



NEW HAMPSHIRE
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION



social capital

BETTER TOGETHER

what is social capital?

“Social capital” refers to the bonds that tie a community together—bonds that make communities safer, schools better and people healthier. When people are invested in their communities, they are more likely to vote, volunteer and care for one another.

Why Does it Matter?

In general, communities with higher social capital have higher educational achievement, better performing governments, faster economic growth, and less crime and violence. People living in these communities are happier, healthier, and have a longer life expectancy. In these communities, it is easier to mobilize people to tackle problems (ration water in a drought or organize against crime) and easier to undertake things that benefit everyone (start a child care cooperative or build a community park).

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND PUBLIC POLICY

Sometimes the most effective ways to build social capital require changes in public policies.

- 1. Smaller Schools.** The smaller the school, the greater the likelihood that all children will feel connected and that parents and the community can be engaged. A number of communities have created smaller, self-contained schools within existing buildings.
- 2. Smart Growth.** Every 10 minutes spent commuting by car reduces by 10% a person’s engagement in virtually every form of social capital—political, volunteering, religious, family time, being with friends. Reduce the sprawl that requires more time in our cars. Support Main Street Programs to strengthen commercial town centers. Advocate for concentrated development in existing communities to make livable, walkable towns. Focus the location and expansion of highways, sewers, water lines, public offices and facilities.
- 3. Service Learning.** Children learn to volunteer. The best school-based service learning programs require all students to do some volunteer work as part of their school curriculum.
- 4. Incentives.** Provide incentives to businesses for exemplary civic behavior through state and federal purchasing and contracting—just as we now provide public incentives for companies that operate in ways that respect the environment.
- 5. Employment Policies.** A century ago, Americans steadily limited the conditions under which work could be required—they eliminated child labor, limited the number of hours of the work week, and provided for workmen’s compensation and health benefits. The current balance needs to shift to protect family and personal time, and not treat the burden of caring for aging parents or children as purely private family obligations.
- 6. Campaign Finance Reform.** Eliminate the power of money to dominate political campaigns.
- 7. Social Capital Impact Statement.** Require public agencies to file statements that highlight the potential impact of any new program on the communities’ stock of social capital. For example, when the US Postal Service proposes to close a small post office, and communities object that the post office plays a crucial role as a local meeting place. The same would be true when a school district proposes building a new school that is located miles from each of the potential feeder communities. A Social Capital Impact Statement would give weight to these concerns.



ABOVE “Bridging” social capital—Families learn about other cultures at a Latin American and Caribbean exhibit at the Currier Museum of Art in Manchester, NH. Photograph courtesy of the Currier Museum of Art

SOCIAL CAPITAL IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

A 2002 major national survey revealed that New Hampshire has among the highest social capital in the nation. The Granite State ranked highest among all communities surveyed in “civic equality”—where the opinion of the plow operator matters as much at Town Meeting as the opinion of the bank president—means that people here are more likely to be involved in community affairs. But, like everywhere else in the nation, New Hampshire has seen its levels of social capital decline. The New Hampshire Charitable Foundation aims to shore it up, encouraging civic engagement through leadership and funding projects that include social capital as a means or as an end-goal.

“We need to look at front porches as crime-fighting tools,” Foundation President Lew Feldstein has said, “treat picnics as public health efforts and see choral groups as occasions of democracy.”

“Bonding” social capital comes naturally between people with much in common; “bridging” differences is more difficult and, perhaps, more important to foster. There is no magic formula.

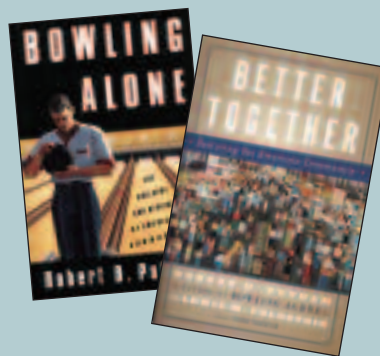
Success is hard to measure. But the state pioneers new ways to build social capital. New Hampshire is the first state in the nation to incorporate social capital testimony in the federal Environmental Impact Statement process, and to pilot ways to build social capital into the Master Planning of individual communities.

From the changes anticipated by the widening of Interstate-93 in the central corridor to the proposed federal prison in the North Country, the Foundation has championed social capital as a critical factor in the quality of life in our communities.

“If you don’t go to somebody’s funeral, they won’t come to yours.” - Yogi Berra

RESOURCES

Visit www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro for more information on *The Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America*, an initiative of Professor Robert D. Putnam at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, and www.bettertogether.org to read “BetterTogether,” the final report of the Seminar.



LEFT The genesis of the Charitable Foundation’s social capital work was inspired by Robert D. Putnam, who authored *Bowling Alone* in 2000—the seminal work that focused world attention on social capital. Putnam and Foundation President Lew Feldstein co-authored *Better Together* in 2003.

The New Hampshire Charitable Foundation has been working to improve the quality of life in our communities since 1962. It manages a collection of funds that are created by individuals, families and corporations for charitable purposes. Each year, the Foundation awards millions of dollars in grants to nonprofits and scholarship funds to students. Based in Concord, the Foundation roots itself in communities across the state through its seven regions—Lakes, Manchester, Monadnock, Nashua, North Country, Piscataqua and Upper Valley.

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Ways to Build Social Capital

Social capital is built through hundreds of actions, large and small, that we do every day. We've filled in many items and left blanks for you to fill in on your own. Try some on your own or with your co-workers and neighbors. Build trust in your organization and neighborhood. Get involved.

20 THINGS YOUR ORGANIZATION CAN DO

1. Invite local government officials to a lunchtime discussion with your staff and volunteers.
2. Host a blood drive for employees, volunteers, and clients.
3. Provide release time to employees for volunteering.
4. Provide meeting space for local community organizations.
5. Form a fitness/health group with your co-workers.
6. Think about how to involve different types of volunteers. If you serve the elderly, how can you bring in children? If you serve children, how can the elderly help?
7. Join the United Way campaign.
8. Form social groups—softball teams, hiking clubs, bridge circles, theater clubs, etc.
9. Host a picnic for staff and nearby residents.
10. Schedule a half hour “get together” before staff meetings.
11. Participate in your local United Way Day of Caring.
12. Set up a voter registration table in your organization.
13. Log onto www.bettertogether.org and learn more about the growing national discussion around strengthening social capital.
14. Have a movie night at your organization—with popcorn during and discussion afterward.
15. Establish a matching grants program: match charitable contributions by your employees.
16. Invite school groups to have a field trip at your site.
17. If a plow clears the snow from your lot, offer to plow the lot of a local day care center.
18. Invite the kids from a community or school art program to paint a “community mural” on the side of your building.
19. Hold staff and/or volunteer discussions about social capital, and what you can do to help increase it.
20. _____

35 THINGS YOU CAN DO

1. Go for a walk, invite a neighbor.
2. Attend gallery openings.
3. Write personal notes when inspired to neighbors and friends.
4. Organize a town-wide yard sale.
5. Visit a local nursing home.
6. Start a children's story hour at your local library.
7. Read your local newspaper, faithfully.
8. Join a book club discussion.
9. _____
10. Sing in a choir.
11. Make a point to help those in need—open the door for someone who has his/her arms full.
12. Go to a contra dance.
13. Stand on the corner of Main Street holding a sign for the candidate of your choice.
14. Attend your town meeting.
15. Support your local merchants.
16. Volunteer your time anywhere.
17. Take dance lessons with your friends.
18. Be a mentor for someone from a different ethnic or religious group.
19. Join a gardening club.
20. Become a blood, organ, or bone marrow donor.
21. _____
22. Join a carpool.
23. Eat breakfast out on Saturday morning at a local gathering spot.
24. Turn off the TV and talk with your family.
25. Offer to rake a neighbor's yard or shovel their walk if he/she needs help.
26. Fight to keep essential local services in the downtown area—your post office, police station, school, etc.
27. Offer to serve on a town committee.
28. Go to church...or temple...or outside with your children. Talk about why it's important to be there.
29. Give to your local food bank.
30. _____
31. Attend Veteran's Day and Memorial Day parades and say ‘thank you.’
32. Join a bowling team or form one.
33. Audition for community theatre or volunteer to usher.
34. Join a baby sitting cooperative.
35. Talk to your family and friends about social capital. Tell them why it matters.