to automatically network formerly closed-rational, institutional, connected organizations rather than trying to change them structurally. This is consistent with the idea that the network did not alter organizational boundaries in any way except for making them more porous and connected relative to the flow, accessibility, and use of information (*Agranoff, 2006*). This approach, however, also requires universities, which are largely rational and natural systems, to become more open and interact in new ways with their environment. Such interaction is the cornerstone of the anchor institution concept, linking it directly to the organizational theory and systems theory framework. This juncture is likely the hardest for the faculty member and administrators to navigate in this type of engagement.

## **Benefits and Opportunities, Drawbacks and Challenges of this Model**

The NWIPSDC is not an entity unto itself but rather a collection of actors in existing organizations and organizational networks that share information in one “space” at the same “time.” As a result,



there is absolutely no need for any participating organization to change anything about its structure. Rather, the concept is to have them change their policing process to one that is network oriented, tool based, and open, having greater connection to and exchange with its environment, with more of the analytical work led by the departments through self-help rather than the current technical-assistance-heavy approach with the university. It is essential to utilize strong academic foundations if a university, group, department, or faculty member is going to build a community-engaged, collaborative, sustained information network that spans sectors of a region, turning theory and research into practice. However, that is just one essential element to creating, maintaining, and growing this type of network.

The NWIPSDC is a practical example of the Carnegie conceptual definition of community engagement (*New England Resource Center for Higher Education, n.d.*):

Community engagement describes collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

The purpose of community engagement is the partnership of college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good. (*“How Is ‘Community Engagement’ Defined?” paras. 1–2*)

This form of community engagement with a university can bring great benefit if done properly, but it can also come at great cost to the university, partners, and community if not founded conceptually on the footing most likely to succeed. Thus, the university must not only provide vision and technical expertise, but also the academic knowledge needed to properly build and manage such networks, even if they are created organically. That said, the agencies also have an essential role to play in this process, and each member has its own organizational changes, challenges, politics, and pressures that must be acknowledged and managed in addition

to the actual work administering the network. Thus, the rest of this article focuses on the benefits and drawbacks of the NWIPSDC as well as the ongoing opportunities and endless challenges.

## **Benefits and Opportunities**

The entire premise of building collaborative, university-anchored service networks is that they bring benefits to the participants and the region (or city) served. These benefits, and the opportunities they present, are wide-ranging. The region being served should always benefit the most from anchor-institution-based community engagement networks, but these benefits are likely the most difficult to measure as they are dispersed. This stands in contrast to a partnership between a faculty member or group of faculty members and a single outside organization, or a single short-term project with an outside entity, as occurs in many service-learning projects. One benefit of the NWIPSDC has been that its data is shared with the public through crime maps and is also a resource for cities and agencies applying for grants. Having the data already formatted and queryable allows the NWIPSDC to respond to any regional data request, whether it be from government, media, or the private sector. It is a general resource as well as a specific asset.

The relationships built through the network have led to the development of many different projects that have benefited cities in the region. For example, two police chiefs who sought to diversify their departments turned to the university to aid in this effort after trust was established, despite this type of activity not being the direct goal of the project. After a series of meetings, several faculty members collaboratively developed a plan to increase the success rates of diverse applicants. This included mock interviews, a test-taking session that offered tips for succeeding on the written test, and support from the local YMCA to prepare candidates for the physical test. In the end, one department hired its second female officer in its 120-year history, and a Black male candidate was fifth on the hiring list and if hired would be the first Black officer ever hired in this department. That same chief received a state-level award for transparency in government in a county with a history of political scandal. This diffusion of benefits has occurred across the spectrum as the network has grown, produced quality work, and created trusting relationships, with the departments incurring no costs at all.

The university benefits from the NWIPSDC also. A large number of positive news articles over time, combined with the NWIPSDC's starting to reach a more national audience, have provided the school with an anchor for its efforts to become a "community-engaged campus" as it works toward that Carnegie designation. In addition, the project has spurred several professors across campus to request guest lectures and initiate their own GIS-based projects, such as a history professor whose class built the historical Potawatomi Trail of Death, an instance of forced removal of Native Americans from the area, into an interactive map. The university is also listed as a sponsor of the Regional Crime Report (the landing page of the newspaper partner) and is noted every time the consortium is mentioned in the media or presented at conferences. Finally, the NWIPSDC provides an example of in-depth collaborative community networks for other faculty as they learn the scope of community engagement opportunities and begin or expand their own efforts.

Students benefit by looking at real local data, in the form of maps and applications in undergraduate criminal justice classes, as they are introduced to techniques and technology that would not exist without the NWIPSDC. In addition, the NWIPSDC has provided numerous learning and service-related opportunities for classes and students. For example, administering a data consortium across an entire region ensures that students can do projects, conduct research, and analyze data that is pertinent to them, and can share these results and ideas with decision makers, giving students actual input into policy decisions and a better understanding of how the agencies they hope to work for someday operate. It also brings a GIS component to their education that would not be present otherwise. In combination, this benefit has led to a class project (in a master's-level management science class) that analyzed fire and EMS calls for a city in the region, then provided input as to whether the city should have two fire stations instead of one and determined the optimal location of the new stations based on city parameters, demographics, call volume, response times, traffic patterns, and call projections. In another class project in a graduate capstone course, the students created the Gary Homicide Map, a publicly available, GIS-based web map application that follows every homicide in the city starting in January 2014. Gary has had one of the highest homicide rates in the nation over the past three decades, so this project had clear implications for the students and offered benefits to the city and region in terms of understanding homicide events, the victims, who was charged (if anyone), and the

details and results of the case, giving victims a place to be remembered. Most recently an undergraduate capstone course mapped every police shooting in the nation in 2017, a project that gained front-page coverage.

As a result of the network, two students have been hired by participating agencies that have created positions for them, conducting analysis and using GIS within the department. Another student, a patrolman working on his MPA, was able to divert some of his time as his department's crime analyst, a position that did not previously exist. This helped his résumé as he moved to a federal law enforcement position. In addition, two successful Project Safe Neighborhoods grants totaling \$600,000 have been awarded to two NWIPSDC participants with the administrator as the principal investigator.

Finally, there are numerous benefits for faculty engaged in this type of service, which provides the clear ability to integrate service with their teaching and research and the ability to engage firsthand in evaluation and policy making. The network provides faculty access to people who run agencies, making service-learning projects, student internships, and other endeavors far easier to implement. It also provides a pathway for faculty to turn their research into practice through consulting with police and probation chiefs as well as other important decision makers in the community. Furthermore, it provides opportunities to help participants by serving on committees, boards, and panels, as well as presenting at invited speaking opportunities. Such efforts are also likely to expand the faculty member's media profile and increase the number of grant opportunities, awards, and other acknowledgments that contribute to their career through promotions and vitae building. This is a quintessential reflection of the citizen-scholar model (*Pestello, Saxton, Miller, & Donnelly, 1996*).

In sum, the benefits of building a network as expansive as the NWIPSDC are wide and deep; they are found at every level, from student to faculty member, department, and university, to all the agencies involved to varying degrees and ultimately to the public served across the region, the same population served by the university. That said, the benefits are diffused and wide in scope. Additionally, there are diverse and challenging drawbacks that should not be taken lightly or understated if a faculty member chooses to pursue building such an expansive network.

## Drawbacks and Challenges

The NWIPSDC is extremely time intensive in both practice (doing the actual work required on data, mapping, application building, training, being available for questions, helping as many people as needed) and process (maintaining existing relationships, building new ones, managing competing demands and providing equal attention to all members). Junior faculty, for all the benefits such a network could bring, must be aware that at most institutions this type of service is welcomed, but not at the expense of teaching, research, and other service obligations, meaning a faculty member undertaking an endeavor with the scope of the NWIPSDC must excel at the other areas in order to “pay for” the time dedicated to the network. Such a project is a major challenge not only because of its scope but because policing agencies are 24/7 enterprises, and this type of service will extend beyond office hours, semesters, and weekdays. Trying to build a network like the NWIPSDC but lacking the time required to support it will lead to its failure and will likely hurt other areas of a professor’s work. Thus the tremendous potential upside of such an endeavor comes with considerable risk. Administrators could mitigate this difficulty through release time for such service work or by altering promotion and tenure guidelines to explicitly value it as important to the university and its mission. Regardless, the major resource that faculty need for this type of work is time, and administrators need to be cognizant of the time it takes to build the relationships, do the work, promote and improve the project, and keep it alive and beneficial.

Building external relationships, especially those in network-structured entities like the NWIPSDC, also takes time and presents unique challenges. Community partner research indicates that such partnerships may reveal conflicts in incentives to participate and gaps in organizational capacities on one or both sides (*Ferman & Hill, 2004*). Law enforcement, parole, and probation agencies are in general not used to working with professors or other outsiders, and they are suspicious of motives by nature. Ulterior motives, such as a professor using the network for the sole purpose of enhancing a tenure dossier, will reflect on not only the individual but the anchor institution and can damage future reciprocal relationships, jeopardizing opportunities for other faculty members and students. The involved faculty member(s) must listen carefully to what the network participants want and focus on building relationships, not a data-sharing network. Great pains must be taken to nurture these relationships, show respect, give credit, and build trust until the institutions are networked beyond the police chief and the

professor, forming a lasting collaboration. Achieving that point remains the driving goal of NWIPSDC in all its facets.

Such a network must be open to any and every agency that wants to participate, which requires more and more of the faculty member's time as the network grows. Over time agencies must transition toward self-help, but the time and effort required because of other realities—unlimited inclusion, diverse goals, and uneven commitment—are drawbacks that must be acknowledged on the faculty and university side. Agencies will use the network unevenly, and a faculty member must be flexible on that front as well, remaining patient and managing these relationships.

The NWIPSDC also has a built-in advantage in its funding mechanism that may be hard to duplicate on other campuses. A local energy company funds the NWIPSDC through a private donation to make it free of cost to network agencies, reducing but not eliminating red tape and bureaucracy within the university. Different funding mechanisms bring different strings that faculty must navigate, adding a burden to building and maintaining such a network. Faculty must be prepared to fight internal hurdles as well as maintain external relationships, and both require great energy commensurate with open system boundary maintenance. This is perhaps the area where university administrators can play the greatest role in the success of any initiative similar to the NWIPSDC. These are new relationships that blur boundaries, and universities are generally more averse to potential liabilities than desirous of reaping potential benefits. To mitigate such concerns, administration might consider creating a university center; likewise, the individual faculty member can minimize risks by staying up to date on the changes, new partners, and new boundaries being formed. Faculty are likely to enjoy the work and shun red tape, and would likely need guidance as they raise questions for the first time. The more informal approach of the NWIPSDC is a drawback in that sense.

Faculty must also approach building such a network with hopes of putting themselves out of the center as technical assistance gives way to self-sufficiency among the community participants. To accomplish this goal, the faculty members must be constantly available for the agencies and remain apolitical while dealing with political actors and organizations. This is far easier said than done. In addition, faculty members must sacrifice some ability to publish and present using data. This may be an unacceptable obstacle for many academics, especially those who are untenured and pressured to publish. In essence, the service and its benefits across the

spectrum need to be at times prioritized over using the vast data being collected and analyzed, meaning application of knowledge is more important than its wider dissemination. This represents a new approach for faculty members that may be more suitable for certain types of institutions (e.g., small liberal arts colleges and comprehensive regional campuses) rather than research-intensive campuses (see *Weerts & Sandmann, 2010*). However, urban campuses are uniquely positioned to perform this type of service, use it in their teaching, and build a reciprocal research agenda that benefits the partners, students, and faculty member(s) involved. Though a fine needle, this can be threaded with forethought, patience, and innovation. That said, as the goal is to move toward self-help and away from technical assistance, moving the institution away from the center of the network is one goal of the project and the ultimate measure of its success.

## **Conclusion**

This article has detailed the NWIPSDC, its origins, evolution, current iteration, future, and academic foundations. NWIPSDC is a multifaceted data-sharing network anchored at Indiana University Northwest with over 30 participating agencies across four counties, multiple levels of government, and multiple sectors.

The realistic benefits are conservatively presented here on multiple levels, including for the region's population, its respective jurisdictions, the university, the students, and the faculty member that founded the consortium. It is left to future research to determine the statistical effects of the NWIPSDC within these levels, as this article was intended to share information about the network rather than tout its impacts. In this light, the drawbacks and challenges for faculty in creating, expanding, and maintaining such a network are detailed to provide a balanced case for performing this type of activity in community-engaged urban universities in regions of need, with consideration to the problems that will be encountered along the way. University administrators are key in helping such an entity come to life, grow, expand, and evolve and are critical players in transitioning such networks to collective impact initiatives. To accomplish this, they need to be especially mindful of the resource of time rather than money, enabling faculty to be more entrepreneurial and lessening bureaucratic hurdles that are inevitable but manageable.

As a final note, this unique network may not be replicable, but similar projects can be implemented in various forms, shapes, and



sizes in any region with its respective university anchor, should the conditions merit its creation and a faculty member is willing to deal with all the drawbacks and challenges to realize the potential benefits and opportunities. This holds true across many fields that can adopt this model to address their issues the way we have crime and public safety.

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