

# Building Social Capital to Strengthen Communities

## For instructors: Social Capital Handouts

The following items may be used as additional handouts and are useful when describing social capital or the ways to increase social capital. Please use if time allows in your presentation.

- Page 2 – Social Capital Defined
- Page 3 – Social Capital Presurvey to have group do in five minutes to assess participants' current thinking. This presurvey leads into the PowerPoint included with this material.
- Pages 4-8 – Various aspects of social capital group activity
- Page 9 – Social capital bingo
- Page 10 – Community Glue activity
- Page 11 – Individual Social Capital activity
- 143 Ways to Increase Your Social Capital (pdf attachment)

**NDSU**  
**Extension Service**

North Dakota State University  
Fargo, North Dakota 58108

February 2009

# Rural Living: Building Social Capital to Strengthen Communities

## Social Capital Defined

The central foundation of social capital is that the connections among people add value to a society in much the same way that financial capital does. It refers to the collective value of all social networks or “*who people know.*” It describes what can arise from these networks when they do things for each other. The basic premise is that the interaction enables people to build communities, commit themselves to each other and knit the social fabric.

### Facts on Social Capital

- Americans are choosing to bowl alone. More people are bowling than ever before, but they are no longer bowling in leagues.
- Since the 1960s, church attendance is down by roughly one-third.
- Involvement in community life, such as public meetings, is down by 35 percent in the last 25 years.
- Club and civic organization participation has been cut by more than half in the last 25 years.
- Inviting friends to the house is down by 45 percent in the last 25 years.
- Beginning in the late 1960s, Americans began to join less, trust less, give less and vote less.

From: Robert Putnam’s “Bowling Alone”

## Why the big change?

- Busyness and time pressures
- Economic hard times
- The movement of women into the paid labor force and the stress of two-career families
- Residential mobility
- Suburbanization and sprawl
- Television, the electronic revolution
- Disruption of marriage and family ties
- Generational trends

## What Does High Social Capital Look Like?

- People feel they are part of the community.
- Citizens feel useful and help in a variety of community activities and ventures.
- Citizens actively participate in community networks such public meetings, organizations and raising money for charity.
- In a crisis, citizens work together to assist others in need.
- Individuals help strangers and involve them in what is going on.
- Individuals trust others in the community and often do not lock their cars
- People know who will help them learn about something.
- Everyone knows everyone’s business (this can have its disadvantages, too!).
- Neighbors keep on eye on each other’s homes.

## Why Is Social Capital Important?

- It allows people to resolve collective problems more easily.
- It allows communities to advance smoothly. If people are trusting, everyday business and other transactions go better.
- It widens our awareness of the many ways in which we are linked.
- The networks filled with social capital assist in the achievement of our goals.

Robert Putnam (2000) *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon and Schuster

# Social Capital Presurvey

As an introduction to Social Capital, please take a few minutes to answer the following sample questions.

Circle your answer to each question. This exercise will not be scored.

This survey is a general tool to explore thoughts and assess individual social capital activities.

## Civic Engagement

- 1. Have you contacted a local tribal/public official in the last 12 months? ..... **YES** **NO**
- 2. Have you attended a celebration or parade in your community or neighborhood in the last 12 months? ..... **YES** **NO**
- 3. Have you helped plan or lead a meeting or activity in the past 12 months? ..... **YES** **NO**

## Trust

- 4. Do you feel safe walking down the street at night in your community? ..... **YES** **NO**
- 5. If you took a two-week trip, could you ask a neighbor to watch your home, take in your mail or water your plants? ..... **YES** **NO**

## Civic Responsibility

- 6. You lost your wallet with \$200 in it. Would people in your community return it to you with the money if they found it? ..... **YES** **NO**
- 7. A terrible storm hit your community and left many families temporarily homeless. Would many people in your community help out in any way? ..... **YES** **NO**
- 8. Do you or your friends think you can impact where you live and make it a better place? ..... **YES** **NO**

## Networks and Connections

- 9. Have you been involved in a youth or parents' organization in the past 12 months? ..... **YES** **NO**
- 10. Have you become involved or helped a friend or family member be involved in a local service or fraternal organization? ..... **YES** **NO**

## Collective Community Vitality

- 11. Do young people move away from your community to find better opportunities? ..... **YES** **NO**
- 12. Do people of different races and ethnicities get along with one another? ..... **YES** **NO**

# Building Social Capital – Civic Engagement

Participation and involvement by community members in their community provides opportunities to further a cause or push the ideas of the community to public action.

Official membership in formal organizations is only one facet of social capital, but it does prove useful to describe community involvement.

How civically engaged are people in your community?

## Sample Survey Questions

Have you donated your time to do volunteer work of any kind in your community in the last 12 months?

Have you contacted a local tribal/public official in the last 12 months?

Have you attended a celebration or parade in your community or neighborhood in the last 12 months?

Have you attended a local sports event or played on a local team in the last 12 months?

Have you been involved in any recreation, sports, investment, garden or hobby groups in the last 12 months?

Have you been involved in any political and civic groups in the last 12 months?

Have you been involved in any activities related to religious or church-sponsored groups in the last 12 months?

## What does civic engagement look like in your community? (list examples)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## What are some ways your community could increase civic engagement?

*(If you need more space, please use back of sheet)*

# Building Social Capital – Trust

Trust often is forged with specific people through common participation in groups, neighborhoods, associations and activities.

Generalized social trust becomes important in getting things accomplished and creating positive realities for all people and may involve the government leaders in your community.

Do people trust and feel safe in your community?

## Sample Survey Questions

How often do you feel safe walking down the street at night in your community?

If you took a two-week trip, could you ask a neighbor to watch your home, take in your mail or water your plants?

How often does your local government play favorites in how it treats certain individuals and groups of people?

How often do your local elected officials care about what happens to people such as you?

Overall, can you trust your local government to do what is right?

## What does trust look like in your community? (list examples)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## What are some ways your community could increase trust?

*(If you need more space, please use back of sheet)*

# Building Social Capital – Civic Responsibility

Are residents voting and feeling a sense of civic duty and responsibility to make their community a better place?  
Do people in the community feel a sense of duty or responsibility to help others in need?

## Sample Survey Questions

You lost your wallet with \$200 in it. How many people in your community would return it to you with the money if they found it?

Imagine that local tribal/public officials asked everyone to conserve water for three weeks during an emergency in your community. How many people would cooperate?

A terrible storm hit your community and left many families temporarily homeless. How many people in your community would help out in any way?

Do people care what the community looks like?

How often do you personally vote in city, county and other local elections?

Overall, how often are people of different races and ethnicities welcomed and involved together in the same groups, organizations and activities in your community?

## What does civic responsibility look like in your community? (list examples)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## What are some ways your community could increase civic responsibility?

*(If you need more space, please use back of sheet)*

# Building Social Capital – Networks and Connections

Building social capital includes inviting neighbors or friends to dinner and joining a bowling league or musical group; individuals are “bonding” with people who are similar to themselves.

Other times, community members are “bridging” with people who may be very different from themselves.

Community members working together can create energy and avenues for individuals to learn, build friendships, establish support systems, identify job or economic opportunities and live healthier lives.

## Sample Survey Questions

During the last 12 months, has your involvement in any clubs, organizations and community groups increased, decreased or stayed the same?

Have you been involved or helped a friend or family member be involved in a local service or fraternal organization?

Have you been involved in any recreations, sports, investment and garden or hobby groups in the last 12 months?

Have you been involved in a job-related group, such as a professional association or trade, farm or business group, in the past 12 months?

Have you been involved in any activities related to religions, spiritual or church-sponsored groups in the past 12 months?

Have you been involved in a youth or parents organization in the past 12 months?

## What do the networks and connections look like in your community? (list examples)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## What are some ways your community could increase its networks and connections?

*(If you need more space, please use back of sheet)*

# Building Social Capital – Collective Community Vitality

Each person, no matter the age, ethnic background, religious belief, income level or language spoken, is important to the energy and vitality of the community.

Sociologists have discovered communities that have built strong social capital are healthier and better able to handle change and challenges when they arise.

## Sample Survey Questions

How often do young people move away from your community to find better opportunities?

How often do people of different races and ethnicities get along with one another?

Overall, how often are people of different races and ethnicities welcomed and involved together in the same groups, organizations and activities?

Have you ever worked with your neighbors to solve a neighborhood problem?

Roughly, how many people or families in your community would you guess cannot pay for basic living costs, such as food, housing, electricity, heating, telephone or health care?

How often can small businesses find good opportunities to start or grow in your community?

## What does collective community vitality look like in your community? (list examples)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## What are some ways your community could increase its collective community vitality?

*(If you need more space, please use back of sheet)*



## Social Capital Autograph Bingo

Please find people in this meeting who can answer yes to one of the open questions and have them sign their name.

Each person can sign your bingo card one time.

The game ends when you have each block filled with a signature.

<b>Was born in the community in which they live</b>	<b>Knows their neighbors</b>	<b>Has attended a community parade/event in the last 12 months</b>	<b>Serves in a volunteer leadership role on a board or committee</b>	<b>Feels safe walking at night in their neighborhood</b>
<b>Has lived in their community less than five years</b>	<b>Has communicated with a local tribal/public official during the past 12 months</b>	<b>Is involved in a youth or parents organization</b>	<b>Has recruited a friend, relative or neighbor to a community project</b>	<b>Is involved in a community or neighborhood project</b>
<b>Helped with a local community event/celebration in the past 12 months</b>	<b>Is involved in a local recreation, sport, garden, hobby group</b>	 <p>(Create your own question)</p>	<b>Feels they can have an impact in helping improve your community</b>	<b>Has belonged to a community bowling group</b>
<b>Is involved in a religious, spiritual or church-sponsored group</b>	<b>Voted in a city, county, tribal or other election during the past year</b>	<b>Has mentored a young person</b>	<b>During the last year has invited a neighbor or friend home for dinner</b>	<b>Read the local community or area newspaper in the past 12 months</b>
<b>Is fluent in more than one language</b>	<b>Knows of a young person who has decided to stay in your community</b>	<b>Is involved in helping solve a local community problem or issue</b>	<b>Has attended a school function during the past 12 months</b>	<b>Helped plan or lead a meeting</b>

## Community Glue – What groups exist?

Do you know all the organizations, clubs, nonprofits, self-help groups and faith-based organizations for youth and adults in your community?

Research suggests a powerful link between a community's economic prosperity and the degree to which its individuals, institutions and organizations are interconnected.

How well are people in your community connected to groups in your community?

### Activity

Brainstorm all the organizations, clubs, nonprofits and faith-based organizations for youth and adults in your community.

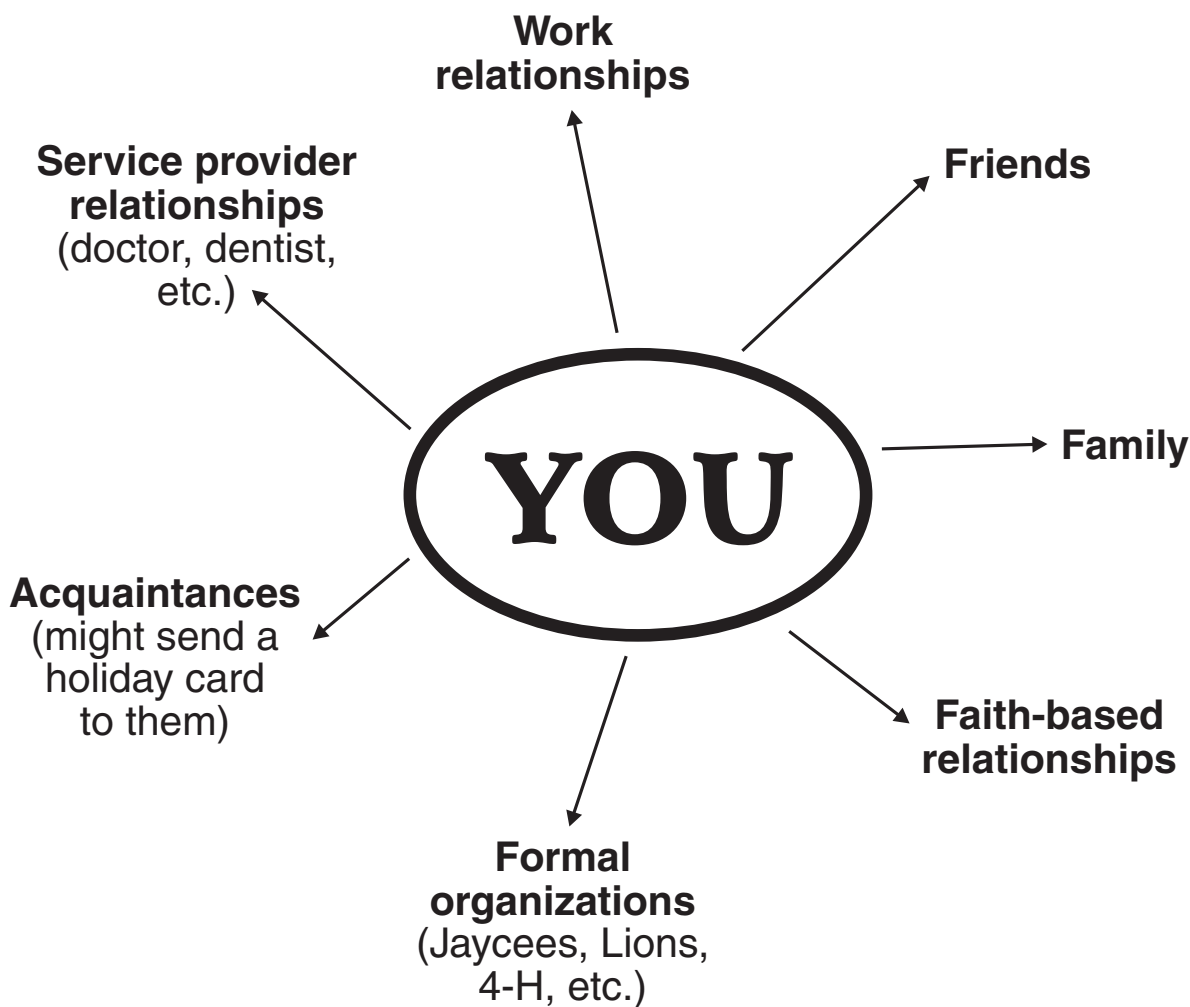
### Optional

Extra credit – Where and when do they meet? Can individuals identify if the groups are interconnected in some way?

### Discussion

- How many groups were you able to name?
- Did you name any new groups that some people did not know about?
- Do you believe any groups might exist that the group attending today's meeting may not know about?
- How do new people moving into your community know about these groups?
- How do these organizations publicize their meetings and welcome new people into their group?
- What should be done with the list? Is this information available on a community Web page? Is it in the community welcome packet?

## Individual Social Capital



## References

Clues to Rural Community Survival. Heartland Center for Leadership Development. Retrieved Jan. 2, 2008, from: [www.heartlandcenter.info/clues.htm](http://www.heartlandcenter.info/clues.htm)

Community Capitals Framework. North Central Regional Center for Rural Development. Retrieved Dec. 20, 2007, from [www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/projects/commcap/7capitals.htm](http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/projects/commcap/7capitals.htm)

Putnam, Robert D., and Feldstein, Lewis M., (2003). *Better together: Restoring the American community*. 2003. New York, N.Y. Simon & Shuster.

Putnam, Robert D., (2000). *Bowling alone – The collapse and revival of American community*. New York, N.Y. Simon & Shuster.

Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey. (2000). The Roper Center Public Opinion Archives. Retrieved Dec. 10, 2007, from [www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data\\_access/data/datasets/social\\_capital\\_community\\_survey.html](http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/data/datasets/social_capital_community_survey.html)

The Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America. Retrieved Dec. 1, 2007, from: [www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro/](http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro/)

# ◆ 143 Ways to Increase Social Capital ◆

## Want to increase your social connections?

### Try any of the following:

1. Organize a social gathering to welcome a new neighbor.
2. Attend town meetings.
3. Register to vote and vote.
4. Support local merchants.
5. Volunteer your special skills to an organization.
6. Donate blood (with a friend).
7. Start a community garden.
8. Mentor someone of a different ethnic or religious group.
9. Surprise a new neighbor by making a favorite dinner – and include the recipe.
10. Tape record your parents' earliest recollections and share them with your children.
11. Plan a vacation with friends or family.
12. Avoid gossip.
13. Help fix someone's flat tire.
14. Organize or participate in a sports league.
15. Join a gardening club.
16. Attend home parties when invited.
17. Become an organ donor or blood marrow donor.
18. Attend your children's athletic contests, plays and recitals.
19. Get to know your children's teachers.
20. Join the local Elks, Kiwanis or Knights of Columbus.
21. Get involved with Brownies or Cub/Boy/Girl Scouts or 4-H.
22. Start a monthly tea group.
23. Speak at or play host to a monthly brown-bag lunch series at your local library.
24. Sing in a choir.
25. Get to know the clerks and salespeople at your local stores.
26. Attend PTA meetings.
27. Audition for the community theater or volunteer to usher.
28. Give your park a weatherproof chess/checkers board.
29. Play cards with friends or neighbors.
30. Give to your local food bank.
31. Walk or bike to support a cause and meet others.
32. Employers: Encourage volunteer/community groups to hold meetings on your site.
33. Volunteer in your child's classroom or chaperone a field trip.
34. Join or start a baby-sitting cooperative.
35. Attend school plays.
36. Answer surveys when asked.
37. Businesses: Invite local government officials to speak at your workplace.
38. Attend Memorial Day parades and express appreciation for others.
39. Form a local outdoor activity group.
40. Participate in political campaigns.
41. Attend a local budget committee meeting.
42. Form a computer group for local senior citizens.
43. Help coach Little League or other youth sports – even if you don't have a kid playing.
44. Help run the snack bar at the Little League field.
45. Form a tool-lending library with neighbors and share ladders, snow blowers, etc.
46. Start a lunch gathering or discussion group with co-workers.
47. Offer to rake a neighbor's yard or shovel his/her walk.
48. Start or join a carpool.
49. Employers: Give employees time (for example, three days per year to work on civic projects).
50. Plan a "walking tour" of a local historic area.
51. Eat breakfast at a local gathering spot on Saturdays.
52. Have family dinners and read to your children.
53. Run for public office.
54. Stop and make sure the person on the side of the highway is OK.
55. Have a block party or a holiday open house.
56. Start a fix-it group of friends willing to help each other clean, paint, garden, etc.
57. Offer to serve on a town committee.
58. Join the volunteer fire department.
59. Go to church or temple or walk outside with your children; talk to them about why it's important.
60. If you grow tomatoes, plant extra for a lonely elder neighbor; better yet, ask him/ her to teach you and others how to can the extras.
61. Ask a single diner to share your table for lunch.
62. Stand at a major intersection holding a sign for your favorite candidate.
63. Persuade a local restaurant to have a designated "meet people" table.
64. Have a potluck supper before your town meeting.
65. Take dance lessons with a friend.
66. Say "thanks" to public servants: police, firefighters, town clerk, etc.
67. Fight to keep essential local services – your post office, police station, school, etc. – in the downtown area.

68. Join a nonprofit board of directors.
69. Gather a group to clean up a local park or cemetery.
70. When somebody says "government stinks," suggest he/she help fix it.
71. Turn off the TV and talk with friends or family.
72. Have a neighborhood barbecue.
73. Bake cookies for new neighbors or work colleagues.
74. Plant tree seedlings along your street with neighbors and rotate care for them.
75. Volunteer at the library.
76. Form or join a bowling team.
77. Return a lost wallet or appointment book.
78. Use public transportation and start talking with those you regularly see.

**Want to increase your social connections?  
Try any of the following:**

79. Ask neighbors for help and reciprocate.
80. Go to a local folk or crafts festival.
81. Call an old friend.
82. Sign up for a class and meet your classmates.
83. Accept or extend an invitation.
84. Talk to your kids or parents about their day.
85. Say hello to strangers.
86. Log off and go to the park.
87. Ask a new person to join a group for a dinner or an evening.
88. Play host to a potluck meal or participate in them.
89. Volunteer to drive someone.
90. Say hello when you spot an acquaintance in a store.
91. Play host to a movie night.
92. Exercise together or take walks with friends or family.

93. Assist with or create your town or neighborhood's newsletter.
94. Organize a neighborhood pick-up, with lawn games afterward.
95. Collect oral histories from older town residents.
96. Join a book club discussion or get the group to discuss local issues.
97. Volunteer to deliver Meals on Wheels in your neighborhood.
98. Start a children's story hour at your local library.
99. Be real. Be humble. Acknowledge others' self-worth.
100. Tell friends and family about social capital and why it matters.
101. Greet people.
102. Cut back on television.
103. Join in to help carry something heavy.
104. Plan a reunion of family, friends or those with whom you had a special connection.
105. Take in the programs at your local library.
106. Read the local news faithfully.
107. Buy a grill and invite others over for a meal.
108. Fix it even if you didn't break it.
109. Pick it up even if you didn't drop it.
110. Attend a public meeting.
111. Go with friends or colleagues to a ball game (and root, root, root for the home team!).
112. Help scrape ice off a neighbor's car, put chains on the tires or shovel it out.
113. Hire young people for odd jobs.
114. Start a tradition.
115. Share your snow blower.
116. Help jump-start someone's car.
117. Join a project that includes people from all walks of life.
118. Sit on your stoop.
119. Be nice when you drive.
120. Make gifts of time.
121. Buy a big hot tub.

122. Volunteer at your local neighborhood school.
123. Offer to help out at your local recycling center.
124. Send a "thank you" letter to the editor about a person or event that helped build community.
125. Raise funds for a new town clock or new town library.
126. When inspired, write personal notes to friends and neighbors.
127. Attend gallery openings.
128. Organize a townwide yard sale.
129. Invite friends or colleagues to help with a home renovation or home building project.
130. Join or start a local mall-walking group and have coffee together afterward.
131. Build a neighborhood playground.
132. Become a story reader or baby rocker at a local child-care center or neighborhood preschool.
133. Contra dance or two-step.
134. Help kids on your street construct a lemonade stand.
135. Open the door for someone who has his or her hands full.
136. Say hi to those in elevators.
137. Invite friends to go snowshoeing, hiking or cross-country skiing.
138. Offer to watch your neighbor's home or apartment while the person is away.
139. Organize a fitness/health group with your friends or co-workers.
140. Hang out at the town dump and chat with your neighbors as your sort through your trash at the recycling center.
141. Take a pottery class with your children or parent(s).
142. See if your neighbor needs anything when you run to the store.
143. Ask to see a friend's family photos.

Source: Better Together Report, Harvard

St. Cloud Times Online Edition - By Times staff.  
Originally published: Aug. 20, 2004