# Social Network Analysis for Stories

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## What is social network analysis?

Social network analysis is a method of research using data to analyze relationships between individuals, organizations, etc. Driving social network analysis is the idea that social networks are fundamentally a part of any group or community. The people who know each other, and, in turn, know others present a web of power and knowledge. Theoretically, these connections and relationships speak volumes about our society and the individual players, or actors, themselves

## Why social network analysis?

Social network analysis software allows you to visualize data and relationships in ways that go beyond columns and rows. Just as mapping software allows reporters to see spatial data in new and different ways, social network analysis software allows you to map relationships. A good deal of reporting revolves around analyzing relationships--social network analysis can help you take this one step further.

## What can you do with social network analysis?

The real question you might have about social network analysis probably doesn't involve software. What you're probably wondering right now is how you can make all of these nodes and lines work for you and your newsroom. What if you don't live in a big city and the most powerful board members in your community belong to the local school district? One of the wonderful things about social network analysis is that it can be tailored to suit many projects. Here are some ideas for just about any beat in all types of communities:

- **Local government power**—which city council members are connected to others outside of government via business or organizations? How might these relationships affect important decisions being made in your community?

- **Campaign contributions**—which candidates are getting all of the money and from whom? Are there special interests that the donors are trying to promote? Are there any political action committees in your community? How is everyone involved?

- **Crime**—criminologists have used social network analysis to track the criminals at the heart of many problems within inner cities. Police can then take that information to target the sources of the problems.

- **Public health**—Researchers have used this method to track the spread of HIV and SARS. Reporters could look at the spread of West Nile and other diseases throughout the nation.

- **Contracts and bids**—Who is getting public money for performing services in your community? Who are the winners and losers in the contract game? Are there any connections between local businesses and government officials that might have an influence on which companies are awarded contracts? How is the public being served through this process?

## Want to know more?

IRE has compiled a list of resources and examples that can help get you started. The IRE Social Network Analysis page (www.ire.org/sna) includes links to stories others have done, tipsheets, literature and examples outside of journalism.

You don't have to work for a large news organization or be a complete CAR nerd to make social network analysis work for you. The good news is there's software available that is reasonably priced and with some effort fairly simple to navigate. The International Network for Social Network Analysis (http://www.insna.org/) has a link to all available software. Our experience has been with UCINET from Analytic Technologies. You can get a free trial download of this software and pricing information at: http://www.analytictech.com/ucinet.htm.

There is also a lot of literature available on the uses and practices of social network analysis. While most of the published work is academic in nature, it can really help shed light on using this stuff. To really understand the methods and theories behind social network analysis most people recommend *Social Network Analysis: A Handbook,* by John Scott; and *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications,* by Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust. Scott's book is a bit simpler and a great place to start, but once you get going you'll find the technical explanations from Wasserman and Faust to be a great help. Also, be sure to check out *Introduction to Social Network Methods*, a free, online handbook by Robert A. Hanneman (http://faculty.ucr.edu/~hanneman/SOC157/TEXT/TextIndex.html). IRE's social network analysis page is also a great source of the latest information on social network analysis and its uses in investigative journalism.