



HMG Network Relations

Summary: Assessment Findings

Introduction

A comprehensive assessment of HMG Network Relations was conducted to evaluate engagement, communication, and collaboration within the HMG affiliate network. The assessment aimed to identify the successes, challenges, opportunities, and affiliate preferences related to HMG Network Relations, specifically focusing on opportunities to understand and enhance meaningful connection, sense of belonging, and increased access, engagement, and ownership within the HMG network.

Identified stakeholder groups were thoughtfully and intentionally engaged to gather feedback on HMG Network Relations. To meet the capacity and participation preferences of a broad network, a variety of engagement opportunities were made available to affiliates (state and local leads) and HMG National staff.

Participation from the HMG affiliate network was notable, with a large majority (87% or 27 out of 31 affiliates) of affiliate states sharing their insights and experiences during the assessment process. At the time of the assessment the HMG affiliate network consisted of 31 states. Engagement in the assessment process from HMG affiliates included 100% participation from multi-system states (7 of 7 multi-system affiliates had a state or local lead participate), and 83% participation from single system states (20 of 24 single system affiliates had a state lead participate).

HMG National staff were also highly engaged in providing feedback on HMG Network Relations. At the time of the assessment HMG National had nine staff members. Four staff members were identified by HMG National to participate in individual interviews. 100% of those team members participated in interviews. Additionally, a survey was sent to all nine HMG National team members. Six HMG National staff members completed the survey (67% or 6 out of 9 staff members). Please note that the four identified HMG National staff who engaged in individual interviews may or may not have participated in the survey due to alternative participation in the interview process.

This report provides a summary of the key takeaways from the full network assessment. For detailed information on the quantitative and qualitative data processes, tools, analysis, and detailed findings from the network assessment see the *Help Me Grow National, Network Relations Assessment Report*. This summary findings report is intended to be a resource for HMG National, supporting ongoing network relations discussions, reflections, planning, and decision-making. For network relations recommendations, please see the *HMG Network Relations Recommendations Report*.

Key Findings: HMG Affiliates (State & Local Leads)

The HMG network exhibits a strong grasp of the networks' shared purpose and foundational concepts. This in combination with a significant proportion of affiliates who report high levels of trust in HMG National Center as a partner, demonstrates a positive perception of the network's credibility. Feedback from HMG affiliates underscores the strength of the HMG model in combining fidelity to a national model with local adaptability, fostering both innovation and purpose.

HMG affiliates are eager to continue to communicate and collaborate in more intentional and meaningful ways to strengthen the network and their individual HMG systems. Opportunities lie in addressing disengagement, increasing engagement and decision-making opportunities for affiliates, and increasing accessibility and clarity of information and resources to ensure all affiliates benefit from available materials and supports. Additional opportunities exist to enhancing collaboration within local HMG systems, between affiliates, and between affiliates and HMG National. Increased network accessibility and collaboration can lead to a more cohesive, connected, and impactful HMG network. The following findings provide a comprehensive overview of the observations and insights gathered from state and local leads (HMG affiliates) regarding HMG Network Relations.

HMG Value

Affiliates identified a high value in a nationwide network of diverse affiliates. They also highly value the fidelity-based model with local flexibility that HMG offers. However, this benefit comes with challenges, affiliates have expressed that the variation in implementation can create confusion and tensions.

The majority (64%) of affiliates indicated that the network's purpose is clear and provides opportunities for innovation (77%). An overwhelming majority of affiliates (94%) reported feeling they understand the HMG model well, with 100% of state leads expressing high levels of understanding and 88% of local leads indicating a clear understanding. This highlights a strong grasp of the network's foundational concepts. Satisfaction levels vary across different aspects of the HMG network, with state leads generally exhibiting higher levels of satisfaction. A significant proportion of state and local leads (80%) consider HMG National a trusted partner, demonstrating a positive perception of the network's credibility.

Many affiliates vocalized a desire for HMG National to market and elevate the HMG network more broadly to expand recognition and increase value within their local systems, with some expressing the nationwide brand recognition as a benefit of their affiliation.

Affiliate Tenure

A significant portion of state and local leads (54%) have joined the HMG community within the last three years with nearly one fifth (17%) having joined in the past year. About one third (29%) of participating affiliates have leads that have been a part of the HMG community for 5 years or more. It is evident that state leads have on average, longer tenures compared to local leads. Around 60% of state leads have been involved in the HMG community for five or more years, whereas local leads exhibit a relatively shorter average of three years or less, constituting 63% of this group.

Collaboration & Relationship Building

HMG affiliates emphasized the importance and value of building strong relations with HMG National, other affiliates, and within their local systems and expressed a clear need for additional opportunities to enhance relationship building and collaboration across the HMG network. Focusing on strategies to increase and support collaboration between various subgroups within the network will foster a more connected, engaged, dynamic, productive, and impactful network. Specific findings for each collaboration subgroup, provided below.

- **Collaboration: Local Systems**
Affiliates identified needed collaboration support within their local HMG system as their top collaboration need. There is a clear opportunity for HMG National to support the active engagement and development of these nested networks. Supporting local collaboration is essential for fostering a broader base of engagement and driving meaningful change, not only strengthening community-driven initiatives but also enhancing the overall network's ability to adapt, innovate, and achieve sustainable impact on a broader scale.
- **Collaboration: Affiliate-to-Affiliate**
Nearly half of all affiliates expressed a need for increased collaboration between their local HMG system and other affiliates. Specifically identifying, a desire for more opportunities for organic and informal connection and problem-solving with one another. There is an opportunity in exploring platforms and strategies that reduce feelings of "gatekeeping" and support affiliates in self-organizing to connect, share ideas, and learn from each other, while still sharing and supporting the growth of the larger network by sharing back to the larger network.
- **Collaboration - Affiliate & HMG National:**
A little more than half of affiliates reported feeling somewhat or strongly engaged with HMG National, while nearly 20% expressed feeling somewhat or strongly disengaged with HMG National. State leads had higher rates of feeling engaged with national. Local leads, however, expressed feelings of being somewhat or strongly disengaged or feelings of neutrality of engagement with HMG National at much higher rates (63%).

Affiliates expressed a desire for HMG National to have a better understanding of their unique systems needs and challenges to better support tailored communication and resources, as well as a desire for more opportunities to meaningfully connect with HMG National including more targeted support from HMG National and the opportunity for more meaningful connection (one-on-one engagement).

Access: Communication & Resources

Communication methods within the network generated varying degrees of satisfaction from affiliates. Generally, affiliates show high satisfaction (86%) with HMG National's communication of new information and resources. Email remains the preferred medium for affiliates to receive and share information although opportunities exist to provide more targeted communication to different subgroups within the HMG network and support increased utilization of information by affiliates.

The large majority of affiliates expressed a strong desire for resources and communication to be more accessible. While many felt that the HMG National website serves as a valuable platform for affiliates to access information and resources, most reported the need for further refinement and enhancements, particularly on the affiliate side of the website. HMG affiliates had a strong desire for a space to easily see what other affiliates have developed, access the information and resources shared by national, as well as have conversations, innovate, and share in real time. Increased capacities in the websites ability to be more accessible, navigable, and functional were repeatedly expressed as an opportunity to improve HMG Network Relations.

Affiliates reported challenges with the language used by HMG National, highlighting instances where communication caused confusion and decreased feelings of belonging. Specific examples of language relatability at the local level and with community partners was expressed, with many stating they have to use additional capacity to "translate" information sent from HMG National to increase its clarity and relevancy.

HMG affiliates indicated that resources shared by affiliates, webinars hosted by HMG National, and opportunities to connect with and learn from other affiliates are valued resources that contribute positively to affiliate engagement. Affiliates additionally underscored the need for more targeted and clear communication, relevant to different roles and affiliations. While many affiliates find resources valuable, efforts can be made to increase accessibility and support actionable utilization of resources.

Coordination & Actionable Support

Across the network, affiliates reported fewer positive perception on the action and coordination within the HMG network. While affiliates expressed high levels of shared purpose and understanding of the model, affiliates also identified a need for resources to be more easily accessible to reduce feelings of unnecessary confusion and duplication of efforts. Additionally, less than half of affiliates reported that the network coordinated and communicated intentionally about actions and strategies, and many felt that there were not well-established processes to provide their input and feedback and meaningfully contribute to network decision making.

Affiliates reported primarily relying on colleagues within their system, the HMG website, and other affiliates for information and support. While state leads place a greater emphasis on HMG National resources, local leads were more likely turn to colleagues and other affiliates for support. Interestingly local leads expressed higher levels of coordination compared to state leads, with local leads expressing feelings of higher coordination within their state systems and peers compared to the larger HMG network.

A need for more coordinated and actionable support within the network was expressed repeatedly, specifically affiliates highlighted the need for increased navigation and accessibility of the tools used by affiliates and HMG National to communicate and share information and resources (HMG website and email). Affiliates also expressed the need for HMG National have an increased understanding of their systems unique needs to provide more targeted support, information, and resource with specific benefit and impact to their system. Relevant to network coordination affiliates additionally expressed a desire for a reduction in gatekeeping, and a strong desire for more organic connection and learning opportunities with and from other affiliates.

Co-Ownership & Leadership

HMG affiliates have varied perceptions of co-ownership and leadership opportunities within the HMG network. Most affiliates express feeling like they do not co-create with national and vocalized a strong desire to be part of decision-making processes within the HMG network. While both state and local leads identified with wanting more leadership and co-ownership within the Network, local leads of multi-system states specifically expressed a desire for increased representation in network conversations and decision-making processes to have their specific needs included as part of the larger network conversations.

- **Communication Challenges & Decision-Making Involvement:**
 Affiliates within the HMG network have expressed difficulties in establishing open lines of communication with HMG National. This challenge is indicative of potential barriers in sharing information, ideas, and concerns between different groups within the network. Communication and information sharing barriers in combination with the expressed desire for increased collaboration by affiliates suggest that affiliates feel a need for their voices to be heard and their perspectives to be taken into account in additional ways when shaping the networks strategies and actions.
- **Perceived Collaboration & Creation:**
 A significant portion of affiliates feel that they are not effectively collaborating or co-creating with HMG National. This sentiment suggests a perception of limited collaboration and shared responsibility in shaping network initiatives. The misalignment in perceived co-creation could stem from previous mentions communication challenges, leading to increased feelings of decreased belonging.
- **Local Leadership Representation:**
 Local leads of multi-system state, in particular, have expressed a desire for increased representation and participation in network conversations and decision-making processes. Many highlighting that the requirements of affiliation are the same as state level affiliation, but feeling like engagement in the broader HMG network is not.
- **Diverse Leadership Development:**
 Opportunities exist with the HMG network to foster more diverse leadership. A majority of affiliates find that the HMG network moderately represents a network that develops diverse leadership, indicating that there are still opportunities for improvement to be made in strengthening diverse leadership with the HMG network.

Key Findings: HMG National Staff

HMG National maintains committed to partnership, collaboration, and relationship building within the HMG network. While several strengths in internal (within the HMG National Center) communication, engagement, and transparency are evident, there are opportunities to improve internal processes, as well as an identified need for clearer and more inclusive processes for affiliate engagement and communication. Addressing these areas of improvement will contribute to a stronger, more connected, and effective HMG Network, fostering enhanced collaboration and support among affiliates. The key findings below combine data analysis and stakeholder input to provide an overview of the observations and insights gathered from HMG National staff regarding HMG Network Relations.

Common Understanding and Approach

HMG National staff expressed a general understanding of what was often referred to as “the HMG way,” which emphasizes collaboration and partnership with affiliates. Generally, the National Center staff see themselves as partners rather than experts, fostering connections and making informed decisions for the network based on affiliate feedback. HMG staff with longer tenure were more easily able to articulate how this concept is cross-cutting across HMG National’s portfolio of work and partnerships, while newer staff expressed a need for clearer expectations, processes, and connections.

HMG National Processes & Tools

While HMG National staff identify strengths in supporting initiatives of colleagues by providing encouragement and assistance, staff also indicate a lack of shared internal practices and cultural norms around HMG Network Relations. The National Center’s ongoing transition and growth highlight the need for clearer pathways, reduced gatekeeping, defined roles, and comprehensive onboarding and support for staff related to network relations. HMG National’s staff demonstrate an openness to embracing new technologies and process to enhance communication that will aid in the successful implementation of processes changes within the Center.

In alignment with clearer internal processes, HMG National staff expressed a need for increased efficiencies in tool utilization to reduce manual processes and reduce chances of error. Many staff highlighted the opportunity to consolidate internal tools for clearer communication and management that supports asynchronous work, clarity of projects, and establishes a standard of communication and collaboration practices within HMG National.

HMG National's Relationship with Affiliates

All HMG staff indicate that they have some level of communication with HMG affiliates on a weekly bases, although the amount of communication varies based on role. The HMG Network's relationship-based focus was widely understood by HMG National staff. While relationships with affiliates were generally viewed as strong by HMG National staff, variations and differences in the strength and consistency of these relationships varied from affiliate to affiliate.

Observations indicate that the HMG National staff believe the HMG network is set up to allow affiliates to engage to their desired extent, but that efforts could be made to establish clearer communication and collaboration processes and pathways. While some HMG National staff see efforts to engage and include affiliates in collaborative projects, there are differing perceptions regarding the consistency and comprehensiveness of these efforts. HMG staff identified a need for additional, continual feedback and data from affiliates to support informed and timely decision-making and the opportunity for HMG National staff to actively engage with HMG affiliates.

HMG National Staff Identified Skills & Opportunities

HMG National staff self-identified strengths in internal (within the National Center) collaborative support, communication, active engagement, adaptation, transparency, and knowledge sharing. Additionally, HMG National staff identified opportunities for improvement in reflective learning, addressing equity and power dynamics, expanding network efforts, embracing uncertainty, and fostering greater interaction with HMG affiliates.

Strength Areas:

- **Supportive Collaboration and Communication:** HMG National staff identify strengths in supporting the initiatives of colleagues by providing encouragement and assistance when needed and communicating effectively.
- **Peer-to-Peer Learning:** Respondents show a dedication to seeking out opportunities to engage with fellow HMG National members.
- **Adaptation:** HMG National staff demonstrate an openness to embracing new technologies and processes to enhance communication and collaboration.
- **Transparency and Knowledge Sharing:** HMG National staff identify strongly with a culture of transparency and a willingness to freely share insights and information.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- **Wider Engagement & Learning from Affiliates:** There is an opportunity for HMG National staff members to more actively seek opportunities for engagement and learning from HMG affiliates, potentially broadening the diversity of perspectives and expanding the knowledge base.
- **Embracing Risk, Uncertainty, and Innovation:** A moderate level of comfort with uncertainty was identified, embracing this skill further could lead to more agile and adaptable strategies within the organization. Encouraging a higher frequency of experimentation, even when outcomes may be uncertain could lead to more innovative solutions and greater growth potential. HMG National staff modeling this behavior in their collaborative work, will work to support a more authentic, engaged, and trusting network culture.
- **Networking and Relationship Building:** While the willingness to connect individual for mutual benefit is evident, a more proactive effort could be made to create meaningful connections, fostering a more robust network.
- **Equity and Power Discussions:** Staff members express a moderate inclination towards understanding privilege, addressing structural inequities, and engaging in open conversations about power dynamics. Further emphasis on these discussions could contribute to a more inclusive and diverse network.
- **Collaborative Leadership -** Staff members demonstrate a willingness to relinquish control to encourage the contribution of diverse ideas and actions, continued modeling of collaborative behavior could promote a culture of shared leadership.